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# VICTIM PARTICIPATION IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS ROLE IN ENHANCING JUSTICE DELIVERY IN INDIA

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## Abstract

The increasing recognition of victims within criminal justice systems marks a significant departure from the traditional state-centric model of adjudication. This article critically examines the nature, scope, and effectiveness of victim participation in the Indian criminal justice system, situating it within comparative frameworks drawn from the United Kingdom and the United States. It argues that while victim participation contributes to procedural fairness and victim satisfaction, its transformative potential remains constrained by the structural logic of adversarial systems. Through a detailed doctrinal analysis, supported by theoretical and comparative insights, the article demonstrates that victim participation in India remains fragmented and weakly implemented. It further contends that meaningful participation requires structural coherence, enforceability, and institutional support rather than mere formal recognition. The article concludes by advancing a conditional model of victim participation that balances inclusion with the fundamental principles of criminal justice.

## 1. Introduction

The architecture of modern criminal justice systems has historically been defined by the centrality of the State and the marginalisation of the victim. The transition from private to public prosecution marked a fundamental shift in the administration of justice, wherein the responsibility for enforcing criminal law was transferred from individuals to the State.<sup>494</sup> While this transformation was justified on grounds of objectivity, consistency, and public interest, it simultaneously resulted in the systematic exclusion of victims from meaningful participation in criminal proceedings.

This exclusion has increasingly come under scrutiny, particularly in light of developments in victimology, human rights jurisprudence, and procedural justice theory. The growing recognition that victims possess legitimate

interests in the criminal process has led to the emergence of victim participation as a significant area of legal reform. International instruments such as the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power have reinforced this shift by emphasising the rights of victims to access justice, receive information, and participate in proceedings.<sup>495</sup>

Despite these developments, the integration of victims within criminal justice systems remains uneven and contested. While many jurisdictions have introduced participatory mechanisms, fundamental questions persist regarding their effectiveness and normative justification. Does victim participation enhance justice delivery, or does it risk undermining the fairness of the process? Can it coexist with the adversarial structure of criminal justice systems, or does it

<sup>494</sup> Andrew Ashworth and Jeremy Horder, *Principles of Criminal Law* (OUP, 7th edn., 2013).

<sup>495</sup> UN General Assembly, *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power* (1985).

require a fundamental reorientation of legal principles?

The Indian criminal justice system provides a particularly instructive context for examining these questions. Legislative amendments and judicial decisions have expanded the role of victims, yet the practical impact of these developments remains limited. The system continues to be characterised by structural constraints, including institutional inefficiencies, procedural complexity, and socio-economic disparities.

This article seeks to critically evaluate the role of victim participation in enhancing justice delivery, with a particular focus on India. It adopts a multi-dimensional framework, analysing participation in terms of its impact on procedural fairness, victim satisfaction, and restorative outcomes. It argues that victim participation is neither inherently transformative nor merely symbolic, but operates as a conditional mechanism whose effectiveness depends on its structural design and implementation.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations of Victim Participation

### 2.1 Historical Marginalisation and the Rise of Victimology

The marginalisation of victims within modern criminal justice systems is closely linked to the evolution of state-controlled prosecution. In pre-modern legal systems, victims played a central role in initiating and conducting prosecutions.<sup>496</sup> The transition to public prosecution, while enhancing consistency and impartiality, resulted in the displacement of victims from the centre of the process.

The emergence of victimology as a field of study in the twentieth century challenged this exclusion by highlighting the experiences and needs of victims. Scholars argued that the neglect of victims undermined both the legitimacy and effectiveness of criminal justice

systems.<sup>497</sup> This critique led to the development of victim-oriented reforms, including compensation schemes, victim support services, and participatory rights.

However, the reintroduction of victims into criminal proceedings has been shaped by the need to balance competing interests. While participation seeks to address the marginalisation of victims, it must also coexist with the foundational principles of criminal justice, particularly the protection of the accused and the public character of prosecution.

### 2.2 Procedural Justice and the Value of Voice

Procedural justice theory provides a key framework for understanding the significance of victim participation. According to Tom Tyler, individuals are more likely to perceive legal processes as legitimate when they are afforded an opportunity to be heard and treated with respect.<sup>498</sup> This emphasis on “voice” and “dignity” underscores the importance of participation in shaping perceptions of fairness.

In the context of victim participation, procedural justice theory suggests that allowing victims to engage with the process enhances their sense of inclusion and recognition. This, in turn, strengthens confidence in legal institutions and contributes to the overall legitimacy of the system.

However, the application of procedural justice theory to victim participation is not without limitations. While participation may improve perceptions of fairness, it does not necessarily lead to better substantive outcomes. Moreover, the introduction of victim perspectives may complicate decision-making processes, particularly where emotional considerations influence judicial reasoning.<sup>499</sup>

### 2.3 Restorative Justice and the Re-Centring of the Victim

Restorative justice offers an alternative framework that places victims at the centre of

<sup>496</sup> Matthew Hall, *Victims of Crime* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>497</sup> Jo-Anne Wemmers, *Victims in the Criminal Justice System* (1996).

<sup>498</sup> Tom R. Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>499</sup> Susan Bandes, “Empathy, Narrative and Victim Impact Statements” (1996) 63 UCLR.

the justice process. Unlike adversarial systems, which focus on determining guilt and imposing punishment, restorative justice emphasises the repair of harm and the restoration of relationships.<sup>500</sup>

Within this framework, victim participation is not merely a procedural right but a substantive component of justice. Victims are actively involved in determining appropriate outcomes, often through processes such as mediation and conferencing.

Despite its normative appeal, the integration of restorative justice within conventional criminal justice systems remains limited. The adversarial structure, with its emphasis on legal rights and procedural safeguards, restricts the extent to which restorative principles can be fully implemented.<sup>501</sup> As a result, victim participation within such systems remains inherently constrained.

### 3. Victim Participation in the Indian Criminal Justice System

#### 3. Victim Participation in India: Doctrinal Deepening through Judicial Interpretation

While legislative developments have provided the formal basis for recognising victims within the criminal justice system, it is through judicial interpretation that the contours of victim participation in India have been meaningfully shaped. The Supreme Court has, over time, attempted to reconcile the traditionally state-centric structure of criminal procedure with the emerging need to acknowledge the interests of victims.

A foundational development in this regard is the decision in *Bhagwant Singh v. Commissioner of Police*, wherein the Supreme Court held that the informant must be given an opportunity to be heard at the stage when a closure report is filed by the police.<sup>502</sup> This decision is significant not merely for recognising a procedural right, but for altering the investigative stage itself, which had

historically been insulated from victim participation. By introducing the requirement of hearing the informant, the Court acknowledged that the victim possesses a legitimate interest in the outcome of the investigation.

The expansion of victim participation was further reinforced in *Mallikarjun Kodagali v. State of Karnataka*, where the Supreme Court recognised the independent right of the victim to appeal against acquittal under the proviso to section 372 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.<sup>503</sup> The Court rejected the argument that such a right must be narrowly construed, holding instead that the legislative intent was to provide victims with a meaningful remedy against erroneous acquittals. This judgment marks a significant shift in the doctrinal position, as it elevates the victim from a passive observer to an active litigant within the appellate process.

However, the Court has also been careful to delineate the limits of victim participation. In *Rekha Murarka v. State of West Bengal*, the Supreme Court clarified that while victims have the right to engage counsel under the proviso to section 24(8) CrPC, such participation cannot extend to independent conduct of prosecution.<sup>504</sup> The Court emphasised that the role of the victim's counsel is to assist the prosecution rather than to supplant it, thereby preserving the primacy of the State in criminal proceedings. This decision reflects a conscious effort to balance the inclusion of victims with the need to maintain prosecutorial coherence.

The tension between expansion and limitation is further evident in *Shiv Kumar v. Hukam Chand*, where the Court underscored that a private counsel engaged by the victim cannot act independently of the public prosecutor.<sup>505</sup> Although decided prior to the 2009 amendments, this judgment continues to influence the interpretation of victim participation by reinforcing the controlled nature of engagement.

<sup>500</sup> John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation* (2002).

<sup>501</sup> Ashworth, supra note 1.

<sup>502</sup> (1985) 2 SCC 537.

<sup>503</sup> (2019) 2 SCC 752.

<sup>504</sup> (2020) 2 SCC 474.

<sup>505</sup> (1999) 7 SCC 467.

In the context of sentencing, the Supreme Court has emphasised the importance of victim compensation as a component of justice. In *Ankush Shivaji Gaikwad v. State of Maharashtra*, the Court held that compensation under section 357 CrPC must be considered in every case and cannot be treated as an ancillary or discretionary measure.<sup>506</sup> This judgment reorients sentencing by incorporating the interests of victims into judicial reasoning, thereby strengthening the restorative dimension of criminal justice.

Further developments can be observed in *Suresh v. State of Haryana*, where the Court reiterated the obligation of courts to consider compensation even in the absence of a specific application by the victim.<sup>507</sup> This approach reflects an increasing judicial awareness of the need to address the consequences of crime beyond the determination of guilt.

At the same time, judicial decisions have also highlighted the limitations of victim participation. In *State of Gujarat v. Kishanbhai*, the Supreme Court emphasised the importance of fair investigation and accountability but stopped short of granting victims a direct role in supervising investigative processes.<sup>508</sup> This reflects the continuing dominance of institutional actors in shaping the course of criminal proceedings.

Collectively, these decisions reveal a pattern of incremental judicial expansion within structural limits. The Supreme Court has sought to enhance victim participation by recognising specific rights at different stages of the process, while simultaneously ensuring that such participation does not disrupt the foundational principles of criminal justice. The resulting framework is one in which victims are increasingly visible, yet remain institutionally mediated participants.

### 3.1 Legislative Developments

The Indian criminal justice system has progressively recognised the role of victims through legislative reforms. The introduction of section 2(wa) in the Code of Criminal Procedure formally defines the term “victim,” marking a significant step in acknowledging their position within the legal framework.<sup>509</sup>

Additional provisions relating to compensation and the right to appeal further expand the scope of victim participation. Sections 357 and 357A provide mechanisms for compensating victims, while the proviso to section 372 grants victims the right to appeal against acquittal or inadequate compensation.<sup>510</sup>

These developments reflect a growing recognition of the importance of victim participation. However, the framework remains fragmented, with participatory rights dispersed across different provisions without a coherent structure.

### 3.2 Victim Participation under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023

The enactment of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 marks a significant moment in the evolution of criminal procedure in India. As a successor to the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, the BNSS introduces a series of procedural reforms aimed at modernising the criminal justice system, including measures that have direct implications for victim participation.

A notable feature of the BNSS framework is the continued recognition of the victim as a distinct stakeholder within the criminal process. The statutory definition of “victim” is retained, thereby preserving the conceptual foundation for participatory rights. However, the significance of the BNSS lies not merely in continuity but in its attempt to operationalise participation through procedural refinement and technological integration.

<sup>506</sup> (2013) 6 SCC 770.

<sup>507</sup> (2015) 2 SCC 227.

<sup>508</sup> (2014) 5 SCC 108.

<sup>509</sup> *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973*, s. 2(wa).

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, ss. 357, 357A, 372 proviso.

One of the key developments under the BNSS is the emphasis on time-bound investigation and procedural efficiency, which has indirect implications for victim participation. Delays in investigation and trial have historically undermined the effectiveness of participatory rights, as victims are often disengaged from prolonged proceedings. By introducing stricter timelines and procedural accountability, the BNSS seeks to enhance the responsiveness of the system, thereby creating conditions under which participation can be more meaningful.

The BNSS also reflects an increasing reliance on digital processes, including electronic communication and recording of statements. This shift has the potential to improve access to information for victims, addressing one of the central limitations identified in the existing framework. Access to timely and accurate information is a foundational element of participation, and the digitisation of procedures may facilitate greater transparency and engagement.

However, despite these developments, the BNSS does not fundamentally alter the structural position of the victim within the criminal justice system. The core architecture of adversarial procedure remains intact, with the prosecution continuing to represent the interests of the State. Victims, while recognised and accommodated, do not acquire independent control over the conduct of proceedings. This continuity underscores the persistence of the traditional model, even in the context of procedural reform.

Moreover, the BNSS does not appear to introduce a comprehensive and unified framework of victim participation, as seen in jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom. Participatory rights remain dispersed across provisions, and their effectiveness continues to depend on implementation rather than design. This raises concerns that the reforms introduced by the BNSS, while significant in certain respects, may not fully address the structural limitations that

have historically constrained victim participation in India.

The introduction of the BNSS therefore reflects a reformist but not transformative approach. It enhances procedural efficiency and introduces technological innovations that may indirectly strengthen victim participation, but it does not fundamentally reconfigure the relationship between the victim, the State, and the accused. The significance of the BNSS lies in its potential to improve the conditions under which participation operates, rather than in redefining its scope.

### 3.3 Judicial Expansion of Victim Rights

Judicial interpretation has played a crucial role in expanding victim participation. In *Bhagwant Singh v. Commissioner of Police*, the Supreme Court recognised the right of the informant to be heard at the stage of closure of investigation.<sup>511</sup> This decision represents an important acknowledgment of the victim's interest in the investigative process.

Similarly, in *Ankush Shivaji Gaikwad v. State of Maharashtra*, the Court emphasised that compensation should be treated as an integral component of justice rather than a discretionary measure.<sup>512</sup> The recognition of victim compensation as a substantive right reflects a shift toward a more victim-oriented approach.

The decision in *Mallikarjun Kodagali v. State of Karnataka* further strengthens victim participation by recognising an independent right of appeal.<sup>513</sup> This development marks a significant departure from the traditional model, in which victims had limited recourse to challenge judicial outcomes.

### 3.4 Structural and Institutional Limitations

Despite these developments, victim participation in India remains constrained by structural and institutional factors. The dominance of the police and prosecution in the criminal process limits the scope for victim

<sup>511</sup> (1985) 2 SCC 537.

<sup>512</sup> (2013) 6 SCC 770.

<sup>513</sup> (2019) 2 SCC 752.

involvement, particularly at the investigation stage.<sup>514</sup>

Procedural complexity further restricts participation, as victims often lack the resources and knowledge necessary to engage effectively with the system. Socio-economic disparities exacerbate these challenges, resulting in unequal access to participatory mechanisms.

The absence of institutional support structures, such as victim assistance services, further undermines the effectiveness of participation. As a result, participatory rights often remain formal rather than substantive, limiting their impact on justice delivery.

#### 4. Comparative Perspectives on Victim Participation

##### 4.1 The United Kingdom: Institutionalised Participation through Administrative Frameworks

The United Kingdom represents a model of victim participation that is characterised not by the creation of enforceable rights in the strict legal sense, but by the development of a coherent administrative framework designed to integrate victims within the functioning of the criminal justice system. Central to this approach is the *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*, which establishes a set of entitlements applicable across different stages of the criminal process.<sup>515</sup>

The significance of the UK model lies in its emphasis on institutional coordination. Victim participation is not conceived as an isolated legal entitlement, but as a component of a broader system of engagement involving the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, and victim support organisations. Through this coordinated framework, victims are provided with information, assistance, and opportunities to engage with proceedings in a structured and predictable manner.

A particularly important mechanism within this framework is the Victim Personal Statement (VPS), which enables victims to communicate the impact of the offence to the court.<sup>516</sup> The VPS operates primarily at the sentencing stage, allowing victims to articulate the consequences of the crime and thereby ensuring that their experiences are acknowledged within the adjudicatory process. However, the VPS does not confer decision-making authority upon victims; rather, it functions as an expressive mechanism, reinforcing the visibility of victims without altering the structural balance of the system.

The limitations of the UK model arise from its reliance on administrative compliance rather than judicial enforceability. While the Victims' Code establishes clear expectations, its effectiveness depends on the willingness and capacity of institutions to implement its provisions.<sup>517</sup> This raises concerns regarding consistency and accountability, particularly in cases where victims lack effective remedies for non-compliance.

##### 4.2 The United States: Enforceable Rights and Judicial Recognition

In contrast to the UK, the United States adopts a rights-based approach to victim participation, exemplified by the Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA).<sup>518</sup> The CVRA establishes a comprehensive set of rights, including the right of victims to be heard at public proceedings, to receive timely information, and to confer with the prosecution. Unlike the UK model, these rights are enforceable through judicial mechanisms, allowing victims to seek remedies in cases of violation.

The enforceability of victim rights constitutes the defining feature of the US system. Courts have recognised that victims possess standing to assert their rights independently, thereby enhancing the practical significance of participation.<sup>519</sup> This has led to a more robust

<sup>514</sup> Law Commission of India, 154th Report (1996).

<sup>515</sup> Ministry of Justice (UK), *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime* (2020).

<sup>516</sup> Crown Prosecution Service (UK), *Victim Personal Statement Scheme*.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 3771 (2004).

<sup>519</sup> *Kenna v. U.S. District Court*, 435 F.3d 1011 (9th Cir. 2006).

framework in which participation is not merely symbolic but carries legal consequences.

The use of victim impact statements at sentencing further illustrates the participatory character of the US system. These statements allow victims to present the effects of the offence directly to the court, thereby influencing the sentencing process. However, this mechanism has been subject to sustained critique. Scholars have argued that the introduction of emotional narratives may compromise the principle of proportionality and risk undermining the objectivity of judicial decision-making.<sup>520</sup>

Despite its strengths, the US model remains constrained by the structural features of adversarial justice. Prosecutorial discretion continues to play a dominant role, and victims do not possess authority over key decisions such as charging or plea bargaining.<sup>521</sup> Participation, therefore, remains bounded and mediated, reflecting a balance between inclusion and procedural integrity.

### 4.3 Comparative Analysis and Implications

A comparative examination of the United Kingdom and the United States reveals that, despite their differences, both systems converge on certain fundamental principles. In both jurisdictions, victim participation is stage-dependent, with the most significant engagement occurring at sentencing and post-trial stages. Furthermore, participation remains institutionally mediated, ensuring that victims do not exercise control over the core functions of prosecution and adjudication.

The principal distinction lies in the mechanisms of implementation. The UK relies on administrative coordination, while the US emphasises enforceable legal rights. Both approaches demonstrate that the effectiveness of participation depends not merely on formal recognition, but on the presence of mechanisms that ensure its practical realisation.

For India, these models offer important insights. They suggest that meaningful participation requires coherence, clarity, and institutional support, rather than isolated statutory provisions. At the same time, they underscore the need to balance participation with the foundational principles of criminal justice.

### 5. Normative and Analytical Evaluation of Victim Participation

The evaluation of victim participation must be grounded in an assessment of its impact on the core objectives of criminal justice. This requires a careful analysis of its contribution to procedural fairness, victim satisfaction, and restorative outcomes, as well as an examination of the structural constraints that limit its effectiveness.

Victim participation enhances procedural fairness by promoting transparency and inclusivity. The opportunity for victims to receive information and to be heard ensures that the criminal process is not perceived as exclusionary. This aligns with the principles of procedural justice, which emphasise the importance of voice and respect in shaping perceptions of legitimacy.<sup>522</sup> However, this contribution is contingent upon the careful design of participatory mechanisms. If participation is extended beyond appropriate limits, it may risk compromising the neutrality of adjudication and the rights of the accused.

The impact of participation on victim satisfaction is similarly complex. Participation provides victims with recognition and engagement, addressing the sense of marginalisation that has historically characterised criminal justice systems.<sup>523</sup> However, the benefits of participation depend on the alignment between expectations and outcomes. Where victims are led to believe that participation will influence substantive decisions, unmet expectations may result in dissatisfaction.<sup>524</sup> This highlights the importance of clearly defining the scope of participation and

<sup>520</sup> Susan Bandes, *supra* note 6.

<sup>521</sup> Paul G. Cassell, "Recognizing Victims in Criminal Procedure" (2005).

<sup>522</sup> Tyler, *supra* note 5.

<sup>523</sup> Wemmers, *supra* note 4.

<sup>524</sup> Matthew Hall, *supra* note 3.

ensuring that victims are adequately informed of its limits.

The relationship between participation and restorative outcomes is more limited. While participation facilitates the acknowledgment of harm and the provision of compensation, it does not fully realise the goals of restorative justice. The adversarial structure of criminal proceedings prioritises adjudication and punishment, limiting the scope for reconciliation and healing.<sup>525</sup> As a result, participation within such systems remains partially restorative, rather than transformative.

The normative evaluation of victim participation must also take into account recent procedural reforms, particularly the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023. While the BNSS introduces measures aimed at improving efficiency and transparency, its impact on victim participation remains indirect and conditional.

The emphasis on time-bound procedures and digital processes has the potential to enhance access to information and reduce delays, thereby addressing some of the practical barriers to participation. However, these reforms do not resolve the fundamental tension between participation and the adversarial structure of criminal justice. Victims continue to operate within a framework that prioritises prosecutorial control and judicial neutrality.

This suggests that procedural reform alone is insufficient to achieve meaningful participation. Without a corresponding shift toward structural integration and enforceable rights, the benefits of the BNSS may remain limited. The Act thus reinforces the central argument of this article: that victim participation is not determined solely by legal recognition, but by the broader institutional and procedural context in which it operates.

## 5.1 Judicial Balancing of Participation and Due Process

The normative evaluation of victim participation in India must also take into account the manner in which courts have balanced participatory rights with the requirements of due process. Judicial decisions reflect a consistent concern that the expansion of victim participation should not compromise the fairness of the trial or the rights of the accused.

In *Rekha Murarka*, the Supreme Court explicitly cautioned against transforming victim participation into a parallel prosecutorial mechanism, observing that such an approach would undermine the structure of criminal trials.<sup>526</sup> Similarly, in *Shiv Kumar*, the Court emphasised that the conduct of prosecution must remain under the control of the public prosecutor, thereby preserving the neutrality of the process.<sup>527</sup>

These decisions demonstrate that Indian courts have adopted a cautious and calibrated approach, recognising the importance of victim participation while maintaining the integrity of the adversarial system. This approach aligns with comparative jurisprudence, which similarly emphasises the need to balance participation with due process.

## 6. Structural Constraints and Risks

The expansion of victim participation gives rise to several structural concerns that must be carefully addressed. One of the most significant concerns relates to the potential conflict between participation and due process. Criminal justice systems are designed to protect the rights of the accused, and any expansion of victim participation must be balanced against this objective.

Another important concern relates to prosecutorial independence. The prosecution represents the interests of the State, and the introduction of victim influence over prosecutorial decisions may undermine the

<sup>525</sup> Braithwaite, supra note 7.

<sup>526</sup> *Rekha Murarka v. State of West Bengal*, supra note 3.

<sup>527</sup> *Shiv Kumar v. Hukam Chand*, supra note 4.

public character of criminal proceedings.<sup>528</sup> Ensuring that participation does not encroach upon prosecutorial discretion is therefore essential.

Participation also raises issues of equality and access. Victims with greater resources and legal awareness are more likely to engage effectively with participatory mechanisms, potentially leading to unequal outcomes.<sup>529</sup> This underscores the need for institutional support to ensure that participation is accessible to all victims.

Finally, the expansion of participation may impact procedural efficiency, particularly in systems already burdened by delays.<sup>530</sup> Balancing participation with the need for timely adjudication represents a critical challenge.

### 7. Reconceptualising Victim Participation: A Conditional Model

The analysis undertaken in this article suggests that victim participation should be conceptualised as a conditional normative good, rather than an absolute entitlement. Its effectiveness depends on the interaction between legal design, institutional capacity, and normative constraints.

Participation enhances justice delivery when it is structured in a manner that:

- provides victims with meaningful opportunities for engagement,
- ensures effective implementation, and
- preserves the fundamental principles of fairness and impartiality.

Conversely, participation may be ineffective or counterproductive where these conditions are absent. This conditional understanding provides a more nuanced framework for evaluating victim participation and for designing appropriate reforms.

### 8. Conclusion

This article has examined the evolving role of victim participation within criminal justice systems, with a particular focus on India. It has demonstrated that while participation contributes to procedural fairness and victim satisfaction, its impact remains constrained by structural and institutional factors.

The Indian criminal justice system reflects a model of fragmented participation, in which legal recognition has not been matched by effective implementation. Comparative analysis indicates that meaningful participation requires coherence, enforceability, and institutional support.

Ultimately, victim participation should be understood as a qualified normative good, capable of enhancing justice delivery when appropriately structured, but insufficient on its own to transform the criminal justice system. Its significance lies in ensuring that victims are recognised as meaningful participants within a process that remains fundamentally governed by the rule of law.

<sup>528</sup> Ashworth and Horder, *supra* note 1.  
<sup>529</sup> Wemmers, *supra* note 4.

<sup>530</sup> Law Commission of India, *supra* note 14.



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