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# Court management, legal aid and access to justice in India: An assessment of judicial efficiency and institutional reforms

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**Abstract**
This study examines the role of court performance management and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms, particularly National Lok Adalats, in improving the efficiency of justice delivery in India. The study analyses data for 2024–2025 to assess the extent to which these mechanisms contribute to dispute resolution and reduction of judicial burden. The findings indicate that out of 4,72,420 cases received for mediation, 98,406 cases were successfully settled, reflecting a settlement rate of approximately 20.83%. In commercial disputes, 59,568 PIM applications were received, although a substantial number were recorded as non-starters, while 877 cases resulted in settlement. National Lok Adalats demonstrated considerable disposal capacity, with 14,89,61,603 cases taken up across four sessions and 10,42,37,861 cases disposed of, involving settlements amounting to Rs. 7,58,368.66 crore. The study highlights the contribution of these mechanisms to reducing judicial workload, facilitating consensual dispute resolution, lowering litigation costs, and promoting timely and accessible justice.

**Keywords:** Court performance management, national lok adalat, alternative dispute resolution

## Introduction

India has taken up various legal and institutional measures for greater effectiveness, accessibility, affordability and timeliness of justice delivery. The reforms have been aimed at the issues of procedural delays, too much litigation, judicial backlogs, poor organization of cases, and the growing need for a readily available forum for settling disputes. The setting up of a system of alternative dispute resolution is another major reform of the legal system to mitigate reliance on traditional litigation. Some notable legal measures are the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, the amendment to the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, the Commercial Courts (Amendment) Act, 2018, and the Mediation Act, 2023.

The Article 21 of the Constitution of India provides fundamental right to life and personal liberty to every citizen of India. The right to a speedy trial formulate a critical part of protection guaranteed under Article 21. The unnecessarily delayed criminal trial may leads to a violation of fundamental right to life and personal liberty. The delayed justice leads to various consequences in life of person, thus, timely disposal is an essential element of a fair criminal justice process and unreasonable delay in conducting a trial may itself constitute a denial of justice (Saini 2018) [1].

Legal aid is a basic tool for removing all barriers to access to justice for economic reasons. Awareness and outreach programmes are important for raising citizens' awareness of their legal rights, available remedies and ways of accessing justice. The Supreme Court of India has been increasingly adopting technology and digital transformation to create a more accessible, transparent, efficient and citizens-friendly justice delivery system. The enhancement of infrastructure and human resources helps to better manage courts and plays an integral role in achieving the overall goal of providing fair, fast, affordable, and citizen-oriented justice.

The Supreme Court of India has also acknowledged this broader understanding of access to justice. According to the Court, ensuring access to justice involves more than simply eliminating obstacles that prevent individuals from approaching courts. Although removing such barriers remains an essential component of access to justice, the concept has a much wider scope and includes ensuring that the legal and judicial system provides meaningful, effective and equitable avenues for securing justice.

A lengthy case disposal leads to negative aspects towards judiciary system and impact public confidence towards judiciary. (Verma *et al*., 2023) [2] in their study highlighted workload of various courts which leads to backlog of cases in India and emphasize on the efficiency of judiciary. The justice delivery can not only consider the limited number of judges but judiciary has to work on efficiency, administrative system and process.

## Review of Literature

Ndulo & Duthie (2009) [3] focuses towards transitional justice and development initiatives. In their study they emphasize to develop the relationship between these two variables for sustainable and inclusive societies. It leads to social cohesion and best governance in terms of justice in India.

Agnes (2017) [4] found that ADR mechanisms can play a significant role in promoting gender justice, particularly by providing women with more accessible avenues for dispute resolution. This can facilitate more participation of women in justice process and improve their admittance to appropriate dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Rakul (2023) [5] highlighted the ADR mechanisms in improving delivery system and in study also compare conventional litigation. The result focused that it helps in reducing backlog of cases to some extent in India and signifies role of ADR in Indian judiciary.

Gopal (2024) [6] highlighted the mechanism to improve justice delivery system in India. In his study the author focused towards major concerns like delayed justice and inefficiency in judicial functioning.

Chauhan (2025) [7] in study analysed the need for judicial reforms in India to provide fair and timely justice. The study highlighted establishment of All India Judicial Service (AIJS), adoption of ADR mechanisms of judicial accountability. These two aspects are helpful for more accessible and responsive justice delivery system in India.

Rizvi (2025) [8] examined the effectiveness of ADR mechanisms to reduce court backlogs and improve admittance of justice. In the study extensive literature survey has been done to analyse the effectiveness and result shows it provides various advantages like procedural flexibility, confidentiality, cost, time efficiency and protection of relationships between disputing parties.

Pal (2026) [9] highlighted the major challenge of backlog of cases and also highlights the effectiveness of ADR to resolve this problem and reduce the burden on judiciary. The study concluded that persistent backlog of cases represents major challenges confronting the Indian judicial system and ADR can make a significant contribution to timely justice, reduced backlog and improved efficiency of Indian justice delivery system.

**Objective of the Study**

- To assess the contribution of legal aid and Legal Aid Clinics in reducing economic, social, and informational barriers to access to justice.

**Sources of Secondary Data**

In present research study various research papers have been reviewed and consider in this study. Further various government reports and policy documents have been considered like annual report of Supreme Court of India.

**Legal Aid and Access to Affordable Justice**

The efficient, timely, accessible and cost-effective administration of justice for litigants is a significant role of court management. It refers to the management of judicial and non-judicial resources in a systematic manner, efficient case-flow management, proper scheduling of hearings, proper tracking of case flow, minimizing unnecessary adjournments, and efficient use of judicial time and resources. An effective court management system allows courts to detect points of congestion and enhance case disposal, without compromising the quality and fairness of court hearings. In this context, the implementation of structured case-management practices, performance monitoring systems, digital technologies and alternative dispute resolution can help to speed up the justice delivery system and increase its efficiency.

Legal aid is a basic tool for removing all barriers to access to justice for economic reasons. It offers free or subsidised legal aid, legal advice and legal representation to eligible persons, especially those who are in a financial or social disadvantage. A functional legal aid system is a pillar of equality before the law, inclusive justice and justice system access and affordability.

**Table 1:** Persons Benefited through Legal Aid and Advice

| Year | Persons Benefitted through Legal Aid and Advice |
|---|---|
| 2024-25 | 1657527 |

**Source:** Indian Judiciary Annual report 2024-25, Published by Supreme Court of India. https://sci.gov.in

**Analysis:** The data presented in Table 1 show that 16,57,527 persons benefited from legal aid and advice during 2024–25, indicating the substantial reach of legal assistance mechanisms in promoting access to justice in India. This large number of beneficiaries reflects the important role of legal aid in supporting individuals who may face financial, social, or informational barriers in accessing the formal justice system. From the perspective of ADR and justice dispensation, legal aid is particularly significant because it enables beneficiaries to understand their legal rights. Therefore, the figure of 16,57,527 beneficiaries demonstrates that legal aid serves not only as an instrument of social justice but also as an important supporting mechanism for efficient, inclusive and accessible ADR-based justice dispensation in India.

**Table 2:** Beneficiaries through Legal Aid Clinics (From April 2024 to March 2025)

| **Categories** | **Legal Services Clinics** | **Persons visited** | **Persons provided legal assistance** |
|---|---|---|---|
| College/ Universities | 824 | 45417 | 24986 |
| Villages | 4668 | 521054 | 314632 |
| Community Centres | 765 | 235800 | 98724 |
| Courts | 1047 | 216999 | 160740 |
| Jails | 1156 | 594580 | 419517 |
| JJB's | 511 | 99806 | 73113 |
| For the people of North-East | 42 | 7693 | 1404 |
| Others | 3006 | 346955 | 248870 |
| Total | 12019 | 2068304 | 1341986 |

**Source:** Indian Judiciary Annual report 2024-25, Published by Supreme Court of India. https://sci.gov.in

**Analysis:** Table 2 presents the outreach and performance of Legal Aid Clinics from April 2024 to March 2025. Overall, the provision of assistance to 13,41,986 out of 20,68,304 visitors indicates substantial utilisation of legal aid services and reflects their importance in making justice more accessible, particularly to vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society.

**Findings**

The findings indicate that effective court management and legal aid mechanisms are important components of an accessible, efficient, and inclusive justice delivery system in India. The provision of legal aid to 16,57,527 persons during 2024–25 demonstrates the substantial reach of legal assistance in addressing economic, social, and informational barriers to justice, while the assistance provided to 13,41,986 out of 20,68,304 visitors to Legal Aid Clinics further reflects significant utilisation of these services. The analysis also highlights that judicial efficiency cannot be addressed solely through increasing the number of judges; effective case-flow management, systematic performance monitoring, appropriate scheduling, reduction of unnecessary adjournments, technological adoption, adequate

infrastructure, and efficient utilisation of judicial and administrative resources are equally important. Legal and institutional reforms, together with ADR mechanisms and digital transformation, can support timely dispute resolution and reduce pressure on conventional courts.

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