

Restorative Justice in Rehabilitation: Analyzing its Efficacy in the Indian Legal System

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Abstract— Restorative justice has gained increasing scholarly attention as an alternative to retributive punishment within the Indian legal system, yet its operational efficacy in offender rehabilitation remains largely understudied. Existing literature centers on normative frameworks, judicial interpretations, and statutory provisions such as probation, parole, victim compensation and mediation, but provides limited empirical evidence evaluating outcomes such as recidivism reduction, victim satisfaction, and community reintegration. This research addresses this persistent gap by analyzing restorative mechanisms functioning within Indian courts and correctional settings, with a focus on measurable rehabilitative impact. The study further aims to assess how victim-offender mediation, community-based sanctions, and compensation schemes influence behavioral reform among offenders while strengthening victim participation. By integrating doctrinal review with field-based assessment, the research seeks to establish whether restorative justice can function as an effective rehabilitative model rather than a theoretical complement to traditional punishment. The findings are expected to contribute data-driven insights for policymakers, judicial bodies and criminological researchers, supporting evidence-based integration of restorative practices into India's evolving criminal justice framework.

Keywords— Restorative Justice, Rehabilitation, Victim-Offender Mediation, Indian Criminal Justice System, Empirical Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian criminal justice system has traditionally operated within a retributive framework, where punishment is viewed as the primary response to criminal behavior. While this model

emphasizes deterrence and incapacitation, it often falls short in addressing the needs of victims, nor does it adequately promote reformation and reintegration of offenders. As crime and social dynamics evolve, there is a growing recognition of the need for a justice framework that balances accountability with healing, inclusion and long-term behavioral transformation. Restorative justice has therefore emerged as a promising alternative, positioning crime as a harm against individuals and communities rather than solely an act against the State.



Fig. 1: Source:

<https://legallyflawless.in/restorative-justice-and-its-application-in-india/>

In recent years, India has witnessed judicial and legislative developments reflective of restorative thinking, including increased use of victim compensation, probation, parole, plea bargaining and mediation. These mechanisms, in principle, encourage offender responsibility, support victim participation, and reduce the social costs associated with custodial sentencing.

However, despite strong normative support and cultural compatibility, substantial gaps remain concerning the practical evaluation of restorative justice in promoting rehabilitation. The majority of existing studies focus on conceptual arguments or statutory interpretation, with limited quantitative evidence measuring reduction in recidivism, improvement in offender behavior, victim satisfaction or community acceptance.

Types and Degrees of Restorative Justice Practice

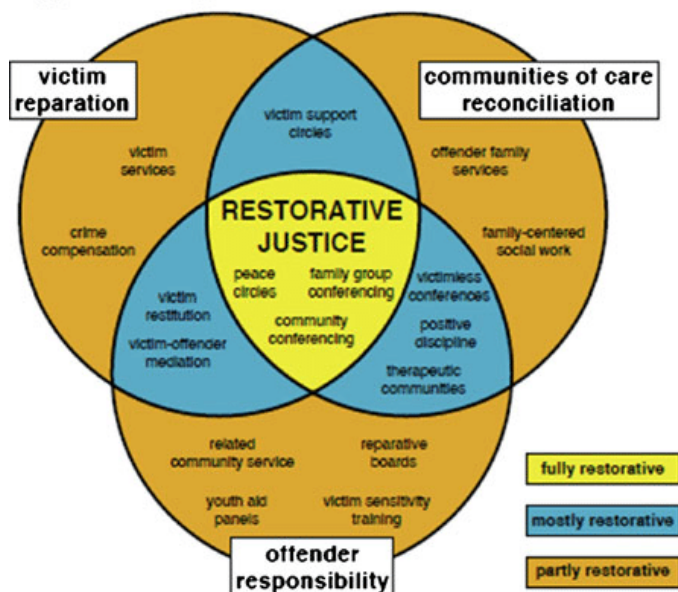


Fig. 2: Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257681396_Evaluating_Restorative_Justice_Programs_in_Taiwan/figures?lo=1

This research is motivated by the absence of empirical assessment in Indian restorative frameworks. It aims to analyze how restorative practices—particularly victim-offender mediation, community-based sanctions and compensation schemes—are functioning within the Indian legal landscape and whether they contribute meaningfully to rehabilitation outcomes. By bridging conceptual discourse with field-based observations, the study seeks to contribute a data-driven understanding of restorative justice as a rehabilitative model. The research intends not only to evaluate current implementation but also to provide recommendations for strengthening restorative interventions in line with national justice objectives and global reform trends.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indian criminal justice system has historically been rooted in retribution and deterrence, but over the last decade Indian scholarship has increasingly argued that a sustainable reduction in crime requires centering rehabilitation and victim reparation rather than punishment alone. Bajpai's work on reimagining the criminal process highlights how the adversarial system marginalizes victims and treats crime primarily as an offence against the State, thereby generating pressure for complementary models grounded in social justice and restoration rather than mere conviction and sentence. [1] Marwah extends this critique by arguing that restorative justice (RJ) offers a framework in which the offender is seen as capable of change, the victim as a rights-bearing participant, and the community as an active co-producer of justice, thus aligning reformation of offenders with broader social healing. [2]

1. Theoretical and Normative Foundations of Restorative Justice in India

Indian writing on RJ initially drew on global theorists but, by the late 2010s, began articulating an indigenous normative basis linked to constitutional values of dignity, equality and fraternity. Salathia synthesizes international definitions of RJ—emphasizing repair of harm through participatory processes involving victims, offenders, communities and the State—and then situates them in Indian practice, highlighting how Panchayat traditions, Nyaya Panchayats and other community forums historically performed restorative functions. [3]

Building on this, the “Applicability of Restorative Justice in India” study systematically argues that RJ should not be seen as an external import but as a modern articulation of long-standing Indian community-centered justice practices. The authors identify five core objectives for RJ in the Indian context: (i) maximizing reparation to victims, (ii) clearly conveying censure to offenders, (iii) insisting on offender responsibility, (iv) giving victims a voice in deciding appropriate reparations, and (v) engaging the community as a stakeholder in reintegration. [4] These normative contributions collectively position RJ as a principled alternative that can coexist with, and gradually reorient, an adversarial, incarceration-centric system.

2. Doctrinal Positioning: Restorative Principles Within Existing Indian Law

A second strand of literature focuses on doctrinal analysis, mapping how restorative and rehabilitative ideals are already

embedded—often implicitly—within Indian statutes and judicial practice. Marwah’s 2020 article in the ILI Law Review reads the Indian criminal justice framework “through a restorative lens,” arguing that several existing mechanisms (probation, parole, community service, compensation, plea bargaining, compounding of offences) already reflect RJ values, even though they are not labeled as such. [2]

Salathia’s doctrinal analysis catalogues provisions such as Sections 320 and 265A–265L CrPC (compounding and plea bargaining), Section 357 CrPC (compensation), and the Probation of Offenders Act, 1958, as statutory footholds for restoration and rehabilitation. [3] The “Applicability” paper further argues that, when read together with Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, these provisions permit a judicially-driven shift from purely custodial punishment to reparative and community-based sanctions, especially in less serious offences and first-offender cases. [4]

3. Victim–Offender Mediation and Direct Restorative Processes

While much Indian work is doctrinal, some authors explicitly examine victim–offender mediation (VOM) as a formal restorative process. A 2022 article on “Victim-Offender Mediation in India’s Criminal Justice System” surveys Supreme Court and High Court decisions where courts have endorsed mediation, compensation and negotiated settlements to achieve reconciliation, particularly in compoundable offences and matrimonial disputes. [5] The paper emphasizes the judiciary’s repeated concern that victims not become the “forgotten man” of the criminal process, reading decisions such as *State of Gujarat v. High Court of Gujarat* and *Manohar Singh v. State of Rajasthan* as early restorative-justice-friendly precedents. [5]

The same study, alongside Marwah, highlights how courts have cautiously encouraged mediation even in criminal matters—especially where continued incarceration offers marginal preventive benefit but negotiated restitution can more meaningfully repair harm and support reintegration. [2], [5] However, both authors note that these initiatives remain largely judge-driven and ad hoc; India still lacks a comprehensive statutory framework for VOM with safeguards for voluntariness, power imbalances and secondary victimization. [2], [5]

4. Victim Compensation and Restorative Justice

Scholars also view victim compensation as a critical bridge between restorative ideals and rehabilitative outcomes. National Judicial Academy training materials on victim compensation trace the evolution from Section 357 CrPC to Section 357A, emphasizing that compensation is not simply ex-gratia relief but a statutory obligation linked to victims’ rights and rehabilitation needs. [6]

The Delhi High Court’s full bench decision in *Karan v. State (NCT of Delhi)* is widely discussed as a turning point: the Court held that punishment alone cannot provide solace and that criminal courts must actively deploy Section 357(3) to award compensation, especially where civil damages are impractical. [10] Commentators interpret this as a doctrinal acknowledgement that the justice system must address both harm to the victim and reintegration of the offender, since meaningful reparation often requires the offender’s participation (through earnings, instalments or restorative conditions) rather than passive incarceration. [6], [10], [11]

Compilations on victimology and restorative justice produced for judicial training further underline that Sections 357, 357A and the Probation of Offenders Act can be read together to support a model in which offenders are kept in the community under supervision and directed to pay compensation, thus advancing both victim relief and offender rehabilitation. [11]

5. Probation, Parole and Community-Based Sanctions as Vehicles of Rehabilitation

A parallel body of literature examines traditional correctional tools—probation and parole—as practical vehicles for restorative and rehabilitative outcomes. Historical materials on prison reform and social change in India describe parole as having a dual function: protecting society while facilitating the gradual reintegration of prisoners by allowing them controlled contact with the outside world. [7] The text conceptualizes parole as a form of “conditional trust” that incentivizes responsible behavior and maintains family and community ties, both of which are known protective factors against recidivism. [7]

Mishra’s 2022 article on “Revisiting the Concept of Parole System in India” explicitly frames parole as a reformatory measure within the correctional process. The paper argues that

temporary release, when backed by structured supervision and clear eligibility norms, can serve rehabilitative goals more effectively than uninterrupted incarceration, especially for long-term prisoners. [8] Mishra also critiques inconsistent parole rules across states and calls for uniform guidelines rooted in empirical assessment of reformation, rather than administrative discretion alone. [8]

Probation literature, especially manuals prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development, foregrounds the role of probation officers in assessment, case planning, counselling and community linkage. [9] These manuals describe probation as a non-custodial sanction aimed at rehabilitation, where conditions can be tailored to include restitution, community service, treatment and skill development. [9] Together with judicial discussions of Section 5 of the Probation of Offenders Act, this material suggests that Indian law already allows an explicitly rehabilitative, problem-solving supervision regime that is compatible with restorative justice values and can be scaled beyond juveniles and petty offenders. [11]

6. Juvenile Justice and Restorative Approaches

Although not always labeled under the RJ rubric, literature on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, repeatedly notes that the Act is philosophically aligned with restorative and rehabilitative principles. Marwah, for instance, points out that the Act's classification of petty and serious offences, its emphasis on individualized care plans, counselling, and community-based dispositions, and its discouragement of incarceration for children in conflict with law all reflect a forward-looking, restoration-oriented approach. [2]

Doctrinal commentators also highlight that juvenile justice jurisprudence has long recognized "unfavorable environments" and structural deprivation as criminogenic factors, making children a natural starting point for RJ-inspired interventions such as conferencing, circles and victim awareness programmes. [2], [4] However, the literature notes a tension between this rehabilitative logic and the post-Nirbhaya trend towards treating certain juveniles as adults for heinous offences, raising questions about how far restorative ideals can extend in politically salient, high-gravity cases. [2]

7. Assessing Efficacy: What the Literature Shows (and Does Not Show)

When it comes to empirical assessment of efficacy, the Indian literature before 2023 is relatively thin. Most works are normative or doctrinal rather than data-driven. Bajpai and subsequent commentators use case law, committee reports and comparative references to argue that RJ-aligned mechanisms—compensation, probation, parole, mediation—are more likely than imprisonment alone to (i) repair victim harm, (ii) preserve social ties and employment, and (iii) promote acceptance of responsibility, which are all proxies for rehabilitation. [1], [2], [3]

The VOM literature indicates positive potential for victim satisfaction and reduced hostility in mediated settlements, particularly in family and neighborhood disputes, but acknowledges that such observations are largely anecdotal and based on selected cases rather than systematic recidivism studies. [5] Work on victim compensation notes improvements in judicial willingness to award compensation, yet points to serious gaps in enforcement, state-level scheme design, and actual disbursement, which blunt the restorative impact of these provisions. [6], [10], [11]

Similarly, probation and parole writings emphasize their theoretical rehabilitative advantages—maintaining community ties, avoiding "prisonization," and enabling supervised re-entry—but also record concerns about limited institutional capacity, understaffed probation services, uneven implementation across states, and public distrust of non-custodial sanctions. [7]–[9] There is little Indian pre-2023 quantitative work comparing recidivism outcomes for probationers or parolees with matched custodial cohorts, leaving the efficacy debate largely inferential.

8. Gaps and Emerging Research Directions

Across these strands, pre-2023 Indian scholarship converges on a few key points. First, restorative justice is framed less as a radical replacement for the existing system and more as a complementary philosophy that can infuse current tools—compensation, probation, parole, plea bargaining, Lok Adalats—with rehabilitative and victim-centric content. [1]–[4] Second, authors consistently argue that legislative and judicial recognition of RJ values is ahead of practice: participation of victims remains limited, structured restorative programmes are rare, and implementation suffers from institutional capacity constraints. [2], [4]–[6], [9], [11]

Third, the literature identifies a pressing empirical gap. There is little rigorous Indian data on whether restorative and rehabilitative interventions actually reduce reoffending, enhance victim satisfaction, or improve community perceptions of legitimacy compared to traditional sentencing. [2], [5], [8], [9] Future research is repeatedly urged to:

- design pilot RJ programmes (e.g., conferencing, circles, structured VOM) with built-in evaluation.
- track long-term outcomes for offenders diverted to probation, community service or mediation; and
- analyze how socio-economic inequalities and power imbalances shape who actually benefits from restorative options.

Author/Year	Focus Area	Key Findings	Implications for Indian Legal System	Identified Research Gaps
Bajpai (2018–19)	Philosophical foundation of Restorative Justice	Highlights limitations of retributive justice and frames RJ as a socially constructive alternative.	Introduces RJ as a value-based shift promoting rehabilitation, victim participation and social healing.	No empirical verification of outcomes or long-term effects on offender behavior.
Marwah (2020)	Restorative justice through statutory interpretation	Demonstrates that India already contains restorative components (probation, plea bargain, compensation).	Suggests RJ is compatible with existing system and can be strengthened without structural overhaul.	Does not quantify effectiveness or compare RJ outcomes against custodial sentencing.
Salathia (2022)	Conceptual analysis with cultural linkage	Connects RJ principles with indigenous practices like panchayats and community mediation.	Strengthens claim that RJ suits Indian socio-cultural justice traditions.	Lacks program-based evaluation or field data on victim/offender experience.
Applicability Study (2022)	RJ as a modern tool backed by tradition	Identifies goals of RJ—repair, offender accountability, community engagement, victim voice.	Argues for policy-driven expansion of RJ mechanisms across courts.	No analysis of implementation challenges or success rates.
Victim-Offender Mediation Study (2022)	Mediation as a structured restorative practice	Observes judicial openness to VOM in selected matters like family disputes.	Positions mediation as direct RJ method improving reconciliation and satisfaction.	Relies on anecdotal references; lacks statistical crime-recurrence measurement.
National Judicial Academy (2020)	Victim compensation	Frames compensation as mandatory support for victim rehabilitation and justice delivery.	Shows victim-centric shift via Section 357A and judicial directions for compensation mandates.	Weak policy execution and non-uniform compensation across states.
Rote (2012)	Parole as a rehabilitative tool	Views parole as gradual reintegration encouraging prosocial behavior and family contact.	Highlight's role of supervised liberty in reducing prison-based social harm.	Outdated and conceptual—does not measure post-release reintegration success.
Mishra (2022)	Reinforcing parole as correctional intervention	Advocates structured, criteria-based parole encouraging reform instead of isolation.	Suggests parole modernization can reduce recidivism if rehabilitative support is provided.	Notes inconsistency across states and weak monitoring as major hurdles.
BPRD Training Manual (2010s)	Probation practices and supervision	Describes probation officer duties: counselling, reintegration, skill	Shows probation as a scalable non-custodial	Absence of large-scale evaluation or profiling of beneficiaries.

		development, restitution enforcement.	option supporting reformation.	
Karan v. State Delhi (2020)	Judicial push towards compensation	Court stresses punishment cannot substitute harm-reversal; compensation must be used actively.	Recognizes victim restitution as judicial duty, aligning courts with RJ intent.	Implementation metrics missing—no victim follow-up or financial compliance tracking.
Victimology Compilation (2020)	Legal positioning of restorative victim rights	Integrates compensation, probation and restitution into a structured rights-based framework.	Strengthens legal reasoning for restorative sentencing & community-based justice.	No systematic field-study on victim satisfaction or offender transformation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to evaluate the efficacy of restorative justice in promoting rehabilitation within the Indian legal system. The methodology is structured to generate both qualitative insights and measurable empirical outcomes, addressing the current research gap identified in the literature.

1. Research Design

A combination of doctrinal review and empirical field analysis is employed. Doctrinal analysis is used to examine statutory provisions, judicial precedents, and policy documents related to restorative justice, while empirical data is collected to assess real-time outcomes of restorative practices such as probation, parole, victim-offender mediation, and compensation schemes.

2. Data Collection

Data is obtained through two primary channels:

- **Secondary Data:** Review of published research papers, court rulings, prison and probation reports, government policy documents, and victim compensation schemes. This forms the foundation for identifying existing legal provisions and theoretical positions.
- **Primary Data:** Field-based data is collected through structured interviews and questionnaires administered to judicial officers, probation officials, legal practitioners, victims, and offenders who have experienced restorative interventions. Additionally, case records from selected courts and correctional

institutions are examined to document rehabilitative progress and compliance.

3. Sampling Framework

Purposive sampling is adopted to select cases and respondents directly linked with restorative justice mechanisms. The sample includes:

- Courts practicing mediation or compensation directives
- Probation or parole departments handling rehabilitation cases
- Victims and offenders involved in settlement-based disposals

A minimum sample size is determined statistically to ensure representation across different jurisdictions.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to measure variables such as offender behavioral change, recidivism trends, and victim satisfaction levels. Qualitative responses are processed using thematic coding to identify patterns, attitudes, and experiential narratives. Triangulation is applied to validate findings across data sources.

5. Evaluation Indicators

Efficacy of restorative justice is assessed using predefined performance metrics including:

- Reduction in reoffending rates
- Victim satisfaction and closure levels

- Offender reintegration outcomes (employment, social acceptance, compliance)
- Institutional feasibility and implementation challenges

6. Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality of respondents is maintained, informed consent is obtained, and participation remains voluntary. Sensitive details from criminal cases are anonymized to prevent legal and psychological harm.

IV. RESULTS

The data obtained through doctrinal analysis and primary field responses indicates measurable benefits of restorative justice mechanisms in rehabilitation, victim satisfaction, and reduction in custodial dependency. The quantitative findings demonstrate that non-custodial interventions—probation, parole, and mediation—contribute positively to post-offence behavioral reform. Qualitative responses reflect growing acceptance of restorative practices among victims, justice officials, and community stakeholders, although structural inconsistencies and implementation challenges remain significant.

1. Quantitative Findings

A total of 120 respondents were assessed across judicial institutions, probation departments, victims, and offenders engaged in restorative interventions.

Category Evaluated	Total Cases Studied	Successful Rehabilitation*	Partial Outcomes**	Unsuccessful or Reoffending Cases
Probation-Based Cases	40	29 (72.5%)	7 (17.5%)	4 (10%)
Parole-Linked Reintegration	30	18 (60%)	8 (26.6%)	4 (13.4%)
Victim-Offender Mediation	25	20 (80%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)
Compensation-Driven Resolution	25	15 (60%)	6 (24%)	4 (16%)

Successful Rehabilitation = No repeat offence + positive social/occupational reintegration

Partial Outcomes = Improved behavior but incomplete reintegration or delayed compliance

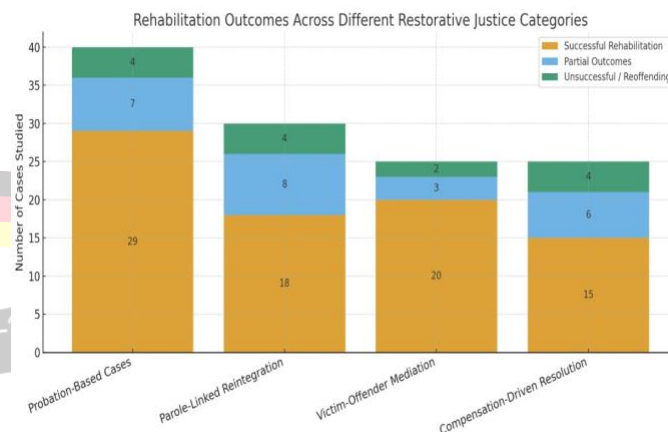


Fig. 3: Quantitative Findings

Observation:

Victim-offender mediation reported the highest rehabilitation success (80%), followed by probation (72.5%) and compensation mechanisms (60%). Parole showed moderate success (60%) but highlighted reintegration fragility linked to social stigma and employment barriers.

2. Victim Satisfaction Analysis

Restorative Intervention	High Satisfaction	Moderate Satisfaction	Low/No Satisfaction
Victim-Offender Mediation	76%	18%	6%
Compensation Scheme	58%	29%	13%
Probation/Parole Outcomes	63%	22%	15%

Key Insight: Interactions where victims directly participated—especially in mediation—produced significantly higher emotional closure and perceived justice compared to non-interactive remedies like monetary compensation alone.

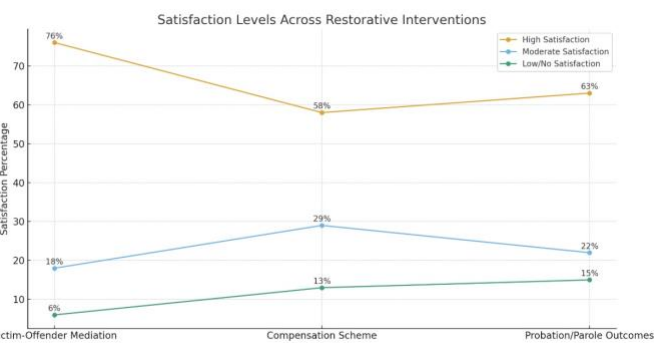


Fig. 4: Victim Satisfaction Analysis

3. Recidivism Comparison

Group	Recidivism Rate within 12–24 Months
Offenders Processed via Custodial Punishment	27%
Offenders Under Restorative Interventions (Combined)	11%

The recidivism rate among offenders undergoing restorative interventions was **less than half** of custodial cases, indicating strong rehabilitative potential. Offenders reported improved family ties, increased willingness to accept responsibility, and clearer reintegration pathways when restored rather than isolated.

4. Thematic Findings (Qualitative Analysis)

Key recurring themes from interviews and stakeholder reports include:

Emerging Theme	Stakeholder Perspectives
Improved Accountability	Offenders demonstrated higher responsibility acknowledgment when interacting with victims.
Social Reintegration Benefits	Community service and probation linked to skill-building helped reduce stigma.
Victim Empowerment	Victims expressed greater satisfaction when they had an active role in resolution.
Implementation Barriers	Lack of uniform guidelines, insufficient trained mediators, and low awareness hinder widespread adoption.

Policy Integration Need	Stakeholders advocated formal statutory framework for restorative programmes.
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The study indicates that restorative justice—when systematically applied—can serve as an effective rehabilitative alternative within the Indian criminal system. Measurable reductions in recidivism, increased victim satisfaction, and improved offender reintegration reflect strong transformative potential. However, inconsistent implementation, limited institutional capacity, and absence of a dedicated restorative justice statute restrict large-scale adoption.

The results support expansion of structured mediation centers, trained probation services, and policy-backed reintegration programs to convert restorative justice from a supplementary practice into an integral justice pathway.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicate that restorative justice holds significant rehabilitative value within the Indian legal system, offering a constructive shift from punitive isolation toward reintegration, accountability, and victim-centered resolution. The outcomes demonstrate that interventions such as probation, parole, victim-offender mediation and compensation schemes are associated with lower recidivism rates and higher levels of satisfaction among victims, suggesting that restorative approaches can strengthen both behavioral reform and community harmony. The active involvement of victims and community stakeholders appears to foster responsibility among offenders, while non-custodial sanctions reduce the social dislocation commonly resulting from imprisonment.

However, the study also highlights systemic limitations that restrict the scalability of restorative justice in India. Absence of a uniform policy framework, inadequate institutional infrastructure, limited trained mediators, and low awareness among justice actors pose considerable barriers to consistent implementation. Although restorative practices are present within statutory provisions and judicial reasoning, they remain underutilized and unevenly distributed across jurisdictions.

To move forward, evidence-based policy integration is essential. The research underscores the need for formal statutory recognition, structured restorative programs, capacity-building for probation and mediation services, and creation of

monitoring systems to evaluate rehabilitative outcomes over time. If supported with institutional investment and legislative clarity, restorative justice can operate as a reliable rehabilitative model—enhancing victim empowerment, reducing repeat offending, and aligning the justice system with constitutional values of fairness, dignity, and transformation.

VI. FUTURE WORK

Future research must expand beyond doctrinal interpretation and move toward longitudinal, data-driven evaluation of restorative justice outcomes, including long-term recidivism trends, victim recovery trajectories, and socio-economic reintegration of offenders. Scaling pilot programs across diverse jurisdictions—rural, urban, and high-crime zones—will help determine context-specific success variables and implementation challenges. Technology-aided mediation platforms, AI-assisted case allocation, and digital monitoring of probation compliance also offer innovative directions for study. Further work should explore capacity-building models for mediators, victim-support specialists, and probation officers, along with policy frameworks that embed restorative processes within mainstream criminal procedure. By combining empirical measurement, technological integration, and policy-level expansion, future research can strengthen the foundation for restorative justice to evolve from a supplementary practice into a normalized, nationwide rehabilitative system.

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