



Nari Adalat as an Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism: A Study with Special Reference to the State of Sikkim

Dr. Deepan Pandey

Dr. Deepan Pandey is Assistant Professor of Law at Sikkim Government Law College
Gangtok, deepanpandey@gmail.com

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17598891>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 17-10-2025

Published: 10-11-2025

Keywords:

Nari Adalat, Sambhal, alternative dispute resolution, Nyaya Sakhi, community participation, gender sensitive, accessible justice.

ABSTRACT

Launched in August 2025 in the State of Sikkim Nari Adalat is a women-led community justice forum to empower women by providing cost effective, informal, localised dispute resolution outside the regular court system. It focuses on addressing minor disputes. Family disputes, non-severe domestic violence and marital issues are sought to be resolved through dialogue, mediation and participatory method. While reducing burden on regular courts and strengthening community harmony, the initiative aims to offer supportive environment where women can resolve issues affecting them. This represents progressive model by blending traditional dispute resolving methods with modern governance methods to enhance grassroot women's active participation in justice system. Though lacking legal authority, such programme would definitely be liked and practiced by the community and lessen the burden of the formal courts.

Introduction

Indian courts are struggling with the huge number of pending cases as well as delays due to various reasons. As per the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), there are 4.57 crore pending cases, with nearly 63 lakh in High Courts and over 80,000 in the Supreme Court. In effect, in most of the cases, justice delayed is justice denied. Against this backdrop, the decision to strengthen Alternative Dispute



Resolution (ADR) marks an important turning point. ADR is in the blood of India's traditional Practice of Dispute Resolution. It is not just a procedural alternative but also a philosophical one. It has several advantages.

So far, the innovative legislature and judiciary have come up with various Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms. The one which has attracted the attention is the Naari Adalat, an alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism aimed to benefit women population at the ground level.

Also Known as Women's Court, the Nari Adalat Program is a sub-scheme of "Sambhal" of Mission Shakti introduced by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. The scheme seeks to provide women with an alternative grievance redressal mechanism at Gram Panchayat Level. It seeks to redress petty issues like subversion, harassment and curtailment of rights etc. The issues are redressed through methods like mediation, reconciliation, negotiation and mutual consent. The idea of Nari Adalat is fast getting momentum and increasing number of states are implementing this programme.

Objectives of Nari Adalat Program:

Nari Adalat Program holds the objective to provide help and support to women through special dispute resolution platforms within the community. The objectives of the program include:

1. To provide an alternative dispute mechanism without depending on the regular legal proceedings.
2. To bring about awareness about the schemes related to women and their legal rights.
3. To supports women through counselling, community engagement, and handholding for women-centric organizations.
4. To collects feedback from the public to improve efficiency and delivery of government schemes.
5. Through community participation, to provide a supportive environment for women.
6. To allows minor disputes to be resolved at community level thereby minimising the burden on regular courts.

Mechanism Created:

The Nari Adalat Program requires the formation of Nyaya Sakhis comprising of 7 to 11 members. This committee includes:

1. Half of the members of Nyaya Sakhi Committee is constituted of Members of Gram Panchayat who are elected Members.



2. Apart from the elected members as stated above, the Villagers also nominate the remaining members. These members can be anyone with a social standing like a doctor or a teacher or a social worker.
3. The head of this committee is Mukhya Nyaya Sakhi will act as the head of the Committee who shall act on the position for a term of six months.

Implementation:

Initially launched in the states of Jammu and Kashmir and Assam, The Nari Adalat Program is being implemented in phases under Mission Shakti. The scheme is being implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Rural Development and Common Service Centres (CSCs) under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. The states implementing are also receiving some allocation to support the implementation of Program.

Advantages of Nari Adalat vis-à-vis Regular Courts:

A community-based platform of dispute resolution has definite advantages over the regular courts particularly when it comes to women. Regular courts adhere to formal legal procedures, which are often time-consuming and daunting for many women. Nari Adalats on the other hand provide an informal, community-based platform for the resolution of their disputes. The chief advantages can be seen under the following heads:

1. Accessible: Nari Adalats are situated within the community. Therefore, they are easily reachable for women in rural areas.
2. Less expensive: Nari Adalats offer affordable justice as they operate without legal fees.
3. Speedy Resolution: Disputes are resolved swiftly as compared to time taking legal proceedings in the regular courts.
4. Sensitive to women: Being community-driven, Nari Adalats is sensitive to local customs and norms, ensuring culturally relevant solutions and is sensitive to women.

Distinctive Features:

Nari Adalat differs from regular courts as it does not have formal legal standing but focuses on reconciliation and quick resolution of disputes at the community level. It provides localized, gender-sensitive platforms that are run entirely by women for women, minimizing the burden on the formal



judicial system and making justice more accessible and responsive to rural and marginalized communities.

Legal Authority:

Unlike Lok Adalats which are governed by Legal Services Authorities Act, Nari Adalats are not constituted under any statutory law. Therefore, it is important to note that Nari Adalats do not hold legal authority and primarily function through mediation and reconciliation. The decisions of Nari Adalats are not legally binding and they cannot be enforced as decrees of a civil court. The decisions of Nari Adalats operate on the principle of voluntary participation and the outcome relies on mutual consent between the contesting parties rather than legal compulsion

Mission Shakti

Mission Shakti is a mission launched by the Government of India as an integrated women empowerment program. The scheme aims to address issues like security, safety and empowerment of women. One of the two sub divisions of the scheme is Sambhal which prioritises safety and security of women and under which programme such as Nari Adalats also fall.

Introduction and Role of Nari Adalat in the state of Sikkim

In the state of Sikkim, the newly announced women led community justice forum called Nari Adalat is expected to promote accessible, community-based dispute resolution while also empowering women socially and economically. The initiative becomes special for the ruling establishment because it began on August 10, 2025 during the First Aama Samman Diwas, inaugurated by the Chief Minister.

The Primary aim and expectation from Nari Adalats in the State of Sikkim is an informal supportive platform for resolving local disputes affecting women outside the regular judicial system. The main aims are:

1. To empower Women to take up leadership roles in justice delivery system and local governance.
2. To offer quick, localized, and cost-effective dispute resolutions in cases like marital conflicts, domestic violence, child custody disputes and property issues within the families.
3. To reduce dependency on the already overburdened regular courts by addressing and dealing with the minor and non-severe cases at the community level itself.



In the state of Sikkim such programme will have a broader impact which will strengthen community solidarity by choosing dialogue and resolution over confrontation. This will also build trust in local institutions through participatory justice. Women's confidence and leadership in rural and semi urban governance will be enhanced because of participatory and leadership roles. It will also serve as a model for other north eastern states seeking to blend traditional conflict resolution with modern framework.

Preparedness Required

A comprehensive planning, institutional coordination and training and capacity building measures are required as preparedness for Nari Adalats in the state of Sikkim. Training, infrastructure, coordination and awareness generation at multiple levels is required for effective realization of the purpose of Nari Adalats. Each Nari Adalat should consist of 7 to 11 members as Nyaya Sakhis to be chosen from the local women leaders including self-help groups, teachers, ASHA or Anganwadi workers and social workers. This is to be supported by Gram Panchayats, local authorities and Common Service Centers (CSCs). It should begin with around 10 Gram Panchayats as pilot initiative and gradually scale up. Extensive training is required for all members about laws and schemes related to women, dispute resolution, gender sensitivity and advocacy based on rights. Legal literacy workshops are required which should be focussed on women's rights pertaining to domestic violence, dowry, child custody, property etc. Apart from the concerned departments NGOs should also come forward to conduct such workshops to empower decision making. Leadership and ethics orientation also becomes necessary for Mukhya Nyaya Sakhi who heads the Adalat.

Apart from the above financial allocation also becomes very important to support infrastructure and training. Record keeping such as case registers, mediation outcomes etc is also vital. Inter departmental coordination with police, child welfare committees and legal aid cells make the programme effective.

Awareness generation, periodic community outreach programmes and stakeholder's sensitization workshops (for panchayats, men's groups and local leaders) are important to inform, encourage voluntary participation and acceptance and legitimacy.

Conclusion

Initiatives such as Nari Adalats are a significant step towards empowering women particularly in rural and semi urban areas by providing them with accessible, informal and community-based platforms for dispute resolution. Even when such Adalats lack legal authority and their decisions are not legally



binding, they offer quicker, cost effective and culturally sensitive resolutions through dialogue and consensus and through the process of mediation. By such initiatives issues directly affecting women such as domestic violence, marital disputes and family conflicts are expected to be resolved locally in a cost-effective and hassle-free manner.

In the state of Sikkim, where Nari Adalats Programme was launched only recently (2025). The Government, intellectual group, stakeholders and people have huge expectation from this programme. They expect that these forums will reduce the burden on formal courts and promote local leadership among women and also strengthen community solidarity.

Overall, Nari Adalats is expected to serve as a progressive, gender sensitive mechanism which will complement formal justice system and also advance social, legal and economic empowerment of women by fostering trust in the system, participation of women and accessible justice at the grassroots level.

References and further readings

- <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/nari-adalat-program>
- <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/nari-adalat>
- <https://www.makkalahakku.com/main-control/uploads/SOP%20for%20Nari%20Adalat.pdf>
- <https://indianexpress.com/article/upsc-current-affairs/upsc-essentials/knowledge-nugget-nari-adalats-upsc-adr-lok-alternative-justice-women-9844215/>
- <https://pwonlyias.com/nari-adalat-program/>
- <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/nari-adalat-program>
- <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/nari-adalat-program/>
- <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/sikkim-cm-launches-nari-adalat-on-occasion-of-1st-amma-samman-diwas/>
- http://www.spniwcd.wcd.gov.in/uploads/pdf/1711618109_McKj2nd7D1.pdf
- <https://pwonlyias.com/nari-adalat-program/>