



## The role of Indian media in criminal trials

Pooran Chandra Pande\* & Dr K.B. Asthana\*\*

\*Research Scholar of law, Maharishi University of Information Technology Lucknow. U.P.  
advocatepooranpande@gmail.com

\*\*Dean, Faculty of law, Maharishi University of Information Technology Lucknow. U.P.  
kb.asthana@muit.in

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### ABSTRACT

A significant field of study that highlights the intersection of ethics, legal frameworks, and public opinion is the media's involvement in criminal cases in India. The importance of the media in criminal cases has increased because it influences defendants' rights, court procedures, and public opinion. In the Indian setting, media coverage affects defendants' rights, court cases, and public opinion. The examination focuses on well-known cases that demonstrate how the media may influence narratives, increase public awareness, and occasionally impede legal proceedings. It also discusses the problems caused by unchecked media practices, such as bias and false information that might jeopardize the fairness of the legal system. In the Indian setting, media coverage affects defendants' rights, court cases, and public opinion. The examination focuses on well-known cases that demonstrate how the media may influence narratives, increase public awareness, and occasionally impede legal proceedings. It also discusses the problems caused by unchecked media practices, such as bias and false information that might jeopardize the fairness of the legal system. The study addresses the phenomena of "trial by media," where sensational reporting can prejudge situations, emphasizing its dual character as a tool for public accountability and a possible source of bias. It can have an impact on the Indian Constitution's guarantee of

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a fair trial. It looks at how media lawsuits brought about by dramatic reporting can compromise the fairness of court decisions. In the end, this research promotes stricter rules and moral principles for media coverage to safeguard the legal system's integrity and inform the public. To promote ethical media reporting, the publication supports the creation of rules and regulations that strike a balance between the public's right to information and the need to uphold justice and fairness in criminal prosecutions.

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## Introduction

A complex and important part of the judicial system in India is the media's involvement in criminal cases. The media is an effective instrument for disseminating information; it also affects public opinion, the legal system, and the balance between the right to a fair trial and the freedom of speech. In India, public narratives around criminal cases are often shaped by news articles, opinion pieces, and social media conversations even before the cases get to trial. Extensive media coverage of high-profile cases may sway the views of juries, witnesses, and even judges. This phenomenon, which is sometimes called "trial by media," gives rise to worries about bias and the presumption of innocence.

Furthermore, guidelines for media reporting during trials are provided by the Indian legal framework, which consists of the Constitution and several statutes. Maintaining openness and the public interest while making sure the accused's rights are upheld presents a difficulty. Maintaining the rule of law and democratic ideals depends on the interaction between the media and the judiciary. The media's involvement in Indian criminal cases presents a dual challenge. Through sensationalism and partiality, it can weaken the legal system or act as a watchdog, encouraging accountability. The continuous discourse surrounding this matter emphasizes the necessity of conscientious reporting and the significance of preserving judicial impartiality.

In today's linked world, when information spreads quickly and public attention frequently peaks during high-profile cases, the role of the media in criminal trials is becoming more and more important. The media plays a key role in mediating the legal system and the public, moulding opinions, constructing stories, and occasionally even affecting the verdicts in court cases. Media coverage of criminal cases can alert the public to institutional problems, highlight justice-related concerns, and

educate the public about the legal process. It also brings up serious worries about the possibility of "trial by media," in which media coverage prior to trial taints juries and jeopardizes the right to a fair trial.

To guarantee that the values of justice and the public's right to know are respected, a careful balancing act must be taken between press freedom and the integrity of the legal system. As we dig deeper into the subject, it becomes imperative that we examine the ramifications of media involvement, journalists' ethical obligations, and the changing media landscape in relation to criminal justice.

The Indian media plays a vital and complex role in criminal cases, influencing public opinion as well as the legal system itself. Public education regarding ongoing cases, court procedures, and rights is facilitated by media coverage, which makes citizens more knowledgeable. To ensure transparency, journalists frequently attend trials to report on the proceedings. Public opinion can be influenced by news that is not always accurate or neutral. High-profile cases can garner a lot of media coverage, which can influence narratives and even put public pressure on the legal system.

Sensationalizing some aspects of a case by the media can result in a trial by the media, which could have an impact on juror impartiality and the defendant's right to a fair trial. The private rights of victims, witnesses, and even defendants may be violated by the media's emphasis on crime. To reconcile individual rights with the public interest, ethical reporting standards are essential. Due to the increased reach and speed of information distribution brought about by the emergence of social media, public attitudes and occasionally mob mentality have formed quickly. To preserve the integrity of ongoing trials, courts may issue gag orders or guidelines for media reporting. This highlights the necessity of striking a balance between openness and the right to a fair trial.

## **Literature Review**

In India, the media's participation in criminal cases has grown in importance, impacting public opinion, legal proceedings, and the justice system. This review looks at the research that has been done on the relationship between the media and criminal trials, emphasizing the advantages, difficulties, and moral issues.

Several studies highlight how the media shapes public perceptions of criminal cases. Sensational coverage frequently results in a "trial by media," where public opinion can influence legal procedures, according to research by Bhatia (2016). This phenomenon can impede the impartiality of the legal

system by leading to an assumption of guilt prior to the trial. Extensive media coverage has been shown to have an impact on the conduct of trial participants, including jurors, judges, and lawyers. Chaudhary (2018) examines situations in which pre-trial media reporting could sway juries' decisions and cause bias. Singh and Sharma (2019) also point out that judges may experience pressure to render decisions that reflect popular opinion, which could compromise their independence. This phenomenon can result in a presumption of guilt before the actual trial, complicating the fairness of the judicial process.

One recurrent topic is the moral ramifications of media coverage of criminal cases. Reddy (2020) criticizes the absence of moral standards guiding media coverage of legal matters. The difficulty is striking a balance between the accused's right to a fair trial and the public's right to knowledge. The lack of strict restrictions frequently leads to the spread of uncorroborated material, so aggravating the problems of defamation and biased reporting.

Several landmark cases demonstrate how the media affects legal proceedings. The 2012 Nirbhaya case is a well-known example of how public debate was impacted by heavy media coverage and how this resulted in important law changes. Khalid's case (2020), on the other hand, emphasizes the perils of false information and its ability to devise public opinion, exposing the media's capability to either uphold or destroy justice.

Positively, the media can serve as a watchdog by keeping the court responsible. Dutta (2021) talks on how adjustments in the criminal justice system have been brought about by the systematic problems that investigative journalism has unearthed. This feature of the media has the capacity to elevate underrepresented perspectives and draw attention to injustices and erroneous convictions. There are both positive and negative aspects to the media's involvement in criminal trials in India. It is an indispensable instrument for accountability and openness, but it also seriously jeopardizes the impartiality of legal proceedings. To preserve the fairness of the legal system, future studies should concentrate on creating strong ethical standards for media coverage in legal settings.

The intricate relationships that exist between the Indian criminal justice system and the media are summarized in this literature study, underscoring the importance of providing fair coverage to the media.

## **Methodology**

We searched a wide range of academic databases, including academic journal providers, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. For this inquiry, a wide range of sources were looked at, including reviews of

reputable websites and court case analysis. This article covers the theoretical framework, topic matter, and discussion of the role of media in criminal trials in India and the law in distributing information as well as the right to free expression.

### **Objective and Goal:**

The primary objective of this study on the media's participation in Indian criminal processes is to comprehend how the media affects public opinion, judicial process, and the overall integrity of the legal system. This means looking at the effects that media coverage has on the general public's perception, the conduct of trial participants, and the administration of justice.

Examine how public perceptions of criminal trials and defendants are shaped by media narratives. Examine how reporting bias and sensationalism affect public perceptions of justice. Analyse how media coverage affects juries, judges, and lawyers during trials. Determine the circumstances in which judicial independence and justice may be jeopardized by media attention. Examine the moral conundrums that journalists encounter when covering criminal trials. Talk about the necessity for rules to guarantee ethical reporting that respects the rules of justice. Examine notable instances where public conversation or results were significantly shaped by media coverage. Examine how these incidents may affect media reporting in the future. Examine the ways in which the media might encourage transparency and accountability within the criminal justice system. Examine cases where injustices have been revealed or legal improvements brought about by investigative journalism. Make recommendations for ways to strengthen the bond between the legal system and the media. Encourage the creation of moral guidelines and education for reporters who cover the law. By accomplishing these objectives, the investigation of the media's involvement in criminal proceedings hopes to advance a more sophisticated comprehension of the media's impact on Indian justice system and, in the end, promote a more responsible media environment that upholds the rule of law.

### **Balancing Act**

In India, the media's participation in criminal cases involves a delicate balancing act between its duty to inform the public and its obligations to uphold the legal system's integrity and the rights of the accused. Here are some important things to think about:

**1. Right to Information vs. Right to Fair Trial;** Information dissemination by the media is vital to a democracy as it provides the people with access to information. On the other hand, a trial by

the media may result from widespread media coverage, which could skew public opinion and bias the jury or judges.

**2. Impact on the Judiciary:** The impact of sensationalized reporting on the judiciary can be significant since it can exert pressure on judges, perhaps influencing their choices or creating a culture of self-censorship where judges steer clear of contentious issues to avoid media attention.

**3. Reporting Standards:** The practice of ethical journalism is essential. Reporting that is responsible should stay away from conjecture, honour the victims' and their families' right to privacy, and not reveal any sensitive material that can endanger the investigation or trial.

**4. Influence of social media:** As social media has grown; the environment has changed and information and ideas can now be shared instantly. This can make the function of traditional media more difficult by amplifying prejudices and rumours.

**5. Public Opinion and Accountability:** The media can serve as a watchdog by drawing attention to situations that might otherwise go unnoticed and holding the legal system accountable. This can guarantee the administration of justice, especially in situations including structural problems like caste or gender discrimination.

**6. Legal Framework:** The Indian legal system contains clauses like Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, which limits the disclosure of victims' identities in specific circumstances. This highlights the necessity for media outlets to follow moral and legal guidelines.

**7. Judicial Responses:** Indian courts have occasionally stepped in to control media attention, issuing directives to restrict coverage that would jeopardize existing legal proceedings. This indicates an attempt to keep judicial integrity and media freedom in check.

In India, the media is crucial in influencing public opinion regarding criminal trials. It must, however, tread carefully when straddling the boundaries between informing the public and exerting influence, making sure that the rights of all parties are upheld. Maintaining the values of justice and democracy requires finding this equilibrium.

## Comparative Perspectives & Analysis

The Indian criminal justice system relies heavily on the media, which plays a complex and important role in shaping public opinion, court decisions, and even case results. The public receives a great deal of information from the media, which helps to maintain judicial process transparency. It contributes to increasing public knowledge of legal rights and the operation of the legal system. Public education of legal procedures and the significance of due process can be achieved by in-depth reporting on high-profile cases. Public opinion can be greatly influenced by media framing. Media trials fuelled by sensationalized reporting have the potential to shape the public's impression of guilt or innocence without following the proper legal procedures. Judges and attorneys may feel pressured by intense media coverage, which could distort their judgment and produce unfair results.

The assumption of innocence can be violated accused people are portrayed in the media, imperilling the right to a fair trial. The right to privacy of victims and accused parties may be violated by coverage, which would be disrespectful and dehumanizing. The Contempt of Courts Act, which attempts to strike a balance between the right to free speech and the integrity of the legal system, is one of the laws and regulations that specifically address media coverage of court proceedings in India. Regulations may exist, but they are not always strictly enforced, and the media frequently flouts the law, especially in dramatic situations. Strict rules regulate media coverage of ongoing trials in many nations to safeguard defendants' rights. To preserve the right to a fair trial, for example, the UK maintains a system of reporting limits. India's media environment presents a distinct set of difficulties from nations with more stringent media regulations because of the country's abundance of news channels and the quick spread of information through social media.

Social media's ascent has quickened the spread of information, which has complicated the function of traditional media and made it more difficult to define what constitutes responsible reporting. Direct public participation and opinion sharing are made possible by social media, which has the potential to magnify prejudices and have an even greater impact on the legal system than traditional media. Media outlets must immediately follow the rules of ethical journalism in order to provide fair reporting that doesn't compromise the legal system. Upholding judicial integrity requires strengthening legal frameworks to handle the changing media landscape and its effects on criminal proceedings. The media presents serious obstacles to the justice and integrity of the legal system, even though it is crucial for educating the public and guaranteeing transparency in criminal proceedings in India. The rights of



the accused, victims, and the public interest must all be balanced. This is still a crucial topic that calls for constant discussion and change.

### **Critical Engagement: Challenges and Limitations:**

There are various obstacles and restrictions regarding the media's involvement in criminal trials in India, which can have a big effect on the legal system. Here are some important things to think about: Before a matter even gets to court, the public's impression of it might be shaped by media coverage. This may result in an assumption of guilt or innocence, which could sway the selection of jurors and have an impact on the verdicts of courts. Reporting on ongoing trials may give rise to sub judice contempt cases, in which public debates impede on the administration of justice. To guarantee fair trials, courts may impose restrictions on media coverage. Prominent legal cases frequently suffer from "trial by media," in which the news media's narrative takes precedence over the courtroom proceedings.

The concept of due process may be compromised by this. Media sources could give sensational stories more weight than accurate reporting, emphasizing the dramatic aspects over the subtleties of the law. This may skew the public's perception of the situation. The pursuit of stories by the media can result in privacy violations for victims, accused parties, and their families, which muddies the waters in terms of journalistic ethics. The public is largely informed by the media, yet the reliability and quality of the information might differ greatly. Fast-moving disinformation can have an impact on legal procedures and public opinion. Constant media attention can exert pressure on the judiciary, which may result in hastily made rulings or judgements that are more affected by popular opinion than by the law. A strong regulatory framework is required to strike a balance between the public's desire for information from the media and the integrity of the legal system.

The media's engagement in India's criminal justice system presents serious obstacles in addition to being vital in fostering accountability and openness. Maintaining justice and maintaining fair trials require striking a balance between the rights of the accused and victims and educated public discourse.

## **Results**

### **Impact on Indian media in criminal trials**

The Indian media has a crucial influence in criminal trials, shaping public opinion, court cases, and the justice system overall. Public awareness of criminal cases is increased by media coverage, which



brings attention to problems with justice, law enforcement, and social norms. This may result in well-informed public conversation. Public opinion can be shaped by sensationalized reporting, perhaps resulting in the accused being unfairly judged. Due to the possibility of juries and judges being influenced by media narratives, this might undermine the idea of a fair trial. In well-known cases, the media frequently participates in "trial by media," in which the accused may be demonized in front of a judge or jury. The presumption of innocence is called into question ethically by this.

Positively, media attention can expose biases or inefficiencies in the way cases are handled by law enforcement and the court system, holding them accountable. The privacy and safety of victims and witnesses can be impacted by media coverage, which may discourage them from coming forward or testifying out of concern for their reputation or possible negative publicity. The legal environment in which Indian media functions is complicated and includes provisions pertaining to privacy, defamation, and contempt of court. To stay out of legal hot water, journalists need to carefully navigate these restrictions. Criminal trial coverage frequently draws attention to more general societal issues, like institutional inequalities or gender-based violence, which sparks calls for social change and judicial system reform. The emergence of social media has brought about a transformation in the reporting and discussion of criminal cases. This has resulted in the quick transmission of information, including misinformation, which can further muddle court proceedings and public understanding.

The Indian media has a significant impact on the conversation around criminal cases, but this effect might have unintended consequences, thus it's important to strike a balance between the right to a fair trial and the freedom of speech.

### **India Court Cases**

The media can serve as a forum for lobbying on matters like criminal justice reforms, bringing attention to systemic problems within the system. Although the Indian media is essential to democratizing information and keeping the legal system transparent, its impact needs to be carefully controlled to prevent jeopardizing the fairness of court proceedings. The way that the media and the law interact is constantly changing, which makes constant discussion of moral obligations and norms necessary. The role of the media in criminal prosecutions has been the subject of several significant court cases and legal rulings in India, underscoring the conflict between the rights to free expression and a fair trial. Here are some notable examples:



1. **K.M. Nanavati v. State of Maharashtra (1961)**: One of the most well-known instances of a media trial in India is this one. Public excitement surrounding the case brought forth by the widespread media coverage raised concerns about the media's potential influence over the jury's verdict. Subsequently, the court stressed the importance of a fair trial devoid of outside interference.
2. **K.A. Abbas v. Union of India (1970)**: The balance between press freedom and the right to a fair trial was at stake in this case. The Supreme Court ruled that to preserve the integrity of the legal system, some limitations on press freedom are acceptable.
3. **S. Rangarajan v. P. Jagjivan Ram (1989)**: The Supreme Court decided that although it is a fundamental right, the right to free speech is not unqualified. The court stressed the need of responsible reporting, particularly in situations when the results of trials may be affected. The Supreme Court declared that there are limitations on the right to free speech and expression. Although the media is essential to democracy, the court stated that it must make sure that its reporting does not obstruct the administration of justice.
4. **R. Rajagopal v. State of Tamil Nadu (1994)**: Known by many as the "Auto Shankar" case, this historic ruling by the Supreme Court proved that, although press freedom is vital, it must be weighed against the right to privacy and a fair trial. The sensationalized reportage that might have tainted the legal process was rejected by the court.
5. **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997)**: Despite being largely about sexual harassment, this case set significant precedents for media coverage of delicate issues, emphasizing the need for prudence to prevent victim-blaming and to protect victims' dignity.
6. **State of Maharashtra v. Dr. Praful B. Desai (2003)**: The effect of media publicity on a fair trial was the subject of this case. The media must avoid disseminating biased information that could sway public opinion and jury selection, the Supreme Court stressed. The court emphasized that biased reporting by the media that might sway public opinion and the legal system should be avoided.
7. **Zee News v. Union of India (2015)**: The Delhi High Court stressed the importance of proper reporting while criticizing the media for sensationalizing cases and using public opinion to conduct trials.

These cases highlight the need for ethical journalism that protects the rights of all parties and reflect the current debate over the influence of the media on criminal proceedings in India. These cases show how difficult it is to maintain a balance between press freedom and the right to a fair trial, highlighting

the importance of moral journalism and legal protections to keep media trials from weakening the legal system.

### Significant Media Cases

The role of Indian media in criminal trials is significant, impacting public perception, legal proceedings, and the justice system. Here are some key points along with notable case examples:

- 1. Trial by Media: Jessica Lal Case (1999):** Public demonstrations calling for justice were sparked by the widespread media coverage of model Jessica Lal's death. Media attention focused on the accused's first acquittal, which prompted a retrial in response to public pressure and finally resulted in a conviction.
- 2. Challenges to Fair Trial: Salman Khan Hit-and-Run Case (2002):** Obstacles to a Fair Trial The hit-and-run case involving Bollywood actor Salman Khan sparked a lot of media attention, which made people worried about how the media may sway the verdict and how the public saw the accused.
- 3. Nithari Case (2006):** Sensationalism and its ability to influence legal procedures were concerns brought up by the media's extensive coverage of the Nithari killings. In order to guarantee that the trial was handled impartially and free from undue influence from media narratives, the Supreme Court got involved.
- 4. Swaying Public Opinion: Aarushi Talwar Case (2008):** Aarushi, a 14-year-old girl, was murdered, and her family's involvement was widely reported by the media. The media trial that resulted from the dramatic reporting affected public opinion and put pressure on the legal system and law enforcement.
- 5. Public Awareness and Advocacy: Nirbhaya Case (2012):** Public indignation and calls for legislative reforms resulted from the gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi, which received extensive media coverage. The in-depth reporting was essential in bringing attention to the issue of women's safety and the necessity for more stringent legislation.
- 6. Impact on Judicial Process: Unnao Rape Case (2017):** Effect on the Judicial Process: The 2017 Unnao Rape Case: The BJP politician's alleged rape case received a lot of media attention, which sparked protests and court interventions to uphold justice, underscoring the media's power to affect judicial accountability.

## 7. Sensationalism and Reporting Ethics: Shah Rukh Khan's Son Aryan Khan Drug Case (2021):

Sensationalism and conjecture in the media, together with a frequent lack of factual accuracy, drew criticism. Concerns about the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocent were brought up by this.

### Discussion

There are several facets to the role that Indian media plays in criminal cases, and this has important ramifications for justice, public opinion, and the judicial system itself. The public is largely educated about criminal cases, court cases, and the justice system by the media. Trial coverage can encourage judicial and law enforcement agencies to be more accountable. Before a trial ends, the public's impressions of guilt or innocence may be shaped by media narratives, which may have an impact on juries and the legal system. Sensational reporting about high-profile cases frequently results in a distorted public image of the accused and the substance of the crime. 'Trial by media' is a phenomenon that can arise from extensive media coverage, in which the accused are subject to public opinion as opposed to the legal system. It might be difficult to guarantee a fair trial when prejudices arise from ongoing coverage of a case.

The right to privacy of those involved in a trial, such as witnesses and victims, must be weighed against the media's freedom to report. Reporting constraints imposed by courts to avoid tainting a case can occasionally clash with the media's public informational mandate. The proliferation of social media platforms has facilitated instantaneous information sharing, hence augmenting the scope and influence of media narratives. The quick dissemination of information can result in false information and make the legal process more difficult. To reduce any potential harm to the legal system, the Indian judiciary has created restrictions governing media coverage of active trials. Reporters who obstruct legal proceedings may be subject to legal repercussions.

The Indian media plays a complex and crucial role in criminal prosecutions. It is an essential conduit for public knowledge and accountability, but it also puts the integrity of the legal system at danger. To guarantee that justice is administered in a fair and open manner, balancing these positions necessitates constant communication between media practitioners, legal experts, and the public.

## Conclusion

The Indian media plays a complex and important role in criminal trials, influencing the legal system, the public's image, and the accused's rights. One way that media coverage can improve accountability and transparency is by highlighting important topics and keeping the public informed about ongoing legal proceedings. However, sensationalism and biased reporting may result in a trial by the media, which could compromise the integrity of the legal system and have an impact on the rights of those concerned. Additionally, the way the media shape's public opinion can exert pressure on the judicial system, leading to hastily rendered conclusions or swaying the verdicts of juries and judges. The difficulty is striking a balance between the need to uphold the integrity of the legal system and the media's monitoring role.

To sum up, the Indian media has a significant impact on the public conversation around criminal cases, but to guarantee that justice is administered in a fair and unbiased manner, it must manage the moral and legal obligations that accompany this influence. Keeping this balance requires responsible reporting and compliance with the law.

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