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ADR AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN INDIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

Access to justice remains a persistent challenge for many women in India due to economic dependence, social barriers, lack of legal awareness, and delays in the formal judicial system. In this context, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as mediation, conciliation, Lok Adalats, and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) have emerged as effective alternatives for providing affordable, accessible, and timely justice.

This chapter examines the role of ADR in enhancing women's access to justice in India and evaluates both its potential and limitations. The study adopts a doctrinal and analytical methodology, drawing upon constitutional provisions, statutory frameworks, judicial decisions, reports, and academic literature. It also employs a gender-sensitive perspective to assess whether ADR mechanisms adequately address the unique challenges faced by women. The chapter argues that ADR offers several advantages, including reduced costs, speedy resolution, confidentiality, flexibility, and greater participation of parties in the dispute resolution process. These features make ADR particularly useful in family, maintenance, custody, property, and workplace disputes. Furthermore, the rise of ODR has expanded opportunities for accessible justice through technology-driven solutions. However, the chapter also highlights concerns such as power imbalances, patriarchal influences, lack of gender-sensitive mediation practices, and the risk of unfair settlements. Additionally, the digital divide continues to restrict the benefits of ODR for many women, particularly those from rural and marginalized communities.

The chapter concludes that while ADR has significant potential to improve women's access to justice, its success depends on the adoption of gender-sensitive safeguards, enhanced legal awareness, and stronger institutional support to ensure fair and equitable outcomes.

Keywords: *ADR, Women's Access to Justice, Gender Justice, Mediation, ODR, India.*

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Introduction:

Access to justice is a fundamental component of the rule of law and is guaranteed under the Constitution of India through the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and protection of life and personal liberty. Despite these constitutional guarantees, many women in India continue to encounter significant barriers in accessing justice due to economic dependence, social and cultural norms, lack of legal awareness, and procedural delays within the formal judicial system. These challenges are particularly evident in disputes relating to family relationships, maintenance, domestic violence, inheritance, child custody, and workplace discrimination.²

The growing backlog of cases in Indian courts has highlighted the need for efficient and accessible methods of dispute resolution. In this context, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has emerged as an effective complement to the traditional justice system. ADR includes mechanisms such as mediation, conciliation, arbitration, Lok Adalats, and, more recently, Online Dispute Resolution (ODR), which seek to provide speedy, affordable, and less adversarial resolution of disputes.³ The enactment of the Mediation Act, 2023 further reflects India's commitment to promoting mediation as a preferred method of resolving civil and commercial disputes.⁴

From a gender justice perspective, ADR has the potential to empower women by reducing litigation costs, ensuring confidentiality, encouraging dialogue, and facilitating mutually acceptable solutions. These features make ADR particularly useful in resolving family, maintenance, custody, and certain property disputes. However, concerns remain regarding unequal bargaining power, patriarchal influences, and the possibility of unfair settlements, especially in cases involving domestic violence or economic dependence.

This chapter critically examines the role of ADR in enhancing women's access to justice in India. It analyses the constitutional and statutory framework, evaluates various ADR mechanisms, and explores the opportunities and challenges associated with their use from a gender-sensitive perspective. The chapter argues that while ADR can significantly improve access to justice for women, its effectiveness depends upon robust legal safeguards, trained mediators, institutional support, and greater legal awareness to ensure fair and equitable outcomes.

² Constitution of India, arts. 14, 15, 21 & 39A

³ *Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd.*, (2010) 8 SCC 24; Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.

⁴ Mediation Act, 2023 (Act No. 32 of 2023).

2. Constitutional and Legal Framework Governing ADR and Women's Access to Justice in India:

The constitutional and legal framework governing Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in India reflects the country's commitment to ensuring accessible, affordable, and effective justice for all, including women. The Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law and obligates the State to remove barriers that hinder access to justice. These constitutional principles, coupled with statutory enactments and judicial interventions, provide the legal foundation for promoting ADR as an effective means of dispute resolution.

2.1 Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of India lays the foundation for gender justice and equal access to justice. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws, ensuring that women receive equal legal protection in all judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings.⁵ Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, while Article 15(3) empowers the State to enact special provisions for women and children to achieve substantive equality.⁶ Further, Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, which has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to live with dignity and the right to access justice.⁷ The Directive Principle under Article 39A mandates the State to ensure that justice is not denied due to economic or other disabilities and requires the provision of free legal aid.⁸ This constitutional mandate has significantly influenced the development of ADR mechanisms such as Lok Adalats and mediation centres, which provide cost-effective and expeditious justice.

2.2 Statutory Framework

The legal recognition of ADR in India is primarily derived from various statutes that institutionalise different modes of dispute resolution.

The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 provides the principal legal framework for arbitration and conciliation in India. Enacted in accordance with the UNCITRAL Model Law, the Act aims to ensure fair, efficient, and speedy settlement of disputes while reducing judicial intervention.⁹ Although primarily commercial in nature, the Act contributes to the overall ADR

⁵ Constitution of India, arts.14.

⁶ Constitution of India, arts.15.

⁷ Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, (1978) 1 SCC 248

⁸ Constitution of India, art. 39A.

⁹ Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

ecosystem by promoting consensual dispute resolution.

The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 established Lok Adalats to provide inexpensive, speedy, and amicable settlement of disputes.¹⁰ Lok Adalats have played a significant role in resolving family disputes, maintenance claims, matrimonial conflicts, and other matters affecting women through conciliation rather than adversarial litigation.

The Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, under Section 89, empowers civil courts to refer disputes to arbitration, conciliation, mediation, or Lok Adalat whenever elements of settlement exist between the parties.¹¹ This provision reflects the legislative intent to encourage settlement outside traditional litigation and reduce the burden on courts.

A major legislative development is the enactment of the Mediation Act, 2023, which provides a comprehensive legal framework for institutional mediation in India. The Act recognises mediation as a structured and enforceable mechanism, encourages pre-litigation mediation in appropriate disputes, and seeks to promote mediation as a preferred mode of dispute resolution.¹² The legislation has the potential to enhance women's access to justice by providing a confidential, flexible, and less adversarial process for resolving family, property, workplace, and civil disputes.

The Family Courts Act, 1984 also strengthens ADR by requiring Family Courts to make efforts for reconciliation before adjudicating matrimonial and family disputes.¹³ This statutory emphasis on conciliation seeks to preserve family relationships while ensuring fair resolution of disputes.

2.3 Judicial Recognition of ADR

The Indian judiciary has consistently encouraged the use of ADR as an effective mechanism for improving access to justice. In *Salem Advocate Bar Association (II) v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure and emphasised the importance of ADR in reducing delays and facilitating speedy justice.¹⁴ Similarly, in *Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd.*, the Supreme Court clarified the scope and implementation of Section 89 CPC and laid down guidelines regarding the categories of disputes suitable for ADR.¹⁵ The Court observed that

¹⁰ Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, ss. 19–22.

¹¹ Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, s. 89.

¹² Mediation Act, 2023 (Act No. 32 of 2023).

¹³ Family Courts Act, 1984, s. 9.

¹⁴ *Salem Advocate Bar Association (II) v. Union of India*, (2005) 6 SCC 344.

¹⁵ *Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd.*, (2010) 8 SCC 24.

mediation and conciliation are particularly effective in family and relationship-based disputes, where preserving harmony is often as important as resolving legal issues.

Thus, the constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and access to justice, supported by an evolving statutory framework and proactive judicial interpretation, provide a strong legal basis for ADR in India. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these mechanisms in advancing women's access to justice depends upon gender-sensitive implementation, availability of trained mediators, legal awareness, and institutional safeguards against coercion and unequal bargaining power.

3. ADR Mechanisms in India:

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) refers to a range of mechanisms through which disputes are resolved outside the traditional court system. These mechanisms aim to provide inexpensive, expeditious, flexible, and amicable solutions while reducing the burden on courts. In India, ADR has gained significant importance through legislative reforms, judicial encouragement, and institutional support. The principal ADR mechanisms include arbitration, conciliation, mediation, Lok Adalats, negotiation, and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR). Each mechanism serves a distinct purpose and contributes to improving access to justice, particularly for women seeking timely and less adversarial resolution of disputes.

3.1 Arbitration

Arbitration is a formal ADR mechanism in which the parties voluntarily agree to submit their disputes to an impartial arbitrator whose decision, known as an arbitral award, is binding upon them. The process is governed by the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, which is based on the UNCITRAL Model Law.¹⁶ Arbitration is particularly effective in commercial, contractual, and business disputes due to its flexibility, confidentiality, and finality. However, it is generally unsuitable for disputes involving matrimonial issues, child custody, or domestic violence, where public policy considerations and personal rights are involved.¹⁷

3.2 Conciliation

Conciliation is a consensual dispute resolution process in which a neutral conciliator assists the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable settlement. Unlike an arbitrator, the conciliator may

¹⁶ Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

¹⁷ Booz Allen & Hamilton Inc. v. SBI Home Finance Ltd., (2011) 5 SCC 532.

actively propose terms of settlement to facilitate agreement. The provisions relating to conciliation are contained in Part III of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.¹⁸ Conciliation is frequently used in commercial disputes, labour disputes, and family matters where preserving relationships is an important consideration.

3.3 Mediation

Mediation is one of the most widely accepted ADR mechanisms in India. It involves the assistance of a neutral mediator who facilitates communication and negotiation between the parties without imposing a decision. The mediator's role is to help the parties voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement while maintaining confidentiality and neutrality.¹⁹

The enactment of the Mediation Act, 2023 marks a significant development in India's ADR framework by providing statutory recognition to mediation and encouraging institutional and pre-litigation mediation.²⁰ Mediation is particularly effective in resolving family disputes, maintenance claims, property disputes, workplace conflicts, and neighbourhood disputes, where preserving relationships is often desirable.

3.4 Lok Adalats

Lok Adalats constitute an important component of the Indian ADR system and are organised under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987. They are intended to provide inexpensive, speedy, and amicable settlement of disputes through compromise and conciliation.²¹ The award passed by a Lok Adalat is deemed to be a decree of a civil court and is final and binding on the parties, with no appeal ordinarily lying against it.²²

Lok Adalats have played a crucial role in resolving disputes relating to matrimonial matters, maintenance, motor accident compensation, labour issues, and public utility services. They have significantly contributed to reducing pendency in courts while promoting access to justice for economically weaker sections, including women.

3.5 Negotiation

Negotiation is the simplest and most informal method of ADR. It involves direct communication between the parties to resolve disputes without the intervention of a third party.

¹⁸ Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, Part III (ss. 61–81).

¹⁹ *Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd.*, (2010) 8 SCC 24.

²⁰ Mediation Act, 2023 (Act No. 32 of 2023).

²¹ Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, ss. 19–22.

²² Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, s. 21.

Since the outcome depends entirely on mutual consent, negotiation preserves autonomy, confidentiality, and flexibility.²³ It is often the first step in resolving family, workplace, and commercial disputes and serves as the foundation for other ADR mechanisms such as mediation and conciliation.

3.6 Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

With the advancement of technology, Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) has emerged as an innovative extension of traditional ADR. ODR utilises digital platforms to conduct negotiation, mediation, conciliation, or arbitration through video conferencing, electronic communication, and online document exchange.²⁴ It became particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when physical court functioning was severely restricted.

ODR offers several advantages, including reduced costs, accessibility, convenience, and faster resolution of disputes. For women, especially those facing mobility constraints or residing in remote areas, ODR can enhance access to justice. However, its effectiveness is limited by digital illiteracy, inadequate internet connectivity, and the digital divide affecting rural and marginalized women.²⁵

4. Role of ADR in Enhancing Women's Access to Justice in India:

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has emerged as an important instrument for improving women's access to justice by offering a more accessible, affordable, and less adversarial alternative to conventional litigation. Women often encounter barriers such as financial constraints, social stigma, lack of legal awareness, and procedural complexities that discourage them from approaching courts. In this context, ADR mechanisms facilitate timely and effective resolution of disputes while encouraging participation, dialogue, and consensual settlements. However, the effectiveness of ADR depends on ensuring that the process is fair, voluntary, and free from coercion.

4.1 Affordable and Speedy Justice

One of the most significant advantages of ADR is that it reduces the financial and procedural burdens associated with litigation. Court proceedings often involve substantial legal expenses and prolonged delays, which disproportionately affect women, particularly those who are

²³ Avtar Singh, Law of Arbitration and Conciliation (12th ed., Eastern Book Company, 2022).

²⁴ NITI Aayog, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (2021)

²⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Justice for Women: High-Level Group Report (2019).

economically dependent. ADR mechanisms such as mediation and Lok Adalats provide quicker and less expensive alternatives, enabling women to seek justice without incurring excessive costs.²⁶

4.2 Promoting Amicable Settlement of Family Disputes

Family disputes involving divorce, maintenance, child custody, inheritance, and matrimonial conflicts require solutions that preserve relationships while protecting legal rights. Mediation and conciliation encourage constructive dialogue between the parties, helping them reach mutually acceptable settlements. The Family Courts Act, 1984 also requires courts to make efforts for reconciliation before deciding family disputes, thereby recognising the importance of consensual dispute resolution.²⁷

4.3 Empowering Women Through Participation

Unlike traditional litigation, ADR allows parties to actively participate in the dispute resolution process rather than leaving the outcome entirely to the court. This participatory approach enables women to express their concerns, negotiate solutions, and make informed decisions regarding their rights. Such involvement promotes confidence, autonomy, and empowerment while reducing the adversarial nature of legal proceedings.²⁸

4.4 Confidentiality and Privacy

Many disputes involving women, particularly those relating to matrimonial issues, domestic relationships, workplace harassment, and family property, involve sensitive personal matters. Mediation and conciliation ensure confidentiality, thereby protecting the privacy and dignity of the parties. Confidential proceedings often encourage women to communicate openly without fear of public exposure or social stigma.²⁹

4.5 Improving Access Through Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)

The emergence of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) has further expanded access to justice by enabling parties to resolve disputes through digital platforms. ODR is particularly beneficial for women residing in remote areas, women with caregiving responsibilities, and those facing

²⁶ Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987; Salem Advocate Bar Association (II) v. Union of India, (2005) 6 SCC 344.

²⁷ Family Courts Act, 1984, s. 9.

²⁸ Mediation Act, 2023; Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd., (2010) 8 SCC

²⁹ Mediation Act, 2023, ss. 22–24 (confidentiality provisions).

mobility or safety concerns. By reducing travel costs and allowing virtual participation, ODR makes dispute resolution more convenient and accessible. Nevertheless, challenges such as digital illiteracy, inadequate internet connectivity, and the digital divide continue to restrict its full potential.³⁰

4.6 Challenges to Effective Access to Justice

Despite its advantages, ADR does not automatically guarantee justice for women. Power imbalances, economic dependence, patriarchal attitudes, and social pressure may compel women to accept unfair settlements, particularly in matrimonial and domestic disputes. Therefore, mediators must adopt a gender-sensitive approach and ensure that settlements are voluntary, informed, and equitable. Cases involving domestic violence or coercion require careful judicial scrutiny, as mediation should never compromise the safety or legal rights of the victim.³¹

5. Challenges and Limitations of ADR in Ensuring Women's Access to Justice:

Although Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has significantly contributed to improving access to justice, its effectiveness in protecting women's rights is not without limitations. The consensual nature of ADR, while advantageous in many cases, may also reinforce existing social and economic inequalities. Therefore, it is essential to critically examine the challenges associated with ADR from a gender-sensitive perspective.

5.1 Unequal Bargaining Power

One of the major limitations of ADR is the unequal bargaining power between parties. Women who are financially dependent or socially disadvantaged may not be able to negotiate on an equal footing with their counterparts. In family and matrimonial disputes, societal pressure and emotional dependence may compel women to accept settlements that are unfair or contrary to their legal rights.³²

³⁰ NITI Aayog, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (2021).

³¹ K. Srinivas Rao v. D.A. Deepa, (2013) 5 SCC 226

³² Constitution of India, art. 15(3); Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd., (2010) 8 SCC 24.

5.2 Patriarchal Social Norms

Patriarchal attitudes continue to influence dispute resolution processes in India. In many instances, women are encouraged to compromise in the interest of preserving family harmony, even when such compromises undermine their legal entitlements. Consequently, ADR may unintentionally perpetuate gender inequality unless mediators actively ensure fairness and equality during the proceedings.³³

5.3 Unsuitability in Cases Involving Domestic Violence

While mediation is effective in resolving many family disputes, it is not appropriate in every case. Matters involving domestic violence, coercion, sexual harassment, or serious abuse require judicial intervention and cannot always be resolved through consensual settlement. Victims may experience pressure to reconcile with the perpetrator, thereby compromising their safety and dignity. Accordingly, ADR should be used cautiously in disputes where there is a significant imbalance of power or a history of violence.³⁴

5.4 Lack of Gender-Sensitive Mediators

The success of ADR depends largely on the competence and neutrality of mediators and conciliators. However, inadequate training in gender-sensitive dispute resolution may result in unconscious bias or failure to recognise the specific vulnerabilities faced by women. Strengthening the capacity of ADR professionals through specialised training is therefore essential to ensure equitable outcomes.³⁵

5.5 Digital Divide in Online Dispute Resolution

Although Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) has expanded access to justice, its benefits are not equally available to all women. Limited digital literacy, poor internet connectivity, and inadequate access to technological resources continue to exclude many women, particularly those residing in rural and economically weaker communities. Consequently, the digital divide remains a significant obstacle to the effective implementation of ODR.³⁶

³³ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979, arts. 2 & 16.

³⁴ K. Srinivas Rao v. D.A. Deepa, (2013) 5 SCC 226

³⁵ Mediation Act, 2023; Law Commission of India, Report No. 222: Need for Justice-dispensation through ADR etc. (2009).

³⁶ NITI Aayog, Designing the Future of Dispute Resolution: The ODR Policy Plan for India (2021)

5.6 Lack of Legal Awareness

A considerable number of women remain unaware of the availability and advantages of ADR mechanisms. Limited legal literacy, combined with social and cultural barriers, often discourages women from seeking legal remedies. Awareness campaigns, legal aid programmes, and community outreach initiatives are therefore essential to enhance women's participation in ADR processes.³⁷

6. Judicial Developments on ADR and Women's Access to Justice:

The Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as an effective means of ensuring access to justice. Through a series of landmark judgments, the Supreme Court has encouraged mediation, conciliation, and Lok Adalats while emphasizing that ADR must not compromise the rights and dignity of women. The courts have consistently maintained that although amicable settlement is desirable, it should never come at the cost of justice or equality.

6.1 Salem Advocate Bar Association (II) v. Union of India

In Salem Advocate Bar Association (II) v. Union of India, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, and recognised ADR as an important tool for reducing judicial delays. The Court directed the formulation of model rules for mediation and case management, thereby strengthening the institutional framework for ADR in India. This judgment laid the foundation for court-annexed mediation centres across the country.³⁸

6.2 Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd.

The Supreme Court, in Afcons Infrastructure Ltd. v. Cherian Varkey Construction Co. (P) Ltd., clarified the scope and application of Section 89 CPC. It identified categories of disputes that are particularly suitable for mediation, including matrimonial disputes, child custody matters, partition disputes, and family conflicts. The Court observed that mediation is especially appropriate where preservation of relationships is important.³⁹ This decision has significantly influenced the referral of family disputes involving women to mediation.

³⁷ Constitution of India, art. 39A; Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.

³⁸ (2005) 6 SCC 344.

³⁹ (2010) 8 SCC 24.

6.3 K. Srinivas Rao v. D.A. Deepa

In *K. Srinivas Rao v. D.A. Deepa*, the Supreme Court emphasised that mediation should be encouraged in matrimonial disputes to reduce hostility and facilitate reconciliation wherever possible. However, the Court also cautioned that mediation must be conducted carefully, ensuring that the rights of women are adequately protected and that settlements are voluntary rather than the result of coercion or undue influence.⁴⁰

6.4 M.R. Krishna Murthi v. New India Assurance Co. Ltd.

In *M.R. Krishna Murthi v. New India Assurance Co. Ltd.*, the Supreme Court highlighted the increasing importance of mediation and recommended the enactment of comprehensive legislation governing mediation in India. The Court observed that mediation has become an integral component of access to justice and can significantly reduce the burden on courts. This judgment paved the way for the enactment of the Mediation Act, 2023.⁴¹

6.5 Judicial Approach to Gender Justice

Indian courts have consistently recognised that access to justice is a constitutional right flowing from Articles 14, 15, 21, and 39A of the Constitution. At the same time, the judiciary has cautioned that ADR should not be used to compel women to compromise in cases involving domestic violence, sexual offences, or other serious violations of fundamental rights. Courts have stressed that the voluntary nature of mediation and the protection of women's dignity must remain central to the ADR process.⁴²

7. Conclusion:

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has emerged as an indispensable component of India's justice delivery system by providing accessible, affordable, and expeditious alternatives to conventional litigation. For women, who often encounter economic, social, and procedural barriers in accessing formal courts, ADR offers significant opportunities to secure timely and effective remedies while preserving relationships and ensuring confidentiality. Mechanisms such as mediation, conciliation, Lok Adalats, and Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) have contributed to making justice more participatory, flexible, and inclusive, particularly in family, maintenance, property, and workplace disputes.

⁴⁰ (2013) 5 SCC 226.

⁴¹ (2019) 4 SCC 177.

⁴² Constitution of India, arts. 14, 15, 21 & 39A; *State of Maharashtra v. Madanlal*, (2015) 7 SCC 681

However, ADR is not without its limitations. Gender-based power imbalances, patriarchal social norms, inadequate legal awareness, and the digital divide may undermine the fairness of consensual dispute resolution processes. In disputes involving domestic violence, coercion, or serious violations of women's rights, ADR should be employed with caution to ensure that settlements are voluntary and do not compromise the safety, dignity, or legal entitlements of women. The effectiveness of ADR therefore depends upon the availability of trained and gender-sensitive mediators, strong institutional safeguards, and continuous judicial oversight. The enactment of the Mediation Act, 2023 marks a significant step towards strengthening the ADR framework in India. When implemented alongside constitutional guarantees of equality and access to justice, robust legal aid mechanisms, and increased legal awareness, ADR has the potential to transform the justice delivery system into one that is more responsive to the needs of women. Ultimately, ADR should not merely function as an alternative to litigation but as a means of achieving substantive justice, empowering women to assert their rights in an environment that is fair, equitable, and respectful of their dignity.

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