



SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOOL OF CRIMINOLOGY: CRIME AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

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Abstract

Crime is a universal social phenomenon that has always existed in all societies throughout history, its causes and expressions differ depending on the social, cultural, and economic circumstances. Crime, according to the sociological school of criminology, is firmly rooted in societal institutions, interpersonal connections, and environmental factors all play a significant role in crime, which is not just the result of personal decision-making or biological predisposition. This paper highlights the transition from individualistic to social explanations of crime by analysing classical, positivist, and sociological viewpoints. In order to demonstrate how social norms, inequality, and environmental constraints impact criminal behaviour, important thinkers such as Donald Taft, Edwin Sutherland, Emile Durkheim, and Robert K. Merton. Additionally, the societal reasons of crime are examined, including inequality, racial discrimination, lack of family control, lack of social control, alcohol & drugs, failure of education system, unemployment, defective marriage and cinema. The practical applications of these theories are illustrated by Indian incidents such as Nirbhaya case, Communal riots and the Khairlanji Massacre. The paper's conclusion reiterates that crime is reflection of society as a whole rather than just individual behaviour, is that comprehensive social interventions targeting structural disparities, cultural norms and community contexts are necessary for effective crime prevention in addition to legal consequences.

Keywords- Sociological School, Society, Criminology, Crime, Criminals, Criminal behaviour, Anomie, Inequality, Social factors.

1. Introduction

Crime is mirror reflecting deeper sociological, psychological, and institutional truth, it is not just the breaking of the law. Crime is not an isolated event rather it is a multifaceted phenomenon with strong roots in legal, cultural, emotional and historical context. Every crime no matter how serious, has a number of causes and effect that affect not just the victim and the offender but also entire communities, families and organisations. It is a phenomenon that call into question how we see justice, morality and human nature.¹ Crime has been a persistent feature of human societies throughout history, reflecting a complex and multifaceted challenge that disrupts social harmony, destabilizes communities, and raises profound ethical, moral, and behavioural concerns. Criminology, as the scientific study of crime, criminal behaviour, and justice system seeks to uncover the roots of criminality, examine its consequences and explore effective strategies for prevention and control. Sociologically, speaking, crime is social construct that is intricately woven into societal norms, institutions, and disparities rather than just an individual act.² A major problem in society all around the world for long time has been criminality. Crime is being seen as societal phenomena, despite the fact that it is still frequently perceived as an individual act of deviance. This viewpoint acknowledges that societal structures, cultural norms, economic circumstances and institutional influence all have an impact on crime and that it

¹ Crime as a Social, Psychological, and Legal Phenomenon, *available at:* <https://www.crimpsy.com/understanding-social-factors-in-criminology> (last visited on September 6, 2025).

² Crime and Criminology: A Sociological Note with 30 Questions, *available at:* <https://hubsociology.com/crime-and-criminology-a-sociological-note-with/> (last visited on September 6, 2025)



is not only product of individual decisions. We may better comprehend the underlying causes of criminality, spot trends, and create efficient strategies to lower crime rates and advance societal peace by looking it as a social phenomenon.

Though they were not criminologists, philosophers like Locke and Rousseau set the theoretical groundwork by putting out the concept of the social contract, according to which people forgo some liberties in exchange for the opportunities to live in a structured community. Violation of this contract were punished with anything from death to exile and social rejection.³The classical school of criminology made an effort to make punishment more proportionate and reasonable. According to Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishment* (1768), penalties need to be exactly enough to offset the enjoyment that comes from committing crimes.⁴ On the other hand, determinism replaced free will as the main focus of the Positivist School of Criminology in the middle of the 19th century. While acknowledging the influence of social causes, theorists such as Lombroso (1876) and his disciples Ferri and Garofalo maintained that criminal behaviour might be linked to biological and psychological characteristics. They argued that preventing crime requires addressing its underlying causes, criticising the traditional idea of punishment alone.⁵Out of these debates, the sociological school of criminology evolved in the early 20th century, emphasizing that crime cannot be understood isolation from the social context. Donald Taft, Durkheim, Sutherland, and Merton were among the thinkers who emphasised that social disarray, inequality, cultural conflict, and social tension are the causes of crime. According to this theory, social and economic circumstances eventually influence psychological aspects as well.⁶

Therefore, the best way to understand crime is as a socially created and relative reality. What is considered illegal in one community could be accepted or even praised in another. For example: while gay marriage is illegal in some nations, it is not in others. In certain jurisdictions, driving after having little amount of alcohol is permitted, but not in others. Some nations require permit to own weapons, while others do not. Some regions of Himachal Pradesh permit production of alcohol for domestic use, while others do not. In most nations, including India, bigamy or polygamy is illegal; however, in Arab nations like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, it is permitted under certain restrictions. Some African tribes abandon their elder relatives in the forests, where they perish from starvation and the weather. The idea of crime varies with time. In the past, Sati was a respected tradition among the Rajput of India. These days, it is major offence.⁷

As Karl Mannheim (Hungarian sociologist) observed, crime is an inevitable and natural occurrence, since conflict and competition are a part of both human and animal existence. No society will ever be totally free from crime; rather, crime is reflection of society's enduring values, rules and tensions.⁸

³ Sociology of Crime (Criminology), available at: <https://sociology.iresearchnet.com/sociology-of-crime-criminology/> (last visited on September 10,2025).

⁴ Cesare Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments* (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis,1963).

⁵ Souvik Chatterji, Angshuman Chakraborty, et.al., "Relevance of Lombroso, Ferri and Garofalo in respect of Positivism and Biological Trait Theory" 6 *International Journal of Law Management and Humanities* (2023).

⁶ Banuka De Silva, "The Emergence of Sociological Criminology: On the factors, perspectives, and impact in the early 20th Century" 4 *ASES International Journal of Education Science* 123-132 (2025).

⁷ Marianne W. Beth, "The Sociological Aspect of Criminology" 32 *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 67 (1941).

⁸ Marguerite R. Howie, "Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge" 143 *The Journal of Education* 55-71 (1961).



2. Intellectual roots of the Sociological School

An emphasis on social causality replaced biological and psychological explanations of crime with the rise of the sociological school of criminology. The sociological viewpoint identified the roots of crime in the basic structure of society, whereas previous positivists like Lombroso linked criminality to genetics or bodily abnormalities. Within this school, criminology concentrated on crime as a social phenomenon influenced by environment, interaction, and cultural norms, as sociology is defined as the study of social organisation, institutions, and collective conduct. The sociological school's fundamental idea is that crime results from larger societal causes rather than being just the result of personal illness. Deviant conduct may occur in a variety of social situations, including the family, the media, the business, education, and religion. Thus, the criminal is understood less as an isolated individual and more as a product of the society that surrounds him.

Key thinkers of Sociological School of Criminology

- **Donald Taft**- Taft was American criminologist. According to him, society itself creates the criminal, genetics has no role in criminal origins and genetics has no role in the origins of crime. The individual appears to be the raw material that has been moulded by his life since infancy, and his criminality only stems from the corrupted environment in which he was born and raised, namely from the social aspect alone.⁹

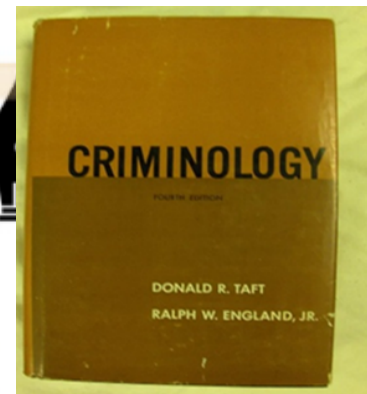


Figure 1: Cover page of Donald R. Taft and Ralph W. England Jr.'s Criminology (4th edn, Macmillan 1964)

⁹ The Sociological School of Criminology: Exploring Social Factors Behind Crime, *available at*: <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-19106-the-sociological-school-of-criminology-exploring-social-factors-behind-crime.html> (last visited on September 6,2025).



- **Edwin Sutherland**- In the third edition of his book *Principles of Criminology*, published in 1939, Sutherland first presented his theory. In 1947, he revised *Differential Association Theory* for the book's fourth edition. He clarified that criminal conduct is acquired through interaction, particularly in close-knit groups, in his **Differential Association Theory**.¹⁰ When a person is exposed to more definitions that support breaking the law than those that support law-abiding conduct, they become delinquent. In essence, people become criminal because they associate with and absorb definitions of crime from others, the frequency, importance, length, and severity of these connections all affect the probability that someone would pick up illegal behaviour. He argued that, in many cases, the development of criminal conduct requires some kind of justification for using the tactics for the criminal purposes rather than actual crime committing methods.



Figure2: Edwin Sutherland

Sutherland describes the ideas of differential association theory with nine propositions¹¹:

1. Every criminal act is learnt.¹²
2. Communication with others is the means via which criminal behaviour is acquired.¹³
3. The majority of criminal behaviour learning takes place in small, intricate groups and interactions.¹⁴
4. Learning how to commit crimes, as well as the reasons and justifications for committing crimes, and the attitudes that required to steer someone towards criminal action, can all be part of the process of learning criminal behaviour.¹⁵
5. By interpreting local laws as either favourable or unfavourable, one can understand the direction of motivations and urges towards illegal behaviour.¹⁶

¹⁰ Donald R. Cressey, "The Theory of Differential Association: An Introduction" 8 *Social Problems* 2-16(1960).

¹¹ Differential Association Theory, available at: [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_\(Boundless\)/07%3A_Deviance_Social_Control_and_Crime/7.06%3A_The_Symbolic-Interactionalist_Perspective_on_Deviance/7.6A%3A_Differential_Association_Theory](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Introduction_to_Sociology/Sociology_(Boundless)/07%3A_Deviance_Social_Control_and_Crime/7.06%3A_The_Symbolic-Interactionalist_Perspective_on_Deviance/7.6A%3A_Differential_Association_Theory) (last visited on September 6, 2025).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory Explained, available at: <https://healthresearchfunding.org/edwin-sutherlands-differential-association-theory-explained/> (last visited on September 6, 2025).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Sutherland's Differential Association Theory Explained, available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/differential-association-theory-4689191> (last visited on September 6, 2025).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*



6. A person will decide to become a criminal when the number of positive interpretations that encourage breaking the law exceeds the number of negative interpretations that do not.¹⁷
7. Not every differential relationship is the same. Their frequency, intensity, priority, and duration can all change.
8. The same mechanisms that are used to learn about any other behaviour are also used to learn criminal behaviours through interaction with others.¹⁸
9. Criminal behaviour may be an expression of generalised needs and values, but does not explain criminal behaviour because non-criminal behaviour also expresses the same needs and values.¹⁹

Despite its popularity, the idea has drawn criticism for its limited relevance to crimes of passion, white-collar crime, and acts motivated by emotional stress.

- **Emile Durkheim-** The Greek term “anomia” (meaning without standards or normlessness) is where the word “anomie” originates.²⁰ In his writings, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) wrote *Suicide* (1897) and *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893). The idea was developed by Durkheim, who specifically applied it to describe the conduct he called “anomie suicide.” Suicide appeared to Durkheim to be ultimate level of free will or free choice. By focuses on suicide rates and using official statistics, he demonstrated how external, societal influences play a major role in determining the choice to perform this act. four ‘ideal’ kinds of suicide were distinguished by Durkheim. Anomic (suicide committed on by anomie or a state of social normlessness), egoistic (self-centred that is when person feels isolated and disconnected from society), altruistic (selfless that is when person sacrifices their life for other), and fatalistic.²¹
- **Robert K. Merton-** An article titled “Social structure and Anomie” published in 1938 introduced Robert Merton’s theory of anomie. Merton used the term “anomie” to describe a state that arises when there are disparities between the resources available to attain social goals and the goals themselves. Building on Durkheim’s idea, contended that anomie arises when there is a discrepancy between culturally prescribed goals and the socially available means to achieve them. For those who lacks legitimate avenues to success, deviance becomes an adaptive strategy. According to his theory of anomie, delinquency and form of deviance is a reaction to the lack

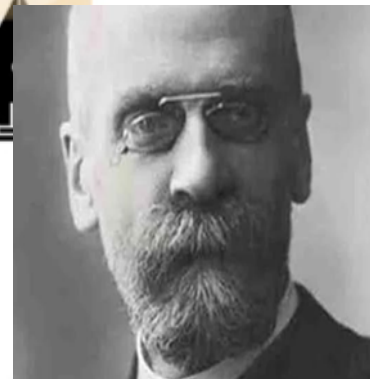


Figure 3: Emile Durkheim

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Stephan R. Marks, “Durkheim’s Theory of Anomie” 80 *American Journal of Sociology* 329-363 (1974).

²¹ Peter Graeff, Guido Mehlkop, “Reason for Suicide: A new Macro-Sociological Approach in the Durkheimian Tradition” 23 *European Sociological Review* 521-535 (2007).



of traditional or socially acceptable path to success. It is trait of people of lower socioeconomic classes because the social structure strains cultural values, making it easy for those with a particular status in society to act accordance with them and difficult or impossible for others.²²

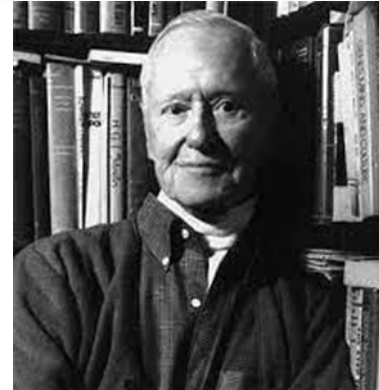
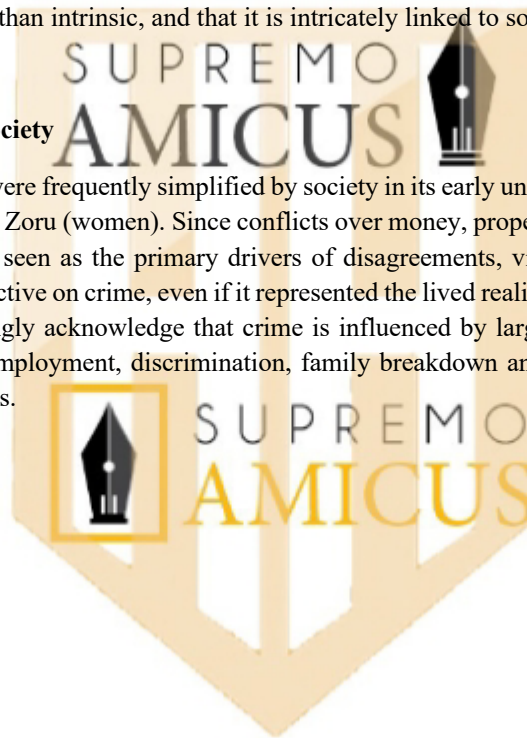


Figure 4: Robert K. Merton

These thinkers together established the sociological school's theoretical foundations, bringing together the notion that crime is socially produced rather than intrinsic, and that it is intricately linked to societal structures, inequalities, and cultural contradictions of society.

3. Social Causes of crime in society

The three main reasons of crime were frequently simplified by society in its early understanding of criminal behaviour to Zar(money), Zamin (land), and Zoru (women). Since conflicts over money, property and relationships often turned into criminal activity, they were seen as the primary drivers of disagreements, violence, and illegal activity. This approach offered a limited perspective on crime, even if it represented the lived reality of traditional societies. Modern sociological viewpoints increasingly acknowledge that crime is influenced by larger social, economic and cultural factors including inequality, unemployment, discrimination, family breakdown and other factors rather than being restricted to these specific motives.



²² Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" *American Sociological Review* 672-682 (1938).



Figure 6: Social Causes of Crimes

1. **Inequality-** The existence of uneven opportunities and incentives for various social positions or statuses within a group or community is what is known as social inequality. It includes regular and organised patterns of uneven opportunities, rewards, penalties, and allocation of goods and wealth. Some people may resort to crime (theft, burglary, and fraud) as a method of surviving when they are unable to get necessities like food, education or work. Inequality can create resentment and emotions of deprivation. People may commit crimes as a way to vent their resentment or to question the social order if they believe they are being treated unfairly. Because marginalised groups frequently do not participate in mainstream society, they are more susceptible to criminal activity and disruptive behaviour.²³
2. **Racial discrimination-** It is when someone is treated differently because of their race, ancestry, ethnicity, skin colour, or hair texture. Refusing to interact, share resources, or conduct business with members of certain group is an example of discrimination. Minority groups may experience economic and social exclusion, which would restrict their access to housing, education, and employment. Some people may influence to engage in criminal

²³ Morgan Kelly, "Inequality and Crime"82 *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 530-539 (2000).



activity by this exclusion. Certain racial groups may be unfairly signed out by discriminatory policing or judicial procedures, which can increase their arrest rates and feed vicious cycle of crime. Feelings of despair, and social alienation brought on by racism can occasionally lead to illegal or rebellious behaviour as a coping mechanism or form of resistance.²⁴

3. **Lack of Family Control** – One of the reasons people commit crime is because the family's head does not have enough control over his children. Unhealthy or broken relationships within the family unit are indicative of broken family. The first social institution to have an impact on behaviour is the family. Children who grow up in unstable homes and are exposed to criminal activity, neglect, or domestic abuse are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviours. Without proper emotional support and moral guidance, children are more vulnerable to deviant behaviour, peer pressure, and criminal influences. As a result, children have a great deal more freedom to conduct crimes as a result.²⁵
4. **Lack of Social Influence**- Society no longer has as much influence over its people. This is more prevalent in urban areas than in rural ones. Social control is completely absent in large cities. Control and local self-government institutions are still few in rural regions. Perhaps this explains why crime rates are greater in cities than in rural areas.²⁶
5. **Alcohol and drugs**- Crime rates are raised by alcohol and intoxication. Alcohol consumption, when excessive often leads to impulsive crimes such as assault, domestic violence, and sexual influence. In addition to committing major crimes while intoxicated, drunks also spend hard earned money on alcohol, which eventually lowers the standard of life for families. Family conflicts might occur when a person's low income is spent on alcohol. Possession, production, or distribution of substances deemed to have potential for abuse, such as cocaine, heroin, morphine and amphetamines, constitutes a drug related offence. Drugs and crime are linked because drug production and trafficking are some drug-related crimes include crime against people, such as sexual assault or robbery.²⁷
6. **Religion**- The most significant source of purification, religion is said to deter criminal activity. But regrettably, religion also contributes to major criminality. Religious disputes have the potential to spark riots, act of violence, and even act of terrorism. Violent demonstrations, forced conversion, and hate crimes can all be justified by extreme or extremist religious views. Underprivileged religious groups may experience persecution in civilisations where religion establishes social hierarchy, which can lead to animosity and occasionally criminal activity. For example, India was divided in the name of religion, resulting in the looting of properties and the commission of the most horrible crimes.²⁸
7. **Education's failure system**- There are specific flows in the current educational system. Morals, which are powerful tools for deterring crime, are not given enough attention in the educational system. In addition, it is

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Causes and Prevention of crime in India, *available at*: <https://www.prosecution.telangana.gov.in/Articles.html> (last visited on September 22,2025).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Social Risk Factors for Involvement Crime, *available at*: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/Social%20Risk%20Factors.pdf> (last visited on September 22, 2025).

²⁸ Causes of Crime, *available at*: <https://blog.ipleaders.in/causes-of-crime/> (last visited on September 24,2025).



somewhat vocational in nature and does not assist young people in finding employment in timely manner. Thus, many turn to other source of income, which can occasionally result in criminal activity. People who lack education are not only marginalised but are also forced to live in degradation, which is basic problem. Sometimes, in order to escape this depravity, the person decides to follow the criminal route.²⁹

8. **Unemployment-** One contributing element to crime is unemployment. There is connection between crime and illiteracy and the resulting lack of employment. When individuals, especially the youth are unable to secure stable income and purposeful work, they experience hopelessness. In the absence of legitimate means of livelihood, illegal activities such as theft, fraud, or even organised crime become attractive alternatives.³⁰
9. **Defective marriage-** A defective marriage is one that includes unhealthy practices including dowries, child marriage, polygamy, sexual abuse, molestation, and sati. Women have frequently been victims of these negative circumstances or societal norms. It has caused the crime and suicide rates in the community to rise.³¹
10. **Cinema-** A popular kind of entertainment these days is the cinema. Indirectly, however, it has promoted crimes including gambling, human trafficking, sex trafficking, robbery, murder, and pornography. All these elements work together to make someone a criminal, and many people copy this in real life. Alcohol use, which again causes mind to act erratically, has been scientifically shown to provide comfort after any setback.³²

There can never be society where there are no crimes committed. Advanced societies have even greater crime rates, particularly sex crimes, which are rising daily. Perhaps humanity will be on the verge of extinction if such heinous crimes are not stopped.

4. Renowned Indian Examples of Crime as a Social Phenomenon

The sociological school of criminology emphasises that crime is an expression of larger societal processes rather than only an individual act. India offers a number of vivid examples due to its intricate political, social, and cultural framework. All of these illustrate how social hierarchies, structural injustices, collective tensions, and institutional shortcomings give rise to criminal activity.

1. Nirbhaya Gang Rape Case (Delhi, 2012)

A 23-year-old Delhi physiotherapy intern was viciously gang-raped on moving bus in December 2012, and she eventually passed away from her injuries. This case shocked the nation. It is a reflection of ingrained **patriarchy**, **gender-based socialisation**, and the **shortcoming of urban infrastructure**, according to sociological perspective. Women are not able to access safe public areas in Delhi, as was the case in many Indian cities, and police mechanism were often reactionary rather than proactive.³³ Due to the case's widespread public protest throughout India, the Justice J.S. Verma Committee was established and made recommendations for changes to the country's penal code. Stricter penalties for sexual assault, definitions that expanded to cover stalking and voyeurism, and changes to the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Understanding Social Factors in Criminology, available at: <https://www.crimpsy.com/understanding-social-factors-in-criminology/> (last visited on September 24, 2025).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Sneha Kadyan, Prabha N. Unnithan, "Extreme cases and the criminal justice system: responses to a traumatic sexual assault in India" 41 *International journal of Comparative and applied criminal justice* 31-59 (2017).



methods for gathering evidence and holding trials were all part of these amendments. Instead, then focussing only on individual moral failing, scholars contend that the case shows how **crime in urban India can be connected to structural social attitudes, poor governance, and cultural acceptance of gender inequality.**

2. Khairlanji Massacre (Maharashtra, 2006)

Members of Maharashtra's upper caste brutally murdered a Dalit family in the Khairlanji massacre. Extreme physical abuse, including sexual assault of women, was inflicted on the family, highlighting the connection between **gender violence** and **caste oppression**. Socially, this case illustrates how caste- based hierarchy and social exclusion still exist in rural India, where **societal norms occasionally allow violence against underprivileged groups**. At first, the court case was criticised for being biased and for having a sluggish response, which demonstrated institutional shortcomings in safeguarding socially vulnerable populations. The massacre raised questions about the **efficacy of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**, showing how social institutions and the legislation work together to either prevent or occasionally fail to prevent crimes that stem from ingrained inequalities.³⁴

3. Communal Riots (Gujarat 2002, Muzaffarnagar 2013)

India's communal riots, where violence is planned along religious or ethnic lines, are clear illustration of crime as a **social phenomenon**. More than 1000 people were killed in the 2002 Gujarat Riots, mostly Muslims, and an extensive amount of property was destroyed.³⁵ Similar to this, 40000 of people were displaced and hundreds of people died during the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots.³⁶ These riots as the result of **identity-based battle for resources and social power, political manipulation, and community polarisation**. These riots were not just unplanned angry outbursts; rather, they were **socially and politically manufactured**, frequently with the help of media narratives, provocative speech, and law enforcement failures. They, show how, rather than being the result of individual deviance, crime can appear on a **collective level**, reflecting larger societal fractures.

4. White Collar Crimes in the Age of Liberalisation

India's economic liberalisation in the 1990s brought with it structural risks and new prospects for wealth accumulation. In the 1992 Harshad Mehta **scam**, fraudulent bank receipts were used to manipulate the stock market, resulting in financial losses amounting to billions.³⁷

³⁴ "Khairlanji: the crime and punishment", *The Hindu*, November 10, 2016, available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/Readers-Editor/Khairlanji-the-crime-and-punishment/article16149798.ece> (last visited on September 26, 2025).

³⁵ Simran Dhillon, "Indian court acquits 69 people of murder of 11 Muslims during 2002 Gujarat riots", *The Guardian*, April 20, 2023, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/20/indian-court-acquits-69-people-of-11-muslims-during-2002-gujarat-riots> (last visited on September 26, 2025).

³⁶ "2013 Muzaffarnagar riots cases| Eight years on, over 1,100 acquitted, just seven convicted", *The Hindu*, September 07, 2021, available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/2013-muzaffarnagar-riots-cases-eight-years-on-over-1100-acquitted-just-seven-convicted/article36332900.ece> (last visited on) September 26, 2025).

³⁷ Aryan Das, Arpit Tiwary, "Decoding the Harshad Mehta Scam: Legal Loopholes and Financial Irregularities in India's Securities Market" 8 *"International Journal of Law Management and Humanities* 3924-3936 (2025).



5. Judicial Recognition of Crime as a Social Phenomenon

1. P.S.R Sadhanantham v. Arunachalam and Anr. 1980

In this landmark case, the Supreme Court observed that crime is wrong against the entire community rather than just a damage to done to single victim. The court stressed that in addition to emphasising retribution, the criminal justice system must also recognise the wider social consequence of criminal activities. By portraying crime as social evil, the ruling reflects the notion that criminal activity threatens public safety, order, and confidence.³⁸

2. Mrs. Harpreet Kaur Harvinder Singh Bedi v. State of Maharashtra and Another 1992

The Supreme Court characterised in this case as “a revolt against the whole society and an attack on the civilisation of the day.” This statement emphasises the understanding that crime not only affect individuals but also undermines the moral and cultural foundation of society. The ruling supports the idea that crime frequently results from ingrained societal dysfunctions including poverty, inequality and lack of social control.³⁹

3. Chinnasamy and others. v. The Deputy Superintendent of Police, Udumalpet 2016 (Udumalpet Shankar Murder Case)

An unfortunate reminder of how deeply ingrained caste-based discrimination and backward societal norms may encourage violent acts is infamous honour killing of Shankar, a Dalit man, after he married Kausalya, a lady from a dominant caste. Although it upheld convictions, the Madras High Court acknowledged that the crime was an expression of socially sanctioned violence stemming from caste hierarchy and ideas of family honour rather than just a personal quarrel.⁴⁰

6. Conclusion

The sociological school of criminology radically alters our understanding of crime by moving the emphasis from the individual offender to the broader social environment in which the offence occurs. Crime is the result of intricate relationship between people and society rather than just being the result of moral failing or personal weakness. Social structures that foster criminal activity include poverty, unemployment, inequality and illiteracy. Similarly, caste-based crimes, honour killings, and gender-based offences are examples of how cultural norms, traditions, and prejudices frequently normalises or excuses various types of violence. Therefore, the sociological school emphasises the notion that social circumstances that encourage crime are inextricably linked to it. Social, economic, political, and cultural structures are all intricately entwined with crime. The sociological school of criminology stresses that criminal behaviour is a reflection of social dynamics rather than just individual deviance, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, caste atrocities, communal riots, insurgencies, and corporate frauds. Effective legal, social, and policy responses depend on an understanding of these trends, which emphasises the necessity of societal development and reform in order to deter crime.

This idea is also supported by court rulings. The supreme court acknowledged social dimension of crime in P.S.R Sadhanantham v. Arunachalam (1980), emphasising that it is a threat to society as a whole as well as breach of individual rights. In a similar vein, the court defined crime as “revolt against the whole society and an attack on the

³⁸ *P.S.R Sadhanantham v. Arunachalam* (1980) 3 SCC 141.

³⁹ *Mrs. Harpreet Kaur Harvinder Singh Bedi v. State of Maharashtra* (1992) 2 SCC 177.

⁴⁰ *Chinnaswamy v. State of Tamil Nadu* (2020) Madras High court.



civilisation of the day” in *Mrs. Harpreet Kaur v. State of Maharashtra* (1992). Cases like the 2016 Udumalai Shankar Murder demonstrate how caste and other societal inequalities and biases may directly contribute to violent crime. These court observations support the sociological school’s contention that social dysfunction, not merely personal decisions, are reflected in crime.

It becomes evident that crime cannot be addressed by punitive measures alone. Although punishment has certain deterrent effects, it does not address the root causes of criminal behaviour. Strengthening family structures, guaranteeing access to education, lowering unemployment, fighting caste and gender discrimination, and raising societal awareness against superstitions and biases are all preventive and reformatory measures that are supported by the sociological approach. Such actions aim to change society in ways that lessen the probability of criminal activity rather than just controlling crime.

Essentially, crime as a social phenomenon emphasises the fact that every criminal act is a reflection of larger societal problems. It both reflects and is a sign of more serious socioeconomic disparities, cultural inflexibilities, and social institution failures. Therefore, society must address these underlying reasons as seriously as it does the application of the law in order to successfully manage crime. By placing crime in its social context, the sociological school offers a framework for creating a society that is inclusive, just and robust to crime.

