



A Critical Examination Of The Indian Legal Framework: Transforming Facets Of Its Criminal Justice And Law Reforms

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ABSTRACT

As part of the greater structure of legal democracy and metamorphosis of governance, a critical analysis of the varying facets of penal system and law reforms in India is conducted. It examines how the penal system, which stems from imperial codification, has undergone several phases of change to become a more participative, rights-centric, and technologically advanced model. The study aims to find out how well these reforms have achieved institutional accountability, procedural justice, and accessibility for all citizens. This study draws from legal texts, court rulings, Law Commission reports, and empirical policy studies using a qualitative in addition to doctrinal research design that is supplemented by comparative and socio-legal viewpoints. To determine whether legislative reforms are consistent with democratic principles and global norms, the analytical structure combines doctrinal examination, comparative study, and based on governance research. The results show that although India has made considerable technological and legislative changes, there are still serious structural issues with prosecutorial independence, judicial efficiency, and prison justice. The report highlights the need for legal education reform, decentralised judicial systems, ethical technology integration, and institutional strengthening. It also emphasises how crucial it is to match local governance structures with the administration of justice in order to guarantee responsiveness and inclusivity. By emphasising the relationship between law, governance, and social fairness, this study adds to international discussions on justice reform and reaffirms justice as the cornerstone of India's democratic transition

1. INTRODUCTION

The crime resolution system in India is an evolving institution that mirrors the nation's transition from colonial rule to democratic republic. It is also deeply ingrained in the administrative and political logic of the Imperial State, which sought to establish power via the precision of bureaucracy and the codification of laws rather than through participatory justice. The Indian Penal Code of 1860 was one of the pioneering and largest colonial-legal initiatives in Asia, according to Patra (1961). Its primary goal being to set administrative equality and discipline throughout the state. The code being founded on imperial and utilitarian ideals that prioritised control over justice and deterrence above rehabilitation. According to .



Singh (1994), this early legal foundation produced a framework that viewed justice as a tool for state regulation rather than a citizen's entitlement. As a result, India inherited a criminal justice system that was more procedural than humanitarian and more oppressive than reformative.

In order to replace the british mechanism with representative and rights-based one, the Indian state started the process of legal and political alteration after obtaining independence. According

to Austin (1966), "the Indian Constitution, which articulated the values of justice, equality, and liberty as the ethos of statecraft, is the cornerstone of the country"¹. However, the criminal justice system's implementation of the constitutional framework's promise of a rule-of-law society was inconsistent and controversial. Baxi (2007) highlighted this paradox, pointing out that although India formally adopted the rule of law, the reality on the ground tended to be one of bureaucratic formality, proceduralism, and selective enforcement.² Because the promise of justice frequently clashes with bureaucratic lethargy and political meddling, the state's moral authority has been criticised. The activities of the justice institutions are still heavily impacted by this legacy of colonial administrative procedures. According to Mawani (2015), colonial control left behind a legacy of law in postcolonial states, which replicates old inequalities in new legalities. This is demonstrated by the fact that India's punitive system continues to prioritise centralised enforcement, stringent codification, and punitive control. Similarly, Sharma (1971) talked about the administration's mentality of upholding law and order, which he described as reactive, coercive, and inclined to prioritise stability over justice. As a result, there has been a great deal of ambivalence. Although the institutions of justice are designed to uphold rights, their operations really operate in tandem with the limitations of control that were established throughout colonialism.

Over the years, India has undergone multiple attempts to modernise its criminal justice system in order to align it with democratic governance. However, rather than being radical, the initiatives have been more incremental. According to Baxi (2007), the only way to change is to redefine justice as a participatory and emancipatory ideal rather than only changing the methods. There is the challenge of striking a balance between the structural impasse of colonial jurisprudence and constitutional ideals of equality and fairness. According to Austin (1966), governing institutions must internalise both the procedural and ethical parts of justice in order for the Constitution's transformational potential to be realised. The disparity between normative and institutional performance is exemplified by the continuation of prison brutality, pending cases, and unequal access to justice.

The development of criminal justice in India also reflects a dynamic link between law and governance as well as public trust. The credibility of the state declines when the populace believes that the system is opaque, unreachable, or prejudiced. Singh (1994) went on to say that the judicial system is a sign of social fairness and governmental responsibility rather than an instrument of the law. As a result, the larger concerns of citizenship, governance, and constitutional morality cannot be separated from the subject of criminal justice reform in India.

The post-globalization era has significantly expanded the discourse on justice. Mawani (2015) asserts that postcolonial states like India must negotiate between new international norms that place a higher priority on human rights, transparency, and restorative justice and conventional legal systems. The post-globalization era has significantly expanded the discourse on justice. Mawani (2015) asserts that postcolonial states like India must negotiate between new international norms that place a higher priority on human rights, transparency, and restorative justice and conventional legal systems. Technology, international human rights norms, and participatory mechanisms all work together to generate new opportunities for modernising the law, but they also highlight deeper structural inconsistencies. India has been working to update its legal system, but it still has trouble altering organizational perspectives and practices that are difficult to alter. As a result, the penal system stands divided between its British past and its legal and representative future. It has the combined challenges of upholding public decorum and safeguarding individual liberties, as well as enforcing the law and delivering justice. According to Singh (1994) and Baxi (2007), the question that still has to be answered is whether India's legal institutions can transcend their colonial heritage and become fully democratic establishments. One should analytically consider the history's continuum as well as the contemporary needs of human rights and governance in order to respond to this topic.

This study is a result of this complex historical and institutional background. It looks at how India's punitive system evolved under the dual strains of constitutionalism and transformation. It also evaluates whether the most recent changes to the legal system are adequate to align justice with democratic ideals. It recognises that the system's shortcomings arise from both its administration and the continuing conflict between justice and power that has defined India's legal system as a modern one.

Key Objectives:

1. To assess how criminal justice system of India has changed structurally and procedurally in terms of its colonial past,

¹ Austin, G. (1966). *"The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation."* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

² Upendra Baxi (2007). *"The Rule of Law in India."* SUR – International Journal on Human Rights, 4(6), 7–27.

constitutional underpinnings, and dynamics of governance.

2. To evaluate the direction and sufficiency of current legal changes in attaining efficiency, justice, and rights protection within the larger context of democratic governance and the rule of law.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The conversation about criminal justice reform has been shaped by a wide range of theoretical and empirical investigative studies that have examined the evolution of systems of justice, the link joining penalty and rehabilitation, and the function of governance in establishing answerability and justice. By highlighting the distinctions between the retributive, deterrence, and rehabilitating theories, Marsh et al. (2004) provided a “fundamental understanding of the ideologies that underpin criminal justice”.³ Their efforts center on the notion that criminal justice is an active institution that is influenced by political institutions, moral standards, and society values rather than a legal one. According to the authors, the criminal justice reforms should be understood in light of broader societal shifts and shifts in the governing ideology. Scholars and policymakers have been preoccupied with the primary theoretical debate between restorative justice and retributive justice. In their analysis of these two paradigms, Wenzel et al. (2008) pointed out that restorative justice seeks to make amends for the harm done to victims, offenders, and communities, in contrast to retributive justice, which prioritises punishment based on the degree of wrongdoing. Their findings provide credence to the notion that restorative approaches foster social engagement and reconciliation while justice systems, which are based on retributive reasoning, frequently foster isolation and repressed anger. By situating the idea of restorative justice within the framework of European reform tendencies and advocating for a change in the legal system toward a participatory approach, Gavrielides (2016) expanded on this argument. He maintained that restorative justice is a procedural shift toward accountability and inclusivity that is consistent with human rights and democratic objectives. When Tyler (1997) connected procedural justice to people who follow the law, he made a significant contribution. According to his findings, “citizens' perceptions of justice in the legal system have a more significant role in the formation of law-abiding behaviour than their fear of punishment”.⁴ By asserting that legitimacy and trust are prerequisites for effective law enforcement, this procedural justice theory rationalises governance as a prerequisite for effective law enforcement. This concept was expanded upon by Walsh and Conway (2011), who examined police governance and accountability and emphasised that, “in order to restore confidence, structural changes in policing institutions should prioritise transparency and citizen control”.⁵ They come to the conclusion that governance and procedural justice are strongly related, and that the criminal justice system can be justified by its procedures rather than its outcomes. Delgado and Stefancic (2007) challenged the impartiality of criminal justice systems and exposed how the law and law organizations frequently perpetuate systemic injustices in their work based on the critical race theory. According to them, “the idea of colourblind justice is an illusion that conceals the pervasive prejudices in legal enforcement and decision-making”.⁶ By closing the lag between discrimination in the framework and the procedure's results, the contribution given by them expands the concept of fairness and change to the realm of ethical and moral responsibility. Baxi (2012) reaffirmed similar concerns in the Indian and postcolonial environment, arguing that the idea of legality takes on a postcolonial shape but the function of colonial form in such cultures. According to his research, injustice persists in so-called democratic systems because Western legal models were introduced without taking local hierarchies and power imbalances into account. Singh and Zahid (2008) emphasised that “governance is crucial to enabling access to justice in the Indian system, particularly for underprivileged communities”.⁷ They contend that justice reform ought to be integrated into the larger framework of social policy and governance rather than being restricted to the judiciary or the police. Their work demonstrated that equitable access to legal remedies is essential to the effectiveness of democracy by linking the idea of justice with involvement in governance. In line with contemporary international approaches to legal modernisation, their study provided an interdisciplinary structure for defining governance as both the means and the purpose of reforming justice. When combined, these works offer a multifaceted understanding of penal reform that integrates philosophy, practice, and governance. While Tyler (1997) along with Walsh and Conway (2011) provide an institutional and empirical view of procedural legality and answerability, Marsh et al. (2004) and Wenzel et al. (2008) provide a philosophical foundation of justice. Baxi (2012) and Delgado and Stefancic (2007) expand on this conversation by exposing the historical and ideological underpinnings of justice systems, especially in post-colonial states. These arguments are extended by Gavrielides (2016) and Singh and Zahid (2008) to restorative and participatory frameworks that prioritise social equality

³ Marsh, I., Cochrane, J., & Melville, G. (2004). *Criminal justice: An introduction to philosophies, theories and practice*. Routledge.

⁴ Tyler, T. R. (1997). “Procedural fairness and compliance with the law”. *The Swiss Journal of Economics and Statistics*, 133(2/2), 219–240

⁵ Walsh, D. P. J., & Conway, V. (2011). “Police governance and accountability: Overview of current issues”. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 55(2–3), 61–86.

⁶ Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2007). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York University Press.

⁷ Singh, A., & Zahid, N. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Strengthening Governance through Access to Justice*. PHI Learning.



and inclusion. Despite the richness of this corpus of work, there are several gaps. First of all, a significant portion of the theoretical discourse is grounded on Western legal systems, making it inapplicable to the unique socio-political context of India. There is little literature that incorporates Indian constitutional precepts with comparative and restorative approaches, despite the fact that Baxi (2012) and Singh and Zahid (2008) fill the gap. Although Tyler's (1997) and Walsh and Conway's (2011) research support this association, there isn't much empirical evidence in India. Third, Delgado and Stefancic (2007) contend that procedural safeguards do not address the systemic injustices inside the legal system.

3. METHODOLOGY:

Research Design

In order to analyse the evolving facets of crime and justice and legal reforms in India, this study used a qualitative-doctrinal research design in addition to a comparative and policy-analyzing research design. The conceptual foundation provided by the doctrinal approach enables the methodical examination of legislative systems, judicial interpretations, and legal texts. Gawas (2017) asserts that doctrinal legal research aids in directing the development of the law by offering clarification for the interpretation and amendment of current legislation. With this method, the paper will be able to follow the historical tradition of the Indian penal system from its imperial founding till its legal reorganisation and identify the structural and procedural continuities and discontinuities. Because it focuses on legal concepts, court decisions, and policy reports rather than numerical generalisations, this research's qualitative feature makes it interpretive and analytically flexible. A balanced understanding of the text and context of the law is provided by the combination of the accuracy of doctrine and the qualities of reasoning. Reforms are placed in the broader governance goals of accountability, transparency, and rights protection by the policy-analytical component.

Data Sources

The research has a thorough covering of both the doctrinal and comparative analysis because it is based on secondary legal and policy materials. These include the constitution's provisions, statutes like the Indian Penal Code (IPC) (1860) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)(1973), reports from the Law Commission of India, parliamentary discussions, rulings, and recommendations from government bodies. There is also an analysis of academic publications and policy materials on institutional transformation and the administration of justice.

Analytical Structure

The model combines the socio-legal, comparative, and doctrinal approaches to understanding the complex legal reform. According to Gawas (2017), the doctrinal dimension takes into account the criminal law's internal coherence and normative suitability. According to Van Hoecke (2013), the comparative method is justified as an interpretive process that establishes the functional similarities and contextual adaptability of legal systems. Through the technique, the study places the Indian changes in the context of global trends related to restorative justice, technological integration, and accountability. Furthermore, Banakar and Travers' (2005) socio-legal perspective links law and governance by illustrating how the police, prosecution, and judicial systems operate in India's political and administrative environment. Combining the three approaches—doctrinal, comparative, and socio-legal—would guarantee institutional relevance, situational sensitivity, and analytical rigour.

4. METHODOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

The goals of the research related to analysing the structural development and reform suitability of India's penal system are directly supported by this composite technique. The comparative approach places India in a global context, the doctrinal approach offers conceptual depth, and the socio-legal lens guarantees consideration of governance realities. When taken as a whole, these approaches promote a critical, culturally based view of Indian judicial reform.

The Development of Indian Criminal Justice

Codification and Colonial Legacy

The penalizing of crimes system in India was formed for the first time in the context of Imperial authority in India, since legislation was a means of colonial control. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860 was the official codify of criminal law in British India. According to Krashennnikova and Trikoz (2017), the IPC was both a legal innovation and a political tool designed to establish imperial rule. It established a centralised, state-run legal system that continues to influence Indian justice today and contained utilitarian ideals that prioritised punishment and deterrent over justice and rehabilitation. Extremely strenuous procedural rules in the procedural equivalent, the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) of 1898, institutionalised colonial authority. In its 41st report (1969), the Law Commission of India acknowledged the CrPC's administrative integrity but noted that it fell short of capturing democratic principles. In its 14th Report on Reform of Judicial Administration, the Law Commission (1958) noted that deficiencies would persist long after independence and had previously critiqued the absence of legal aid, accountability, and timely adjudication. These findings underlined how

colonial codification prioritised imperial expediency over human rights. Krashennnikova and Trikoz (2017) claim that the British system also introduced a centralised police force and a hierarchical court system that alienated the populace from justice. The Law Commission (1958) brought up similar issues as a major obstacle to bureaucratic formalism and rigidity, with little opportunity for indigenous or community-based participation into the legal system.

Developments After Independence

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has worked to replace the colonial legal system with a constitutional system founded on liberty and equality. The Law Commission's (1969) 41st Report, which recommended process simplification and accused protection, led to the enactment of the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973. The 154th Report (1996), which recommended plea bargaining, victim-focused reforms, and more judicial control, came after this. Judicial activism contributed to these advancements. Verma (2001) claims that the Supreme Court transformed constitutional rights into justice, fairness, and compassionate treatment by interpreting Article 21 broadly. However, the real reform proved difficult because of the administration's reluctance and the rigidity of the procedures, as the Law Commission (1958) had already warned.

Modernity's New Paradigms and Reforms

India is progressing toward modernity and rights-based justice, as seen by recent changes. The Law Commission suggested restitution and accountability in cases of miscarriages of equity in the 277th numbered report on the Unlawful Prosecution (2018), which is a symbol of the transition towards restorative and victim-centred jurisprudence. By expanding the criteria of sexual violence and bolstering victim protection, the Report of the Verma Committee (2013) served as a catalyst for historical gender equality reforms. The implementation of the BNS, BNSS and BSA in the year 2023 represents the latest stage of systemic transformation. According to Akhil Kumar (2023), these codes are an attempt to modernise Indian criminal law using technology and incorporate constitutional ideals. The Verma Committee (2013), the Law Commission Reports (1958, 1969, 1996, 2018), and recent legislative enactments all demonstrate how India is transitioning from colonial punitive control to democratic, digital, and restorative justice. The criminal justice system in India has been steadily evolving toward a restorative and rights-centered system throughout the years, as seen by the cumulative tendency of reforms. Table 1 summarises the key turning points and reform results that have defined this institutional and historical development.

An Evaluation of the Indian Legal System

Procedural and Institutional Difficulties

Delays in the legal system and institutional inefficiencies continue to plague India's criminal justice system. According to Dawer (2022), the court system is overburdened with cases due to an outdated administrative system, a lack of judicial capacity, and a laborious procedure. People's faith and the constitutional promise of timely administration of justice have been compromised by this. Jain (2022), who argues that the persistence of arrears requires empirical, evidence-based reform rather than a patchwork effort at the administrative level, supports this topic. More court infrastructure, judicial data analysis, and efficient case administration are all necessary to address this systemic dilemma. In addition to the court system's delays, prosecutors' independence is an issue. According to Michel (2017), prosecution systems in most jurisdictions that protect justice and due process are strengthened by institutional autonomy. However, there is a tussle of interest and a lack of fairness in India because the administration has a tendency to dominate the prosecutors. Additionally, it lacks an efficient system of accountability for prosecutorial conduct, which makes the legal system even less accountable. According to Chaturvedi (2017), the problem is made worse by the inability to properly execute the police reforms that the Supreme Court has suggested. Political meddling, inadequate training, and a lack of professional autonomy have all contributed to the policing techniques, which are mostly reactive and coercive rather than rights-oriented. All of these flaws show how institutional inertia, executive dominance, and procedural inefficiency continue to impede any significant reform. The Indian criminal justice system's violation of human rights is a grave moral and constitutional failure. Singh's (2021) study highlights that the legal system's involvement and constitutional safeguards have not been able to end police violence and torture in detention. These abuses are indicated by inadequate accountability regulations and inadequate oversight of custodial facilities. Adhikari (2021) describes the appalling state of Indian jails, where convicts' dignity is not respected or their rehabilitation is aided by pre-trial imprisonment, overcrowding, and inadequate facilities. The emphasis should be on humane and rehabilitative correctional institutions rather than retaliation. Even socioeconomic disparities exist in access to justice. Higgins (2014) notes that despite the constitutional and statutory provisions on free legal aid, underprivileged communities still encounter obstacles because of bureaucratic inefficiencies, a lack of legal infrastructure, and a lack of awareness. This type of unequal access undermines the legitimacy of the legal system and continues to foster mistrust among the populace.

Technology and Modernisation

Recent technology advancements in India have begun to impact the country's judicial system. According to Verma (2018), the e-Courts Project, which offers speedier and simpler case administration and publicising, is one of the crucial steps toward digitisation and openness. By evaluating the potential efficiency benefits of artificial intelligence in judicial decision-making as well as the ethical risks it poses to judicial neutrality, Sharma et al. (2025) further this conversation. Accordingly, Das and Sarkar (2022) highlight the growing significance of digital forensics in evidence admissibility since technology may improve the validity of evidence but necessitates stringent regulation. All of these studies have demonstrated that although the Indian criminal justice system has embraced digital modernisation, institutional responsibility, human rights, and constitutional ethics should guide its transformation. Table 2, which outlines the key issues, gaps in the reforms, and policy priorities that are found as a result of the analysis, combines the fundamental concerns found in the institutional, human rights, and technology levels.

International and Comparative Views

Worldwide comparative perspectives offer valuable insights into how penal systems around the world are evolving to strike a balance between effectiveness, equity, and human rights protection. In their comprehensive comparative analysis of the existing legal systems, Hamid et al. (2024) demonstrate how different jurisdictions integrate community involvement, restorative justice, and technology innovation. According to their findings, countries that have adopted adaptable, victim-centered, and technologically responsive justice models have higher levels of accountability and openness. These teachings are applicable to India, where the penal system continues to struggle with challenges of inequitable access to justice, procedural stagnation and delays. In his comparison of criminal law and human rights legislation, Trechsel (2000) contributes to this discussion by arguing that democratic nations must strike a balance between upholding individual liberties and enforcing the law. His research emphasises the significance of procedural safeguards in preventing injustices, and the Indian reform rhetoric reflects this concern. One key measure of India's reform achievement has been the criminal justice system's adherence to international human rights norms. Li (2025) offers a contemporary strategy based on the Chinese experience of modernising criminal justice reform by integrating human rights protection. He demonstrates how state-based reforms and a human rights-based strategy may coexist as long as institutions are transparent and courts are independent. This comparative analysis supports India's need for reforms that uphold constitutional morality and human dignity in addition to modernising procedures. Franceschet (2002) looks at two popular strategies for managing international justice at the level of global governance: cosmopolitan governance and liberal institutionalism. The two models place a heavy emphasis on judicial accountability and collective responsibility, which are pertinent in the evolving Indian environment of boosting institutional independence and public trust. Hwang (2009) also highlights the shift in the administration of justice inside the UN system, emphasising equitable representation, due process, and transparency. The universal recognition of justice as a moral and procedural imperative is emphasised by these international norms. In order to improve accountability, Bose (2025) expands the comparative discussion to constitutional law analysis, where more than federal democracies use judicial review and decentralisation. Because he is able to demonstrate how comparative constitutionalism ideas might guide local reform, his paper situates India inside the framework of the global constitution.

Table 1 summarises the aforementioned comparative observations and offers key international models, their justice frameworks, and potential lessons for Indian law.

TABLE 1

Comparision oriented examination of Global Criminal Justice Structures and Teachings for India Jurisdiction / Framework	Core Justice Approach	Distinctive Features
United Nations System	Governance worldwide and administrative justice	Attention on transparency of system,, due process, and an equitable representation (Hwang, 2009).
European Union / Scandinavian Models	Restorative and community-oriented justice system	Emphasising on the victim participation and social reintegration (Hamid et al., 2024).

China	Protection of Human Rights through a state-driven modernisation	Institutional reforms which are balanced with the human right commitments (Li, 2025).
Global Human Rights Frameworks	Protective safeguards in the law enforcement and penalty	Balancing of the enforcing and liberty through a procedural fairness (Trechsel, 2000).
International Governance Models	Liberalistic institutionalism along with cosmopolitan answerability	Judicial errors and collective reliability (Franceschet, 2002).
Comparative Constitutional Democracies	Federal style of governance and judicial review	Decentralisation as a means for legal accountability (Bose, 2025).

When taken as a whole, these opinions show that while criminal justice reform is a context-dependent idea, its foundations are the universal values of justice, openness, and human rights. In order to achieve informed but localised justice, India's present reforms should be able to integrate global best practices into their own local socio-legal environment.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The crime and justice system in India has undergone several reform waves, as this study has shown, yet the system's issues are deeply ingrained in its institutional, technological, and legislative components. Despite the present modernisation process, the system continues to struggle with inefficiency, lack of access, and insufficient decentralisation. Three interrelated dimensions—institutional reforms and efficacy, local governance in addition to community based justice, and modernisation through technology and a service delivery—are highlighted in the discussion, which is based on current studies and policy facts. The penal system in India has undergone several phases of change, as this study has shown, yet the system's issues are deeply ingrained in its institutional, technological, and legislative components. Despite the present modernisation process, the system continues to struggle with inefficiency, lack of access, and insufficient decentralisation. Three interrelated dimensions—institutional transformation and efficacy, district level governance and community oriented justice, and modernisation through technology along with service delivery—are highlighted in the discussion, which is based on current studies and policy facts. The justice systems' responsiveness and efficacy have been hampered by this inability to address institutional design flaws. The judiciary is at the heart of these issues. Tripathi (2007) asserts that both an efficient system and the independence of the court are necessary for a truly effective justice system. However, judicial innovation has been hampered by bureaucratic rigidity and over-centralization. Pendency, according to Sekhri (2019), is a design problem as well as a backlog crisis that arises from a lack of cooperation between the police, prosecution, and judiciary. Despite the Constitution's guarantees of equality and prompt justice, this inefficiency leads to a decline in public trust and procedural justice. The NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data confirms these findings. The Crime in India 2021 and Crime in India 2022 reports show poor disposal rates and a steady rise in criminal cases, indicating that the judiciary is unable to handle the increasing volume of cases (NCRB, 2022; 2023). Marginalised communities are disproportionately affected by these delays, which increases their risk of before-trial detention and exacerbates social injustices. Thus, Tripathi (2007) suggests judicial and administrative reforms based on institutional accountability, transparency, and the integration of contemporary management techniques. Because he focuses on providing justice to those involved in the legal system, Taxman (2014) is a complement to this analysis. She maintains that in order to create service-based procedures that emphasise rehabilitation, reintegration, and system coordination, the justice system must go beyond punitive systems. In the Indian context, this means developing procedures that would use collaborated support systems, legal aid, and social reintegration programs to meet the needs of both victims and offenders.

Community Justice along with Local Governance

A crucial component of democracy is the decentralisation of the administration of justice. According to Dhandar (2024), decentralised institutions have raised the degree of local participation and responsiveness in a number of governance domains, including community development and service delivery. However, decentralisation in criminal justice is still in its infancy. The formal legal system is highly centralised and frequently out of touch with local conflict resolution practices and community realities. The formal and informal legal systems can be effectively replaced by alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms. Jaiswal and Mandloi (2020) assert that the Panchayat system in rural India continues to be an effective

grassroots mechanism for resolving minor conflicts without causing financial expenses. In a similar vein, Khan (2006) claims that because Lok Adalats are easily accessible and welcoming to the public, they are a highly effective venue for the resolution of civil and criminal issues outside of traditional courts. These local justice systems lessen the burden on formal courts and are in line with the constitutional ideals of access to justice. Additionally, Vincentnathan and Vincentnathan (2009) point out that community policing and justice initiatives foster remedial and preventive models of justice by accelerating cooperation between the police and the community. According to their findings, local level penal systems not only reduce clogging but also rebuild public trust in the government. Despite their potential, these entities lack the necessary institutional support and legal standing. The findings suggest that integrating communal justice into the larger legal framework would greatly improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of the Indian legal system.

The conflict between centralisation and decentralisation is another tension that is apparent in the conversation. While centralisation ensures consistency and legal clarity, too much dependence on it results in a lack of local intercommunication. Dhandar (2024) asserts that India's future lies on combining formal judicial institutions with distributed justice efforts without compromising the quality of the legal system. Technology, Modernisation, and the Prospects for Reform

In recent years, modernity and technology have played a bigger part in changing the way justice is administered. Verma (2018) claims that the e-Courts Project is one of the turning points in the digitalisation of legal processes, making them easier to access and less inefficient to administer. A step toward greater transparency and data-driven judicial workflow management is this technological shift. In support of this, Sokol (2023) also emphasises how, with the right regulation, technology-based governance can improve institutional efficacy and population service delivery. However, he cautions that uncontrolled digitisation may result in privacy invasion and algorithmic bias, which is a global concern about the moral use of technology in the legal system.

Millar (1925) offers one of the first, although still highly pertinent, historical perspectives on modernisation in criminal procedure, seeing it as a cyclical process that continuously mirrors societal shifts. His view highlights the need for technology reform to remain linked to the legal precepts of justice and due process. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully balance India's rapid adoption of digital technology to prevent the digital replication of structural prejudices. Additionally, technology should be used in policing, prosecution, and incarceration in addition to courts. Predictive analytics, forensic databases, and digital case management may be combined to improve accountability and reduce delays. However, as Sahu and Khamari (2022) and Tripathi (2007) remind us, technical innovation cannot take the place of institutional reform; rather, it should be bolstered by it.

An examination of these results shows that while the Indian justice reform program has become more ambitious, it is constrained by institutional stagnation, ineffective procedures, and decentralisation. An inclusive and responsive judicial system requires improving local justice, improving service delivery, and integrating ethical technologies.

Therefore, finding a balance between reform and governance is a key component of India's criminal justice system's future. As demonstrated by NCRB (2022; 2023), Dhandar (2024), and Taxman (2014), justice reform requires systemic coordination at the institutional, community, and technological levels. Lastly, the three vitals of efficacy, human rights, and democratic answerability should serve as the foundation for India's legal modernisation process so that justice is not only administered but also perceived as equitable, approachable, and compassionate. The debate over India's criminal justice system has demonstrated the necessity of implementing an integrated, multifaceted approach to policy in order to improve the system. To reduce delays and improve accountability, improving the institutions should begin with increased cooperation between the police, prosecution, and judiciary. Systematic routes of communication, case management tools, and collaborative changes can all contribute to improving procedure efficiency and restoring public trust in the legal system.

Building community and institutional capability is also essential. Long-term training, funding, and administrative independence are necessary for local courts such as Lok Adalats, Panchayats, and legal assistance centers. Decentralising these systems will help reduce increased court workloads and improve wider access to justice, especially for under-represented groups.

Technology should be carefully integrated into the legal system. Digital technologies can improve efficiency and openness, but they should be used in conjunction with strong protections to preserve human rights, due process, and privacy. Ethical guidelines, digital literacy initiatives, and ongoing assessment systems should guide the use of AI, online dispute resolution, and digital forensics in the legal system. Another crucial policy requirement is the reform of legal education. Human rights, constitutional values, and technological adaptability must be the main topics of study at law schools and training facilities. In order to produce a generation of legal professionals prepared to handle the demands of the modern judicial systems, interdisciplinary studies of law, government, and technology should be promoted. Finally, a new path toward decentralised and participative justice should serve as the foundation for future reforms. Encouraging community mediation, public participation, and local checks and balances will boost responsiveness, transparency, and confidence. The ideals of justice, equality, and constitutional democracy in contemporary India would be better supported by a technologically advanced and socially embedded legal system.

6. CONCLUSION

The Indian Constitution's ethical foundation and the cornerstone of democratic governance is justice. Both positive and negative features of the Indian criminal justice system's evolution over time, as well as the persistence of systemic inefficiencies and injustices, may be seen in its past, colonial development, and current reform effort. The convergence of law, governance, technology, and social change presents a difficult challenge for the justice system, which is at a turning point. It is useful not only for passing new legislation but also for the institutions' ability to uphold existing laws in a way that is equitable and accessible to all citizens.

The current stage of the legal reform reflects the increasing recognition of the necessity of striking a balance between efficiency and justice, modernisation and human rights, and centralisation and decentralisation. Technology integration has the potential to completely transform the way justice is administered, but it is also creating new procedural and ethical issues that need to be tightly regulated. Similarly, the recent emphasis on community justice and the participatory process highlights the relevance of localisation in managing the overwhelming diversity of Indian socio-legal reality. Future criminal justice reforms in India should be built around three main pillars: integrity of the various institutions, empowerment given to the citizens, and empirical examination. Transparency and the legitimacy of justice will result from increased police, judicial, and prosecution accountability. Making citizens legally knowledgeable and implementing community-based systems can help realise the law and society bridge. Lastly, in order to identify what succeeds, what fails, and why, empirical study on the effects of reforms throughout time must be maintained. In order to protect rights, advance equality, and fulfil the constitutional promise of justice to all people, the legal system of India must have evolved not only in the capacity of a government but also as a valuable endeavour.

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