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Introduction

Welcome to the Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research (IJLAR), a distinguished platform dedicated to the dissemination of comprehensive legal scholarship and academic research. Our mission is to foster an environment where legal professionals, academics, and students can collaborate and contribute to the evolving discourse in the field of law. We strive to publish high-quality, peer-reviewed articles that provide insightful analysis, innovative perspectives, and practical solutions to contemporary legal challenges. The IJAR is committed to advancing legal knowledge and practice by bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Preface

The Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research is a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence in legal scholarship. This volume presents a curated selection of articles that reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of legal studies today. Our contributors, ranging from esteemed legal scholars to emerging academics, bring forward a rich tapestry of insights that address critical legal issues and offer novel contributions to the field. We are grateful to our editorial board, reviewers, and authors for their dedication and hard work, which have made this publication possible. It is our hope that this journal will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, and will inspire further inquiry and debate within the legal community.

Description

The Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research is an academic journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles on a wide range of legal topics. Each issue is designed to provide a platform for legal scholars, practitioners, and students to share their research findings, theoretical explorations, and practical insights. Our journal covers various branches of law, including but not limited to constitutional law, international law, criminal law, commercial law, human rights, and environmental law. We are dedicated to ensuring that the articles published in our journal adhere to the highest standards of academic rigor and contribute meaningfully to the understanding and development of legal theories and practices.

PEOPLE'S JUSTICE SYSTEM: EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE OF LOK ADALATS

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ABSTRACT

The statute of law and democracy both rest on equal and fair access to justice. Yet, in many instances, traditional judicial systems have inherent shortcomings, including delays, costs, and difficulties associated with procedures as part of their judicial system. In India, Lok Adalats (People's Courts) have developed into a reliable means of alternative dispute resolution (ADR), intended to provide quick, low-cost, and relatively non-confrontational systems of justice and settle the disputes faster than traditional courts. The same legal effect given to the award which is given by the Lok Adalats. Peoples are resolving their cases by consent only. So, there is no appeal right from the Lok Adalat decision. It also examines empirical data to establish the rate at which cases are determined and discovers how they function to discharge the backlog of cases pending in the courts and classifies organizational and operational challenges experienced by Lok Adalats throughout India. Finally, this paper provides recommendations to improve the operation of Lok Adalats in order to increase how well they serve as accessible justice delivery systems for people.

Keywords: Justice, Dispute, Resolution, Rights, Lok Adalats

Introduction

The Indian judiciary, one of the largest in the world, has long resisted with an devastating backlog of cases. Millions of disputes remain pending at various levels, resulting in delayed justice. The famous maxim "*justice delayed is justice denied*" reflects the perseverance of improving the justice delivery system.

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In response to this challenge, India has established Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms, among which Lok Adalats hold a exclusive place. Lok Adalats represent a combination of formal and informal justice systems, combining legal authority with community-based dispute resolution practices.

Concept and Meaning of Lok Adalat

The term “Lok Adalat” literally means “People’s Court.” It denotes to a medium where disputes are settled through compromise or conciliation, outside the traditional court system.

Lok Adalats are characterized by:

- Informality of procedure
- Speedy disposal of cases
- Cost-effectiveness
- Voluntary participation
- Emphasis on settlement rather than adjudication

Unlike regular courts, Lok Adalats do not follow strict procedural laws. Instead, they aim to enable negotiation between parties and encourage mutually adequate solutions.

Historical Evolution

The roots of Lok Adalats can be outlined back to traditional village panchayats, which determined disputes through community compromise.

Key Milestones:

- **Pre-independence era:** Informal dispute resolution through village councils
- **Post-independence:** Legal aid movement gains momentum
- **1980s:** First organized Lok Adalats conducted in Gujarat
- **1987:** Enactment of the Legal Services Authorities Act

The Legal Services Authorities Act established Lok Adalats and provided a statutory framework for their functioning.

Legal Framework

Lok Adalats are administered by the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, which provides for:

- Establishment of National, State, District, and Taluk Legal Services Authorities
- Organization of Lok Adalats
- Jurisdiction and powers

Key Provisions:

- **Section 19:** Organization of Lok Adalats
- **Section 20:** Cognizance of cases
- **Section 21:** Award of Lok Adalat deemed as a decree of a civil court
- **Section 22B–22E:** Permanent Lok Adalats

The award passed by a Lok Adalat is:

- Final and binding
- Non-appealable
- Enforceable as a civil court decree

Types of Lok Adalats

Lok Adalats in India can be classified into the following categories:

National Lok Adalat

Organized periodically across the country to settle large volumes of cases.

Permanent Lok Adalat (PLA)

Deals with public utility services such as:

- Transport
- Postal services
- Electricity

Mobile Lok Adalat

Travels to rural and remote areas to provide access to justice.

Mega Lok Adalat

Handles a large number of cases in a single day.

Jurisdiction of Lok Adalats

Lok Adalats deal with:

- Civil disputes
- Compoundable criminal cases
- Motor accident claims
- Matrimonial disputes
- Labour disputes
- Bank recovery cases

They cannot deal with:

- Non-compoundable criminal offences
- Serious criminal matters



Procedure of Lok Adalat

The procedure followed is simple and flexible:

1. Case is referred to Lok Adalat
2. Parties are notified
3. Conciliation proceedings begin
4. Settlement is reached through mutual agreement
5. Award is passed

No court fees are charged, and if already paid, it is refunded.

Performance of Lok Adalats: Empirical Analysis

Lok Adalats have demonstrated remarkable success in disposing of cases and reducing judicial backlog.

Case Disposal Statistics

- Over **3.09 crore cases** were disposed of in a single National Lok Adalat event in 2025
- Around **1.13 crore cases** settled in 2024

- About **1.45 crore cases** resolved in another session, preventing fresh litigation

Recent Developments

- In Jharkhand, **over 22 lakh pre-litigation cases** were resolved in a single Lok Adalat
- A **36-year-old land dispute** was settled in just 10 minutes
- In Karnataka, thousands of cases including matrimonial disputes were resolved, even leading to reconciliation of couples

These examples determine the speed and social impact of Lok Adalats.

Role in Access to Justice

Lok Adalats play a crucial role in promoting access to justice, especially for marginalized communities.

Key Contributions:

- Free legal aid
- Simplified procedures
- Reduced litigation costs
- Quick resolution

They align with **Article 39A** of the Constitution, which directives equal access to justice.

Advantages of Lok Adalats

Speedy Justice - Cases are resolved in a single day or within a short period.

Cost-Effective - No court fees and minimal expenses.

Reduction of Backlog - Significantly reduces burden on courts.

Amicable Settlement - Promotes harmony and social cohesion.

Finality of Decisions - No appeal ensures final resolution.

Limitations and Challenges

Despite their success, Lok Adalats face several challenges:

1. **Lack of Awareness** - Many people are unaware of Lok Adalats.

- 2. Compromise-Based System** - Settlement depends on mutual consent; no decision if parties disagree.

Quality of Justice - Critics argue that emphasis on settlement may compromise justice.

Limited Jurisdiction - Cannot handle serious criminal cases.

Infrastructure Issues - Inadequate facilities in rural areas.

Critical Evaluation

While Lok Adalats have achieved impressive quantitative success, qualitative concerns remain.

Positive Aspects:

- High disposal rates
- Reduced litigation burden
- Improved access

Concerns:

- Pressure to settle cases
- Lack of detailed legal reasoning
- Potential imbalance between parties

Studies indicate that Lok Adalats serve as a bridge between formal and informal justice systems .

Comparative Perspective:

Compared to courts:

Aspect	Courts	Lok Adalat
Procedure	Formal	Informal
Cost	High	Minimal
Time	Long	Short
Appeal	Allowed	Not allowed

Lok Adalats are predominantly effective for minor and civil disputes.

Suggestions for Improvement

To enhance effectiveness:

1. Increase public awareness
2. Strengthen infrastructure
3. Ensure voluntary settlements
4. Provide trained mediators
5. Expand jurisdiction cautiously
6. Use technology (online Lok Adalats)

Conclusion

Lok Adalats characterize a transformative process to justice delivery in India. By merging legal authority with conciliatory practices, they deliver a people-centric alternative to traditional courts. Their success in placing of millions of cases highlights their standing in reducing judicial backlog and attractive access to justice.

However, their efficiency must be assessed not only in terms of number but also excellence of justice. Strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring fairness, and increasing awareness will be crucial in making Lok Adalats a more robust pillar of India's justice system.

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