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THE ROLE OF LOK ADALATS IN DELIVERING SPEEDY JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

India's Judicial system is drowning in over 52 million pending cases.¹ Crippled by a lack of facilities, infrastructure and judicial officers, adjudication crawls at a snail's pace leaving the economic and emotional burden on its litigants. In response to these challenges, Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms, particularly Lok Adalats have emerged as an effective means of speedy justice. This blog examines the effective role of Lok Adalats in delivering speedy Justice, while also assessing the limitations of their effectiveness.

SPEEDY JUSTICE: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

The Right to access speedy justice is a Fundamental Right protected under Article 21 and Article 14.² Yet, millions of ordinary Indian citizens find this right out of reach. The litigants who can access the legal system find themselves caught in the cycle of delayed justice. When Adjudication crawls at a snail's pace, the consequences ripple across society.

- **Loss of Public Trust on Judiciary-** Delayed justice undermines the public confidence thereby raising the concerns regarding rule of law.
- **Human and Economic Costs-** Prolonged litigation drains financial sources of ordinary citizens causing mental stress.

¹ National Data Judicial Grid, NJDG - National Judicial Data Grid, [https://njdg.ecourts.gov.in/njdg_v3/\(last visited June 7,2026\)](https://njdg.ecourts.gov.in/njdg_v3/(last%20visited%20June%207%2C2026)).

² Live Law, 'Access to Justice is a Fundamental Right Guaranteed under Article 14&21 of the Constitution: Supreme Court Constitution Bench, Live Law (July 17, 2016), <https://www.livelaw.in/access-justice-fundamental-right-guaranteed-article-14-21-constitution-sc-constitution-bench> (last visited June 7, 2026).

- **Frequent Changing of Judges-** As the cases continue for decades, the judges presiding over them transfer or retire. When no single judge witnesses the entire cycle of a case, the core essence of a case will be lost and justice becomes a casualty.
- **Erosion of Democratic Credibility-** A crippled judiciary weakens India's reputation at the global stage.

In order to address the systemic paralysis, the Indian legal system adopted Lok Adalats most notably referred to as “People’s Court”.³ Functioning as an important forum of the judiciary, it shifts the focus from rigid procedural battles to mutual compromise. Lok Adalats have emerged as a crucial platform delivering rapid settlements while relieving the immense pressure on conventional courts.

LOK ADALATS: MEANING AND STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

Lok Adalats have a legal foundation in the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987⁴, which came into existence to provide equal access to justice to all and resolve disputes amicably. As opposed to the ordinary court system, the Lok Adalat adopts an amicable method and convinces the two parties involved to sort out the problem through negotiation rather than opting for litigation. The Lok Adalat considers pending cases as well as pre-litigation disputes, as far as they are suitable and both the parties’ consent to mediation.

While millions of cases are resolved by Lok Adalats annually, this staggering speed raises a critical question of credible evaluation of genuine justice. The statute strips away the stringent and time-consuming rules such as Code of Civil Procedure⁵ and Evidence Act⁶. Further, the order passed by the Lok Adalat holds the same status as the order passed by the civil court and binds the two parties. Such institutions provide an ideal platform to resolve disputes before they are involved in court proceedings. They mostly resolve the disputes through negotiation, compromise, and dispose of cases relatively within a short period rather than decades. Thus,

³ Ministry of Law & Justice, Government of India, *The Lok Adalat is one of the important Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mechanism available to Common People*, Press Information Bureau (Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1884151®=48&lang=2> (last visited June 7 2026).

⁴ The Legal Service Authorities Act, No.39 of 1987.

⁵ The Code of Civil Procedure, No.5 of 1908.

⁶ The Evidence Act, No. 1 of 1872.

the Lok Adalat system reminds us that justice is not just about laws and courts, it is about people, dignity, and the simple, profound right to move forward in life with fairness and hope.⁷

LIMITATIONS OF LOK ADALATS

While Lok Adalats are instrumental in assisting courts in managing their case overloads, they are limited in their effectiveness due to the manner in which decisions are reached. The process used to arrive at those decisions is based largely on the ability of the parties to agree on compromise terms. When one party is poor or disadvantaged, there is an increased likelihood that they will accept any reasonable offer to end their suffering. While quantifiable outputs are often used to assess the effectiveness of Lok Adalats, the process is not always solely based on merits of justice and fairness since, at its core, it is a numbers-driven process rather than a just process.

A significant limitation that affects the effectiveness of Lok Adalats is that they only hold limited jurisdiction. They cannot address complex legal issues that need an extensive analysis of evidence, application of legal concepts, and a party's rights and interests. Thus, Lok Adalat processes are meant to supplement but not replace traditional court processes. Therefore, the underlying challenge will be to achieve an acceptable balance between effectiveness and justice. Some quick trials are preferable; however, prioritizing merely the speed at which trials are conducted may undermine the true spirit of Justice.

CONCLUSION

Lok Adalats operate as a double-edged sword within the Indian justice delivery system. On one hand, they provide an efficient dispute resolution mechanism reducing judicial backlog and enhancing access to justice. On the other hand, it raises concerns regarding the fairness and substantive quality of outcomes. Therefore, the need of the hour is not merely speedy justice, but Justice that is both swift and fair, ensuring that efficiency does not come at the cost of equity and due process.

⁷ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Lok Adalats: Justice That Speaks for the people (Dec. 13, 2025), <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2203446®=3&lang=1>

