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**Title of the Thesis:** *Criminalisation of Politics: A Study of the Emerging Political Trends in Indian Democracy with Special Reference to Purnea, (1990-2005)*

**Abstract:**

This is a study of the phenomenon of ‘Criminalisation of Politics’, with special reference to the emerging trend in the decade of 1990s in Purnea district of Bihar. Criminalisation of politics, certainly, is not a new phenomenon, but, its urgency among the scholars has been realized very recently. It has been left, totally, at the mercy of the journalists. However, the media cannot and does not report everything that happens, and there is always a greater political meaning to every story that goes into print or on air. This is an attempt at a proper academic study of the phenomenon of ‘criminalisation of politics’, especially considering the paucity of substantial academic works on the subject. However, the periodization of this study, certainly, should not be prematurely confused as adding to the contest between the upper castes/class and the backward/lower castes/class of the Indian society.

To specify, this study does not see the phenomenon of ‘criminalisation of politics’ merely in narrow terms of electoral politics. It considers it as something that challenges the very survival of a democratic polity and threatens the social fabric of Indian society, which is so heterogeneous, so plural in its making. It doesn’t consider mere entry of criminals into legislatures, rather inquires deeply into, the displacement of democratic institutional mechanism by show of muscle, money and gangs that has led to the crisis of governability and illegitimacy of the state. It brings into focus how individuals, under the false impression of settling scores of caste and faction, have tried to settle their scores at the expense of the larger democratic system.

In explaining the phenomenon of ‘criminalisation of politics’, it shows how the democratic process itself has become implicated. In more direct terms, the study shows that the process of democratization has contributed to the perpetuation of ‘criminalisation of politics’ and therefore, in order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to disaggregate democracy itself. Starting from the structural-functional analytical perspective of Rajni Kothari in his *Politics in India* to an entirely different framework of normative and empirical accounts in the later decades, this study comes closer to the idea of ‘crisis of governability’ and the ‘crisis of legitimacy’ of the state, raised by Atul Kohli, Achin Vanaik and their contemporaries. However, the present study extends itself beyond that period and analyses the situation of ‘breakdown in governance’ and growing ‘illegitimacy of the state’ in the decades of 1990s and 2000s. In addition to that, the study also examines the changing pattern of democracy and the uncoupling of crime-punishment relationship. It finds that, though the process started changing with the political intervention of the state in the 1970s and 1980s, in the later phase, it converted into state’s incapacity to intervene. The institutions of the state started declining and the political leadership started finding itself, increasingly, under uncertainties. Thus, in order to maintain their position; they gave way to extra-normative varieties, from money power to muscle power at all level of politics, but mostly at the level of the grassroots. At the higher level in the state apparatuses they invented ways of commissions and kickbacks.

This study is divided into three parts. The first part examines the relationship of crime and punishment in the country, using available literature from a variety of sources. Some of the

arguments made have also been validated by empirical studies. Though a reference has been made, in this study, of the criminalisation of political process at the central level, detailed evidence has been collected from the state of Bihar, especially from its north-eastern district of Purnea.

Part II- *Economics and Politics of Change in Bihar* is written with a focus on the state of Bihar. This part suggests that state in Bihar has failed to respond to the demands of the changing socioeconomic and political needs. Agricultural stagnation, dismal land reforms, industrial backwardness and caste politics, became its principle characteristics and all these factors together led to its acute backwardness. With agrarian class relations firmly remain embedded in caste; it became economically the poorest and socially the most divided society in the country. Though in the 1970s, the expectations of the marginalized started to challenge the status quo, the state continued to remain a tool in the hands of the upper-castes, and feeling threatened by the powerful upsurge, they waged war on those below them. Slowly, however, the backward caste/class started to understand the importance of their numerical majority and the profile of the ruling elite in Bihar began to change. People from the backward caste/class started occupying the majority of seats in the Assembly. For them the prime concern was to replace the traditional feudal decree, right from the village functionary to the level of the chief of the executive in the state. Therefore, there arose a curious scheme of social justice through caste empowerment sans economic development. This was again opposed by the traditional forces in a more reactionary way, and the state was dragged into a phenomenon of caste war. However, this scheme of distorted social justice sans development, ultimately failed even to satisfy the target groups and facilitated in a rapid induction of socially injurious and parasitic elements into the political system.

Part III: *Micro Analysis of Purnea* is also divided into two chapters. Chapter 5 traces the history of the phenomenon of the 'criminalisation of politics' and Chapter 6 is written with a focus on the emerging trends in the post-1980 phase. The district Purnea has been a ground of contentious politics since the time of independence. However, since the 1970s, it increasingly became prone to violence and has witnessed three moments of change in its political pattern. One, it began witnessing an intense land struggle, between the upper/dominant castes and the scheduled castes/scheduled tribes. Second phase, in the 1980s, the place became a ground for caste war between the forwards and backwards, (primarily between Rajputs and Yadavs), and the backward group challenged the forward group in all fields, including politics. This provided opportunities to the ganglords to extend their activities in many ways. And consequently, in the last phase Purnea was pushed into the hands of ganglords. In the decade of the 1990s, the criminals in Bihar, particularly in Purnea, achieved such heights in politics never seen before. There emerged a peculiar political class that was concerned only with grabbing as much power as possible to become the uncontested kings of the land. This made Purnea the epicentre of violence and crime.

In sum, there are three main themes that can be said to have emerged as conclusions from this study. One, the present status of crime and criminality is only an act of "misuse of power" and the "failure of the criminal justice system" and this has disturbed the crime-punishment relationship in the country. Gangsterism is a direct by-product of the society's preference for the status quo. Two, in a democracy the resolutions and rewards of politicians are voter's judgment of political performances. However, politicization of the masses without democratization left the citizens of India helpless. And third, to maintain the crime-punishment relationship, there is an utter need for a disinterested arbiter, equivalent to state, which has been completely lacking in our case. With the disappearance of institutionalized procedures, the political process spawned, to use Bardhan's term, 'a new breed of unscrupulous racketeers' which ultimately threatened the very legitimacy of the political process and uncoupled the crime-punishment link.