

GRASSROOTS JUSTICE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF PANCHAYATS IN MEDIATION IN SONIPAT DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The Panchayat institution represents a resilient matrix of local self-governance and conflict resolution in rural India. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises Panchayat-driven mediation as a pragmatic pathway that channels customary authority into structured alternative dispute resolution (ADR) frameworks, alleviating court congestion and widening the reach of legal redress. Grounded in constitutional decentralisation and enriched by centuries of village-level jurisprudence, this article situates Panchayat mediation within modern access-to-justice debates, clarifies its research agenda, and maps the methodological scaffolding that underpins subsequent analysis. This article examines the ground reality of the existing Panchayat regime in the district of Sonipat, Haryana, to analyse the efficacy of the existing regime and the motivations that drive individuals to seek recourse to the court system. This article aims to provide suggestions that help the panchayat system and the Indian courts complement and supplement each other effectively.

I. INTRODUCTION

Implementing access to justice projects in developing countries has always been a problem that needs to be tackled at a grass-root level.(Davis & Turku, 2011)In India, Panchayats have been a cornerstone of dispute resolution process since ancient times. Early Sanskrit dharmashastra describes village councils as pivotal forums for compromise among disputants.(Jaiswal & Mandloi, 2020; Baxi U. , 1982) During the Late, British administrators codified that tradition in the Bengal Regulations of 1781, positioning local panchayats as auxiliaries to colonial civil courts. Post-Independence, legal thinkers such as Upendra Baxi and Marc Galanter treated Panchayats as a laboratory for democratising legal access.(Baxi & Galanter, 1979; Baxi U. , 1982) andthe 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 entrenched Panchayats as the third tier of governance, delegating powers that include informal dispute settlement.(Alok, 2023)Parallel statutory innovations, most prominently the Gram Nyayalayas Act 2008, equip village-level courts with mobile jurisdiction and procedures, creating fertile ground for Panchayat mediation to evolve.(Bail, 2015) Recent empirical studies reveal high settlement rates where Panchayats integrate conciliatory techniques modelled on Lok Adalats and community mediation.(Chauhan & Deshta, 2024)

As a dispute resolution mechanism, Panchayats have always shown the characteristics of Mediation, where parties settle on their terms while retaining amicable relationships post-resolution.(Radford, 2000) With Panchayats being the forerunner institution utilising mediation, they can effectively reflect how well the general population is responding to mediation as a dispute resolution mechanism.

The primary objective of this article is to measure how far Panchayat mediation reduces procedural barriers of cost, distance, language and promotes remedial equity among marginalised agrarian populations. A secondary objective evaluates the reliability and trust attributed to panchayats by the parties requesting dispute resolution. Findings will illuminate whether Panchayats serve as complementary or substitute venues relative to formal courts.

To achieve the objectives, this article is divided into five parts: Part I lays down the introduction of the study; Part II sheds light on the historical evolution of Panchayats and how they attained their modern day characteristics in the colonial era; Part III highlights the post-independence reforms related to panchayats and the balance attained between present day legislations and panchayats; Part IV dwells into the empirical data and the findings concerning panchayats in district Sonipat; Part V provides insights and concluding remarks from the above discussions.

Research Methodology

This article utilises both doctrinal and empirical research methodologies to attain its objectives. Primary Data is collected through unstructured interviews conducted in 41 village panchayats in Sonipat district. The interview was further supplemented with data collection through a questionnaire to identify the number of disputes tackled and resolved by the respondents. The respondents consist solely of the *Sarpanch* (elected village head) and in their absence/ unavailability, *panch*(elected village councilman) of the respective villages, and the sampling method used is snowball sampling. This study also incorporates an analysis of case laws, statutes and policies. Secondary data is taken from journal articles, books and published reports of reputed organisations.

II. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF VILLAGE-LEVEL DISPUTE SETTLEMENT

The village panchayat's journey from a flexible clan assembly to a constitutionally recognised unit of local justice spans more than two millennia. Literary evidence from the Vedic age records autonomous *sabha* and *samiti* bodies that mediated communal quarrels(Majumdar, 1951); nineteenth-century Revenue Regulations subsequently curtailed such autonomy; and a succession of post-Independence committees finally restored- and re-imagined- grassroots adjudication within India's democratic framework.(Alok, 2023)

Village councils figure prominently in classical jurisprudence such as *Arthashastra* whose passages stipulate that boundary and land disputes be resolved *in situ* by gram-*Adyaksha* (village elders) in open assemblies, with royal courts entertaining appeals only in exceptional circumstances.(Chakravarti, 2017) Early Vedic sources such as the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata describe *sabhas* and *vidathas* as bodies that combined deliberative and judicial functions under *Gramik*. Epigraphic evidence from the Gupta era records *grampati* issuing fines for theft and family maintenance, demonstrating that binding sanction was integral to these forums.(Tripathi, 2018)

Customary authority rested upon dharma, a normative complex integrating law, morality, and social hierarchy. Jati-based or guild panchayats (*kula*, *sreni*, *puga*) exercised jurisdiction over trade quarrels and matrimonial transgressions, often imposing ostracism or ritual penalties rather than pecuniary awards.(Muller & Syaa, 2024) The participatory character of these proceedings-oral testimony, consensus verdicts, and emphasis on compromise-produced inexpensive, culturally resonant outcomes that commanded high voluntary compliance.(MANJULA, 2021)By the late medieval period, regional sultanates tolerated, and occasionally codified, village justice. District *qazis* generally confined themselves to matters implicating Islamic personal law, leaving agrarian and caste disputes to panchayat decision-making.(Farooqi, Anwar, & Sher, 2019; Sharma, 1951) Such pluralism allowed custom to coexist with imperial appellate oversight, preserving the Panchayat's relevance on the eve of colonial intervention.(Thomas, 2019)

Pre-colonial panchayats blended sacred authority with pragmatic negotiation, delivering swift remedies through locally sanctioned norms. Their legitimacy derived from community participation and the moral weight of dharma rather than from formal state coercion.

Earliest ‘legislative’ recognition to panchayats in India was given through the Bengal Regulation IV of 1781 which instructed provincial judges to “prevail upon the parties” to submit minor suits to village arbitration. Thomas Munro’s 1816 minute for the Madras Presidency praised panchayats as “justice at every man’s door,” advocating their use for revenue disputes.(Jaffe, 2015) Yet codification soon altered this calculus; The Code of Civil Procedure 1859 and successive amendments transferred jurisdiction over debts and land titles to mofussil courts, imposing English evidentiary norms that eclipsed oral adjudication.(Tripathi, 2018)The Bengal Local Self-Government Act 1885 later introduced elected district boards but left panchayats dormant; the Bengal Village Self-Government Act 1919 replaced them with Union Boards focused on police and sanitation, effectively stripping judicial competence. Comparable trajectories unfolded in Bombay and United Provinces, where Panchayat Acts of 1920 vested only limited powers and tethered awards to district-magistrate confirmation. Colonial courts, viewing customary rulings as ultra vires when inconsistent with statutory law, increasingly issued writs of certiorari that annulled Panchayat decrees.(Rudolph & Rudolph, 1965; Thomas, 2019)Colonial codification re-engineered local governance, subordinating customary tribunals to statutory courts and thereby eroding the Panchayat’s jurisdictional space. Although early administrators appreciated village adjudication, legislative centralisation and juridical distrust precipitated its decline.(Baxi U. , 1982)

III. POST INDEPENDENCE REFORMS

After 1947, Article 40 of the Constitution of India placed a directive obligation on the State to “organise village panchayats” but the implementation of the same required urgent policy reforms. The National Development Council, therefore, constituted the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), which advocated a three-tier Panchayati Raj system with directly elected gram panchayats empowered to settle local disputes. The Council, in 1958, acknowledged these recommendations, noting the Panchayat’s potential to shoulder sixty-two discrete administrative and quasi-judicial functions.

Balwant Rai Committee’s successor the Ashok Mehta Committee (1977) proposed a two-tier model and urged statutory recognition of Mandal Panchayats to unclog subordinate courts. Its call for constitutional status gained momentum after the G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985) highlighted “grass without roots” syndrome in rural development. Building on these insights, the L.M. Singhvi Committee (1986) framed Panchayats as “instruments of participatory democracy,” urging establishment of cluster-level Nyaya Panchayats with simplified evidentiary rules.

Political consensus nevertheless proved elusive as the Sixty-fourth Constitutional Amendment Bill (1989) lapsed in the Rajya Sabha amidst federalism concerns. Renewed advocacy from civil-society scholars and international development agencies, including a 2001 World Bank study citing decentralisation dividends, reinforced the case for legal entrenchment.(World Bank, 2010) Ultimately, Parts IX and IX-A, inserted by the Seventy-third Amendment Act 1992, endowed Panchayats with authority “to secure justice and economic development,” while enabling states to legislate Nyaya Panchayats.

Part IX (Art.243-243O) of the Constitution is predominantly an enabling framework for local self-government. Article 243G, for example, authorises a State legislature “by law [to] endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government”, conferring on Panchayats the “preparation of plans for economic development and social justice” and the implementation of development schemes including those in the Eleventh Schedule. In itself, however, Art.243G does not create any adjudicatory organs at the village level; it is an enabling provision that

empowers States to allocate functions to Panchayats by statute. Thus, unless a State Act explicitly assigns dispute-resolution duties, Panchayats have no inherent judicial authority. Likewise, Article 243A provides that a Gram Sabha “may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the Legislature of a State may, by law, provide”. This again is permissive as any exercisable authority (e.g. to mediate local disputes) must be statutorily granted. (Pandey & Sinha, 2023)

An overview of the provisions along with commentaries of jurists draw a clearer picture that the constitutional provisions vest only potential ADR power in Panchayats, not any automatic court-like role. Hence, the Constitution itself neither mandates nor forbids village-level mediation but rather provides an open avenue to discuss issues within the self-sustained unit called a village.

Interface with Procedural Laws

India’s core procedural statutes broadly encourage settlement of disputes, though not explicitly via Panchayats. Civil Procedure Code (hereinafter “CPC”) Section 89 instructs courts to formulate out-of-court settlements whenever possible. In particular, courts may refer cases to arbitration, conciliation, or Lok Adalats if they see “elements of a settlement”. By implication, a village settlement could fall under “out of court settlement” when parties come to court. Additionally, Order XXIII Rule 3 of CPC provides for amicable suits: where parties agree, the court can record a compromise as a consent decree. In practice, a Panchayat-negotiated settlement can be formalised under these provisions, although the Code nowhere mentions Panchayats by name. While supplementary to panchayats, these provisions highlight the lack of enforceability of panchayat settlements.

Criminal Procedure Code (hereinafter “CrPC”) under Section 320 lists “compoundable” offences where the complainant may waive the complaint in part or in full. In effect, a Gram Panchayat may mediate a minor assault or property damage case, after which the parties can proceed with requesting the court for withdrawal of charges under Section 320 of CrPC. However, some procedural hurdles remain under Section 320(3) where the consent of the police officer or State government is required for certain offences, potentially limiting purely local settlements. Thus, CrPC provides a mechanism for litigating parties to compound offences, which aligns with village compromise, but it does not formally involve or recognise the Panchayat’s role.

This leaves panchayat settlements with no appeal or enforcement route except through a fresh suit before a court of law. Furthermore, Section 89 of CPC, which lays the groundwork for all ADR within the Indian legal system, allows courts to refer matters to ADR methods, but it also ignores the possibility of panchayat mediation. At the heart of village-level justice lie several concentric forums that begin with the constitutionally mandated Gram Sabha, expand through Nyaya Panchayats, intersect with the state-sponsored Lok Adalat movement, and coexist with a dense layer of customary and religious councils.

Under the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987, Lok Adalats function as statutory “people’s courts” whose awards are deemed civil-court decrees and are immune from appeal. Courts may refer pending cases to District and State Legal Services Authorities, or the parties may apply directly. In addition to this, the Legal Services Authorities also conduct Lok Adalats at regular intervals to dispose of petty issues. Academic analysis frames Lok Adalat as the “bridge” between informal village fora and the formal judiciary. (Amit Singh, 2024)

Kerala’s “Sunithi” programme is a good example of the prowess of District Legal Services Authority. Here, volunteers approached Andoorkonam Gram Panchayat, resolved grievances, and convened Grama Adalats in panchayat halls, resolving 26 of 35 matters on the spot. (Times of India, 2025)

While Lok Adalats share Panchayat goals of consensus and cost efficiency, they import court-centric procedures and are staffed by retired judges or advocates, not elected villagers. This professionalisation reassures parties about legal finality but risks sidelining local norms. Conversely, Justice Committee settlements from Gram Sabhas often reach Lok Adalats only when one party defaults, inducing duplication of effort.

Divergent State Panchayati Raj Acts: A Comparative Overview

The state Panchayati Raj Acts show a highly uneven approach with only a few states explicitly empowered Panchayats with judicial or conciliatory functions, but most did not. Uttar Pradesh's Panchayat Raj Act (1947) is a classic example as it contains a dedicated chapter on Nyaya Panchayats, vesting small civil and criminal jurisdiction in elected village tribunals. West Bengal (Panchayats Act 1973) similarly established Nyaya Panchayats, and Punjab's 1994 Act includes a chapter on the "Judicial Functions of Gram Panchayats". Himachal Pradesh and newly formed Uttarakhand incorporated Nyaya Panchayat provisions (in their PR Acts of 1994 and 1997, respectively). Conversely, many large states expressly omitted such provisions. Karnataka (1993), Kerala (1994), Maharashtra (1961), Madhya Pradesh (1993), Odisha, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu (1994) all have no Nyaya Panchayat chapters. Gujarat, Jharkhand, Goa, Chhattisgarh, Assam and several North-East states likewise have no statutory village tribunals. (Alok, 2023)

The Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (hereinafter "PESA") allows for the establishment of gram sabhas in scheduled areas to legally recognise the right of tribal communities to govern through their system of self-government and to acknowledge their traditional right over natural resources. With states such as Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat (Warwantkar, 2024) establishing dispute resolution mechanisms within their PESA rules, these states have seen a significant increase in law and order within scheduled areas. (Alok, 2023)

Many villages' gram sabhas or panchayats still hold community sittings to amicably resolve disputes. For example, Karnataka's Act "does not empower the panchayats to perform any judicial functions, yet the panchayats are performing the judicial functions informally". Research in Karnataka found that ward members and Gram Panchayats routinely receive complaints and try to negotiate settlements by persuasion and consent. Civil disputes are generally heard in open panchayat sabhas, while sensitive family disputes may be handled privately. If local efforts fail, parties may then resort to formal courts. (Krishnappa & Agarwal, 2023)

Thus, even in the absence of statutory authority, de facto village-level ADR operates widely based on custom, culture and simple community pressure. However, these informal settlements lack binding legal status unless later adopted in court.

Gram Nyayalayas Act 2008: Integrating Village Courts and Mediation

The Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008, was intended as a pan-India reform to bring courts to the villages. Its stated purpose is to provide "inexpensive justice to people in rural areas at their doorsteps". The Act mandates one or more Gram Nyayalayas per intermediate panchayat level or a cluster of Gram Panchayats where each Gram Nyayalaya is a court presided over by a *Nyayadhikari* (a judicial officer) and assisted by two local *Nyayamitras* (conciliators) who exercise jurisdiction over petty civil claims and minor criminal offences. Importantly, the Act incorporates mediation: under Section 26, the Nyayalaya must "endeavour in the first instance to bring about a settlement of the dispute".

In terms of implementation, however, Gram Nyayalayas have had limited reach. As of July 2025, 490 Gram Nyayalayas had been notified nationwide, but only 333 were functional. (Justice, 2025) As to integration with the Panchayati Raj system, the Act is largely separate, apart from defining "Gram Panchayat" for context and siting Gram Nyayalayas at

panchayat headquarters. The Gram Nyayalaya Act gives no adjudicatory or procedural role to Gram Panchayats or Gram Sabhas. Officially, Gram Nyayalayas utilise court-appointed conciliators and have all powers of a magistrate; they do not defer to village elders or panchayat verdicts. Informally, a Gram Nyayalaya might seek local advice (e.g. elders or sarpanch) to understand facts, but this is discretionary.

Therefore, the Gram Nyayalaya scheme institutionalises village-level ADR by establishing formal courts with embedded mediation procedures and therefore complements rather than subsumes Panchayat mediation. While there are still enforcement gaps, such as a lack of linkage between panchayat settlements and Gram Nyayalaya records.

Mediation Act 2023 and Community Mediation

The Mediation Act, 2023, is a landmark national law aiming to institutionalise ADR specifically through its prominent forms such as institutional mediation, community mediation, and online mediation. The Act establishes a Mediation Council of India and allows accredited bodies to administer structured mediation proceedings. Courts are empowered to refer eligible civil/commercial disputes to mediation under the Act, and even certain minor criminal/matrimonial cases. Under the current provisions, a mediation settlement attains the same enforceability as a decree of the court, thereby removing one of the major hurdles to the popularity of mediation.

However, given the qualifications set for mediators under the act, the focus of the policymakers appears to have been directed towards urban disputes. To address the needs of the country, the Act also brings forward the concept of “Community Mediation” under Section 43, which allows disputes “affecting peace, tranquillity or harmony in a local community” to be mediated by a panel of three “community mediators” approved by the Legal Services Authority or District Magistrate.

While the new framework helps standardise the dispute resolution process as well as grants the settlement agreements enforceability on par with a decree of civil court, the same is not reflected in the case of “Community Mediation”. Section 44(4) specifically denies the enforcement of settlement agreements reached in light of community mediation to promote harmony among the public. While stringent enforcement mechanisms help ensure protection of rights of parties, that is limited to individual disputes; matters falling under Section 43 pertain to social harmony. The limitation set under Section 44 (4) meticulously highlights the importance of restoration of social order through mutual respect rather than legal mechanisms. These provisions allow for parties to achieve dispute resolution without neglecting cultural sensitivities, which have been an integral part of individual social identity (Gray, Halliday, & Woodgate, 2002; Fel, Lenart-Kłos, Boguszewski, & Grudziecka, 2025).

The Mediation Act 2023 greatly expands India’s mediation ecosystem on paper but mostly in a top-down, legal-institutional manner. Its recognition of “community mediation” is a nod to local conciliation, yet it ties that process to formal government authority rather than to elected Panchayats or customary shalas. The Act contains no reference to Panchayati institutions, which is a missed opportunity, since in many villages Gram Sabhas already convene informal meetings to preserve peace. While the act does not disable Panchayats, it failed to properly address the panchayat system to introduce enabling provisions.

Customary Elders, Religious Forums and Other Informal Mediators

Beyond statutory bodies, a mosaic of customary and faith-based institutions has been the baseline for resolution of rural conflicts in India. In West Bengal, the Gram Shalishi, an ad-hoc assembly convened by the elected Gram Panchayat handles land and inheritance quarrels in Bengali, drawing legitimacy from tradition rather than statute. (Samity, 2003) In Meghalaya,

the three-tier Dorbar Shnong/Raid/Hima structure, headed by the Rangbah Shnong or Syiem, resolves land and social disputes by consensus, with no right of appeal and minimal written record. Among the Tangkhul and other Naga tribes, clan elders (pipas) still mediate inter-village boundary claims, although state interference and armed groups have eroded their authority.(Upadhyaya & Upadhyaya, 2016)

A recent inter-faith study shows how Dharma, Sulh and Ahimsa principles from Hindu, Islamic and Jain traditions legitimate conciliatory outcomes and dissuade parties from re-litigating resolved matters. Such forums excel at restorative remedies, public apology, ritual reconciliation, and symbolic fines-unavailable in formal law.(Jain, 2025; Farooqi, Anwar, & Sher, 2019) However, empirical critiques note patriarchal exclusion of women in Dorbar and caste panchayats and the vulnerability of minority faiths to majoritarian sanctions.(Upadhyaya & Upadhyaya, 2016).

Customary and faith-based councils continue to deliver socially resonant justice but raise acute questions of gender equality, minority protection and legal enforceability.(McQuoid-Mason, 2021) Sociological fieldwork shows that caste panchayats routinely discipline Dalit households through fines, boycotts and social ostracism, often excluding them from deliberation panels.(Hayden, 1984; Kumar, 2021)

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Method:

The data collected from 41 panchayats across Sonipat District of Haryana (India) involves unstructured interviews with Sarpanch (Panchayat head) along with other panch (Panchayat members). The questions for interview focused on dispute resolution procedure in panchayats, the social response, enforcement and enactment of panchayat settlements. The researcher sought to unearth the chief concerns of a panchayat member during settlement of disputes.

Sampling:

The researcher has used the Snowball sampling method to collect data. Considering the social and political status of respondents coupled with the specificity of dispute resolution data requested, snowball sampling method is most effective under the requirement of the current research. (Goodman, 2011)

The collection of data across 41 panchayats in Sonipat district along with the sampling method ensures that the findings are generalizable across Sonipat district and provide a robust foundation for data analysis.

Findings:

A. Empirical data collected:

Data Collected From District Sonipat, Haryana (India)	
No. of Respondents	41
Total Number of Disputes Handled by the Respondents	700
Disputes Resolved by the Respondents	620
Disputes Escalated from Respondents to the Court	80
Average Rate of Resolution	86.71
Standard Deviation in Rate of Resolution	10.44
Variance in Rate of Resolution	109.03

B. Interview Responses:

The interviews process yielded the following results:

- a. Benefits of resolving disputes before Panchayat:
 - Maintaining social harmony: (38 out of 41 respondents)
 - Effective dispute resolution: (36 out of 41 respondents)
 - Restoration of social relationship: (31 out of 41 respondents)
- b. Major hurdles of resolving disputes before Panchayat:
 - Interference from social groups: (35 out of 41 respondents)
 - Lack of certainty of settlement:(38 out of 41 respondents)

Discussion:

The data collected from Sonipat showcases an average dispute resolution rate of 86.71%. When viewed in light of the official data provided by Minister of Law and Justice wherein mediation centres in Haryana received 3410 cases out of which only 442 were resolved leading to a dispute resolution rate of less than 15%.(Department of Legal Affairs, 2022)The official data showcases a consistently low dispute resolution rate for mediation centres in Haryana. Even Supreme Court Mediation Centre under Supreme Court of India shows a dispute resolution rate below 40% since its inception in 2009. (SCMC, 2024)

In addition to the high-dispute resolution rate, the data also shows a standard deviation of 10.44 and variance of 109 both of which indicate low dispersion around the mean values in the given context. These observations lay down the base understanding that panchayat mediation has provided significantly better results compared to their mediation centre counterparts, even if limited by the scope and nature of disputes they deal with.

The success of panchayats can be traced to the fact that panchayats are effective dispute resolvers. Giving due regards to courts, it must be noted that panchayats are not bound by the procedural or substantive laws that govern court procedure and justice process. This allows panchayats to actively mediate the dispute between parties and help them achieve a settlement that caters to their needs. While 88% respondents agree that panchayats provide effective dispute resolution; 92% remind us that there is an inherent uncertainty in the settlements achieved through panchayats. Due to the lack of enforcement mechanism associated with panchayat settlements, parties often come across doubts with regards to the implementation of such settlements. While the rural landscape is strongly bound within the social fabric, such close-knit structure is prone to societal collapse in light of continued uncertainties. Another visible factor that affects the justice delivery is the various social groups that exists within the village whose priority lies with preserving benefits of the group rather than village as a whole. While studies from neighbouring countries also acknowledge that the existence of these groups have significant impact on the ambit and coverage of the final settlement; they do not act as roadblocks to the decision-making process. (Khan, Mohamed, & Omoola, 2025)With 85% of the respondents acknowledging that there have been interferences from various social groups during disputes, all of them acknowledge that these interferences have allowed them to resolve matters quickly but not haphazardly. This creates a dichotomy where ‘interference’ as a factor is playing a positive and enabling role rather than a negative role in justice delivery.

V. CONCLUSION

The above discussions lead us to an observation that while mediation is deep-rooted in Indian culture, the same has lost its optimum form due to year of distortion through legislative and policy changes. Though that might be the case, the empirical research points towards the fact

that the essence of mediation still exists at grassroot level and villages resolve disputes through traditional means. Giving due regard to the changing times, the need for changes is not to be neglected but the empirical data and interview responses showcase that the changes are needed in the structure of justice delivery mechanism not in its form. In a country like India, where access to courts is a privilege for most of the populace, the ideals of “access to justice” are being realised through community mediation. However, with changing times, access to information and increased connectivity, the same populace is now prone to uncertainties of the traditional method of justice delivery. Through this article, the researchers observe that the key element that acts as a hurdle towards justice delivery at village level is uncertainty of enforcement of settlements and the key suggestions, consequently, are as follows:

- Allowing Village panchayat’s decision to have the effect of a court decree through legislative amendments.
- To implement ‘Community Mediation’ provisions envisaged under the Mediation Act 2023 to allow panchayats to decide on village level disputes with increased authority and certainty.

While other nuances exist at the moment that have a negative impact on justice delivery at village level; within the scope of current discussion these suggestions are hypothesized to have significant positive impact on justice delivery in panchayats. Panchayat as an institution have been an integral part of Indian culture as well as its judicial and administrative structure, this statement has held true in ancient times and holds true in the present day as well.

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