

ISSN: 2582-6433



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Open Access, Refereed Journal Multi Disciplinary  
Peer Reviewed 6th Edition

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 7

[www.ijlra.com](http://www.ijlra.com)

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IJLRA

# **CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

*Authored By- Muskan Goyal  
&  
Anjali Dhupar*

**“Most people approve of capital punishment, but most people  
wouldn't do the hangman's job.”**

## **Aim**

This paper aims to understand the concept of capital punishment, study the various methods of capital punishment in India, and analyse the application of capital punishment in cases.

## **Objective**

- To understand the concept of capital punishment and its origin.
- To analyse the need for capital punishment.
- To study the various methods of capital punishment.

## **Introduction**

India is a country where criminals and wrongdoers exist. In India, all judgments are aimed at punishing offenders. The penalty is imposed for two reasons: firstly, the wrongdoer must bear the consequences, and secondly, punishing the offender demotivates those who share the same mind-set. In India, several punishments are available depending on the offence, including capital punishment, detention, life imprisonment, jail with a fine, and fines.

Capital punishment is a hard punishment. Almost every country on the planet has used this punishment at some point. Capital punishment has never been abandoned as a form of punishment in the history of human civilization. Capital punishment for murder, treason, arson and rape was often used in ancient Greece under the rules of Draco (fl. 7th century BCE), but Plato believed that it should only be used for the incorrigible. It was also used by Romans for a variety of offences, however, citizens were excused for a brief period during the republic. "The Roman Republic did not abolish capital punishment, while its non-use was primarily controlled by the practices of punishment or exile, as well as the procedure of questions," writes Sir Henry Marine.

The issue of capital punishment was not discussed in the British India Legislative Assembly until 1931, when Shri Gaya Prasad Singh, a member from Bihar, attempted to propose a Bill to abolish the

death penalty for offences under the Indian Penal Code. When the Ministry Of home affairs responded, the motion was lost. Before independence, the government's perspective on capital punishment in British India was addressed twice in debates in the Legislative Assembly by the Home Minister, Sir John Thorne. "The administration does not consider the removing of capital punishment for any crime for which it is currently used is a wise decision."

## **Meaning**

Capital punishment, also known as the death penalty, is a state-sanctioned act of murdering anyone as a punishment for breaking the law. Execution is the act of carrying out a death sentence, which is a judgment that instructs an offender to be punished in this manner. A prisoner who has been sentenced to death and is now awaiting execution is referred to as being on "death row."

Capital crimes or capital offenses vary by jurisdiction but commonly include serious crimes against the person, such as murder, mass murder, aggravated rape (often including child sexual abuse), terrorism, aircraft hijacking, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, as well as crimes against the state, such as attempting to overthrow the government, treason, espionage, and sabotage. Aggravated robbery, and kidnapping, in addition to drug trafficking, drug dealing, and drug possession, are all considered as capital crimes or enhancements in some cases.

## **Methods Of Death Penalty**

Hanging, shooting, lethal injection, beheading, stoning, gas inhalation are all used in India to carry out the capital punishment. According to the Criminal Procedure Code, hanging is the mode of execution in the civilian court system. The Army Act of 1950, however, lists both hanging and shooting as official methods of execution in the military court-martial system.

In 2020, sexual offences accounted for 50 (65%) of the 77 total death sentences handed down by trial courts, the highest number in five years. Minors were involved in 82 per cent of sexual offence cases, or 65 percent of all cases. As of December 31, 2020, there are 404 persons on death row, with Uttar Pradesh having the highest (59), Maharashtra having 45, and Madhya Pradesh having 37. With only two death row inmates, Andhra Pradesh is the state with the fewest. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Indian judiciary was seen in 2020, with a dramatic decline in the amount of death sentences imposed by trial tribunals. Prior to the announcement of the lockdown on March 24, 2020, trial courts had imposed 62 percent of death sentences in the first three months of the year.

According to the research, the total figures would have been much higher if the pandemic had not occurred.

Although, the overall number of death sentences imposed by sessions courts has decreased from 153 in 2016 to 77 in 2020, the proportion of death penalty cases involving sexual offences has steadily increased, from 17.64 percent in 2016 to 37.27 percent in 2017, 41.10 percent in 2018, 53.39 percent in 2019, and nearly 65 percent in 2020. India has carried out eight executions since 2000, the most recent of which happened in 2020. On March 20, 2020, Mukesh, Akshay Kumar Singh, Vinay Sharma, and Pawan Kumar, who were on death row for the gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh in December 2012, were beheaded.

Yakub Memon was sentenced to death in July 2015, Afzal Guru was sentenced to death in February 2013, Ajmal Kasab was sentenced to death in November 2012, and Dhananjay Chatterjee was sentenced to death in August 2004.

74.1 percent of those put to death were financially disadvantaged, according to their profession and landholding, with 93 percent of those sentenced to death hailing from Kerala. 23 percent had never attended school, and 76% were from low-income families or religious minorities.

<b>Capital Offences in Indian Penal Code (IPC)</b>		
<b>S.no.</b>	<b>Section Number</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.	Section 121	Treason, for waging war against the Government of Indian
2.	Section 132	Abetment of mutiny actually committed
3.	Section 194	Perjury resulting in the conviction and death of an innocent person
4.	Section 195A	Threatening or inducing any person to give false evidence resulting in the conviction and death of an innocent person
5.	Section 302	Murder
6.	Section 305	Abetment of a suicide by a minor, insane person or intoxicated person
7.	Section 307 (2)	Attempted murder by a serving life convict
8.	Section 364A	Kidnapping for ransom
9.	Section 376A	Rape and injury which causes death or leaves the woman in a persistent vegetative state
10.	Section 376E	Certain repeat offenders in the context of rape
11.	Section 396	Dacoity with murder

<b>Capital Offences in Other Laws</b>		
<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Section Number</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.	Sections 34, 37, and 38(1)	The Air Force Act, 1950
2.	Section 3 (1) (i)	The Andhra Pradesh Control of Organised Crime Act, 2001
3.	Section 27 (3)	The Arms Act, 1959 (repealed)

4.	Section 34, 37, and 38(1)	The Army Act, 1950
5.	Section 21, 24, 25(1)(a), and 55	The Assam Rifles Act, 2006
6.	Section 65A(2)	The Bombay Prohibition (Gujarat Amendment) Act, 2009
7.	Sections 14, 17, 18(1)(a), and 46	The Border Security Force Act, 1968
8.	Sections 17 and 49	The Coast Guard Act, 1978
9.	Section 4(1)	The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
10.	Section 5	The Defence of India Act, 1971
11.	Section 3	The Geneva Conventions Act, 1960
12.	Section 3 (b)	The Explosive Substances Act, 1908
13.	Sections 16, 19, 20(1)(a), and 49	The Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force Act, 1992
14.	Section 3(1)(i)	The Karnataka Control of Organised Crime Act, 2000
15.	Section 3(1)(i)	The Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999
16.	Section 31A(1)	The Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985
17.	Section 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 43, 44, 49(2)(a), 56(2), and 59	The Navy Act, 1957
18.	Section 15(4)	The Petroleum and Minerals Pipelines (Acquisition of rights of user in land) Act, 1957.
19.	Section 16, 19, 20(1)(a), and 49	The SashastraSeemaBal Act, 2007
20.	Section 3 (2) (i)	The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities)Act, 1989
21.	Section 3(1) (I)	The Suppression of unlawful Acts against Safety of Maritime Navigation and Fixed Platforms on Continental Shelf Act, 2002:
22.	Sections 10 (b)(i) and Section 16 (1) (a)	The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967

Source: India. Law Commission of India, Report no.262 on Death Penalty, August 2015, pp.31-32S

## Case Laws

The Supreme Court ruled in **Jagmohan v. State of Uttar Pradesh** that Articles 14, 19, and 21 did not infringe the death penalty. The judge was reported to choose between the death penalty and life in prison based on the circumstances, facts, and nature of the offence that were documented throughout the trial. As a result, the decision to impose the death penalty was made in line with the legal procedure, as required by Article 21.

However, in **Rajendra Prasad v. State of Uttar Pradesh**, the judge ruled that capital punishment could not be justified unless the defendant posed a threat to society. The judge argues that the death penalty should be abolished, with the exception of "white collar crimes." It was also determined that the death penalty for murder awarded under I.P.C. Section 302 did not contradict the constitution's fundamental characteristic.

However, in **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab**, the Supreme Court noted that Article 21 of the Constitution recognises the State's authority to deprive a person of his life in line with an equitable, fair, and reasonable method established out by law. Furthermore, the death sentence for a murder offence granted under Section 302 I.P.C. does not violate the Constitution's basic character.

The case of **Vinay Sharma v. Union of India (2020)**, widely known as the **Nirbhaya gang-rape case**, had outraged the nation's conscience. The terrible and violent tragedy occurred on a bus in Delhi's chilly weather. Six people were accused of viciously raping the girl, which resulted in her death. She was also flung naked to the road after an iron rod was shoved into her private parts. Her death resulted from the physical and mental suffering she had endured. One of the accused committed himself in jail when the case was brought before the court, and one of the accused was a minor, thus he was not sentenced to death. The other four defendants, on the other hand, were condemned to death and will be hanged in 2020. After considering the aggravating and mitigating elements, this decision was reached. If there were any, the aggravating factors outweighed the mitigating aspects. Because life imprisonment deemed insufficient in light of the circumstances of the crime and the horrific torture that led to the victim's death, the death penalty was imposed.

The lady was sentenced to death in **Shabnam v. the Union of India (2015)**, and she was hanged for the first time in the Indian criminal court system. Shabnam and her lover assassinated members of her family in this case. In the year 2008, this incident occurred. Shabnam assassinated her family members for refusing to let her marry her lover. As a result, she devised a horrible murder plot for her family, which served as an aggravating circumstance. She didn't even leave her baby nephew (who was just 10 months old) and forced him to wear a bloody robe. She also requested clemency from the president, which was denied, and she is expected to be hanged by the end of the year.

In the case of the **Hyderabad veterinarian (2019)**, the female doctor was alone in her scooter, which she parked at the Shamdabad plaza and from which she took a taxi to her office. Meanwhile, four suspects were keeping an eye on her, which led them to puncture her scooter when she was away. When she returned home from work, she discovered that her scooter had a puncture. Meanwhile, these four accused arrived and began torturing and raping her, as well as setting fire to her body. The case was clear-cut enough for a death sentence to be handed down, but when the police

came upon the accused, it raised doubts about our Indian criminal justice system.

**The Jessica Lal case**, also known as **SidharthaVashisht @ Manu Sharma v. the State (NCT Of Delhi) (2010)**, was one of the horrible death cases that taught society that money can buy anything but justice. When the girl refused to provide drink to one of the accused, she was shot to death. Her sister had to rush to all of the courts for justice for her sister, eventually leading to the suomotu case being taken to the High Court through a media trial. The accused in this case misled the key eye witness into becoming a hostile witness, prompting the court to sentence him to life in jail. After considering the balance of aggravating and mitigating variables, this decision was made.

**SurendraKoli v. the State of Uttar Pradesh (2011)**, popularly known as **NithariKaand**, was one of the most stunning developments for Indians in 2007. The bodies of the murdered children and adults were discovered at Mohinder Singh Pandher's home in the Noida village of Nithari. When the case was investigated further, it was discovered that the girls' bodies had been raped, killed, and eaten by him. He was sentenced to death after committing such a crime on fifteen girls. The aggravating factors applied to him. However, due to particular plea bargaining conditions, he was sentenced to life in jail.

## Capital Punishment In The Early 21st Century

Despite the demand for abolition, many countries have retained capital punishment in place, and some have even expanded its scope. Importing and possessing certain pharmaceuticals for the intention of selling them is banned in more than 30 countries. In Iran, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, even small amounts of prohibited narcotics are punishable. Around three-quarters of those executed in Singapore in 2000, which has by far the highest execution rate per capita of any country, were convicted of drug offences. In about 20 countries, bribery and corruption of public officials, embezzlement of public funds, currency speculation, and theft of huge sums of cash are all punishable by death. Sexual violations of various kinds are punishable by death in about two dozen countries, including most Islamic regimes. In the early twenty-first century, China had more than 50 capital offences.

Despite the massive number of capital offences across the globe, just about 30 countries carry out executions each year. Since 1976, approximately two-thirds of all executions in the United States have happened in just six states: Texas, Virginia, Florida, Missouri, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, where the death penalty is currently applied by roughly 60% of states and the federal government (when new death penalty laws were affirmed by the Supreme Court). China was supposed to execute around 1,000 people per year until the first decade of the twenty-first century (no trustworthy numbers are available), when estimates of the number of fatalities dropped substantially. Several countries, including Belarus, Congo (Kinshasa), Iran, Jordan, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Yemen, punish offenders on a regular basis, despite the fact that the number of executions changes from year to year. Both Japan and India have had the death penalty in place and have executed people on occasion.

Only a few countries allow for the execution of criminals who were minors at the time of the crime. The vast majority of these executions took place in the United States, which has not signed the

Convention on the Rights of the Child but has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, despite its opposition to the death sentence. Beginning in the late 1990s, there was intense debate about whether the death penalty should be administered upon mentally ill people; much of the debate centred on US practises, where more than a dozen such executions happened between 1990 and 2001, despite a UN ban in 1989. In 2002 and 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court Held that executions of the mentally ill and those under the age of 18 were unconstitutional, and in 2014, it ruled that states could not define mental handicap as an IQ score of 70 or below. The capital punishment for rape was abolished by the court in 1977, while the capital punishment for child rape was abolished in 2008.

In the 1990s, numerous states in the U.S. considered capital punishment prohibited after a series of cases in which people convicted of capital crimes and on death row were cleared on the basis of new evidence, particularly evidence based on new DNA-testing technology. Governor George Ryan of Illinois issued such an order in 2000, highlighting the fact that the state had executed 12 people between 1977 and 2000, but had overturned the death penalties of 13 others during the same time period. In 2003, right before leaving office, Ryan vacated the state's death row by pardoning four criminals and commuting the sentences of 167 others. Among the states that have abandoned capital punishment are New Jersey (2007), Illinois (2011), Connecticut (2012), Washington (2018), and Virginia (2021). Governors of Oregon (2011), Pennsylvania (2015), and California (2016) imposed moratoriums, supporting abolitionist movements in the United States (2019).

## **Arguments For And Against Capital Punishment**

The morality of capital punishment and its impact on criminal behaviour have long been argued. Modern arguments for and against capital punishment are categorized into three parts: moral, utilitarian, and practical.

### **Moral arguments**

People who commit murder, according to supporters of the capital punishment, have forfeited their right to life because they have taken the life of another. Furthermore, they believe that capital punishment is a legal form of retribution that expresses and reinforces not only the moral anger of the victim's family, but also the moral indignation of all law-abiding citizens. Capital punishment critics argued that, by justifying the behaviour that the state is attempting to repress—killing—capital punishment sends a conflicting moral message, citing Cesare Beccaria's books (especially *On Crimes and Punishments* [1764]). Furthermore, they say that capital punishment for small offences is wrong because it is totally unjustified to the harm suffered. Abolitionist's further say that capital punishment is inherently cruel and degrading since it violates a person's right to life.

Although death was imposed for crimes in many sacred religious scriptures and was historically frequently executed with the support of religious hierarchy, there is no clarity today across religious religions, or among groups or sects within them, on the morality of capital punishment. In the latter half of the twentieth century, an increasing number of religious leaders, mainly from Judaism and

Roman Catholicism, began agitating against it. The state of Israel abolished capital punishment for all crimes except treason and crimes against humanity, which Pope John Paul II condemned as "cruel and unnecessary."

### Utilitarian arguments

Capital punishment proponents say that it is a particularly effective deterrent for potentially violent offenders for whom the penalty of imprisonment is insufficient. On the other hand, opponents cite evidence that the capital punishment is not a more effective deterrent than life imprisonment or long-term incarceration.

### Practical arguments

There are also worries as to whether the capital punishment can be carried out in a fair and reasonable manner. Supporters of capital punishment believe that laws and procedures could well be developed to ensure that only those who absolutely deserve to die are put to death. On the other hand, opponents claim that the history of capital punishment shows that attempting to single out specific types of offences as deserving of death is arbitrary and discriminatory. They also point to other factors that they think to prevent capital punishment from being applied fairly, claiming that the poor and ethnic and religious minorities frequently lack access to good legal representation, that racial prejudice motivates predominantly white juries in capital cases to convict black and other non-white defendants in disproportionate numbers, and that mistakes are unavoidable even in a well-run criminal justice system, and that because mistakes are unavoidable even in a well-run criminal justice system. Finally, they argue that because the capital punishment appeal system is lengthy, those who have been sentenced to death are often cruelly forced to endure long periods of uncertainty about their fate.

## Conclusion

In the long history of the Indian criminal justice system, these were the only truly dreadful death cases. Multiple incidents, such as the Hathras Gang Rape Case, the Aarushi Talwar Murder Case (Noida Double Murder Case), and the Unnao Gang Rape Case, are still under investigation or without a conclusive decision, but now the severity of the crime certainly asks for the capital punishment. In order to avoid future incidents of similar violence, these precedents serve as the case study. Most importantly, while passing judgment in such cases, it is always vital to find a balance between aggravating and mitigating circumstances.

Capital punishment is often challenged on the grounds that society has a moral responsibility to ensure its citizens' safety and welfare. Murderers lay this safety and welfare in risk. Society can only ensure that convicted killers don't kill again by putting criminals to death. Death penalty is one such practise that society should support in order to maintain a balance of light (good) over darkness (evil). It is often argued that executing criminals who have been found guilty of murder will discourage future attacks. Families of the victims are also offered comfort by it.

In order to make sure that everyone is treated fairly is what justice means. It is essential that society punishes perpetrators with punishment that is at least as severe as the hardship faced by innocent

victims and their families. Society shouldn't allow offenders by allowing them to escape with paying less than what the victim has paid and suffered. According to the seriousness of their crimes, people should be given what is owed to them. Criminals should get what is due to them and should be suitably punished for their misconduct.

The excessive delay in carrying out the capital punishment has reduced the impact of the justice. . Just because of that, a significant part of the population supported the Hyderabad police encounter in Disha's case. In order to gain public trust in our judicial system, it is necessary to accelerate investigations done by a well-trained and equipped police force, supported by fast track trials.

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