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CRIMINAL COURTS IN INDIA : STRUCTURE, JURISDICTION, POWERS AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT :

Criminal courts constitute an essential institution of the Indian criminal justice system. They are responsible for adjudicating criminal disputes, determining the guilt or innocence of accused persons, protecting the rights of victims, and ensuring that criminal liability is imposed in accordance with law. The effectiveness of criminal courts is closely connected with the constitutional principles of equality, personal liberty, judicial independence, and fair trial.

The Indian criminal court system operates within the constitutional framework and the statutory provisions governing criminal procedure, substantive criminal law, and evidence. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), which came into force on 1 July 2024, provides the principal procedural framework governing criminal courts and criminal proceedings. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA), govern substantive criminal law and evidentiary matters, respectively, subject to their applicable provisions and transitional arrangements.

This paper examines the historical development, constitutional foundations, hierarchy, jurisdiction, and functions of criminal courts in India. It further analyses important judicial decisions relating to speedy trial, personal liberty, arrest, bail, and fair trial. The paper identifies institutional challenges, including case pendency, undertrial detention, inadequate infrastructure, and barriers to access to justice. It concludes that strengthening criminal courts requires judicial independence, effective case management, adequate resources, and strict adherence to constitutional safeguards.

Keywords: Criminal Courts, Indian Judiciary, Criminal Justice System, BNSS 2023, Fair Trial, Speedy Trial, Fundamental Rights, Access to Justice.

1. Introduction

The administration of criminal justice is one of the most significant functions of the State. A democratic society requires an effective judicial system capable of protecting individuals against crime, determining criminal liability, and ensuring that punishments are imposed only in accordance with law. Criminal courts perform these functions by examining evidence, interpreting statutory provisions, and deciding cases through an independent and impartial judicial process.

In India, criminal courts operate within a constitutional framework that recognises the rule of law, equality before the law, personal liberty, and the right to a fair trial. The judiciary is entrusted with the responsibility of protecting individuals against arbitrary State action while ensuring that persons who commit offences are held accountable through lawful procedures.

The Indian criminal justice system includes the Supreme Court, High Courts, Courts of Session, Judicial Magistrates, Executive Magistrates performing statutory functions, and special courts established under particular enactments. These institutions exercise different powers according to the Constitution and the applicable statutory provisions.

An important development in Indian criminal law occurred when Parliament enacted three new criminal laws in 2023. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, came into force on 1 July 2024, subject to applicable exceptions and transitional provisions.[1] These enactments replaced the principal general criminal statutes previously known as the Indian Penal Code, 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

The BNSS is particularly important for the present research because it regulates the constitution and powers of criminal courts and the procedure followed in criminal proceedings. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the statutory framework depends not merely on the existence of legislation but also on its implementation, the availability of judicial resources, and the protection of constitutional rights.

Accordingly, this paper examines the legal framework and practical functioning of criminal courts in India, with particular attention to their structure, jurisdiction, judicial interpretation, and contemporary challenges.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the existence of an established judicial hierarchy and a comprehensive statutory framework, criminal courts in India face persistent challenges. Delays in criminal trials, a substantial burden of pending cases, undertrial detention, inadequate infrastructure, and difficulties in obtaining effective legal representation can undermine access to justice.

The central research problem is whether the existing structure and functioning of criminal courts adequately fulfil the constitutional objectives of fair, speedy, impartial, and accessible criminal justice.

The paper also considers the extent to which institutional reforms and technological developments can improve judicial efficiency without compromising the rights of accused persons and victims.

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3. Research Objectives

The principal objectives of this research are:

- To examine the historical development of criminal courts in India.
- To analyse the constitutional and statutory framework governing criminal courts.
- To explain the hierarchy, jurisdiction, and powers of different criminal courts.
- To examine the role of criminal courts in protecting fundamental rights.
- To analyse important judicial decisions concerning criminal procedure and fair trial.
- To identify the principal institutional challenges affecting criminal adjudication.
- To suggest legal and administrative reforms for improving the administration of criminal justice.

4. Research Questions

This paper addresses the following research questions:

What is the constitutional and statutory structure of criminal courts in India?

How are the jurisdiction and powers of criminal courts determined?

What role do criminal courts play in protecting the rights of accused persons and victims?

How have judicial decisions shaped the principles of fair trial and speedy justice?

What institutional challenges affect the effective functioning of criminal courts?

What reforms are necessary to strengthen access to criminal justice?

5. Research Methodology

This research adopts the doctrinal method of legal research. It relies principally on primary legal sources, including constitutional provisions, statutes, and judicial decisions. Secondary sources, such as textbooks, commentaries, and official legal publications, may be consulted to support the analysis.

The research follows an analytical and descriptive approach. It examines the statutory framework governing criminal courts, evaluates relevant judicial pronouncements, and identifies institutional problems affecting the administration of criminal justice.

The geographical scope of the research is India. The principal statutory focus is the legal framework applicable following the commencement of the new criminal laws on 1 July 2024, subject to relevant savings and transitional provision

6. Historical Development of Criminal Courts in India

6.1 Ancient and Medieval Periods

The administration of justice in ancient and medieval India operated through diverse institutions influenced by political authority, customary practices, and prevailing legal traditions. The arrangements varied across regions and historical periods. These institutions differed significantly from the modern constitutional system of independent courts.

6.2 British Period

British rule introduced a more formalised structure of courts and criminal procedure. The Indian Penal Code, 1860, established a general framework of criminal offences and

punishments, while the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, codified important evidentiary rules.

The Code of Criminal Procedure underwent several legislative developments and was ultimately consolidated in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.

[1] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (Act No. 45 of 2023); Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (Act No. 46 of 2023); Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (Act No. 47 of 2023). See also the commencement notifications issued by the Government of India.

These enactments substantially influenced the criminal justice system inherited by independent India.

6.3 Post-Independence Development

After independence, the Constitution of India established an independent judiciary and provided safeguards for individual liberty. The Supreme Court and High Courts developed important principles concerning arrest, detention, bail, legal aid, speedy trial, and procedural fairness.
The Constitution also provided the institutional framework for the subordinate judiciary, which performs much of the day-to-day work of criminal adjudication.

6.4 The New Criminal Laws

The enactment of the BNS, BNSS, and BSA in 2023 represents a significant development in India's criminal law framework. The three enactments address substantive offences, criminal procedure, and evidence, respectively.
For criminal courts, the BNSS is particularly significant because it provides the procedural rules governing criminal proceedings and identifies the classes of criminal courts.[2]
However, the practical impact of these enactments must be assessed through their implementation, judicial interpretation, and effect on access to justice.

7. Constitutional Framework of Criminal Courts

The Constitution provides the foundational principles governing criminal adjudication in India.[2]

7.1 Article 14: Equality Before the Law

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.[3] In criminal proceedings, this principle requires the State and judicial institutions to act consistently with constitutional standards and prohibits arbitrary discrimination.
Equality before the law is essential to ensuring that criminal proceedings are conducted according to legal principles rather than irrelevant personal or social considerations.

7.2 Article 20: Protection in Respect of Conviction for Offences

Article 20 provides important safeguards relating to criminal liability. These include protection against retrospective criminal punishment, double jeopardy within the constitutional meaning, and compelled self-incrimination.[4]
These protections restrict the exercise of criminal law powers and contribute to the prevention of arbitrary punishment.

7.3 Article 21: Protection of Life and Personal Liberty

Article 21 provides that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.[5] Judicial interpretation has established that procedures affecting personal liberty must satisfy constitutional requirements of fairness.
The right to a fair trial and the right to speedy trial have been recognised as important components of the protection afforded by Article 21.[6]

7.4 Article 22: Protection Against Arrest and Detention

Article 22 provides constitutional safeguards relating to arrest and detention, subject to the exceptions specified in the Constitution.
These safeguards include the right to be informed of the grounds of arrest and the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of one's choice.
The Constitution also contains provisions relating to production before a magistrate within the prescribed period, subject to applicable constitutional exceptions.[7]

7.5 Articles 124 and 214: Supreme Court and High Courts

Article 124 provides for the establishment and constitution of the Supreme Court of India, while Article 214 provides for High Courts for the States, subject to the constitutional provisions permitting common High Courts.[8]
These institutions exercise constitutional, appellate, and other jurisdiction conferred by the Constitution and applicable legislation.

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2. Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, ss. 6–23.
3. Constitution of India, art. 14.
4. Constitution of India, art. 20.
5. Constitution of India, art. 21.
6. Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar, (1980) 1 SCC 81.

7.6 Articles 233–237: Subordinate Judiciary

Articles 233–237 address aspects of the appointment, control, and organisation of the subordinate judiciary.[9] These provisions are important because district and subordinate courts are central to the trial and disposal of criminal cases.

8. Structure and Hierarchy of Criminal Courts in India

The criminal court system operates through a hierarchy of judicial institutions. The jurisdiction of each court is determined by the Constitution, the BNSS, and other applicable legislation.

8.1 Supreme Court of India

The Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in India. It exercises criminal appellate jurisdiction under Article 134 and may grant special leave to appeal under Article 136.[10] It also exercises jurisdiction under Article 32 for the enforcement of fundamental rights.
Its functions in criminal matters include reviewing decisions of lower courts where jurisdiction exists, interpreting constitutional[3] safeguards, and ensuring that criminal proceedings comply with legal and constitutional requirements.
The Supreme Court does not ordinarily conduct the initial trial of criminal offences. Its principal role in the criminal justice system is constitutional adjudication and appellate review.

8.2 High Courts

High Courts exercise jurisdiction over criminal matters under the Constitution and applicable legislation.
Their functions include hearing criminal appeals and revisions, exercising constitutional jurisdiction, supervising subordinate courts, and exercising inherent powers under Section 528 of the BNSS, subject to the governing legal principles.[11]
High Courts also exercise statutory powers concerning the confirmation of death sentences passed by Sessions Courts.

8.3 Courts of Session

Section 8 of the BNSS provides for a Court of Session for every sessions division.[12] Sessions Courts generally try serious offences assigned to them by law and exercise appellate and other jurisdiction conferred by statute.
A Sessions Court may impose punishments authorised by law, subject to statutory restrictions. A death sentence passed by a Sessions Judge requires confirmation by the High Court under the applicable legal framework.[13]

8.4 Chief Judicial Magistrates

The BNSS provides for Chief Judicial Magistrates and related judicial offices.[14] Their powers and responsibilities depend on the applicable statutory provisions and the allocation of judicial business within the district.
Chief Judicial Magistrates exercise criminal jurisdiction within the limits established by law and perform functions concerning the administration of criminal proceedings.

8.5 Judicial Magistrates of the First Class

Judicial Magistrates of the First Class deal with criminal cases falling within their statutory jurisdiction. They conduct trials, consider applications, issue judicial orders, and exercise powers conferred by the BNSS and other applicable laws.
Their sentencing powers are subject to the statutory limits prescribed by Section 23 of the BNSS.[15]

8.6 Judicial Magistrates of the Second Class

Judicial Magistrates of the Second Class deal with offences assigned to their jurisdiction. Their authority to conduct trials and impose punishment is limited by the applicable statutory provisions.
The distinction between the two classes of Judicial Magistrates helps allocate criminal cases according to their legal classification and the powers of the relevant court.

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7. Constitution of India, art. 22.
8. Constitution of India, arts. 124 and 214.
9. Constitution of India, arts. 233–237.
10. Constitution of India, arts. 32, 134 and 136.
11. Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, s. 528; Constitution of India, arts. 226–227.
12. Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, s. 8.

8.7 Executive Magistrates

Executive Magistrates perform statutory functions relating primarily to preventive measures and public order. Although Section 6 of the BNSS includes Executive Magistrates among the classes of criminal courts, their functions differ from those of Judicial Magistrates conducting criminal trials.[16]
Their powers must be exercised within the limits established by the BNSS and other applicable laws.[4]

8.8 Special Courts

Special courts are established or designated under particular statutes to adjudicate specified categories of offences.
Examples include Special Courts under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012; the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989; the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988; and the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008.[17]
These courts exercise jurisdiction according to the legislation under which they are established. Specialisation may facilitate focused adjudication, although effective functioning depends on adequate resources, trained personnel, and procedural fairness.

9. Jurisdiction and Powers of Criminal Courts

Jurisdiction refers to the legal authority of a court to hear and determine a matter.

9.1 Territorial Jurisdiction

Territorial jurisdiction concerns the geographical area within which a court may exercise its authority. The applicable procedural law determines where an offence may be investigated, inquired into, and tried.

9.2 Subject-Matter Jurisdiction

Subject-matter jurisdiction concerns the categories of offences a court is authorised to adjudicate. The applicable statute determines whether a particular offence is triable by a Magistrate, a Court of Session, or a special court.

9.3 Original Jurisdiction

Original jurisdiction is the authority to hear and decide a matter at the initial stage. Criminal trial courts exercise original jurisdiction when conducting trials within their statutory competence.

9.4 Appellate Jurisdiction

Appellate jurisdiction permits a higher court to review a judgment or order where an appeal is authorised by law. Appeals provide an important mechanism for correcting errors and ensuring consistent application of criminal law.

9.5 Revisional Jurisdiction

Revisional jurisdiction enables a competent higher court to examine certain proceedings or orders of subordinate courts within the limits established by statute.
Revision is distinct from an ordinary appeal and cannot be assumed to provide an unrestricted rehearing of every factual or legal issue.

9.6 Inherent and Constitutional Powers

The High Courts possess inherent powers under Section 528 of the BNSS, while the Supreme Court and High Courts exercise constitutional jurisdiction under the relevant constitutional provisions.
These powers help courts protect the legality and fairness of proceedings, subject to the applicable statutory and constitutional limitations.

13. Ibid., s. 22.
14. Ibid., s. 10.
15. Ibid., s. 23.
16. Ibid., ss. 6 and 14–17.
17. Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, s. 28; Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, s. 14; Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, s. 3; National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, s. 11.

10. Fundamental Principles Governing Criminal Trials

10.1 Presumption of Innocence

The presumption of innocence is a fundamental principle of criminal adjudication. An accused person must not be treated as guilty merely because an accusation has been made.
In an ordinary criminal trial, the prosecution bears the burden of proving guilt beyond reasonable doubt, subject to applicable statutory provisions that may govern particular issues.

10.2 Fair Trial

A fair trial requires an impartial tribunal, compliance with applicable procedure, a meaningful opportunity to present and challenge evidence, and protection against arbitrary adjudication.
The principle protects the accused while also supporting the legitimate interests of victims and society.

10.3 Speedy Trial

Speedy trial is an important component of Article 21. Excessive delay may prejudice the accused, prolong uncertainty for victims, and weaken public confidence in the administration of justice.

10.4 Judicial Independence

Judicial independence enables courts to determine cases without improper influence. It is essential for constitutional government and the impartial administration of criminal justice.

10.5 Reasoned Judicial Decisions

Judicial decisions should be based on applicable law, the evidence presented, and legally relevant considerations. Reasoned decisions promote transparency and facilitate appellate review.

11. Important Judicial Decisions

Judicial precedents have significantly shaped the operation of criminal courts and the interpretation of constitutional safeguards.

11.1 Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India

In Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, the Supreme Court interpreted Article 21 in a manner that strengthened the constitutional protection of personal liberty.[18] The judgment established that a procedure affecting personal liberty cannot be assessed merely as a formal requirement; its operation must satisfy constitutional standards of fairness and non-arbitrariness.
Although the case did not directly concern an ordinary criminal trial, its reasoning has had a broad influence on criminal procedure and the protection of personal liberty.

11.2 Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar

In Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar, the Supreme Court addressed the plight of undertrial prisoners who had remained in custody for prolonged periods.[19]
The Court recognised the constitutional importance of speedy trial under Article 21 and highlighted the injustice caused by excessive delay in criminal proceedings.
The case remains a leading authority on speedy trial and the need to address prolonged undertrial detention.

11.3 D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal

In D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal, the Supreme Court considered safeguards against custodial abuse and arbitrary detention.[20] It laid down requirements concerning arrest and detention to protect individuals against misuse of police powers.
The judgment demonstrates the importance of judicial oversight in protecting personal liberty and ensuring that investigative powers are exercised in accordance with law.

11.4 Zahira Habibulla H. Sheikh v. State of Gujarat

In Zahira Habibulla H. Sheikh v. State of Gujarat, the Supreme Court emphasised the importance of a fair trial and the responsibility of courts to ensure that proceedings are not undermined by circumstances that prevent reliable adjudication.[21][5]
The decision recognised that a fair trial is not exclusively a concern of the accused; it also involves the interests of victims and society.

11.5 Hussain v. Union of India

In Hussain v. Union of India, the Supreme Court addressed delays in criminal proceedings and emphasised the importance of timely adjudication and effective case management.[22]
The decision supports the principle that criminal cases should be dealt with efficiently while maintaining the requirements of a fair trial.

11.6 Satender Kumar Antil v. Central Bureau of Investigation

In Satender Kumar Antil v. Central Bureau of Investigation, the Supreme Court discussed principles governing arrest and bail and emphasised the need to prevent unnecessary arrests and avoidable pre-trial detention.[23]
The judgment is significant for the protection of personal liberty and for addressing the consequences of unnecessary incarceration. Its principles must be applied with reference to the relevant statutory provisions and subsequent legal developments.

12. Rights of Accused Persons and Victims

The legitimacy of criminal adjudication depends upon a balanced approach to the rights of accused persons and the lawful interests of victims.

12.1 Rights of Accused Persons

The accused is entitled to constitutional and statutory safeguards, including protection against compelled self-incrimination, the right to legal representation, and a fair opportunity to defend the case.
The accused may also seek bail in accordance with the applicable law. The decision depends on the nature of the offence, statutory restrictions, and relevant judicial principles.

12.2 Rights and Interests of Victims

Victims may have legal interests concerning participation in proceedings, protection, compensation, and access to relevant information. The extent of these rights depends on the applicable statute and the circumstances of the case.
Courts must consider the legitimate interests of victims while preserving the accused's right to a fair trial. A balanced system must neither disregard victims nor compromise the procedural safeguards necessary for reliable adjudication.

13. Challenges Facing Criminal Courts in India

13.1 Pendency of Cases

A substantial burden of pending cases can delay trials and the delivery of judgments. Delays may arise from judicial vacancies, inadequate infrastructure, repeated adjournments, and difficulties in securing the attendance of witnesses.

13.2 Undertrial Detention

Extended detention before the conclusion of a trial raises concerns about personal liberty and the presumption of innocence. Unnecessary detention can also contribute to prison overcrowding and impose significant social and economic costs.

13.3 Inadequate Infrastructure

Some courts face shortages of courtrooms, administrative staff, digital facilities, and appropriate spaces for witnesses and vulnerable participants.

18. Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, (1978) 1 SCC 248.
19. Hussainara Khatoon v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar, (1980) 1 SCC 81.
20. D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal, (1997) 1 SCC 416.
21. Zahira Habibulla H. Sheikh v. State of Gujarat, (2004) 4 SCC 158.
22. Hussain v. Union of India, (2017) 5 SCC 702.
23. Satender Kumar Antil v. Central Bureau of Investigation, (2022) 10 SCC 51.

13.4 Investigative and Forensic Limitations

Weak evidence collection, delayed forensic reports, inadequate laboratory facilities, and failures in preserving the chain of custody can affect the reliability of criminal trials.

13.5 Access to Legal Aid

Economically disadvantaged persons may face difficulties in obtaining timely and effective legal representation. Legal aid must be accessible and of sufficient quality to ensure meaningful participation in criminal proceedings.

13.6 Witness Protection

Witnesses may face intimidation, inconvenience, or financial difficulties that discourage participation. Appropriate protection and support can improve the reliability of evidence and the fairness of trials.

13.7 Technological Challenges

Electronic records and digital evidence are increasingly important in criminal cases. Courts must ensure that such evidence is collected, preserved, authenticated, and assessed according to applicable law.
Technology may improve efficiency, but it must not undermine privacy, access to justice, or procedural fairness.

14. Reforms Required to Strengthen Criminal Courts

Several measures may improve the functioning of criminal courts.
First, judicial vacancies should be addressed through timely and transparent appointment procedures. Adequate judicial strength is essential for reducing excessive workloads.
Second, court infrastructure should be strengthened, particularly in districts with substantial caseloads. Digital systems should be introduced and maintained in ways that remain accessible to persons with limited technological resources.
Third, legal aid services should be improved to ensure that eligible persons receive competent representation at the appropriate stage of proceedings.
Fourth, investigating agencies should receive appropriate training in forensic science, digital evidence, and evidence preservation. Effective investigation reduces avoidable procedural errors and assists courts in evaluating the evidence.
Fifth, witness-protection arrangements should be strengthened in appropriate cases. Victims and witnesses should be able to participate in proceedings without unreasonable fear or intimidation.
Sixth, case-management practices should be improved through effective scheduling, monitoring of adjournments, and appropriate coordination between courts and relevant agencies.
Finally, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, and court staff should receive continuing training on the BNS, BNSS, and BSA. These measures should preserve judicial independence and constitutional safeguards.

15. Findings and Discussion

The research establishes that criminal courts are indispensable to the protection of the rule of law in India. Their authority derives from the Constitution and legislation, and their effectiveness depends upon independent adjudication and reliable legal procedures.
The constitutional framework, particularly Articles 14, 20, 21, and 22, imposes important limitations on criminal justice authorities and safeguards the rights of individuals.
The BNSS provides the principal general procedural framework governing criminal courts, while the BNS and BSA address substantive criminal law and evidence. Special statutes may confer additional jurisdiction or prescribe particular procedures.
Judicial decisions have strengthened the principles of speedy trial, fair procedure, protection against custodial abuse, and the proper exercise of arrest and bail powers.
Nevertheless, institutional challenges continue to affect the practical availability of justice. Delays, undertrial detention, shortages of resources, and barriers to legal assistance can prevent the legal framework from achieving its full constitutional purpose.
The findings suggest that statutory reform alone is insufficient. Effective administration requires adequate resources, institutional accountability, continuing professional training, and practical measures that preserve the rights of all participants.

16. Conclusion

Criminal courts are fundamental institutions for the protection of individual liberty, the enforcement of criminal law, and the maintenance of constitutional government. Their principal responsibility is to determine criminal liability through a lawful, fair, and impartial process.
The Supreme Court and High Courts provide constitutional supervision and appellate review, while Sessions Courts, Magistrates, and special courts perform trial and other functions assigned to them by law. Each institution contributes to the administration of criminal justice within its prescribed

jurisdiction.

The commencement of the BNS, BNSS, and BSA on 1 July 2024 marked an important development in the statutory framework governing criminal justice in India. The effectiveness of these enactments depends upon their consistent implementation, proper judicial interpretation, and adequate institutional support.

The quality of criminal justice should not be measured solely by the number of cases disposed of. It must also be assessed by the fairness of proceedings, the reliability of evidence, the protection of fundamental rights, and the accessibility of legal remedies.

It is therefore necessary to strengthen criminal courts through judicial appointments, improved infrastructure, effective legal aid, reliable investigation, witness protection, and responsible use of technology. Such reforms must preserve judicial independence and the constitutional rights of accused persons and victims.

Ultimately, an accessible, independent, impartial, and efficient criminal judiciary is indispensable to the rule of law and the protection of justice in India.

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