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## **ANALYSIS ON LOK ADALATS IN INDIA ITS EVOLUTION, IMPACT AND CHALLENGES**

### **Abstract**

Lok Adalats are also known as “People’s Court” which acts as a core and effective part of India’s justice system. This also offers an informal, speedy and cost-effective alternative dispute or the traditional court process. This was introduced under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. The main focus in lok adalats are resolving civil and compoundable criminal disputes through the process of compromise, settlements, mediation, negotiation and reconciliation. This article has a critical analysis on the historical development, practical functioning, legal structure and the real world impact of Lok Adalats, particularly referring to Karnataka state. Actual case studies are provided, which also emphasises on the key challenges such as limited awareness, enforcement issues, structural weaknesses. Finally, the article ends with suggestions on improving the efficiency and approach of the Lok Adalats.

### **Introduction**

India’s courts system is facing extraordinary challenges ,as there are over 4.7 crore cases waiting to be resolved at present (according to the National Judicial Data Grid). The delays often affect ordinary people more, specifically in rural and semi-urban areas, since they lack both information and access to justice. Under these circumstances, Lok Adalats have been found to be an efficient way to resolve disputes. Relying on compromise and agreeing together , Lok Adalats take on some court cases and deliver justice more rapidly to people.

Lok Adalats are based on India’s village panchayats which served as unofficial courts in the past. Nevertheless, the institutional system was first established in Gujrat in 1982 and the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1982 , ensured its introduction across India. Under this legislation ,all Lok Adalats in the country were overseen by Legal Services Authorities at the national, state, district and taluk levels.

Gradually, Lok Adalats have assisted a large number of people, resolving numerous cases while offering relief to them. Last year, Lok Adalats in Karnataka helped close over 120,000 cases (as indicated in the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority Annual Report). Lok Adalats encounter difficulties in operation such as ineffective implementation, not many people knowing about and insufficient finances. This article examines the growth, influence and weakness of Lok Adalats, giving plenty of cases and

research studies for support. It provides helpful advice on ways to strengthen this essential part of India's laws.

#### Understanding Changes and the Legality of Lok Adalats

The tradition of friendly conflict resolution dates back to olden times in India. Before colonization, village panchayats were responsible for proving justice and settling arguments which arose within the village. Because of this spirit, the modern Lok Adalat movement started in Gujarat in 1982 as something people did on a voluntary basis. Because it was successful, the Government of India passed the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987, encouraging other states to set up legal aid services.

As a result of the Act, Lok Adalats were considered official and incorporated into the legal system of India. NALSA and the State and District Legal Services Authorities were set up by the Act to hold Lok Adalat at regular time frames. As explained in Section 19, Lok Adalats enjoy the authority to settle disputes heard in any court or at the pre-litigation stage, if both parties agree to a settlement. Essentially, the Act ensures that parties involved in Lok Adalats must follow the decisions as if they came from a civil court.

There are four types of Lok Adalats: Permanent Lok Adalats, National Lok Adalats, State Lok Adalats and Mobile Lok Adalats. Under Section 22B, Permanent Lok Adalats deal mainly with conflicts involving public utility services. Periodically, National Lok Adalats solve a wide variety of disputes, Both non-criminal and minor criminal ones. Justice is delivered to marginalized people living in remote areas by Mobile Lok Adalats.

#### The role and manner in which Lok Adalats are used in India

They are recognized for being flexible and using informal producers. Lok Adalats rely on the principles of natural justice, unlike regular courts which strictly implement the law in steps outlined by the Code of Civil Procedure or Criminal Procedure Code. Judges, lawyers and social workers commonly help lead people by advising them on how to reach an agreement. Moreover, Lok Adalats do not require any court fees and initial fees paid in regular courts are returned when cases are settled in a Lok Adalat.

Thanks to the Karnataka State Legal Services Authority, the use of Lok Adalats has become more common in Karnataka. Many Lok Adalats are arranged by the KSLSA, together with NGOs, civil society organizations and government departments. Most cases settled include accidents involving motor vehicles, matters relating to marriage, labor disputes, land-related issues and cheque bounce cases if they fall under Section 138 of the Negotiable instruments Act.

#### Lok Adalats: Making a difference in people's Lives

An interesting case can be seen in Bengaluru, where in 2020, Ramesh, who worked in a car, got injured in an accident. It took over three years for his MACT case regarding competition to be heard. Last year, during the National Lok Adalat session, the insurance provider selected the case with a payment of ₹5 lakh as compensation. Ramesh got his money two months after filing the case, something a regular trial would have delayed for years.

For more than ten years, two sisters in Mysuru named Shanta and Lakshmi were involved in a fight over land ownership. After experiencing a long battle in court, they went to a Lok Adalat event in 2022. Through the help of mediators, both parties reach an agreement on how to divide the land. The case was selected very quickly, thanks to Lok Adalats, whose priority is to help families while resolving conflicts rapidly.

A case in Hubli dealt with Meena, a domestic worker seeking financial support from her husband. Despite the Lok Adalat's order for a monthly payment, her husband did not pay and she was required to go back to the regular court. The example shows that Lok Adalats often find it difficult to enforce settlement once they have been made.

#### The Problems that Lok Adalats Face

Even though Lok Adalats help many people, there are obstacles that prevent them from functioning effectively. One of the primary challenges is that most people in rural and underdeveloped areas are uninformed about this area. Not many citizens realize they have the option of resolving disputes with Lok Adalats, as they mainly link justice to the courts.

Another problem has to do with enforcing the rules. Although a Lok Adalat decision is seen as equivalent to a civil court order, implementing them is generally not strong. At times, respondents do not pay attention to the outcomes after Lok Adalats, as these proceedings do not carry harsh consequences. In Meena's citation, the police and court systems are not strong enough, so their trustworthiness declines.

Additionally, there is a lack of proper infrastructure and staffing in most Lok Adalats. Most meetings are organized in temporary places with few resources. A lack of trained mediators and legal aid lawyers lowers the quality of mediation. There are times when conciliators are too busy which can result in a rushed agreement that barely manages to fix the problems.

Lok Adalats only have a limited reach in certain cases. They are only allowed to hear civil and compoundable cases involving criminal law. Criminal offences of a serious nature, matters related to the constitution and cases where legal issues are complained are not considered by them. Therefore, they cannot provide complete access to justice for everyone.

There are also worries about the standard of justice given out. Since we can act quickly, there is a chance that weaker groups may be pushed into resolutions they aren't ready for. The argument against Lok Adalats is that if there are not enough safeguards, they may further increase imbalances in society.

#### Suggestions to improve Lok Adalats

Making certain changes will make Lok Adalats operate more effectively. It is first necessary to educate more people by spreading the message through media, meeting the public and creating awareness programs. In order to benefit people in remote areas, regional advertisements on TV, radio and social media must be used for Lok Adalats.

In addition, we need laws that ensure the results of Lok Adalat can be properly upheld. Having fast-track cell and summary execution teams in place can help enforce settlements.

It is also important to focus on developing infrastructure. Lok Adalats should be formed permanently in each district and taluk, giving them good amenities, useful technology and a decent team. The mobile Lok Adalats should be expanded to reach interior parts of Karnataka and other states.

We need to ensure that capacity-building steps are in place as well. Those in mediation and conciliation work should often attend training on negotiation, ethics, being gender-sensitive and the laws in the country. Both law schools and bar councils are able to ensure that ADR is taught in law programs.

Finally, checks and reviews should be carried out routinely to understand how effective the settlements were. Feedback collected from people involved in the litigation process helps reveal areas that can be improved.

### **Conclusion**

Lok Adalats are considered by many to be among the most important changes made in India's justice system. Because they use both ancient teaching and modern laws, they have handled and resolved many cases without involving the court. Karnataka is an example where people can especially value what they do because getting to a court is not always easy. Settling dispute related to motor accidents, land use and family is proof that Lok Adalats offer help, maintain relationships and support ordinary citizens.

This discussion makes clear that the system has many imperfections. Most vulnerable communities lack information about this issue. If efforts to enforce rules and build infrastructure are not sufficient, the results can be minimized. Since Lok Adalats can only handle a small number of cases, not all deserving litigants are able to use them. There are still worries that people may be forced to settle disputes not on an equal basis.

We should address the issue by reforming the law, improving how administrations operate and by working with local communities. Both the central and state governments should play a role in explaining Lok Adalats and supervising the enforcement of its decisions. It is important for the courts to provide advice and monitor things, so that settling matters does not lead to injustice.

Given That court cases can be slow, expensive and difficult to access for people, Lok Adalats offer them a unique chance to find justice. They follow the main principles of equality, access and fairness included in the constitution. If bolstered, they may end providing justice to millions as their first pick.

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