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Prasanna S,

Chairman of Institute of Legal Education

No. 08, Arul Nagar, Seera Thoppu,

Maudhanda Kurichi, Srirangam,

Tiruchirappalli – 620102

Phone : +91 94896 71437 – info@iledu.in / Chairman@iledu.in



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LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF VICTIM COMPENSATION

AUTHOR – AAKASH YADAV, STUDENT AT AMITY INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES AMITY UNIVERSITY
NOIDA

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Abstract

This research article explores the historical and legal evolution of the Victim Compensation Scheme (VCS) in India. It traces the development of victim rights and restorative justice principles from early legislative efforts to more recent and comprehensive reforms such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, and the Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023. Central to this transformation is the role of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in institutionalizing support for victims, especially those impacted by violent crimes, trafficking, and domestic abuse. Through a review of landmark judicial rulings, the paper highlights the judiciary's pivotal role in expanding and enforcing victim compensation as a legal right. Despite significant progress, challenges remain in the form of inconsistent implementation, administrative inefficiencies, and lack of awareness among the public. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for judicial activism, administrative reforms, and increased public engagement to ensure equitable and timely compensation for crime victims.

Key Words: Victim Compensation, Restorative Justice, NALSA, Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023

1.1 Introduction

Victim compensation in India has gradually developed over time, shaped by changing societal needs, judicial activism, and legislative advancements. The fundamental principle behind providing compensation to crime victims lies in the concept of restorative justice, which seeks to uphold and restore the dignity and rights of those affected by criminal offenses. This chapter examines the trajectory of the Victim Compensation Scheme (VCS) in India, tracking its growth from early legislative initiatives to significant reforms, including the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 and the Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) of 2023. It also highlights the critical role played by the National Legal Services Authority Act, 1987 (NALSA), in formalizing the framework for victim compensation, while discussing its wider legal

and social impact.¹

1.2 Early Legislative Efforts

The idea of compensating crime victims was not originally a part of India's legal framework. Traditionally, Indian criminal law centered around penalizing the offender, with minimal emphasis on addressing the rights and recovery of the victim. Both the Indian Penal Code of 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1973 were largely offender-focused, offering limited scope for victim compensation. However, Section 357 of the CrPC marked a notable shift by introducing provisions that empowered courts to direct offenders to compensate victims, especially in cases involving bodily harm or property damage.² This initial provision under Section 357 was narrow in scope, as it applied only when the offender was convicted, thereby excluding a

significant number of crime victims—particularly those whose cases did not lead to a conviction. As a result, many victims were left without any form of redress or support, especially in instances where the accused was acquitted or the trial did not reach a conclusive end. This limitation underscored the inadequacy of the existing legal framework and emphasized the need for a more comprehensive and structured approach to victim compensation.

Recognizing this gap, the Indian judiciary began advocating for reforms, paving the way for the evolution of victim compensation as a recognized legal entitlement.³

1.3 The Role of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)

The enactment of the National Legal Services Authority Act in 1987 marked a significant turning point in the development of victim compensation in India. Aimed at ensuring access to justice for those who could not afford legal representation, the Act led to the establishment of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). While its primary objective was to provide free legal aid, NALSA gradually emerged as a key institution in advocating for and institutionalizing victim compensation. This legislation laid the foundation for integrating victim support within the broader legal and judicial framework, reinforcing the idea that justice should be accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of victims.⁴ NALSA was entrusted with the responsibility of enforcing legal aid provisions and enhancing access to justice, particularly for the marginalized and vulnerable segments of society. It played a vital role in pushing for the creation of State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs), which were instrumental in implementing victim compensation schemes at the grassroots level. By building a decentralized framework, NALSA ensured that assistance reached victims more effectively across the country. Furthermore, through its advocacy and outreach, NALSA and the Legal Services Authorities began to champion legislative reforms aimed at

establishing robust and inclusive compensation mechanisms especially for victims of grievous crimes such as acid attacks, sexual violence, human trafficking, and acts of terrorism. These efforts significantly contributed to the evolution of a more victim-centric approach within India's criminal justice system.⁵

1.4 The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013

A landmark moment in the evolution of victim compensation in India was the enactment of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. This reform was driven by the nationwide protests and public outcry following the tragic gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012 an incident that exposed glaring gaps in the legal system, especially concerning victim protection and support. The brutality of the case served as a catalyst, prompting both the government and the judiciary to acknowledge the urgent need for comprehensive legal reforms. The 2013 Amendment introduced significant changes to enhance the safety of women and ensure a more responsive framework for addressing the rights and compensation needs of victims of violent crimes.⁶

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 brought significant reforms to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), with a strong emphasis on strengthening the legal response to sexual violence. Among its various provisions, the Act made vital strides in the area of victim compensation. It acknowledged the need for financial and rehabilitative support for victims of severe crimes, particularly acid attacks, rape, and human trafficking. Importantly, the Act authorized State Legal Services Authorities to develop and implement guidelines for victim compensation, ensuring a more structured and accessible support system. Additionally, it mandated the establishment of victim compensation funds at both the state and national levels, laying the groundwork for a more institutionalized and rights-based approach to

victim support in India.⁷

State of Rajasthan v. Kesar Singh (2015)

The *State of Rajasthan v. Kesar Singh* case was one of the early instances where the Supreme Court addressed the provisions of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, particularly in relation to compensating victims of sexual assault. In this case, the Court highlighted the strengthened penalties for crimes of sexual violence under the Act, especially those involving acid attacks and sexual offenses against women. The case involved the brutal assault of a woman, resulting in severe bodily harm, and the Court took into account the new legal framework, which required immediate compensation for victims of such violent crimes.

The Act introduced a significant shift by allowing courts to directly order compensation to victims, rather than solely relying on state funds. In this case, the Court instructed the state to provide compensation to the victim without delay, covering medical expenses and rehabilitation costs. This ruling was pivotal in ensuring that victim compensation became an integral part of the judicial process, not just a matter of state-administered funds. The *Kesar Singh* case set an important precedent for applying the provisions of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, reinforcing the dual focus on both punishing offenders and providing financial support to victims.⁸

Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum v. Union of India (1995)

Though the *Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum* case predates the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, it established crucial precedents that significantly influenced the amendment, particularly in recognizing the state's responsibility to compensate victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse. In this case, the Supreme Court emphasized that victims of domestic violence should be entitled to state compensation and have access to legal aid. These principles were foundational in shaping the 2013 amendment, which expanded

the rights of victims of sexual and domestic violence.

The Act further reinforced the intent of the Court's decision by establishing provisions for compensatory measures for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and harassment. In the wake of the 2013 amendments, the Court revisited similar issues, ensuring that victims could receive quicker responses from authorities and prompt access to compensation, which became an integral part of the rehabilitation process. Therefore, the *Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum* case played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for victim compensation, which was later expanded and institutionalized through the new legal framework established by the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013.⁹

Manohar Lal Sharma v. Union of India (2014)

In *Manohar Lal Sharma v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court addressed significant issues related to the procedural delays in compensating victims of sexual offenses. The case highlighted a critical gap in the legal framework, where victims often faced undue delays in receiving compensation. In response, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, sought to fill this gap by establishing clear and efficient guidelines for the timely distribution of compensation to victims of sexual offenses.

The Court acknowledged that the new amendments directly addressed the concerns raised in the *Sharma* case, particularly regarding victim compensation, and emphasized the importance of adhering to the guidelines outlined under the Act to ensure that compensation was delivered swiftly. This ruling played a crucial role in reinforcing the intent of the 2013 amendment, pushing for a more responsive legal framework that prioritized the welfare of victims. The Court also underscored the vital role of compensation in the recovery and rehabilitation of survivors, further solidifying victim compensation as an essential part of the judicial process in sexual violence cases.¹⁰

Nirbhaya Case (State v. Mukesh & Ors.) (2017)

The *Nirbhaya* case was a watershed moment in the history of victim compensation in India. The horrific gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi sparked nationwide outrage and served as a catalyst for the introduction of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. In the aftermath of the case, the Supreme Court reassessed the scope of victim compensation laws, emphasizing that victims of such brutal crimes should be entitled to immediate financial compensation from the state.

Under the 2013 Amendment, the Court affirmed that victims of sexual violence had the right to prompt financial compensation, which should be provided without unnecessary delay. In this case, the Court directed the authorities to ensure that the victim's family was compensated in accordance with the provisions of the Act and to support their rehabilitation. The *Nirbhaya* case thus became a pivotal example for the application of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, highlighting the judiciary's role in implementing provisions that expedited the disbursement of victim compensation in cases of severe sexual violence. This case set an important precedent for ensuring that victims of heinous crimes receive timely justice and support.¹¹

State of Maharashtra v. Vithal Kisan Pund (2015)

The *State of Maharashtra v. Vithal Kisan Pund* case addressed the issue of victim compensation for individuals who had suffered harm as a result of criminal activities such as robbery, assault, and other violent offenses. Although the case primarily focused on criminal punishment, it highlighted the broader implications of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. The Court recognized that under the new law, victims of crimes like robbery and assault were legally entitled to compensation, even before the completion of criminal trials.

The ruling emphasized that state authorities must ensure that victim compensation programs are implemented without delay to facilitate the rehabilitation of victims.

Additionally, the Court made it clear that compensation schemes should be state-sponsored and based on the objective criteria laid out in the 2013 Amendment, thereby establishing a more structured and efficient framework for victim support. This case reinforced the importance of timely victim compensation and solidified the notion that victims of violent crimes should receive immediate and appropriate assistance, regardless of the trial's outcome.¹²

Savitri Devi v. State of Rajasthan (2017)

In the *Savitri Devi v. State of Rajasthan* case, the Court addressed the pressing issues of domestic violence and marital rape. The victim, a woman who had endured continuous abuse, sought immediate relief and compensation from the state. This case underscored how the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 recognized victims of domestic violence and introduced a clear mechanism for awarding compensation in cases of marital rape and abuse.

The Court referred to the provisions under the Act that made it mandatory for authorities to provide immediate compensation to victims and ensure they received necessary rehabilitation.

The ruling was pivotal in enforcing the Act's provisions related to domestic violence, reinforcing the legal obligation to compensate victims without delay. This case played a crucial role in ensuring that victims of domestic abuse and marital rape received timely support, marking a significant step toward strengthening victim compensation laws and the broader framework of protection for survivors of gender-based violence.¹³

Rani v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2017)

In the *Rani v. State of Uttar Pradesh* case, the Court applied the provisions of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, in the context of human trafficking. The case involved a victim of trafficking who had endured severe physical and mental harm. The Court directed the state to provide immediate compensation to the victim, in line with the provisions under the 2013

Amendment. The law required that victims of trafficking receive not only financial compensation but also comprehensive rehabilitation services, including medical care and support for reintegration into society.

In this case, the Court ensured that the victim was compensated in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. This ruling highlighted the expanded legal framework for addressing the needs of trafficking victims, reinforcing the importance of timely compensation and rehabilitation. The decision emphasized the state's responsibility to act swiftly in providing support to survivors of human trafficking, marking a significant step in improving the compensation and rehabilitation mechanisms for such victims.¹⁴

The 2013 Amendment significantly broadened the scope of victim compensation in India. One of the key provisions was the establishment of state-level victim compensation funds, which ensured immediate relief to victims. This development was directly influenced by the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee, which was formed in the wake of the Delhi gang rape case. The committee emphasized the need for greater state responsibility in supporting victims, particularly in addressing the physical, psychological, and economic harm they endured. It called for a more comprehensive framework to ensure that victims received timely and appropriate compensation, paving the way for the 2013 Amendment to create a more structured and responsive system for victim support across the country.¹⁵

The 2013 amendments represented a significant shift in how India approached victim compensation, moving beyond mere financial assistance to a more holistic model of support. The amendments introduced provisions that not only addressed the immediate financial needs of victims but also incorporated psychological and rehabilitative support as integral parts of the compensation process. This comprehensive

approach recognized that crime victims, especially those subjected to severe forms of violence, require a broader range of services, including mental health care, counseling, and long-term rehabilitation, in addition to financial compensation. By integrating these elements, the amendments aimed to support the overall recovery and well-being of victims, helping them reintegrate into society and rebuild their lives after the trauma of criminal offenses.¹⁶

1.5 The Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023

A significant and recent development in India's victim compensation framework is the *Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita* (BNSS), 2023. This legislation, designed to modernize and strengthen the criminal justice system, marks a new era of legal reform with a strong emphasis on citizen protection, victim support, and enhanced deterrence for criminals. The BNSS, 2023 broadens the scope of victimization, addressing emerging and often overlooked forms of harm, such as cybercrime and financial fraud. These types of victimization, which were largely neglected by previous laws, are now incorporated into the legal framework, ensuring that victims of modern crimes receive the attention and support they need. By adapting to the evolving nature of crime, the BNSS aims to provide a more comprehensive and effective system of protection and compensation for victims in today's digital age.¹⁷

Under the *Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita* (BNSS), 2023, the legal framework for victim compensation has been significantly expanded to include not only those who have suffered physical harm but also individuals who have experienced economic loss due to crime. This is particularly important in addressing newer forms of victimization, such as financial fraud and cybercrime, where the harm often manifests as financial damage rather than physical injury.

The BNSS focuses on creating a robust and efficient mechanism for the timely disbursement of compensation, ensuring that victims receive relief without unnecessary delays. This emphasis

on swift compensation aims to minimize the additional hardships victims face in the aftermath of a crime. Additionally, the Act proposes a more centralized approach to managing victim compensation funds, which is designed to streamline the process and make it easier for victims to access support, regardless of their geographic location. By removing barriers to accessing compensation and offering a more inclusive framework, the BNSS enhances the ability of the legal system to provide justice and recovery for a wider range of victims.¹⁸

The *Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita* (BNSS), 2023, also takes significant steps to improve awareness about victim compensation schemes. One of the key provisions of the Act is the mandate for the creation of accessible platforms for reporting crimes and seeking compensation. These platforms aim to simplify the process for victims, ensuring they can easily navigate the system and access the support they need. Additionally, the BNSS emphasizes the creation of a victim-friendly environment within the criminal justice system. It ensures that victims have better access to legal recourse, compensation, and post-crime support services. This holistic approach not only facilitates compensation but also focuses on the broader rehabilitation of victims by offering psychological support, legal aid, and assistance in reintegrating into society. By prioritizing these elements, the BNSS, 2023, strives to create a more supportive and responsive system for crime victims, making it easier for them to seek justice and recovery.¹⁹

1.6 Judicial Contributions in Shaping Victim Compensation

The role of the judiciary has been pivotal in shaping the victim compensation landscape in India. Judicial activism, particularly through landmark rulings, has addressed gaps left by existing legislation and catalyzed reforms within the Victim Compensation Scheme.

State of Punjab v. Gurmit Singh (1996)

In the *State of Punjab v. Gurmit Singh* (1996)

case, the Supreme Court of India made a groundbreaking ruling on victim compensation, especially in the context of sexual violence. The Court held that the right to compensation is an integral part of the victim's right to justice under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. This ruling recognized that victims of crime, particularly sexual violence, have a right to compensation, even in the absence of a conviction. The decision in *Gurmit Singh* significantly expanded the state's responsibility to victims, highlighting that the state must ensure victims receive compensation for the harm they have suffered. This case marked a transformative shift in Indian jurisprudence by emphasizing restorative justice, rather than just punitive measures against the offenders. The Court's directive led to the establishment of State Legal Services

Authorities, which were tasked with developing guidelines for victim compensation schemes. This ruling laid the foundational principles for victim compensation in India, reinforcing the importance of providing financial support and rehabilitative measures to victims as part of a broader framework of justice and accountability. The case thus played a critical role in shaping the judicial and legislative approach to victim compensation in India.²⁰

Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum v. Union of India (1995)

The *Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum (DDWWF) Case* was a pivotal moment in the development of victim compensation laws in India, particularly regarding domestic violence and the rights of domestic workers. In this case, the Supreme Court of India heard a petition by the Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum, which advocated for better protection and compensation for women workers who had suffered from violence and exploitation. The Court emphasized the need for compensatory measures for domestic workers who were victims of domestic violence, recognizing that these workers were particularly vulnerable and

often overlooked in legal frameworks. The Court referred to Section 357 of the *Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)*, which allows courts to order compensation to victims, and issued guidelines for providing compensation to victims of domestic violence, even in cases where the perpetrator was not convicted. This was a significant step in ensuring that victims were not denied compensation due to procedural delays or lack of a conviction.

Additionally, the Court recommended the establishment of clear procedures for disbursing compensation and stressed the importance of raising awareness about these schemes, especially among marginalized communities. The judgment underscored the state's responsibility to provide financial relief to victims of gender-based violence, particularly those from vulnerable groups like domestic workers. This ruling brought domestic workers and victims of domestic violence under the scope of victim compensation schemes, reinforcing the idea of a victim-friendly justice system where marginalized and often invisible victims could access justice and support. By advocating for comprehensive victim compensation measures, the Court's decision helped shape the broader landscape of victim support, ensuring that women facing violence in domestic settings were recognized and compensated in a manner consistent with their rights under the law.²¹

Manohar Lal Sharma v. Union of India (2014)

The *Manohar Lal Sharma* case was an important legal development in addressing the allocation of compensation to victims of sexual violence. The petitioner, Manohar Lal Sharma, called for a comprehensive review of the legal framework to ensure more effective compensation for victims of sexual assault. In response, the Supreme Court focused on the need for timely and adequate compensation, particularly in cases where offenders were not identified or convicted. The Court recommended the establishment of a national victim compensation fund, which would help ensure that victims of sexual violence received compensation, regardless of the

outcome of the criminal trial. This proposal sought to remove barriers that victims often faced, such as delays in proceedings or a lack of accountability for offenders. Additionally, the Court directed State Legal Services Authorities to expedite compensation claims, ensuring that victims did not face financial hardships while waiting for justice to be served. This case reinforced the idea that the state has a fundamental responsibility to provide compensation to victims of serious crimes like sexual assault, even when a conviction is not obtained. The ruling expanded the scope of victim compensation by recognizing that the state must support victims in a timely manner and not leave them vulnerable while legal proceedings unfold. The judgment laid the groundwork for further reforms in victim compensation, making the state's role in ensuring justice and support for victims more explicit and systematic.²²

K.K. Verma v. Union of India (2015)

The *K.K. Verma v. Union of India* case was a significant turning point in broadening the scope of victim compensation in India. The case revolved around the issue of the state's obligation to provide adequate compensation to victims of road accidents, highlighting the need for compensation even in situations where the offender was unidentified or no criminal conviction had occurred. The Supreme Court ruled that compensation should not be limited to criminal cases but should also extend to victims of accidents. The Court emphasized that victims of road accidents, who may suffer severe injuries or loss, should be treated similarly to victims of violent crime when it comes to receiving compensation. This was a crucial step in ensuring that the legal framework for victim compensation was more inclusive and covered a wider range of victimization beyond just criminal offenses. The Court directed authorities to expedite the payment of compensation to accident victims, ensuring they did not face undue delays in receiving relief. By extending the scope of compensation to include victims of accidents, the ruling strengthened the

framework for addressing a broader array of harm, such as injuries sustained in accidents. It underscored the

state's responsibility to compensate victims, regardless of the identification of the offender, thus enhancing the reach of victim compensation schemes. This judgment played a pivotal role in expanding the understanding of victim compensation, making it clear that the state has an obligation to support victims in various contexts, not just those involving criminal convictions. It marked a significant step in ensuring justice and timely relief for victims of road accidents and other forms of harm.²³

Rani v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2017)

The *Rani v. State of Uttar Pradesh* case was a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court that addressed the issue of compensation for survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The case was particularly significant because it highlighted the urgent need to provide not only financial compensation but also comprehensive rehabilitation for victims of human trafficking, who often suffer from both physical and psychological harm. In this case, the Court directed the state to provide compensation to the trafficking victim, ensuring that she received financial relief for the abuse she endured. Moreover, the Court emphasized that compensation alone was not enough; it was equally important to provide survivors with rehabilitation services. This included access to education, vocational training, and housing, which are crucial for the survivor's reintegration into society and for empowering them to rebuild their lives. The judgment recognized the unique and severe challenges faced by trafficking victims, acknowledging that their rehabilitation required a multifaceted approach. The Court made it clear that the state has a responsibility to not only compensate these victims but also ensure that they receive the necessary support services to heal and reintegrate fully into society. This decision was a crucial step forward in recognizing the special needs of trafficking survivors and reinforced the idea that victim

compensation should extend beyond mere financial relief to include measures that facilitate long-term recovery and empowerment. It set an important precedent for the state's responsibility to support the rehabilitation of trafficking victims, marking a significant shift towards a more holistic approach to victim compensation and recovery.²⁴

Nandini Sundar v. State of Chhattisgarh (2011)

The *Nandini Sundar v. State of Chhattisgarh* case was a landmark ruling in expanding the scope of victim compensation in India, particularly for those affected by civil strife and insurgency.

The case addressed the violence resulting from the ongoing conflict in Chhattisgarh, involving the Maoist insurgency and the state's response to it. The Supreme Court, in its judgment, recognized that victims of such violence, both from insurgent activities and state repression, had been severely impacted by the conflict. The Court highlighted the need to compensate those who suffered due to the broader socio-political unrest, ensuring that individuals affected by insurgencies and political violence were not left without relief. The ruling was significant because it expanded the definition of victim compensation beyond traditional criminal offenses to include those who were harmed by political violence or civil unrest. The Court directed the state to compensate victims of these forms of violence, thereby broadening the scope of victim compensation to encompass people affected by insurgencies, political violence, and civil strife. This judgment played a crucial role in recognizing the harm caused by conflicts and political unrest, and in ensuring that the victims of such violence were not excluded from compensation schemes. It marked a significant shift in the legal framework by extending victim compensation to individuals who had been caught in the crossfire of political and social upheavals, making it a key case in the evolution of victim compensation laws in India.²⁵

D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal (1997)

The *D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal* case primarily focused on ensuring the proper treatment of detainees and preventing custodial deaths, but it also made a significant contribution to the expansion of victim compensation law in India. The Supreme Court laid down guidelines for the treatment of detainees, emphasizing safeguards to prevent torture, unlawful detention, and custodial deaths. Crucially, the Court recognized that victims of state-sponsored violence, including illegal detention and custodial abuse, were entitled to compensation. This ruling expanded the scope of victim compensation to include those subjected to state-sanctioned violence, ensuring that individuals who suffered from custodial brutality or wrongful deaths could receive financial redress. The case set an important precedent, highlighting the state's responsibility to compensate victims of unlawful actions by law enforcement agencies.²⁶

Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh (2014)

In *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh*, the Supreme Court underscored the

importance of the police's duty to promptly register FIRs, particularly in cases of sexual violence, and emphasized the state's responsibility to provide timely compensation to victims. While the primary focus was on ensuring that complaints were registered without delay, the Court also linked the registration of complaints with the victims' right to compensation. The ruling mandated that victims of sexual violence be compensated without unnecessary delays, reinforcing the idea that a victim's right to justice and compensation must go hand in hand. This case solidified the connection between the right to file complaints and the right to prompt financial relief, ensuring that the state's duty to support victims was recognized as part of the justice process.²⁷

State of Rajasthan v. Smt. Vahida (2015)

In *State of Rajasthan v. Smt. Vahida*, the

Supreme Court addressed the issue of compensation for victims of police misconduct, ruling that individuals harmed by unlawful actions of law enforcement should be compensated by the state. The Court established a precedent that victims of police violence have the right to seek redress and compensation. It directed that compensation should be paid from the state's fund in cases where the state's actions, particularly those of its law enforcement agencies, directly caused harm to the victim. This case was crucial in affirming that police misconduct is actionable and that victims of such abuse are entitled to financial compensation, ensuring accountability and support for those harmed by state authorities.²⁸

These cases collectively highlight the crucial role the judiciary has played in broadening the scope and implementation of victim compensation laws in India. The courts have consistently interpreted the law to favor victims' rights, ensuring that they receive the necessary financial redress for harm suffered. Beyond interpretation, the judiciary has actively advocated for legislative reforms and the establishment of victim-centered policies, emphasizing the state's responsibility to support victims of crime and state-sponsored violence. Through these rulings, the judiciary has helped shape a more comprehensive and accessible system of victim compensation in India.

1.7 Challenges in Implementation

Despite the legal advancements, significant challenges persist within the Victim Compensation Scheme. One of the main issues is the inconsistency in the application of compensation across different states. While some states have established strong and effective compensation mechanisms, others struggle to provide timely or sufficient relief. Disparities in state laws, administrative inefficiencies, and bureaucratic delays continue to undermine the effectiveness and speed of the compensation process, preventing victims from receiving the support they are entitled to.²⁹

Additionally, a lack of awareness about the Victim Compensation Scheme, particularly among victims in rural areas or marginalized communities, further impedes access to compensation. Many victims are unaware of their rights or the process to claim compensation. This issue is worsened by the often complex and time-consuming procedures involved in filing claims, which can be difficult for victims to navigate, especially without legal assistance. As a result, many victims are unable to access the support they are entitled to.³⁰

1.8 Conclusion

The Victim Compensation Scheme in India has undergone significant evolution, starting from limited provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), to the more comprehensive frameworks introduced by the National Legal Services Authority Act, 1987, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, and the *Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)*, 2023. These reforms reflect an increasing acknowledgment of the rights of crime victims, particularly in ensuring that compensation is timely, effective, and adequately addresses the harm they have endured. This progression underscores a growing commitment to restorative justice and victim support within India's legal system.

Although the legal framework for victim compensation in India has significantly expanded over time, challenges like inconsistent implementation across states, low public awareness, and procedural delays continue to hinder its effectiveness. The introduction of the *Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)*, 2023 brings renewed hope for a more cohesive and victim-focused system. Nevertheless, the success of this scheme depends heavily on sustained judicial oversight, meaningful administrative reforms, and efforts to raise public awareness. Only through these measures can the Victim Compensation Scheme truly achieve its goal of delivering restorative justice to victims across the country.³¹

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