
**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF LOK ADALATS: CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE JUSTICE DELIVERY**

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ABSTRACT:

The current era of digital transformation has impacted each aspect of governance, including the judicial system of India. In addition to this the COVID-19 pandemic has catalysed digital transformation in India's complete judicial system, this has also impacted one of the alternative dispute redressal mechanisms, known as 'Lok Adalats'. Introduction of virtual hearings, e-filing, and online dispute resolution can be seen as a boon to combat chronic judicial delays amid court suspensions. This theoretical study investigates e-Lok Adalats as socio-technical systems that promise efficiency improvements but are threatened by rural India's digital divide and illiteracy barriers. Infrastructure shortcomings—limited broadband penetration, device scarcity—and skill gaps appear as procedural exclusions: missed e-notices, login problems, intermediary dependence, and impaired hearing participation, compounding caste, gender, and class disparities. Drawing on the theory of "Access to Justice," the paper argues that while E-Lok Adalats successfully address backlog efficiency. It aims examine normative arguments, various forms of barriers, theoretical integration, solution designs, and legitimacy conditions. The study proposes a comprehensive framework for "Assisted ODR" (Online Dispute Resolution), advocating for hybrid engagement models, the integration of Common Service Centers (CSCs) as justice hubs, and the deployment of multilingual, low bandwidth The report recommends multilayered changes based on doctrinal examination of legal texts, policy evaluations, and conceptual synthesis, including last-mile connectivity, hybrid models, digital justice facilitators, and user-centric interfaces. The findings show that e-Lok Adalats have constitutional impact only when reframed as inclusion projects that include capacity building

and ensure timely justice as a rural entitlement. Finally, it suggests that the legitimacy of digital justice is contingent on closing the gap between technological competence and social accessibility.

KEYWORDS: Lok Adalat, Digital Transformation, Legal Reforms, Rural Integration.

INTRODUCTION

India's judicial system confronts a profound "crisis of pendency," with over 5 crore cases pending across courts as of 2025, denying millions, especially rural litigants the constitutional right to speedy justice. This backlog disproportionately burdens the poor, who face protracted delays, mounting legal costs, and lost livelihoods while awaiting resolution.

In such a scenario within Indian judicial inclusivity context, Lok Adalats have been widely recognized to help decrease the strain on courts which has long struggled with the "crisis of pendency," that denies millions of people the basic right to speedy justice, by providing speedy and low-cost dispute settlement. Lok Adalat is one of the alternative dispute redressal mechanisms, within this forum based on Gandhian principles of conciliation and compromise, cases currently pending in court or are in the pre-litigation stage be mutually resolved by mutual agreement. Established according to the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987 Lok adalats currently possess statutory status. Even Though the Lok Adalat forums have tried to manage a decrease in burden of Indian judicial system, its potential have still not been utilised properly due to inefficiencies and lack of technology integration.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 served as a disruptive catalyst, driving a rapid, often sudden to virtual platforms. The subsequent emergence of the "E-Lok Adalat" represented an important turn in India's legal history. With physical movement prohibited, the judiciary relied on video conferencing and computerized filing to keep the wheels of justice moving. This move underlined E-Lok Adalats' enormous potential for overcoming geographical obstacles and lowering the costly transaction costs associated with physical litigation travel, waiting time, and daily wage loss which disproportionately affect the rural poor. Launched on 27 June 2020, e-Lok Adalats introduced virtual hearings via video conferencing, e-filing, automated notices, and online compromise decrees across 28 States and Union Territories. This shift enabled continuity amid lockdowns, disposing of around 1.15 crore cases through e-Lok formats alone by mid-2022, while hybrid National Lok Adalats (online-offline blends) scaled to 10 crore disposals post-2020 surpassing pre-digital cumulative volumes in a fraction of the time. Preliminary evidence indicates that E-Lok Adalats have greatly accelerated the resolution

of pre-litigation issues, particularly banking and settlement conflicts. slashing geographical barriers and costs that previously deterred rural participation. Aligned with e-Courts Phases I-III and Digital India, e-Lok Adalats position technology as a justice equalizer, theoretically empowering a Bihar farmer to settle with a Mumbai bank without leaving home.

Unfortunately, this technological optimism is tempered by the harsh reality of the digital divide. In a country where rural internet density lags far behind urban regions and digital literacy is still considered a privilege rather than a norm, the digitization of justice risks systematic exclusion. With rural internet penetration at ~40% (TRAI, 2024) versus urban 70%, unreliable broadband in "broadband deserts," smartphone scarcity among women and Scheduled Castes/Tribes, and English-dominant interfaces alienating non-Hindi speakers, digitization risks converting "access to justice" into "access to technology." If the interface of justice becomes digital, then access to the internet becomes synonymous with access to justice. For the rural litigant in India, often alienated by English-centric, high-bandwidth digital infrastructures, the E-Lok Adalat system risks becoming an inaccessible "black box." For the digital transformation of Lok Adalats to be constitutionally valid and socially impactful, it must move beyond a techno-centric approach.

Review of Literature

The discussion over the digitization of the judiciary and Lok Adalats can be divided into three major themes: The efficiency paradigm, The digital divide as an access barrier, and The post-COVID normative shift.

The Efficiency Paradigm in ODR

Scholars like Susskind (2019) have long argued that Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) is inevitable for modernizing legal systems. In the Indian context, literature often highlights the quantitative success of Lok Adalats. Deshpande (2021) notes that E-Lok Adalats have democratized access by removing the requirement of physical presence, theoretically allowing a litigant in a remote village to settle a dispute with a bank in a metropolitan city. Bhattacharya and Rao (2022) emphasize that the reduction of "docket explosion" is the primary metric of success for these platforms. Their work suggests that the automation of notices and the use of algorithmic sorting in E-Lok Adalats have streamlined procedural bottlenecks that historically plagued the lower judiciary.

The Digital Divide and Exclusionary Risks

Contrasting the efficiency narrative, critical legal scholars focus on the sociological

implications of technology. Marc Galanter's seminal work on "repeat players" vs. "one-shotters" is frequently adapted to the digital age. Sen and Gupta (2023) argue that in the digital realm, the "repeat player" (e.g., insurance companies, banks) possesses superior digital infrastructure and literacy compared to the "one-shotter" (rural farmer, daily wager). This asymmetry creates a "digital power imbalance." Agrawal (2021) provides empirical observations on the "connectivity gap," noting that in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, internet intermittency during hearings often leads to adjournments or, worse, ex-parte decisions where the litigant is technically "present" but communicatively absent. The literature here establishes that the digital divide is not just about hardware; it is an epistemic barrier that prevents meaningful participation (Bakhshi, 2022).

The Post-COVID Normative Shift

The literature post-2020 reflects a shift from viewing ODR as "alternative" to viewing it as "essential." The Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (2021) reports indicate that the pandemic legitimized virtual hearings, transforming them from an emergency measure to a permanent fixture of judicial reform. However, scholars like Kannan (2022) warn of the "de-humanization" of justice. In the context of Lok Adalats, which rely heavily on persuasion, empathy, and the physical pressure of peers/elders to reach a compromise, the sterile environment of a Zoom call may erode the "conciliatory spirit." Literature suggests that while disposals have increased, litigant satisfaction—a key metric of restorative justice—remains under-researched in the digital format.

Current literature establishes the need and the risk but lacks a cohesive theoretical framework that reconciles the two through a "hybrid" model specifically designed for rural India's socio-economic reality.

Research Gap

While much research has been conducted on the technological architecture of ODR and the statistical disposal rates of Lok Adalats, there is a notable lack of theoretical literature that conceptualizes the E-Lok Adalat as a distinct socio-legal ecosystem. Most research focuses on validity (legal recognition) or feasibility (infrastructure). There is little academic research into the "Assisted ODR" model as a specific solution to the rural digital divide. Furthermore, the nexus of "digital pressure"—in which petitioners may feel pushed to settle quickly due to technology intimidation—has received little attention in Indian rural law.

Research Objectives

1. To follow the progression of Lok Adalats from physical gatherings to digital platforms in the post-COVID age.
2. To examine the effect of E-Lok Adalats on judicial delays and transaction costs for the complainants.
3. To critically evaluate the structural constraints created by the digital divide (connectivity, digital literacy, and device access) in rural India.
4. To assess the effectiveness of current "Assisted ODR" mechanisms, including Common Service Centres (CSCs) and paralegal volunteers.
5. To present a theoretical foundation for a "Phygital" (Physical + Digital) model that promotes inclusive justice delivery.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, doctrinal, and socio-legal methodology to theorize the transformation of Lok Adalats.

Data collection

The study relies on primary and secondary data sources

Primary data- Primary legal texts include the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and subsequent e-committee guidelines issued by the Supreme Court of India. Policy documents and statistical reports from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Ministry of Law and Justice provide the quantitative foundation regarding case disposal rates and pendency figures pre- and post-COVID.

Secondary Data- The research synthesizes findings from non-governmental reports (e.g., DAKSH, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy) regarding internet penetration rates and digital literacy levels in rural India.

The Idea of Lok Adalats in the Digital Age

Lok Adalats, introduced as a mechanism to enhance access to justice, derive legitimacy from three principal elements: (1) reduction of litigation backlog, (2) provision of inexpensive informal dispute resolution, and (3) reinforcement of social harmony through conciliatory talks. Historically embedded in India's socio-legal ethos, Lok Adalats have served as a bridge between the formal judicial system—characterised by procedural rigidity—and the

community-driven ethos of consensus-based dispute settlement. The Lok Adalat mechanism, as institutionalised under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, emphasizes reconciliation rather than adjudication: the focus is not “winning a case” but “resolving a dispute.”

The main reason for E-Lok Adalats is a significant reduction in court delays. In the post-COVID era, the capacity to conduct a "National E-Lok Adalat" in which lakhs of cases are resolved in a single day demonstrates the scalability of digital infrastructure. For the judiciary, this is an answer to the "arithmetic of backlog."

However, digital disruption has raised fresh challenges about this traditional social function. The initial concept of Lok Adalats was based on face-to-face negotiations, casual verbal communication, and accessibility to local public areas. When this process is translated to the virtual sphere—becoming "e-Lok Adalats"—its legitimacy is determined by whether digital platforms can sustain (rather than pervert) the amicable spirit that defines Lok Adalats. This complicated situation creates a situation of paradox. The rural litigator, accustomed to village panchayat debate, is unfamiliar with the speed of digital clicking. The debate demonstrates that "transaction costs" (travel/money) are lowered, while "cognitive costs" (understanding the process) increase. A farmer engaging via a pixelated smartphone screen may not completely understand the significance of the reward being awarded, resulting in "blind assent."

The digital gap in rural India is more than just bandwidth; it is also about agency. According to the research, the most significant barrier is the "last mile" difficulty. Although the optical fibre network (BharatNet) has grown, functional internet connectivity in remote tribal and rural areas remains uneven. When a link fails during a negotiation, the mediation is disrupted, typically resulting to dissatisfaction or abandonment of the claim. Furthermore, the "device gap" implies that many rural litigants rely on shared gadgets or middlemen, jeopardizing privacy and confidentiality which is a key element of the Lok Adalat system

E-Lok Adalats developed as an inevitable extension of online courtrooms and e-filing systems. The transition increased dramatically during COVID-19, when actual Lok Adalat meetings were halted. e-Lok Adalats used virtual conferencing systems, online settlements, digital alerts, and electronic drafts of compromise decrees. They were not simply "technology-enhanced camps," but rather new conflict resolution ecosystems including a diverse range of actors, including court officials, legal service authorities, disputants, facilitators, and digital intermediates.

The key conceptual shift here is that e-Lok Adalats are socio-technical systems rather than just digital institutions. Their effectiveness is determined by how well technological design aligns with societal factors such as digital access, literacy, social classes, gender norms, caste power structures, and economic affordability. An e-Lok Adalat is successful not because it is online, but because digitization enhances accessibility and fairness. If digitalization only moves offline barriers to online formats, the justice aim will be unfulfilled.

Reimagining Judicial Efficiency: Global Evidence from Digital Court Reforms

Global experiences with digital justice transformation reveal that technology, when strategically embedded within judicial ecosystems, substantially enhances efficiency, transparency, and accessibility—but its effectiveness hinges on institutional design and governance context. Singapore’s Integrated Courts Management System (ICMS) stands out as a benchmark of digital maturity, underpinned by high digital literacy (88% population), a robust legal framework via the Electronic Transactions Act, and political will enforcing mandatory e-filing since 2013. Its user-centric interface design emphasizes simplicity over feature density, achieving an enviably low pendency of about six months.

Brazil’s Processo Judicial Eletrônico (PJe) represents a major innovation in federal judicial digitalization. Although national in scope, its implementation across 27 states faces coordination challenges akin to India’s federal structure. The Brazilian experience illustrates the importance of defining centralized technical standards while allowing localized flexibility, maintaining interoperability without stifling contextual adaptation.

China’s Smart Court system—processing nearly 100 million cases annually—demonstrates automation’s potential through AI-assisted drafting, online hearings, and language recognition technologies. Yet, concerns about algorithmic opacity and diminished human oversight highlight the ethical imperative for India to preserve a “human-in-the-loop” decision model, keeping judges as the ultimate arbiters of justice.

The UK’s HMCTS Reform Programme, despite advanced technologies such as video hearings and cloud-based management, experienced a growing backlog exceeding 60,000 cases (2020–2023), primarily due to resource shortages and a 15% reduction in judicial capacity. This underscores the reality that digital tools amplify but cannot substitute judicial capacity—a vital caution for India.

Table 1: International Digital Justice Systems.

Jurisdiction	Digital Justice Model	Key Technologies	Pendency Impact	Lessons for India
Singapore	Integrated Courts Management System (ICMS)	E-litigation, paperless trials, AI legal research	Low pendency (~6 months avg)	User-centric design; mandatory e-filing success
Brazil	Processo Judicial Eletrônico (PJe)	Electronic processing, AI precedent matching	29% reduction in case duration (2015-2020)	Scalable federal approach; address regional disparities
China	Smart Courts	AI judgment drafting, speech-to-text, online courts	Approximately 40% efficiency gain reported	Manage automation risks; safeguard due process
Estonia	e-File, e-Court	Blockchain notarization, 99% digital filings.	Minimal backlog	Leverage digital ID and integration; small-state model
United Kingdom	HMCTS Reform Programme	Cloud-based case management, video hearings	Delays increased 2020 post-	Technology must pair with judicial capacity
United States	PACER / CM-ECF (federal & state)	E-filing, case management	Inconsistent; jurisdiction-dependent	Unified national framework needed for equity

Digital Transformation in Indian Justice Ecosystem

India's judicial digitalisation has progressed from e-Courts Phases I and II, which enabled e-filing and database access, to pandemic-driven e-proceedings and ODR pilots in consumer and financial domains. e-Lok Adalats are a disruptive experiment that combines technology with inclusive conflict resolution. They view technology as an equalizer, a tool for justice, and a fundamental right, as part of the Digital India mission. However, progress remains uneven, driven by gaps in infrastructure, connection, and institutional preparation, highlighting the importance of digital justice projects addressing India's structural inequities in order to attain universal, equitable access to justice.

The constitutional foundations of India’s digital justice evolution directly inform the design and legitimacy of the E-Lok Adalat framework. Article 14, assuring equality before law, mandates that technological adoption must reinforce—not erode—equitable access. This requires closing the rural-urban digital gap, measurable through a parity index target of 75% or higher, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of geography, can equally participate in online

dispute resolution platforms. Under Article 21, where the right to life encompasses the right to speedy and fair justice, digitalization is constitutionally justified only when it reduces pendency without compromising due process, with a 25% improvement in disposal rate serving as a benchmark. Article 39A institutionalizes the ideal of equal justice and free legal aid; hence, E-Lok Adalats must embed *assisted online dispute resolution (ODR)* services for marginalized users, with 100% coverage of e-Sewa Kendras to ensure inclusivity. Finally, Article 50 envisions the separation of the judiciary from the executive—a principle extended to digital governance—requiring that judicial technology choices remain autonomous and guided by the Supreme Court e-Committee, safeguarding independence amid technological transformation. Together, these provisions anchor E-Lok Adalats not merely as digital innovations, but as constitutional instruments of democratic justice.

Table 2: Constitutional Mandates for Inclusive Digital Justice.

Constitutional Provision	Textual Mandate	E-Lok Implication	Adalat Compliance Metric
Article 14	Equality Before Law	Technology must not discriminate; ensure equal digital access	Rural-urban parity index $\geq 75\%$
Article 21	Right To life includes speedy justice	Digital tools should reduce delays without compromising due process.	Disposal rate improvement $> 25\%$
Article 39A	Equal Justice and Free legal aid	Assisted mandatory for marginalized remote users	ODR for and 100% e-Sewa Kendra coverage
Article 50	Separation	Judicial autonomy over technology adoption; e-Committee leadership	Judiciary-led digital reform initiatives

The Rural Indian Experience: Digital Promise vs Digital Divide

The operation of e-Lok Adalats in rural India reveals more than a technological shift—it marks a profound transformation of the social and communicative ecology of justice.

With the launch of e-Lok Adalats during the COVID-19 period (first held on 27 June 2020), virtual formats enabled hearings via video and other online modes in 28 States and Union Territories, with over 10.30 crore cases taken up and 1.15 crore cases disposed of through

e-Lok Adalats alone in the period reported to Parliament. Earlier press releases show that in the initial phase from June to October 2020, 27 e-Lok Adalats in 15 States took up 4.83 lakh cases and disposed of 2.51 lakh cases, indicating a rapid scaling of virtual dispute resolution even under pandemic conditions. National Lok Adalat statistics for subsequent years (2022–2024) show that total disposal across National Lok Adalats—now commonly using blended online/offline formats—runs into several crore cases annually, suggesting that digital components have been integrated into a mass, high-volume disposal model rather than remaining marginal pilots. Official narratives from the Department of Justice and NALSA explicitly link e-Lok Adalats to improved access for people who were “otherwise unable to participate” in physical Lok Adalats, signalling a policy understanding that virtual modes reduce geographical and physical barriers, even as they rely on sufficient connectivity and devices. Qualitatively, the shift has altered the spatial and institutional footprint of Lok Adalats. Earlier, physical and mobile Lok Adalats travelled periodically to different locations, with more than 15.14 lakh Lok Adalats organized and 8.25 crore cases settled by 2015 through predominantly face-to-face sittings. After e-Lok Adalats were conceptualized in 2020, State Legal Services Authorities began organizing “online/offline” National and State Lok Adalats, enabling benches to function from multiple locations while connecting parties virtually, which is evident in state reports (for example, Rajasthan’s National Online/Offline Lok Adalats disposing of several million cases in single-day drives). The beneficiaries profile has also shifted: NALSA emphasizes that legal services and Lok Adalats target women, Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, persons with disabilities, and low-income groups, and official descriptions of e-Lok Adalats highlight their role in improving access for such groups during and after COVID-19, even though disaggregated rural digital-divide data are not routinely published. From a procedural perspective, e-Lok Adalats have encouraged greater use of digital case-management, online listing, and remote settlement of pre-litigation matters, which aligns with broader e-Courts and Digital India reforms and has contributed to very high single-day disposal numbers, but also raises concerns about the depth of participation and the effects of connectivity gaps on rural and marginalized users.

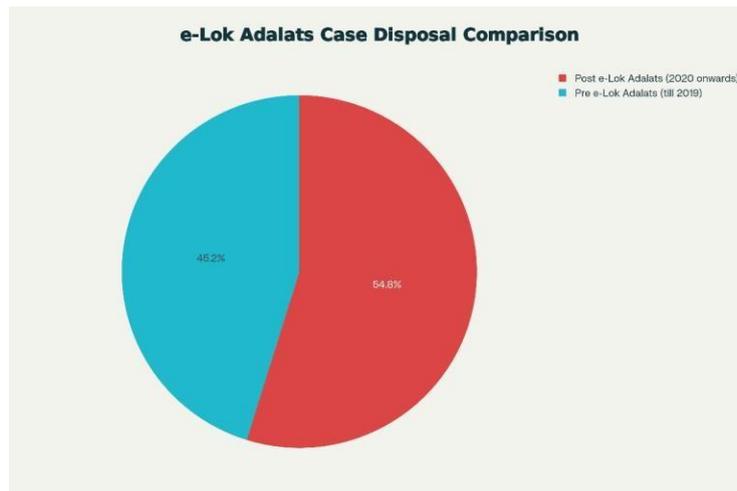


Figure 1.

The figure 1 shows that while Lok Adalats had already disposed about 8.25 crore cases in the pre-digital era, the post-2020 phase has slightly surpassed this with roughly 10 crore disposals in a much shorter span, driven by e-Lok Adalats and hybrid online–offline National Lok Adalats. This represents a 21% increase in disposal volume and signals two key developments: first, digital and hybrid formats have enabled acceleration in the pace of dispute resolution, particularly through online pre-litigation settlements and remote hearings; second, the pandemic forced rapid digitization that, rather than diminishing Lok Adalat effectiveness, appears to have amplified its capacity for mass disposal.

The Socio-Technical Limits of Digital Lok Adalats

The digital divide, long recognized as an economic and spatial inequality, becomes here a form of procedural exclusion: those without stable broadband connections or access to smartphones are effectively silenced from participating in their own justice processes. Rural broadband penetration remains unreliable, particularly in geographically remote or mountainous regions, often forcing disputants to travel significant distances or rely on external intermediaries such as cyber cafes or local “digital service providers.” This overdependence on intermediaries introduces new gatekeepers into what was envisioned as a decentralized, empowering system, potentially reinforcing existing patterns of dependency and control. Many disputants, especially women and marginalized caste groups, may find the digital interface not only technologically intimidating but socially unfamiliar—detached from the relational warmth, moral persuasion, and shared accountability that once shaped conciliatory justice in traditional Lok Adalats.

Further, the challenge is not confined to physical access; it extends into the linguistic and

cognitive domains. E-Lok Adalat portals and communication tools are often designed with English-language infrastructure, creating a cognitive barrier for rural litigants whose linguistic repertoires are rooted in regional or tribal tongues. Legal communication, already heavy with procedural formality, becomes doubly alienating when filtered through an unfamiliar language and interface. This digital complexity reintroduces asymmetries of power between educated intermediaries and ordinary disputants, often compelling the latter to surrender agency in navigating their own cases. Digital illiteracy—lack of confidence in handling audio-visual communication, online documentation, or virtual submissions—translates into an unspoken exclusion even when formal accessibility exists. Consequently, what appears as a “virtual inclusion” may mask a deeper form of symbolic exclusion, where marginalized users remain visible to platforms but unheard in practice. The participatory ethos of the Lok Adalat—built upon accessibility, empathy, and informal persuasion—thus faces a redefinition in digital space, where conciliation is mediated not through direct presence but through fragmented screens and unstable signals. Socio-cultural hierarchies compound these technological and linguistic limitations. In several rural communities, the dominance of upper-caste males in local decision-making persists even in digital forums, subtly influencing who speaks, decides, or withdraws from proceedings. Women, Dalits, and Adivasis experience layered deterrents to participation, not only because of limited device ownership or digital skill but also due to social hesitation reinforced by patriarchal or caste-based norms that discourage public self-expression. Digital mediation, rather than neutralizing these hierarchies, can sometimes conceal them under the guise of procedural efficiency. The shift from community warmth to algorithmic formality risks displacing the emotional and social depth that sustained the legitimacy of Lok Adalats. Therefore, e-Lok Adalats must not be imagined as mere virtual replicas of physical institutions but as dynamic arenas where justice is renegotiated through new technological, social, and communicative grammars. To be effective in rural India, digital justice mechanisms must account for these relational and infrastructural deficits—not only expanding technical access but reimagining digital participation itself as a culturally embedded, socially inclusive process.

Solutions and Recommendations

The challenges of e-Lok Adalats in rural India, stemming from infrastructural deficits, policy gaps, and literacy barriers demand a multi-paradigmatic reform strategy that prioritizes "phygital" (physical-digital hybrid) models over pure digitalization. Rejecting the "Do-It-Yourself" ODR approach, this framework emphasizes on assisted access through CSCs and e-

Sewa Kendras, upskilling Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) as Digital Paralegals to bridge legal-digital divides. Recommendations are structured across three paradigms: institutional infrastructure, digital policies, and digital literacies/awareness, ensuring inclusive justice aligns with constitutional mandates under Articles 14 and 39A.

Institutional (Infrastructure) Paradigm.

Immediate action requires deploying satellite backups (OneWeb/Starlink) in 40% rural broadband deserts for 25 Mbps justice-critical connectivity, alongside expanding e-Sewa Kendras to 7,000+ tehsils with mobile justice vans ensuring no litigant exceeds 20km from access points. NALSA-CSC partnerships should fast-track 5,000 Digital Facilitators via 40-hour training on platforms, confidentiality, and vernacular support, transforming CSCs into phygital hubs for hybrid benches that counter device scarcity and intermediary dependence.

Digital Policies Paradigm

NALSA (Lok Adalat) Regulations 2009 should be amended to mandate physical alternatives in every e-Lok Adalat for marginalized groups (SC/ST/women/elderly), with opt-out rights. Implement judicial data privacy under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act using AES-256 encryption and annual audits; deploy AI (OCR, scheduling) only for admin tasks via an Ethics Committee guarding against bias. Policy must divert 40% pendency to ODR in simple cases while routing complex rural disputes (land/matrimonial) through hybrid protocols, complementing judicial recruitment to approximately 50 judges/million.

Digital Literacies (Awareness) Paradigm

Redesign e-portals by 2026 with multilingual (8 languages covering 80% rural users) audio-visual interfaces to dismantle English barriers and digital illiteracy. Train Digital Paralegals (VLEs) in legal terminology for community campaigns targeting women/Dalits/Adivasis, integrating 40-hour modules into rural skilling to build navigation confidence and counter socio-cultural suppression. Awareness drives via CSCs will foster trust-based participation, ensuring technology serves litigants rather than excluding them.

Summary

The digital transformation of Lok Adalats marks a watershed moment in India's quest to deliver timely and equitable justice, especially in rural areas long burdened by infrastructural scarcity and social inequities. While e-Lok Adalats have demonstrably increased case disposal volumes and reduced travel and transaction costs, their true success hinges on transcending

technological novelty to foster inclusivity and empowerment. This requires rejecting simplistic, purely digital “Do-It-Yourself” models in favor of nuanced “Assisted ODR” frameworks rooted in local contexts and constitutional values. The creation of “phygital” ecosystems—where robust satellite-backed internet connectivity, community-based digital paralegals, and physically accessible e-Sewa Kendras work in tandem with user-friendly multilingual platforms—can facilitate meaningful participation by marginalized populations such as women, Dalits, and Adivasis who face layered barriers. Equally critical are policy reforms mandating physical opt-outs for those unable or unwilling to use digital tools, alongside stringent data privacy protections and ethical AI oversight to prevent new forms of exclusion or bias. This transformation must be approached as more than a technical upgrade. It calls for a holistic reimagining of justice delivery that preserves the ethos of Lok Adalats—empathetic conciliation, informal communication, and community trust—within digitally mediated spaces. Attention to socio-cultural hierarchies, linguistic diversity, and digital literacy is paramount to ensuring virtual justice does not become a “black box” that amplifies existing disparities. Judicial capacity must also be scaled in parallel, recognizing that technology accelerates but cannot replace human adjudicatory roles. In sum, embracing a multi-paradigm approach combining institutional infrastructure, inclusive digital policies, and grassroots digital literacy initiatives offers a path to constitutional compliance and social equity in digital justice. The evolving e-Lok Adalat ecosystem, if carefully nurtured, holds promise to transform India’s justice landscape by making accessible, speedy, and participatory dispute resolution a genuine rural entitlement rather than an urban privilege. This vision aligns technological innovation with India’s democratic and egalitarian constitutional commitments, shaping a more just and inclusive future.

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