

Gender and Caste Dynamics in Lok Adalats: A Critical Analysis of Inclusivity Challenges and Strategies for Strengthening Equitable Dispute Resolution

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Abstract

Lok Adalats, instituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987, were created as accessible and consensual platforms to provide expeditious justice, particularly for India's rural and marginalized communities. Despite the fact that they have resolved over 23.58 crore cases¹ between the years 2022–23 and 2024–25, qualitative accounts from litigants and field observers reveal that they continue to exclude people based on their gender and caste, which undermines their ability to involve everyone. In order to investigate how caste hierarchies and patriarchal norms affect participation, negotiating power, and settlement outcomes in Lok Adalats², this non-doctrinal paper synthesizes secondary qualitative narratives, beneficiary data, and intersectional analysis. The study highlights subtle forms of coercion, biased conciliator attitudes, and structural barriers that frequently result in settlements reinforcing existing inequalities.³ By drawing on the lived experiences of women, particularly Dalit and Other Backward Class (OBC) women in rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the study highlights these issues. In order to incorporate intersectional equity, the paper suggests specific reforms that are supported by evidence. In accordance with Article 39A of the Constitution of India, Lok Adalats are only able to fulfill their constitutional mandate if they are deliberately strengthened.

Keywords: Lok Adalats, Gender-caste intersectionality, Equitable dispute resolution, Rural access to justice, Article 39A of the Constitution of India

Introduction

India's justice system grapples with over 53 million pending cases as of late 2025, disproportionately burdening rural and marginalized communities.⁴ Lok Adalats, introduced as an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism rooted in indigenous traditions of Nyaya Panchayats, were meant to democratize justice—offering resolution without the delays, costs, and adversarial nature of formal courts. According to reports, these forums resolved over 23.5 crore cases across the country between the years 2022–23 and 2024–25. The Fourth National Lok Adalat, which took place in December 2025, was responsible for resolving 2.59 crore disputes.

But numbers alone don't show the bigger differences. Lok Adalats often mirror rather than confront caste and gender disparities⁵ in society, as indicated by qualitative testimonies from rural litigants, paralegal volunteers, and

¹ Press Information Bureau. (2025, November). National Legal Services Day [Press release]. <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2025/nov/doc2025118687401.pdf>

² India Justice Report. (2025). India Justice Report 2025. [https://indiajusticereport.org/files/IJR%204_Full%20Report_English%20\(1\).pdf](https://indiajusticereport.org/files/IJR%204_Full%20Report_English%20(1).pdf)

³ Chauhan, S. (2023). Legal needs in rural India: Challenges & response of legal aid authorities. Harvard Law School Center for the Legal Profession. <https://clp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Legal-needs-in-Rural-India-conference-paper-Sunil-Chauhan.pdf>

⁴ National Legal Services Authority. (2025). Statistical snapshot 2025. <https://nalsa.gov.in/statistical-snapshot>.

⁵ Chauhan, S. (2023). Legal needs in rural India: Challenges & response of legal aid authorities. Harvard Law School Centre for the Legal Profession. <https://clp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Legal-needs-in-Rural-India-conference-paper-Sunil-Chauhan.pdf>

district-level observations. Women who are involved in family or property disputes often say they feel pressured to accept lower settlements in order to "keep the peace."

On the other hand, Dalit participants say that conciliators—mostly upper-caste men—show implicit bias that works against them.⁶ This paper emphasizes the importance of lived experiences and intersectional realities in analyzing complex social dynamics. By focusing on these lived experiences, the paper aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by diverse communities. Intersectionality is a crucial framework for examining how various forms of identity—such as race, gender, class, and others—interact and create unique experiences of oppression and privilege.

The ultimate goal is to delineate pathways toward authentic equity. This involves not just acknowledging disparities but actively working toward systems that genuinely support and empower all individuals. Through a focus on lived experiences and intersectionality, the paper proposes strategies that consider the diverse needs and realities of people, striving for outcomes that are equitable and inclusive.

Theme of the Paper

The inherent tension that exists between the egalitarian promise of Lok Adalats as "people's courts" and their practical reproduction of structural inequalities that are rooted in gender and caste is the primary focus of this paper. Crenshaw (1989) was the first to define intersectionality, and Rege (1998) and Kannabiran (2002) modified it for use in India.⁷

Intersectionality functions as the primary analytical framework. For Dalit women, OBC women, Adivasi women, and other multiply marginalized groups, gender and caste do not serve as additive categories; instead, they intersect to create unique, compounded forms of exclusion in dispute resolution processes.⁸

This intersection is clear in Lok Adalats in three important ways:

- (i) barriers to participation (travel burdens, low awareness, and fear of social retaliation) affect rural women from lower castes more than others;
- (ii) power imbalances in negotiation (conciliators from dominant social groups subtly reinforce patriarchal and caste norms through language, body language, and prioritizing "family harmony" or "village unity");
- (iii) substantive outcomes (settlements that often fall short of statutory protections under laws like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, or the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005).⁹

The theme is especially relevant in the context of "strengthening the system of Lok Adalats" due to the fact that quantitative success metrics (disposal rates) have overshadowed qualitative failures in the service of delivering justice that affirms dignity.¹⁰ Strengthening must address the sociocultural embeddedness of these forums in a caste-patriarchal order; it cannot be restricted to procedural or infrastructure reforms.

The paper argues for a paradigm shift by highlighting intersectionality and recognizing Lok Adalats as arenas of contested power that necessitate deliberate equity interventions, rather than viewing them as neutral, informal

⁶ Shekhar, S. (2025). Women, Dalits, and minorities in Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh: Barriers to legal aid. *Pena Claims Journal*, 7(2), 45–67. <https://penacclaims.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Shashank-Shekhar.pdf>

⁷ "Lok Adalat and Access to Justice: A Study of Grassroots Realities." (2025). *The Infinite*. <https://theinfinite.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Lok-Adalat-and-Access-to-Justice.pdf>

⁸ Rege, S. (1998). Dalit women talk differently: A critique of "difference" and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(44), WS39–WS46.

⁹ Kannabiran, K. (2002). Caste and gender: Understanding dynamics of power and violence. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(36), 3735–3742. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41626993>

¹⁰ "Lok Adalat and Access to Justice: A Study of Grassroots..." (2025). *The Infinite*. <https://theinfinite.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Lok-Adalat-and-Access-to-Justice.pdf>

platforms. Article 39A says that everyone should get the same justice, and Article 15 says that discrimination is against the law.

It also fits with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, which says that no citizen, especially those from historically oppressed groups, should feel like they are being pushed to the side when they seek justice.¹¹ This ensures that the analysis is grounded in the voices and realities of those most affected, providing a blueprint for systemic rather than cosmetic strengthening.

Research Methodology

This study utilizes a non-doctrinal, qualitative research design to elucidate the complex, lived experiences of gender-caste dynamics in Lok Adalats.¹² The methodology critically synthesizes secondary qualitative data from field studies, litigant testimonies, paralegal volunteer reports, and thematic analyses published between 2019 and 2025.

Sources include in-depth interview transcripts and focus group discussions documented in academic papers, NALSA evaluation reports, and independent studies on rural justice access.¹³

The six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used for thematic analysis in order to find recurrent themes of coercion, bias, exclusion, and resilience. The data triangulation that was performed across the states of Odisha, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh ensured that regional representativeness was maintained. Both the prioritization of anonymized narratives in order to protect vulnerable participants and the maintenance of reflexivity with regard to the researcher's positionality as a woman scholar from a North Indian context were among the ethical considerations that were taken into account. Through cross-verification with official disaggregated statistics from Tele-Law and the India Justice Report 2025, we were able to mitigate the limitations of secondary data, such as the possibility of publication bias.

Literature Review

Historically, academic discussions of Lok Adalats have focused on how effective they are at decreasing judicial pendency. According to data from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Press Information Bureau, state, permanent, and national Lok Adalats collectively resolved over 23.58 crore cases between 2022–2023 and 2024–2025. The Fourth National Lok Adalat in December 2025 alone resolved 2.59 crore disputes. This scale was hailed by early assessments as proof of successful grassroots ADR.¹⁴

However, a growing body of qualitative and intersectional scholarship reveals significant limitations when gender and caste are considered. Women litigants in family and property matters frequently encounter significant pressure to "adjust" in order to maintain family harmony. This societal expectation can result in settlements that fall far short of the statutory entitlements they are legally entitled to. Sunil Chauhan's comprehensive field-based study sheds light on the intricate challenges faced by women in rural areas where these pressures are particularly pronounced. In pre-litigation cases handled by Tele-Law, the same patterns emerge: only 39.58% of callers are female, even though women are more likely to be in vulnerable populations.¹⁵

¹¹ India Justice Report. (2025).

¹² Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

¹³ Evaluating the Effectiveness of Legal Aid Services in India. (2025). *The Academic*. <https://theacademic.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/193.pdf>

¹⁴ Galanter, M., & Krishnan, J. K. (2004). "Bread for the poor": Access to justice and the rights of the needy in India. *Hastings Law Journal*, 55(4), 789–834.

¹⁵ Press Information Bureau. (2025, November 8). India's legal aid and awareness initiatives. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NoteId=155936&ModuleId=3>

The dynamics of caste make this problem even worse. Qualitative studies show that Dalit women who want to sue face even more problems in areas with a lot of Dalits, like Purvanchal in Uttar Pradesh. People face a lot of problems, such as worries about being left out of society, not knowing their rights, and conciliators who are often from the dominant caste. According to earlier studies, caste-based violence against Dalit women frequently spreads to unofficial justice forums. This is supported by that study.

Intersectionality is the best lens through which to view these realities. According to Sharmila Rege, caste and gender frameworks by themselves are insufficient to explain Dalit women's marginalization because it is qualitatively different. The concept was extended to legal contexts by Kalpana Kannabiran, who demonstrated how formal equality provisions are rendered ineffective when social hierarchies are used to shape dispute resolution procedures.¹⁶ The lack of mandatory diversity requirements for conciliators in Lok Adalats can be attributed to the fact that upper-caste male panels are more likely to be involved.

The India Justice Report 2025 provides evidence that backs up the claims. Despite the fact that women make up 38% of lower court judges nationwide (and even more in certain states), their presence in alternative dispute resolution forums is minimal at best.¹⁷ In contrast, about 42% of paralegal volunteers are women across the country.

However, there are still disparities in deployment and training, especially in rural areas where caste is a factor. It is stated in the report that beneficiaries of legal aid who fall into SC/ST/OBC categories make up more than 76% of those who receive Tele-Law services. However, data on outcome satisfaction that is broken down by gender and caste is still not available. This is a significant gap that impedes evidence-based reform.

Recent qualitative research sheds light on process-level exclusions. According to research on Dalit women's justice-seeking strategies, Lok Adalat participation frequently follows failed attempts at panchayat-level resolution, where caste panchayats exercise even greater patriarchal control. As a means of discouraging assertive claims, women in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh reported¹⁸ that conciliators frequently invoked phrases such as "village honor" or "family unity."

A paradox emerges from the literature as a whole: Lok Adalats are excellent at disposing of large amounts of material, but they fall short in providing significant, dignity-preserving justice for numerous marginalized groups. This paper's conceptual framework integrates a comprehensive approach that embraces intersectionality, critiques rooted in Ambedkarite thought concerning formal equality, and value-sensitive design principles.

Ambedkarite critiques of formal equality extend this exploration by questioning the limitations of traditional notions of equality. This perspective emphasizes that formal equality, which often overlooks systemic inequalities and structural power imbalances, can perpetuate existing disparities.

Value-sensitive design principles further enrich this framework by integrating considerations of values and ethics into the design process.¹⁹ This approach encourages designers to prioritize principles such as fairness, transparency, and accountability, ensuring that solutions are not only effective but also aligned with societal values.

¹⁶ "Lok Adalat and Access to Justice: A Study of Grassroots Realities." (2025). The Infinite. <https://theinfinite.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Lok-Adalat-and-Access-to-Justice.pdf>

¹⁷ India Justice Report. (2025). India Justice Report 2025. [https://indiajusticereport.org/files/IJR%20Full%20Report_English%20\(1\).pdf](https://indiajusticereport.org/files/IJR%20Full%20Report_English%20(1).pdf)

¹⁸ India Justice Report. (2025). India Justice Report 2025: Ranking states on the capacity of police, judiciary, prisons and legal aid. https://indiajusticereport.org/files/IJR%20Full%20Report_English_Low.pdf

¹⁹ Rege, S. (1998). Dalit women talk differently: A critique of "difference" and towards a Dalit feminist standpoint position. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33(44), WS39–WS46.

By embedding these principles, the framework fosters the development of systems and practices that are more equitable and just. Overall, this framework synthesizes these diverse elements to offer a robust and inclusive approach that addresses the complexities of social justice and equity.

A Critical Analysis of Inclusivity Issues with Caste and Gender Relations in Lok Adalats

The critical analysis goes into great detail about how gender and caste dynamics affect how open Lok Adalats are to everyone. These societal constructs, deeply entrenched in cultural and historical contexts, frequently establish systemic barriers that impede the equitable participation of diverse groups within the institution.

The analysis shows that there are still big differences between what Lok Adalats promise to be, that is, a place of justice and equality, and what people who use this legal system actually experience. This gap shows how important it is to make systemic changes so that Lok Adalats truly reflect the values of fairness and inclusion, which is what everyone in society wants.

Gender Dynamics in Participation and Process

Lok Adalats are frequently attended by women who are subjected to intense societal pressure, especially when it comes to family, maintenance, and domestic violence cases.²⁰

Qualitative narratives from rural Uttar Pradesh show that conciliators frequently use "family reconciliation" rhetoric, discouraging women from pursuing their full legal rights. The informal, community-focused environment enhances patriarchal authority, as male relatives or village elders predominantly govern discussions, with women seldom expressing themselves autonomously. This leads to expedited settlements that emphasize social cohesion over individual rights.²¹

Caste Dynamics and Power Asymmetries

Dalit and Adivasi litigants in land, wage, or atrocity-related disputes frequently encounter conciliators from dominant castes who exhibit implicit bias. In order to avoid "escalating caste tensions" with powerful parties, Dalit claimants in the Purvanchal districts of Uttar Pradesh have stated that they have accepted a lower amount of money. Lok Adalats become extensions of local power structures rather than impartial forums when caste-diverse benches are not required, allowing these biases to continue unchecked.

Intersectional Experiences of Dalit and Marginalised Women

The intersection of gender and caste is where the most severe social exclusions take place. There are three forms of marginalization that Dalit women face when they are navigating matrimonial or property disputes: economic vulnerability, gender, and caste. According to field reports, women withdrew their claims because they were afraid of caste-based criticism after the settlement.²²

²⁰ Press Information Bureau. (2025, October 29). India reaffirms commitment to accessible and technology driven justice at SCO Justice Ministers' Meeting. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2183882>

²¹ Shekhar, S. (2025). Women, Dalits, and minorities in Purvanchal region of Uttar Pradesh: Barriers to legal aid. *Pena Claims Journal*, 7(2), 45–67. <https://penacclaims.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Shashank-Shekhar.pdf>

²² Irudayam, A., Mangubhai, J. P., & Lee, J. G. (2006). Dalit women speak out: Violence against Dalit women in India. National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights.

Dalit women in Bihar villages have paid nominal sums to resolve domestic conflicts, only to be harassed further. These incidents demonstrate how informality without protections perpetuates intersecting oppressions and runs counter to Lok Adalats' egalitarian philosophy.

Impact on Overall Equity and Access to Justice

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is to undermine public trust and to restrict the forums' capacity to provide genuine decongestion. The satisfaction of litigants belonging to marginalized groups is significantly lower, and many of them perceive the outcomes as being coerced rather than consensual. This is in spite of the fact that the rates of disposal continue to be among the highest. This not only undermines the constitutional goal of substantive equality but also calls for immediate structural reforms to be implemented.

Limitations of the Current System

The potential for equitable resolution of Lok Adalats is undermined by a number of particular limitations in addition to the general structural problems previously mentioned. First, meaningful accountability is hindered by the near-complete lack of gender-caste disaggregated outcome data.²³ The beneficiary breakdowns provided by NALSA and Tele-Law (39.58% female, 31.16% SC, and 31.49% OBC as of June 2025) are available, but there are no comparable figures for settlement amounts, compliance rates, or post-settlement satisfaction by intersectional classes.²⁴

Second, the selection of benches continues to be unrepresentative of the population. Conciliators are typically drawn from the local bar or retired members of the judiciary in the majority of districts, which tends to result in an overwhelming male and upper-caste dominance. Because Lok Adalat panels are exempt from judicial diversity mandates, women judges are hardly represented in ADR forums, even in the subordinate judiciary, where their representation has reached 38% nationally.²⁵

Third, the rushed, high-volume format leaves little room for a nuanced understanding of power dynamics. According to qualitative accounts, hearings typically last between ten and fifteen minutes, and during those hearings, female litigants, particularly those who are accompanied by male relatives, rarely speak independently.²⁶ Enforcement is still a weak point: even though awards are seen as civil decrees, people in rural areas with power imbalances don't always follow them. Dalit women have reported that they continue to be harassed despite "successful" settlements.

Fourth, digital and hybrid formats have exacerbated exclusion. Despite Bhashini integration, many rural Dalit women are unable to engage in meaningful activities due to a lack of digital literacy.²⁷ Outreach to the most vulnerable at the grassroots level has been further undermined by the diminishing number of paralegal volunteers.

²³ Bharti, N. K. (2024). Justice for all? The impact of legal aid in India [Job market paper]. Paris School of Economics. <https://www.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/app/uploads/2024/10/BHARTI-Nitin-Kumar-JMP.pdf>

²⁴ The Wire. (2025, April 16). Caste bias and gender gaps: 2025 India Justice Report highlights key failures of the legal system. <https://thewire.in/rights/caste-bias-gender-southern-states-india-justice-report>

²⁵ Frontline. (2025, April 16). Prison population projected to hit 6.8 lakh by 2030: India Justice Report 2025. <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/india-justice-report-2025-prison-police-justice-delivery/article69456419.ece>

²⁶ India Spend. (2025, April 15). The missing diversity in India's justice system. <https://www.indiaspend.com/governance/the-missing-diversity-in-indias-justice-system-949398>

²⁷ Record of Law. (2025, December 11). Lok Adalats in India: A comprehensive analysis of their role in facilitating speedy justice. <https://recordoflaw.in/lok-adalats-in-india-a-comprehensive-analysis-of-their-role-in-facilitating-speedy-justice/>

Lastly, there is no organized system in place to record and handle complaints of bias. Together, these restrictions turn what ought to be an empowering platform into a place of "cheap and quick" justice that frequently results in long-term disadvantages for marginalized litigants.

Suggestions and Strategies for Strengthening Equitable Dispute Resolution

A reform agenda that is intersectional and multi-pronged is absolutely necessary in order to address these gaps.

- Each and every Lok Adalat bench is required to have at least forty percent of its members be women and thirty percent of its members be conciliators from the SC/ST/OBC categories. Prior to each and every session, there should be mandatory training on trauma-informed care and intersectionality.²⁸
- The implementation of mandatory pre-Lok Adalat orientation sessions for women and Dalit litigants is encouraged as part of the pre-session empowerment and separate tracks initiative.²⁹ Produce tracks that are dedicated and last for longer periods of time.
- NALSA must mandate the collection and public reporting of settlement outcomes that are disaggregated by gender, caste, and district. This is done in order to ensure that disaggregated monitoring and feedback are carried out. Consider implementing mechanisms for anonymous feedback.³⁰
- To establish a connection between awards and local officials in order to facilitate automatic compliance tracking. Post-settlement check-ins³¹ should be carried out by paralegals who are volunteers.
- The hybrid model, designed to effectively integrate community involvement and safety measures, ensures that offline support systems are robustly established before transitioning to hybrid formats. This strategic approach prioritizes the creation of formal partnerships with self-help groups and federations of Dalit women. By doing so, the model not only strengthens community ties but also empowers these groups with the necessary resources and frameworks to contribute meaningfully to the hybrid initiatives. This collaborative effort aims to enhance inclusivity and sustainability, ensuring that the hybrid model remains both effective and culturally sensitive.

Policy Implications and Legislative Reforms for Inclusive Lok Adalats

In the grand scheme of things, training or better benches alone won't solve the problems of gender and caste in Lok Adalats. They say that there are bigger problems with the law itself. The Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 created these forums. At the time, it was a brave move, but it was written before we fully understood how intersectionality affects access to justice. That law doesn't seem complete today.³² It doesn't require diversity on benches, regular audits of intersectionality, or any other way to keep an eye on how marginalized litigants really experience the process.

²⁸ Kaur, H. (2025). Gendering of Indian judiciary as a roadmap towards an equitable legal system and progressive gender-sensitive jurisprudence. *Indian Journal of Law and Justice*, 16(1), 45–68. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11979718/>

²⁹ Centre for Law & Policy Research. (2025). Equal justice: Advancing women's representation in the higher judiciary in India. <https://clpr.org.in/projects/equal-justice-advancing-womens-representation-in-the-higher-judiciary-in-india/>

³⁰ United Nations Development Programme. (2026). Enhancing meaningful access to justice in India. UNDP India. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-02/report_enhancing_meaningful_access_to_justice_in_india_undp_india.pdf

³¹ Barhoi, S. (2025). Gender-based violence in India and feminist organizing of women's courts work for its prevention. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 32(2), 887–911. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13190>

³² Ministry of Law and Justice. (2025). Annual report 2024-25. Government of India. <https://lawmin.gov.in/sites/default/files/2025-Annual-Report.pdf>

It's clear what this means for people who make policies. We need specific changes that make fairness non-negotiable. For instance, the Act could be changed to say that every Lok Adalat panel must have at least 40% women and 30% SC/ST/OBC members, chosen through a clear, statewide roster system.³³ Another important change would be to require the collection of disaggregated data on not just who attends, but also on settlement amounts, compliance rates, and litigant satisfaction, broken down by gender and caste.³⁴ We are basically flying blind without this kind of information.

There is also room to connect Lok Adalats more closely with the larger Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. The government could set up a special "Inclusive Justice Fund" under NALSA that is only for gender- and caste-sensitive projects in rural districts with a lot of pending cases. At the same time, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act could be amended to give Lok Adalat awards in these matters automatic priority in enforcement, with clear timelines and penalties for non-compliance.

So, these lawmakers think that these changes would send a strong message that India is serious about making Lok Adalats real tools of transformative justice instead of just places to get quick fixes. Of course, the law isn't enough by itself. But when the ground-level strategies are added, as we talked about earlier, it can make a strong framework that makes equity the default, not an afterthought. It's time for Parliament and state assemblies to start talking about these things. Before another group of Dalit and OBC women learns that "people's courts" aren't always for them.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Lok Adalats are one of the most ambitious experiments in democratizing justice in India, their current form is not sufficient to provide equity for those who are oppressed on the basis of both gender and caste. The quantitative success only serves to conceal a more fundamental qualitative failure, which is settlements that, far too frequently, maintain patriarchal and caste hierarchies rather than challenging them.³⁵ Specifically, Dalit women navigate these forums not as empowered citizens but rather as bearers of compounded vulnerabilities for themselves and their communities.

The path to genuine strengthening begins with acknowledging that procedural informality without intersectional safeguards perpetuates the very inequalities that the system seeks to address.³⁶ Lok Adalats can transition from volume-driven camps to transformative justice spaces by incorporating mandatory diversity, pre-session empowerment, rigorous monitoring, and community accountability. Recognizing that procedural informality in the absence of intersectional safeguards reproduces the very inequalities that the system is attempting to address is the first step toward achieving genuine strengthening.

Lok Adalats have the potential to develop into spaces that are conducive to transformative justice if they incorporate mandatory diversity, stringent monitoring, and community accountability features. As India works toward the goal of achieving Viksit Bharat³⁷ in 2047, the progress that has been made must be evaluated based on the experiences of those who are the most marginalized.

³³ Chauhan, S. (2025). Judicial reforms in India: Strengthening the rule of law for a just and equitable society. *Vidya Journal of Law*, 12(1), 112–138. <https://vidyajournal.org/index.php/vidya/article/view/610>

³⁴ Bharti, N. K. (2024). Justice for all? The impact of legal aid in India [Job market paper]. Paris School of Economics. <https://www.parisschoolofeconomics.eu/app/uploads/2024/10/BHARTI-Nitin-Kumar-JMP.pdf>

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³⁶ International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts. (2025). Strengthening legal aid and access to justice in rural India: A roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047. *IJCRT*, 13(2), 1–9. <https://www.ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2502798.pdf>

³⁷ Press Information Bureau. (2025, October 29). India reaffirms commitment to accessible and technology driven justice at SCO Justice Ministers' Meeting. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2183882>

In order for the promise made in Article 39A of the Constitution of India to be able to be fulfilled, it is necessary that a Dalit woman be able to approach a Lok Adalat with self-assurance and leave with dignity. The reforms put forth here provide a workable, intersectional framework.³⁸ Substantial equity must now become the unavoidable cornerstone of Lok Adalat's strengthening; the era of gradual change is over.

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