

# The Evolution of Criminal Law in India: Analysing Landmark Cases and Their Impact on Society

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## Abstract

This research paper aims to analyze the evolution of criminal law in India by examining five landmark cases: the Nirbhaya Case (2012), Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984), Satyam Scam (2009), 2G Spectrum Scam (2008), and Arushi Talwar Murder Case (2008). By scrutinizing these cases, the paper seeks to identify the legal challenges, societal implications, and subsequent reforms in the Indian criminal justice system. The objectives of this study are to (1) evaluate the impact of these landmark cases on the development of criminal law in India, (2) assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian criminal justice system in light of these cases, and (3) propose recommendations for further improvements to ensure justice, fairness, and efficiency in the criminal law framework. The paper employs a qualitative research methodology, relying on primary and secondary sources, including case law, statutes, and academic literature. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interplay between criminal law, society, and legal reforms in India.

## Introduction

Criminal law is a critical component of any society, as it seeks to maintain order, protect citizens, and punish wrongdoers. In India, the criminal justice system is primarily governed by the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which has undergone numerous amendments since its inception in 1860. However, the evolution of criminal law in India has been significantly influenced by landmark cases that have exposed the system's flaws, sparked public outcry, and prompted legal reforms. This research paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the development of criminal law in India by examining five such landmark cases: the Nirbhaya Case (2012), Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984), Satyam Scam (2009), 2G Spectrum Scam (2008), and Arushi Talwar Murder Case (2008). Each of these cases has had a profound impact on Indian society, highlighting the need for a more robust, fair, and efficient criminal justice system.

### The objectives of this study are threefold:

1. To evaluate the impact of these landmark cases on the development of criminal law in India, focusing on the legal challenges faced, the amendments to existing laws, and the introduction of new legislation.
2. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian criminal justice system in light of these cases, examining factors such as the role of media, public opinion, and the efficacy of investigative and judicial processes.
3. To propose recommendations for further improvements in the criminal law framework, aiming to ensure justice, fairness, and efficiency in the handling of criminal cases.

By achieving these objectives, this research paper seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interplay between criminal law, society, and legal reforms in India. The findings of this study will be valuable for policymakers, legal professionals, and researchers interested in the development of criminal law in India and its impact on society.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1: Nirbhaya Case (2012)

- **Background:** On December 16, 2012, a 23-year-old female physiotherapy intern, Jyoti Singh Pandey, was brutally gang-raped and assaulted in a moving bus in Delhi. She succumbed to her injuries on December 29, 2012.
- **Legal proceedings:** The trial began in the fast-track court on January 21, 2013. The juvenile accused was tried separately. On September 10, 2013, the fast-track court convicted all the accused and sentenced them to death, except for the juvenile, who was given the maximum sentence of three years' imprisonment in a reform facility.
- **Challenges faced:** The case faced several challenges, including public outrage, media pressure, and the need for speedy justice while ensuring a fair trial.
- **Amendments to criminal law post-Nirbhaya case:** The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, was passed, which amended the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Indian Evidence Act. The amendments introduced stricter penalties for sexual offenses, including the death penalty for repeat offenders.
- **Impact on society and women's safety:** The case sparked nationwide protests and a demand for better safety measures for women. It also led to increased awareness about sexual violence and the need for a more responsive criminal justice system.

Date	Event
16/12/2012	Nirbhaya gang-rape and assault incident
29/12/2012	Victim succumbs to injuries
21/01/2013	Trial begins in fast-track court
10/09/2013	Fast-track court convicts and sentences the accused
03/02/2013	Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, comes into force

### Case Study 2: Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984)

- **Background:** On the night of December 2-3, 1984, a toxic gas leak from the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal led to the death of over 3,000 people and affected more than 500,000 others.
- **Criminal charges against UCIL:** The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) filed criminal charges against UCIL and its officials under the Indian Penal Code, including culpable homicide not amounting to murder, causing death by negligence, and causing grievous hurt.
- **Challenges in the legal proceedings:** The case faced numerous challenges, including the extradition of the main accused, Warren Anderson, who was the chairman of Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) at the time of the incident. The Indian government's settlement with UCC in 1989 also faced criticism for being inadequate.

- Lessons learned and changes in environmental laws: The Bhopal Gas Tragedy highlighted the need for stricter environmental regulations and better disaster management plans. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, was introduced, which provided for the protection and improvement of the environment.

Date	Event
02/12/1984	Bhopal Gas Tragedy occurs
07/12/1984	Warren Anderson, UCC chairman, arrested and released on bail
01/12/1987	CBI files chargesheet against UCIL and its officials
14/02/1989	Indian government settles with UCC for \$470 million
07/06/2010	Court convicts seven former UCIL employees, two acquitted

### Case Study 3: Satyam Scam (2009)

- Background: In January 2009, B. Ramalinga Raju, the founder and chairman of Satyam Computer Services, confessed to inflating the company's assets and income by approximately \$1.47 billion.
- Criminal charges: The CBI filed charges against Raju and nine others under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including criminal conspiracy, cheating, forgery, and breach of trust.
- Implications for corporate governance and auditing practices: The Satyam Scam exposed the weaknesses in corporate governance and auditing practices in India. It led to the introduction of the Companies Act, 2013, which aimed to strengthen corporate governance and increase the accountability of auditors.
- Amendments to relevant laws: The Satyam Scam also led to amendments in the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949, to prevent and punish corporate frauds.

Date	Event
07/01/2009	Raju confesses to inflating Satyam's assets and income
09/01/2009	Raju and his brother arrested by Andhra Pradesh police
18/11/2011	CBI files supplementary chargesheet against the accused
09/04/2015	Special CBI court convicts Raju and nine others
29/08/2013	Companies Act, 2013, comes into force

### Case Study 4: 2G Spectrum Scam (2008)

- Background: In 2008, the allocation of 2G spectrum licenses by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) was found to be irregular and underpriced, resulting in a loss of approximately \$29 billion to the exchequer.
- Criminal charges: The CBI filed charges against several politicians, bureaucrats, and corporate executives under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, and the Indian Penal Code.
- Impact on the telecom industry and public trust: The 2G Spectrum Scam eroded public trust in the government and the telecom industry. It led to the cancellation of 122 telecom licenses by the Supreme Court in 2012.
- Legal reforms: The scam led to the introduction of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, which aimed to strengthen the anti-corruption framework and increase transparency in government decision-making.

Date	Event
25/09/2008	DoT allocates 2G spectrum licenses
21/10/2009	CBI registers case against unknown DoT officials
02/04/2011	CBI files first chargesheet naming A. Raja and others
02/02/2012	Supreme Court cancels 122 telecom licenses
26/07/2018	Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, notified

### Case Study 5: Arushi Talwar Murder Case (2008)

- Background: On May 16, 2008, 14-year-old Arushi Talwar and 45-year-old domestic help Hemraj Banjade were found murdered in the Talwar residence in Noida, Uttar Pradesh.
- Controversial investigation and trial: The investigation and trial were marred by controversies, including the lack of forensic evidence, the destruction of evidence, and the flip-flop of the CBI's stance.
- Media's role and public opinion: The case received intense media coverage, with many speculating about the involvement of Arushi's parents, Rajesh and Nupur Talwar. The media trial and public opinion put immense pressure on the investigating agencies and the judiciary.
- Lessons for the criminal justice system: The Arushi Talwar Murder Case highlighted the need for a more professional and scientific approach to criminal investigations and the importance of maintaining the integrity of evidence.

Date	Event
16/05/2008	Arushi Talwar and Hemraj Banjade found murdered
23/05/2008	Rajesh Talwar arrested, released on bail on July 12, 2008
29/12/2010	CBI files closure report, naming Rajesh Talwar as suspect
25/11/2013	CBI court convicts Rajesh and Nupur Talwar
12/10/2017	Allahabad High Court acquits Rajesh and Nupur Talwar

### Analysis

In this section, we analyze the five landmark criminal cases in India, focusing on the common themes, patterns, strengths, and weaknesses of the Indian criminal justice system. We also examine the role of media and public opinion in high-profile criminal cases and the impact of these cases on legal reforms and societal change.

#### 1. Common themes and patterns:

Table below presents the common themes and patterns observed across the five landmark criminal cases.

Theme/Pattern	Nirbhaya Case	Bhopal Tragedy	Gas Scam	Satyam Scam	2G Spectrum Scam	Arushi Talwar Murder Case
Public outrage	✓	✓			✓	✓
Media pressure	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Delayed justice		✓		✓	✓	✓
Inadequate punishment		✓				
Challenges in investigation		✓				✓

Need for legal reforms	✓	✓	✓	✓	
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## 2. Strengths and weaknesses of the Indian criminal justice system:

Table below highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian criminal justice system as observed in the five cases.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Fast-track courts (Nirbhaya)	Delayed justice (Bhopal, Satyam, 2G, Arushi)
Amendments to laws (Nirbhaya)	Inadequate punishment (Bhopal)
Convictions (Satyam, 2G)	Challenges in investigation (Bhopal, Arushi)
	Lack of accountability (Bhopal, 2G)
	Inconsistencies in CBI's stance (Arushi)

## 3. Role of media and public opinion in high-profile criminal cases: The media played a significant role in shaping public opinion in all five cases, often leading to a media trial parallel to the legal proceedings. Table below summarizes the impact of media and public opinion on each case.

Case	Impact of media and public opinion
Nirbhaya Case	Nationwide protests, demand for stricter laws and speedy justice
Bhopal Gas Tragedy	Public outrage, criticism of the government's handling of the case
Satyam Scam	Increased scrutiny of corporate governance and auditing practices
2G Spectrum Scam	Erosion of public trust in the government and telecom industry
Arushi Talwar Murder	Media trial, speculation about the involvement of Arushi's parents

## 4. Impact of landmark cases on legal reforms and societal change: Table below presents the legal reforms and societal changes triggered by each of the five landmark cases.

Case	Legal reforms	Societal change
Nirbhaya Case	Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013	Increased awareness about sexual violence and women's safety
Bhopal Gas Tragedy	Environment (Protection) Act, 1986	Stricter environmental regulations and disaster management
Satyam Scam	Companies Act, 2013; amendments to IT Act and CA Act	Strengthened corporate governance and auditing practices
2G Spectrum Scam	Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018	Increased transparency in government decision-making
Arushi Talwar Murder	None specific to the case	Heightened public interest in criminal investigations

The analysis of these landmark criminal cases in India reveals the complex interplay between law, society, and media. While these cases have exposed the flaws in the criminal justice system, they have also triggered important legal reforms and societal changes. However, there is still a need for further improvements to ensure a more efficient, fair, and accountable criminal justice system in India.

## Conclusion

The evolution of criminal law in India has been significantly influenced by landmark cases that have exposed the weaknesses in the criminal justice system and prompted legal reforms. This research paper has analyzed five such cases: the Nirbhaya Case (2012), Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984), Satyam Scam (2009), 2G Spectrum Scam (2008), and Arushi Talwar Murder Case (2008). These cases have highlighted various issues, such as public outrage, media pressure, delayed justice, inadequate punishment, and challenges in investigation. The analysis of these cases reveals both strengths and weaknesses in the Indian criminal justice system. While fast-track courts and legal amendments have been positive developments, delayed justice, inadequate punishment, and lack of accountability remain significant concerns. The media has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and triggering societal changes, but it has also contributed to the phenomenon of media trials, which can undermine the fairness of the legal process.

Despite the challenges, these landmark cases have led to important legal reforms and societal changes. The Nirbhaya Case prompted amendments to the criminal law, leading to stricter penalties for sexual offenses. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy resulted in the introduction of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, while the Satyam Scam led to the strengthening of corporate governance and auditing practices through the Companies Act, 2013. The 2G Spectrum Scam paved the way for the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018, aimed at increasing transparency in government decision-making. In conclusion, the evolution of criminal law in India has been a complex process shaped by landmark cases, societal pressures, and legal reforms. While progress has been made, there is still a need for further improvements in the criminal justice system to ensure fairness, efficiency, and justice for all. By learning from these cases and implementing necessary changes, India can strengthen its criminal law framework and build a more equitable society.

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