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INVESTOR PROTECTION LAW: BALANCING RISK AND INNOVATION IN THE SECURITIES MARKET

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ABSTRACT

The Indian securities market is a fundamental building block for the economic development of the nation, facilitating the mobilisation of resources and the effective utilisation of capital. The rising participation of institutional and retail investors is the result of increased confidence in the Indian financial system. Yet, the smooth operation of this market relies on an elegant balance between safeguarding investor interests and fostering an environment conducive to innovation. The sustained growth of the Indian capital market is inherently linked to the preservation of investor confidence, and therefore security policies need to be enforced effectively. The regulatory framework must address the inherent conflict where over-regulation can dampen market vigor and the introduction of innovative financial products and under-regulation can put investors at unnecessary risk and undermine market integrity.

The authors, through this research paper, seeks to assess the Indian legal framework with respect to investor protection and its delicate interaction with innovation in the securities market. The analysis considers how legislations and regulatory agencies assist in safeguarding investors from scams such as insider trading, malpractices in the market, and deceptive information. It does this by encouraging honesty, good conduct, and well-informed participation in primary and secondary markets. It also examines the constant challenge of balancing protection of investors with promoting new ideas and efficiency in the securities market. This is particularly so with rapidly evolving technology and innovative financial products. By examining rules in depth, enforcement actions taken in their case, and initiatives to develop the market, the study illustrates how critical SEBI is in developing a robust and dynamic capital market. The report identifies that regulations need to change on a periodic basis to respond to new risks.

Keywords: SEBI, Investor protection, Investors, Securities Market, Risk Management, Stock Exchange, Market Manipulation.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian securities market stands as a cornerstone of the nation's economic framework, facilitating capital formation, resource allocation, and wealth generation. As participation by both retail and institutional investors has grown, there is a noticeable consolidation of confidence in India's financial system. Nevertheless, efficient and consistent functioning of this market depends critically on

the delicate balancing act between two opposing objectives: protecting investors' interests and maintaining an environment that fosters innovation and dynamism. The system of regulation is perpetually strained by needing to balance this inherent tension. Excessive regulation, as much as it is aimed at the safeguarding of investors, risks stifling the market's ability to innovate, limiting access to innovative financial products and even

weakening the collective market wisdom. On the other hand, an overly permissive regulatory environment might expose investors to enormous risks, allowing malpractices such as fraud, insider dealing, and market manipulation to flourish, consequently undermining investor trust and destabilizing the integrity of the market. At the center of this balancing act stands the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the apex regulatory authority for the securities market. SEBI's dual mandate—to protect investors and simultaneously promote market development—requires it to craft policies that are both protective and progressive. This dual responsibility often necessitates nuanced decision-making, where the trade-offs between risk mitigation and innovation need to be carefully calibrated to foster a healthy, resilient, and dynamic capital market ecosystem.

The past decades have seen the market evolve dramatically from being a disintegrated and obscure system to becoming a high-tech, sophisticated, and globally linked financial system. This has been characterized by more participation by both retail and institutional investors, mirroring enhanced faith in India's financial system. Yet, innovation and expansion in the securities market also bring inbuilt threats. The market is prone to malpractices like insider trading, market manipulation, fraudulent filings, and corporate governance failure. Besides causing financial loss to the investors, they also undermine confidence in the efficiency and fairness of the market. Investor protection henceforth becomes the foundation for the long-term growth of the capital market. Strong investor protection mechanisms are key to instilling investor confidence, making the market operate effectively, transparently, and in a fair manner.

However, protecting investors cannot be considered independently of the need to promote innovation within the market. Financial innovation—expressed through new vehicles such as derivatives, Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), and green bonds, as well as

sophisticated trading technology and computerized investment platforms—has a key role to play in increasing liquidity, expanding access, lowering costs, and facilitating more advanced risk management for market players. Too rigid or excessive regulatory regimes run the risk of stifling such innovation, even making the market less competitive internationally. On the other hand, a lack of regulation may leave investors open to unexpected dangers, systemic uncertainty, and unsavory market conduct. This requires a careful and evolving balancing act: developing and sustaining a regulatory framework that simultaneously guards investors against abuses and encourages an environment supporting market vitality, technological progress, and financial innovation. In India, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is the lead regulator responsible for making this balance. SEBI's role, backed by a complex web of laws, rules, guidelines, and enforcement mechanisms—including the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956, the SEBI Act, 1992, the Companies Act, 2013, and subsequent regulations and amendments—encompasses protecting investor interests, regulating market intermediaries, ensuring corporate governance, and promoting the orderly development of the securities market.

Recent years have brought additional challenges to this balancing effort. The expansion of online trading platforms, the emergence of decentralized finance (DeFi), initial coin offerings (ICOs), algorithmic trading, and financial decision-making by artificial intelligence have drastically changed the landscape of the securities markets. These developments have introduced new risks, including cybersecurity attacks, algorithmic bias, and increased enforcement complexities. Therefore, the rulebook has to not only keep up with the speed of innovation but also project into the future, and in a proactive and forward-looking manner.

In this context, this paper takes a critical examination of Investor Protection Law in India

and how the Indian legal and regulatory environment navigates the dynamic tension between mitigating risk and advancing innovation in the securities market. The research will:

- Discuss the objectives and underlying principles of India's investor protection legislation.
- Discuss the mechanisms used to protect investors, such as disclosure rules, market monitoring, grievance redressal mechanisms, and penalties for misconduct.
- Discuss how the regulatory regime enables or inhibits financial innovation, drawing on new technologies and new market products.
- Assess the success of SEBI's dual function in ensuring market integrity while enabling growth and innovation.
- Emphasize recent legislative and regulatory changes to enhance investor protection and support a more robust and adaptable market environment.
- Meet the future challenges of continued digitalization of financial services and propose policy lines to improve protection harmonization with innovation.

Finally, the paper aims to emphasize that the future direction of the Indian securities market—and its potential to meaningfully contribute to national economic objectives—hinges vitally on sustaining an adaptive, balanced, and investor-focused regulatory framework that fosters innovation without sacrificing trust and integrity.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF INVESTOR PROTECTION IN INDIA

1.1. Pre-SEBI Regulatory Framework

Before the establishment of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), investor protection in India was primarily governed by the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 (SCRA) and the Companies Act, 1956. This regulatory framework was relatively rudimentary, focused mainly on regulating stock exchanges and contracts in securities with limited emphasis on investor protection. The Controller of Capital Issues (CCI) under the Ministry of Finance was responsible for pricing

issues, while stock exchanges implemented many of the regulations themselves. This fragmented approach proved inadequate as the Indian capital market expanded, particularly highlighted by the securities scam of 1992 involving Harshad Mehta, which exposed significant weaknesses in the regulatory framework.

1.2. Establishment of SEBI and Early Developments

The watershed moment for investor protection in India came with the establishment of SEBI. "SEBI was officially established by the Government of India in the year 1988 and came into effect in the year 1992 with the SEBI Act 1992, which was passed by the Government of India"⁷¹³. The SEBI Act, 1992, empowered the regulator with the explicit mandate to protect investor interests and promote market development. Section 11 of the Act outlined SEBI's functions and powers, providing the statutory foundation for investor protection in the securities market.

During this initial phase, SEBI introduced several significant reforms aimed at enhancing investor protection, including a comprehensive regulatory framework for mutual funds, regulations governing substantial acquisitions of shares and takeovers, rules for disclosure and investor protection in public offerings, and a framework for regulating various market intermediaries such as brokers, merchant bankers, and portfolio managers.

1.3. Modern Framework (2000–Present)

The period from 2000 to the present has witnessed substantial refinement and expansion of India's investor protection framework. Key developments include:

1. The Securities Laws (Amendment) Act, 2004, which enhanced SEBI's enforcement powers, including the ability to impose higher penalties for market violations.

⁷¹³ Abhilipsa Kar and Yashoswini Mishra, 'SEBI ON INVESTOR PROTECTION', *Indian Journal of Integrated Research in Law*, IV (1), pp. 339–348. doi: <https://ijlr.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/SEBI-ON-INVESTOR-PROTECTION.pdf>.

2. The Companies Act, 2013, which introduced significant reforms in corporate governance and shareholder protection, including provisions for class action suits and enhanced disclosure requirements.

3. The comprehensive revision of SEBI's Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) Regulations in 2015, strengthening disclosure norms and corporate governance requirements for listed entities.

4. The introduction of regulatory frameworks for innovative market segments and instruments, including Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs).

5. The establishment of the Social Stock Exchange, "a novel platform designed to facilitate capital raising for social enterprises while ensuring appropriate investor safeguards"⁷¹⁴2.

This evolution reflects SEBI's growing emphasis on balancing investor protection with market innovation, recognizing that both objectives are essential for a well-functioning securities market.

1.4. The Current Legal Framework for Investor Protection

1.4.1. Constitutional and Statutory Foundation

The foundation of investor protection in India can be traced to constitutional principles, particularly Article 19(1)(g), which guarantees the freedom to practice any profession or carry on any occupation, trade, or business, subject to reasonable restrictions. The regulation of securities markets represents one such reasonable restriction, aimed at ensuring market integrity and protecting public interest.

The statutory framework for investor protection is comprised of several key legislations:

1. **The SEBI Act, 1992:** The cornerstone of the investor protection framework, establishing SEBI as the primary securities market regulator with explicit investor protection functions.

2. **The Companies Act, 2013:** Contains numerous provisions relevant to investor protection, particularly for shareholders in listed companies, including enhanced disclosure requirements, strengthened corporate governance norms, and provisions for class action suits.

3. **The Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956:** Continues to serve as a fundamental pillar of securities regulation, governing recognition and regulation of stock exchanges and contracts in securities.

4. **The Depositories Act, 1996:** Provides the legal framework for the establishment and regulation of depositories, enabling electronic holding and transfer of securities.

1.4.2. SEBI's Regulatory Framework

Building upon this statutory foundation, SEBI has developed a comprehensive regulatory framework consisting of rules, regulations, circulars, and guidelines. "Investor protection legislation is described under the Section 11(2) of the SEBI Act, 1992"⁷¹⁵1. The key elements of this framework include:

1) Disclosure and Investor Protection Guidelines

SEBI's disclosure requirements address information asymmetry in securities markets through:

- The SEBI (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2018, governing public offerings and mandating detailed disclosures in offer documents.

- Continuous disclosure requirements under the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015.

⁷¹⁴ Guduri Nagaveni, Dr N Subrahmanyam, D. Satish Babu, Dr. Ankireddy Yenireddy (2025) "The Evolution of Innovative Financial Instruments in India's Securities Market: Trends and Investor Dynamics", *South Eastern European Journal of Public Health*, pp. 2932–2949. doi: 10.70135/seejph.vi.3417.

⁷¹⁵ *supra* note 1.

- Specialized disclosure norms for specific instruments such as mutual funds, AIFs, and structured products.

2) Market Integrity Regulations

To maintain market integrity and prevent manipulation, SEBI has established:

- The SEBI (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) Regulations, 2003.
- The SEBI (Prohibition of Insider Trading) Regulations, 2015.
- The SEBI (Substantial Acquisition of Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2011.

These regulations address specific forms of market misconduct that could harm investor interests, establishing both preventive measures and punitive consequences for violations.

3) Intermediary Regulation

SEBI regulates various market intermediaries to ensure they operate in the best interests of investors through regulations governing stock brokers, merchant bankers, investment advisers, research analysts, and other market participants. These regulations establish entry requirements, operational standards, and conduct expectations, creating accountability mechanisms that protect investor interests.

1.5. Institutional Mechanisms for Investor Protection

Several institutional mechanisms contribute to investor protection in India:

a) Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF): Established under the Companies Act, utilizing unclaimed dividends and amounts to fund investor awareness and education initiatives.

b) Investor Protection Funds at Stock Exchanges: Funds maintained by stock exchanges to compensate investors for losses resulting from broker defaults or other specified circumstances.

c) Investor Grievance Redressal

Mechanisms: Including SCORES (SEBI Complaints Redress System), arbitration mechanisms at stock exchanges, the Securities Appellate Tribunal for appeals against SEBI orders, and recognized investor associations.

d) Market Surveillance Systems:

Sophisticated systems operated by SEBI and stock exchanges to detect market manipulation, insider trading, and other unfair practices in real-time.

2. SEBI'S MULTIFACETED ROLE IN INVESTOR PROTECTION

2.1. As the primary securities market regulator, SEBI performs several key regulatory functions aimed at investor protection, SEBI registers and regulates various market intermediaries, ensuring that only qualified entities with adequate capital, infrastructure, and expertise can operate in the securities market. "SEBI ensures that market participants adhere to fair trading practices, preventing activities like insider trading and market manipulation"⁷¹⁶. For each category of intermediary, SEBI has established specific eligibility criteria, capital requirements, conduct standards, and operational guidelines, SEBI regulates both primary and secondary markets through comprehensive regulations governing public offerings, secondary market trading, and market infrastructure institutions. These regulatory measures create a level playing field for investors and minimize the risk of market manipulation or unfair practices and SEBI's Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements establish continuous disclosure obligations for listed entities, requiring prompt disclosure of material events, periodic financial results, and compliance with corporate governance standards. By mandating timely and accurate information dissemination, these requirements address information asymmetry and enable informed investment decisions.

⁷¹⁶ ISPP (2025) *How do sebi's policies and regulations protect investors? - indian school of public policy, Indian School of Public Policy* -. Available at: <https://www.ispp.org.in/how-do-sebis-policies-and-regulations-protect-investors/> (Accessed: 10 April 2025).

2.2. EBI employs various enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with its regulations and to address violations that harm investor interests which would be inclusive of SEBI having broad investigative powers, including the authority to call for information and records, summon and examine witnesses, inspect books and records, and conduct search and seizure operations (with judicial approval). These powers enable SEBI to investigate potential violations thoroughly and gather evidence for enforcement actions, SEBI's adjudication process allows for the imposition of monetary penalties for violations of securities laws and regulations. Beyond monetary penalties, SEBI can issue directions such as cease and desist orders, disgorgement of ill-gotten gains, suspension or cancellation of registration, and debarment from accessing the securities market, SEBI's settlement mechanism allows alleged violators to resolve matters without admission or denial of guilt, subject to payment of settlement charges and compliance with other terms. To ensure effective execution of monetary penalties and disgorgement orders, SEBI has powers to attach bank accounts and other assets, retain amounts payable to the violator, arrest and detain persistent defaulters, and appoint receivers for property management and most importantly SEBI conducts investor awareness campaigns to educate individuals about their rights and responsibilities in the securities market. This helps investors make informed decisions⁷¹⁷. These initiatives include the "Visit SEBI" program, workshops and seminars for specific target groups, comprehensive financial education resources, and investor awareness programs targeting semi-urban and rural areas where financial literacy levels may be lower.

CASE STUDIES

1. The Sahara Case: Defining the Boundaries of Investor Protection⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁷ *supra* note 4.

⁷¹⁸ Uma Shabsikant (2014) 'Sahara: A landmark case that brought focus on investor protection', *Economic Times*, 10 March. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/et-commentary/sahara-a->

The Sahara case represents one of the most significant investor protection cases in Indian securities law history. The case involved two companies of the Sahara Group - Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Limited (SIRECL) and Sahara Housing Investment Corporation Limited (SHICL), which between 2008 and 2011 raised over Rs. 24,000 crores from more than 3 crore investors through Optional Fully Convertible Debentures (OFCDs).

The case involving the Sahara group and the jailing of its owner is landmark since it shows that even powerful companies that defraud investors can be brought to book⁶. The issue came to SEBI's attention when the companies filed draft red herring prospectuses for public issues, and SEBI discovered that they had already issued OFCDs without complying with public issue requirements under securities laws.

In *Securities and Exchange Board of India v. Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Ltd. & Ors.*⁷¹⁹, the Supreme Court concluded that the OFCD issuances were public offerings subject to SEBI regulations and directed the companies to refund the entire amount collected with 15% interest. When the companies failed to comply, the Court took unprecedented steps, including the incarceration of Sahara Group's chairman, Subrata Roy⁷²⁰.

The Sahara case significantly strengthened investor protection in India by clarifying SEBI's jurisdiction over securities issuances regardless of their labelling, establishing that collecting funds from a large number of investors constitutes a public offering subject to regulatory requirements, and demonstrating the judiciary's willingness to enforce investor protection measures through strong remedial actions.

2. The Adani-Hindenburg Case

The Adani-Hindenburg case addressing Market Volatility, which emerged in 2023, highlights the challenges of protecting investors from extreme

landmark-case-that-brought-focus-on-investor-protection/articleshow/31658922.cms (Accessed: 10 April 2025).

⁷¹⁹ (2012) 10 SCC 603.

⁷²⁰ *supra* note 6.

market volatility. In January 2023, Hindenburg Research published a report alleging accounting fraud and stock manipulation by the Adani Group, triggering significant volatility in Adani Group stocks.

Several petitions were filed before the Supreme Court seeking investigation into the allegations and enhanced regulatory measures to protect investors. The Court specifically questioned SEBI about its approach to investor protection in the context of market volatility: "Now what does SEBI intend to do to protect this kind of volatility... which leads to a loss of investor value," the bench asked. "Has SEBI looked at whether it is necessary to tighten the regulations. What is SEBI intending to do in terms of ensuring the protection of investors"⁷²¹3.

The Court observed that "one of the principal reasons which led the apex court to intervene in these petitions was the extreme volatility of stock market"⁷²²3. This case highlights the challenges of protecting retail investors from sudden market volatility and the need for balanced regulatory responses that address volatility without unduly restricting market functions.

3. The Karvy Stock Broking Case

The Karvy Stock Broking case of 2019–2020 highlighted the importance of segregating client assets from proprietary assets and the role of effective regulatory supervision in protecting investor interests. Karvy Stock Broking Limited (KSBL) was found to have misused client securities worth approximately Rs. 2,300 crores, pledging them with banks to raise loans for its proprietary activities, in violation of SEBI regulations. In *SEBI v. Karvy Stock Broking Ltd.*⁷²³, SEBI took swift action to protect investor interests by prohibiting KSBL from taking new clients, directing depositories to transfer securities from KSBL's account to

client accounts, and coordinating with stock exchanges and clearing corporations to minimize client impact. The case led to significant systemic reforms, including the implementation of the pledged securities monitoring system, enhanced reporting requirements for brokers regarding client securities, and the introduction of the "Client-level Segregation of Funds and Securities" framework. This case demonstrated the importance of regulatory supervision and the effectiveness of prompt intervention in minimizing investor losses.

BALANCING RISK AND INNOVATION IN THE SECURITIES MARKET

➤ Innovative Financial Instruments in India

India's securities market has witnessed significant innovation in recent years. Indian securities market has witnessed tremendous changes over the last decade, with such changes having been driven both by regulatory reforms and the development of innovative financial instruments"⁷²⁴2. These innovations include:

a. Green Bonds and Sustainable Finance

Green bonds are fixed-income securities issued to finance projects with positive environmental or climate benefits. In 2016, SEBI introduced its Green Bond Framework, establishing disclosure requirements and use-of-proceeds criteria for these instruments. This framework aims to facilitate capital raising for environmentally sustainable projects while ensuring adequate investor protection through standardized disclosures.

b. REITs and InvITs

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) enable small investors to participate in commercial real estate and infrastructure assets, respectively. Search result specifically mentions these instruments as important innovations "brought under scrutiny to find out their impact

⁷²¹ Business Standard (2023) 'What Sebi intends to do to protect investors from volatility in market: SC', *Business Standard*, 24 November. Available at: https://www.business-standard.com/markets/news/what-sebi-intends-to-do-to-protect-investors-from-volatility-in-market-sc-123112400793_1.html (Accessed: 10 April 2025).

⁷²² *supra* note 7.

⁷²³ WTM/GM/EFD/99/2019-20

⁷²⁴ *supra* note 2.

on investor interest and the way to achieve good performance"⁷²⁵2.

SEBI's regulatory framework for these instruments balances investor protection with market development through minimum asset size and distribution requirements, independent valuation and governance structures, detailed disclosures on asset performance and risks, and leverage limitations.

c. Social Stock Exchange

The Social Stock Exchange represents a novel platform "setting up" of which is mentioned as an "important innovation"⁷²⁶2. The SSE aims to facilitate capital raising for social enterprises and voluntary organizations through various financial instruments, including zero-coupon zero-principal bonds, social impact funds, and development impact bonds.

d. Alternative Investment Funds

SEBI's AIF regulations provide a framework for various private investment vehicles, including venture capital, private equity, and hedge funds. The tiered regulatory approach (Category I, II, and III AIFs) calibrates regulatory requirements according to the risk profile of each fund category, balancing innovation with investor protection.

➤ Regulatory Challenges Posed by Innovation

Financial innovation creates several regulatory challenges for investor protection:

a) Information Asymmetry and Complexity

Innovative financial instruments often involve complex structures that may be difficult for average investors to understand. This complexity can exacerbate information asymmetry between issuers and investors, potentially leading to mispricing of risks or inappropriate investment decisions.

b) Regulatory Arbitrage

Innovative instruments may be designed to exploit gaps or inconsistencies in the regulatory framework, potentially circumventing investor protection measures. As demonstrated in the Sahara case, seemingly innovative structures were used to avoid regulatory requirements applicable to public offerings⁷²⁷6.

c) Risk Assessment Challenges

New financial instruments may create risks that are difficult to assess using traditional methods. For example, green bonds introduce sustainability-related risks that require specialized evaluation frameworks, while crypto-assets present novel technological and operational risks.

➤ SEBI's Approach to Balancing Protection and Innovation

SEBI has adopted several approaches to balance investor protection with market innovation:

a) Calibrated Regulatory Frameworks

SEBI has developed tailored regulatory frameworks for different innovative instruments, calibrating requirements according to the instrument's risk profile and target investors. This includes more stringent requirements for instruments targeting retail investors, specialized disclosure formats for unique instruments, and tiered regulatory frameworks for investment vehicles.

b) Regulatory Sandbox

In 2020, SEBI introduced a regulatory sandbox framework allowing limited testing of innovative financial services or products in a controlled environment with regulatory relaxations. This approach enables SEBI to observe new products or business models in action, identify potential risks before widespread adoption, and develop appropriate regulatory responses based on empirical evidence.

c) Risk-Based Supervision

SEBI has implemented a risk-based supervision framework that allocates regulatory resources according to the level of risk posed by different

⁷²⁵ supra note 2.

⁷²⁶ supra note 2.

⁷²⁷ supra note 6.

entities and activities. This approach allows more efficient oversight of innovative areas while maintaining appropriate supervision of traditional market segments.

d) Collaborative Approach

SEBI engages with market participants, industry associations, and other stakeholders to understand innovations and their implications before finalizing regulations. This collaborative approach helps ensure that regulations are both effective and practical.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON INVESTOR PROTECTION

Global Approaches to Investor Protection:

Investor protection frameworks vary significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting differences in legal traditions, market development, and regulatory philosophies.

a) The United States Model

The U.S. investor protection framework is characterized by comprehensive disclosure requirements through the Securities Act of 1933 and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, strong enforcement powers vested in the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and private rights of action for investors, including class action mechanisms. The U.S. model emphasizes disclosure-based regulation, allowing sophisticated investors to make informed decisions while providing strong enforcement mechanisms against fraud and misrepresentation.

b) The European Union Approach

The EU framework emphasizes harmonized standards across member states through directives and regulations, including the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II) focus on investor categorization and suitability requirements, and the Prospectus Regulation's standardized disclosure format. The EU approach combines disclosure requirements with more prescriptive conduct regulation, particularly for retail investors.

c) The Singapore Model

Singapore's framework is notable for risk-based capital requirements for intermediaries,

differentiated regulatory treatment based on investor sophistication, and a balanced approach to financial innovation through regulatory sandboxes. Singapore's approach has been particularly influential for emerging economies seeking to develop globally competitive financial markets while maintaining appropriate investor protections.

d) COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE INDIAN FRAMEWORK

➤ Similarities with Global Best Practices

India's investor protection framework shares several features with international best practices:

- Like the U.S., India emphasizes disclosure requirements and has strong enforcement powers vested in SEBI.
- Similar to the EU, India has adopted a categorized approach to investors, with enhanced protections for retail investors.
- Following Singapore's model, India has implemented a regulatory sandbox for financial innovation.

These similarities reflect India's efforts to align with global standards while adapting them to local market conditions.

➤ Distinctive Features of the Indian Framework

Several aspects of India's framework are distinctive:

- The extensive use of investor education and awareness programs, reflecting the diverse literacy levels among Indian investors.
- The strong judicial involvement in shaping investor protection, as demonstrated in cases like Sahara⁷²⁸[6](#).
- The comprehensive regulation of collective investment schemes, developed in response to numerous fraudulent schemes targeting small investors.

⁷²⁸ *supra* note 6.

- The emphasis on corporate governance reforms as an indirect investor protection mechanism.

e) Comparative Strengths and Areas for Enhancement

The Indian approach exhibits several comparative strengths, including adaptability to market evolution, strong enforcement capabilities, and comprehensive coverage of market segments. However, comparative analysis suggests areas where India might enhance its approach:

- Strengthening private enforcement mechanisms, such as class action provisions, which are more developed in jurisdictions like the U.S.
- Enhancing the efficiency of dispute resolution mechanisms to reduce the time required for investor grievance redressal.
- Developing more sophisticated approaches to regulating market conduct, similar to the UK's principles-based framework.
- Expanding cross-border cooperation mechanisms to address increasingly global investment activities.

CHALLENGES IN THE CURRENT INVESTOR PROTECTION FRAMEWORK

➤ Enforcement Challenges

Despite significant strengthening of SEBI's enforcement powers, several challenges persist in effectively enforcing investor protection provisions:

a) Adjudication Timelines

The duration of enforcement proceedings often extends over several years due to procedural requirements, resource constraints, and legal complexities. In *United India Periodicals Pvt. Ltd. v. SEBI*⁷²⁹, the Supreme Court emphasised the importance of timely adjudication in securities matters, noting that excessive delays undermine market confidence and investor protection.

b) Jurisdictional Challenges

Overlapping jurisdiction among different regulators—SEBI, RBI, IRDAI, and others—creates challenges in addressing activities that span multiple regulatory domains. This is particularly evident in cases involving unregulated investment schemes that exploit regulatory gaps.

c) Recovery and Distribution Challenges

The recovery of funds from securities law violators and their distribution to affected investors presents significant practical challenges. As demonstrated in the Sahara case, even after definitive judicial orders, the process of recovering and returning funds to investors can be protracted and complex⁷³⁰.

➤ Technological Challenges

Rapid technological advancement in financial markets creates several challenges for the investor protection framework:

a) High-Frequency Trading and Market Manipulation

The rise of algorithmic and high-frequency trading introduces new forms of potential market manipulation that may be difficult to detect using traditional surveillance methods, including spoofing, layering, momentum ignition strategies, and cross-market manipulation.

b) Cybersecurity Risks

The digitalization of securities markets introduces cybersecurity risks that potentially threaten investor assets and market integrity, including unauthorized access to trading accounts, data breaches, system vulnerabilities, and potential for market disruption through cyber-attacks.

c) Digital Assets and Decentralized Finance

The emergence of digital assets and decentralized finance platforms creates novel challenges for investor protection, including determining which digital assets qualify as securities under existing legal definitions and

⁷²⁹ (2001) 5 SCC 714.

⁷³⁰ *supra* note 6. +

establishing appropriate disclosure requirements for token offerings.

d) Social Media and Information Dissemination

Social media platforms have transformed how investment information is disseminated and consumed, creating challenges for ensuring information quality and preventing manipulation, including difficulty in monitoring and regulating investment advice on social platforms and the potential for coordinated misinformation campaigns affecting market prices.

➤ Investor Awareness and Behavioral Challenges

Effective investor protection is not solely a function of regulatory frameworks but also depends on investor behavior and awareness:

a) Financial Literacy Limitations

Despite SEBI's extensive investor education efforts, financial literacy remains limited among significant segments of the investing population. This creates challenges for disclosure-based regulation, as investors may not fully comprehend even well-designed disclosures about investment risks and features.

b) Behavioral Biases

Investor decision-making is influenced by various behavioral biases that may lead to suboptimal outcomes even with adequate disclosure, including herding behavior, overconfidence, recency bias, and loss aversion. These biases limit the effectiveness of traditional disclosure-based regulation and suggest the need for additional protective measures in some contexts.

c) Information Overload

The volume and complexity of investment information can overwhelm investors, leading to superficial analysis or excessive reliance on simplified metrics. This challenge is exacerbated by the proliferation of investment options and the increasing complexity of financial products.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING INVESTOR PROTECTION

➤ Induction of Legislative Reforms

a) Comprehensive Securities Market Legislation

A unified securities market legislation could consolidate and update various acts currently governing the securities market, eliminating inconsistencies and overlaps in the current fragmented framework, modernizing regulatory provisions to address emerging market realities, strengthening SEBI's enforcement powers, and clarifying jurisdictional boundaries.

b) Enhanced Investor Remedies

Strengthening private enforcement mechanisms could complement regulatory enforcement through expanding and streamlining the class action framework introduced in the Companies Act, 2013, establishing specialized securities courts or tribunals, creating an investor compensation scheme funded by market participants, and introducing statutory provisions for derivative actions.

c) Digital Assets and Services Framework

A comprehensive legislative framework for digital assets and services would address current regulatory gaps through clear definitions of different types of digital assets and their regulatory treatment, licensing and conduct requirements for digital asset service providers, and specific investor protection provisions addressing unique risks of digital assets.

➤ Regulatory Improvements

a) Risk-Based Supervision Enhancement

SEBI's supervision framework could be enhanced through developing more sophisticated risk assessment methodologies, implementing advanced data analytics for early risk identification, establishing a dedicated market intelligence unit for emerging risk monitoring, and creating specialized supervisory teams for complex or innovative market segments.

b) Disclosure Modernization

Modernizing disclosure requirements would enhance their effectiveness through layered disclosure formats with tiered information detail for different user needs, interactive and digital-first disclosure designs leveraging technology, standardized templates for complex product features and risk profiles, and behavioral testing of disclosure formats to evaluate investor comprehension.

c) Investor Categorization Refinement

A more nuanced approach to investor categorization would enable better calibration of protective measures through introducing intermediate categories between retail and institutional investors, incorporating both wealth/income thresholds and financial knowledge assessments, and allowing category-specific protections rather than all-or-nothing approaches.

d) RegTech and SupTech Development

Regulatory technology (RegTech) and supervisory technology (SupTech) initiatives could enhance both compliance and supervision through AI-powered surveillance systems for market manipulation detection, automated compliance monitoring for market participants, and machine learning applications for risk assessment and early warning.

e) Targeted Financial Education Programs

Financial education programs targeting specific investor segments would enhance effectiveness through school-based financial literacy initiatives, workplace financial education programs, community-based programs for underserved populations, and digital learning platforms with personalized education pathways.

f) Behavioral Finance Integration

Incorporating behavioral finance insights into investor education would address behavioral biases through education on common investment biases and their impact, decision-making frameworks for systematic investment evaluation, and tools for recognizing emotional factors in investment decisions.

CONCLUSION

The Indian investor protection legal framework is established on a strong foundation of acts and regulations, which are mainly regulated by SEBI. The main aims of these laws are to protect the interests of investors, maintain market integrity, promote market development, and ensure transparency and fairness. Aids to key legislation like the SEBI Act, the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, and the Companies Act, coupled with a detailed set of SEBI regulations, constitute a multi-layered system to ensure these objectives. Risk management mechanisms exist at both regulatory and investor levels, in the form of regulations like margin requirements and settlement guarantee systems, as well as at the investor level through practices like diversification and stop-loss orders. SEBI actively considers and influences innovation in the securities market through efforts such as the regulatory sandbox and the launch of new financial products, and also modifies regulation to keep up with the changing fintech and digital platforms landscape.

The natural conflict between investor protection and encouraging innovation necessitates a constant balancing by SEBI. Tools like regulatory sandboxes, risk-based regulation, ongoing engagement with stakeholders, and regular review of the regulations are used to manage this fine balance. Although the present Indian investor protection system has made tremendous strides in market safety and transparency, there are still challenges in the spheres of enforcement, dealing with information asymmetry, and regulating the fast-paced and rapidly changing digital arena. Recent changes and updates in the legal framework also reflect a direct trend towards boosting transparency, refining governance, combatting risks accompanying new technologies such as AI, and simplifying processes to enhance market participation. Overall, the Indian regulatory framework for the protection of investors attempts to seek a fine line between protecting investors' interests

while promoting a fast-paced and progressive securities market. SEBI has a key role in constantly adapting and fine-tuning regulations to meet the risks coming up and promote sound innovation. The ongoing releases and amendments indicate a determination to provide a safe, transparent, and orderly market that offers benefits to investors and the economy in general. The Indian securities market of the future will rest upon the regulatory regime's ongoing capability to steer clear of the ever-changing landscape in an effective way, realizing the power of innovation while safeguarding the interests and confidence of the investor. Recent trends affecting this balance include the digitalisation of investment processes and services, growing retail investor participation in equity markets, increased interest in ESG and sustainable investing, and the emergence of new investment platforms and business models. These trends create both opportunities and challenges for investor protection, necessitating regulatory responses that maintain protection while accommodating beneficial innovation.

In my view several new factors will likely influence the evolving balance between investor protection and market innovation, such as:

- The continued advancement of financial technology
- Growing interconnectedness of global markets
- Changing investor demographics and preferences
- Evolving understanding of behavioral factors in investment decisions

Maintaining the appropriate balance will require not only specific regulatory measures but also an institutional mindset that recognizes both protection and innovation as legitimate and reconcilable objectives.

India's approach to investor protection reflects a recognition that effective protection is not

achieved through restrictive regulation alone but through a balanced framework that enables informed participation in fair and transparent markets. This approach acknowledges that investor protection and market development are complementary rather than competing objectives—well-protected investors are more likely to participate in markets, and well-functioning markets better serve investor needs.

As India aspires to a more prominent position in global financial markets, the strength and effectiveness of its investor protection framework will be a critical factor in attracting both domestic and international investment. Continued refinement of this framework, incorporating international best practices while addressing India-specific challenges, will contribute to the development of a market that serves the dual objectives of investor protection and economic growth.

The path forward requires not only specific regulatory reforms but also a broader commitment to the principles of transparency, fairness, and accountability that underpin effective investor protection. By maintaining this commitment while embracing appropriate innovation, India can develop a securities market that both protects investor interests and contributes to national economic development objectives.