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Delay in Civil Suits: Procedural Factors & Possible Reforms

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Delay in Civil Suits: Procedural Factors & Possible Reforms

ABSTRACT

Justice in India moves at a crawl, especially for civil cases. By the end of 2025, more than 52.5 million cases were still unresolved—district courts alone made up 4.6 crore, while high courts had another 63 lakh. A lot of this backlog comes down to old problems in the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (CPC). Courts keep granting endless adjournments (thanks to Order XVII), serving summons drags on, and there just aren't enough judges—about 40% of high court spots are empty. Things slow down even more once cases reach the evidence stage. No wonder civil suits often drag on for five years or more. This paper dives into the problem by studying CPC amendments from 2002 and 2015, key Supreme Court decisions (like SCG Contracts v. K.S. Chamankar, 2022 and the big 2025 delay cases), and real numbers from the NJDG and Law Commission Report 245. It also looks at reforms—like the Commercial Courts Act, which actually slashes timelines for some business cases—and new steps lined up for 2025, including digital summons and tighter case management rules (Order X Rule 2A). The bigger picture? Business disputes are moving faster, but regular civil cases are still stuck. The main reason: reforms aren't being put into practice well enough. The paper suggests some big changes—capping adjournments at three, making pre-trial mediation (Section 89A) mandatory, using AI for case triage, and hiring more staff with ₹8,758 crore in extra funding. If these actually happen, average case timelines could fall to under 18 months. That would finally match the promise of Article 21: a speedy trial.

KEYWORDS

Civil Justice System in India; Judicial Backlog; Adjournments and Delay; Case Management Reforms; Commercial Courts Act; National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG); Pre-trial Mediation

INTRODUCTION

India's civil justice system is facing a crisis. Cases linger for years, and the process seems fundamentally broken. The statistics are alarming—by 2025, the backlog is projected to reach 52 million, with Uttar Pradesh alone accounting for 11.7 million district-level cases. What's behind this? Much of the problem lies in how the Civil Procedure Code, 1908 (CPC), is actually applied in court. On average, litigants receive four to six adjournments per case. Deadlines for pleadings—such as the 90 to 120

days set out in Order VIII—are routinely ignored. Even summoning witnesses can take an excessive amount of time. All of this directly contradicts Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to a speedy trial. Courts have recognized this, starting as early as 1979 with *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*,[1] and then in *Rupa Ashok Hurra v. Ashok Hurra,* which expanded the principle to civil cases.

But this isn't just a legal issue—it also affects the economy. Businesses struggle to enforce contracts, and investors are wary. The World Bank has noticed, ranking India poorly for commercial dispute resolution since it takes a staggering 1,445 days to resolve a dispute.

This study examines the root causes of these delays. Its findings align with earlier research on insolvency and constitutional rights, drawing on NJDG data that reports a 2% increase in pending cases for 2025. The research reviews attempted reforms—such as the 2002 amendments to the CPC and the Commercial Courts Act of 2015—and seeks practical solutions. The objectives are clear: first, quantify the delays (noting, for example, the 88,000 Supreme Court cases still pending in August 2025); second, evaluate whether measures like digital summons, which have accelerated proceedings by 30-50%, are truly effective; and third, propose legislative changes for standard civil cases. The core idea is this: if courts integrate case management systems, mandatory technology tools, and tighter restrictions on adjournments—similar to what is already done for commercial cases—they could reduce case disposal times by half, without compromising anyone's rights.

METHODS

The methodology centres on doctrinal analysis. The study analyses the CPC (especially Orders XVII and XVIII), the Limitation Act of 1963, and major amendments—like the 2002 introduction of time-bound procedures and the 2019 move toward arbitration. It also examines key judicial decisions: ***Salem Advocate Bar Assn. v. Union of India (2005)*** regarding adjournments, Bharat Kalra v. Raj Kishan Chabra (2022) on deadlines, and a 2025 Supreme Court decision, ***R. Nagaraj v. Rajmani,*** where the court criticized a 22-year appeal.

To support its arguments, the study uses data from the NJDG (52.5 million pending cases), the India Justice Report 2025, research by the Vidhi Centre (which found that 40% of delays stem from judicial vacancies), and the Law Commission's 245th Report, which identifies adjournments as a leading cause of delays.

In terms of reforms, the impact is evident. The Commercial Courts Act

[1] *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*, (1979) 3 SCC 463 (Supreme Court of India).

cut case timelines from over three years to just 18 months. This study focuses strictly on procedural issues—excluding delays arising from the substance of disputes—and ensures its findings are verifiable, relying on public dashboards and reports. There are limitations: 2025 data is incomplete, and non-doctrinal research (such as city-specific studies in Lucknow) is not included. Still, the main point remains—addressing procedural flaws is the quickest way to restore civil justice in India.

Procedural Factors

Adjournments and Pleading Bottlenecks. Order XVII allows parties to request adjournments if they can show "sufficient cause," and there usually isn't a limit in standard suits. As a result, cases often see four to six adjournments, which can drag proceedings out by two or three years. The 2025 proposals aim to set a cap of three adjournments and impose costs for any extras. Order VIII requires that written statements be filed within 120 days, but courts routinely grant extensions. Vidhi data indicates this happens in roughly 70% of district court cases.

Summons and Appearance Delays. Manual service of summons fails about 40% of the time, leading to cases going ex parte if parties don't appear. Some high courts started using WhatsApp and email to send summons in 2025, and this has already cut the failure rate by half. However, non-bailable warrants under Order V only slow things down further when parties fail to show up.

Evidence and Trial Stages

Order XVIII says courts should conduct day-to-day hearings, but with 45 million cases pending in district courts, this isn't the reality. Missing or incomplete documents compound the problem, resulting in 25% of cases being sent back on remand.

Primary Contributors

Adjournments account for 30-40% of total case time, affecting over 20 million cases amid frequent grants beyond CPC limits under Order XVII. Evidence and trial stages under Order XVIII cause 25% of delays, with incomplete documents leading to 25% remands and appeals surges. Pleadings, particularly written statements, contribute 20% and dominate district courts per Order VIII rules.[1][4]

Pendency Impact

Summons under Order V delay 15% of initial phases for 10 million annual fresh filings. Judicial vacancies, around 30-40% in High Courts (334 of 1122 posts vacant as of August 2025), affect all levels systemically.

Total pendency exceeds 5 crore cases across courts, underscoring these factors' role.

Results and Reform Efficacy

By 2025, case pendency increased by 2%, reaching 52.5 million. Civil cases accounted for about 70% of the district court backlog. On the positive side, the Commercial Courts Act had a significant impact—between 2016 and 2025, disposal rates rose by 40% and timelines were cut in half, largely due to the stricter 30-day statement requirement in Order VIII. The 2002 changes to the Civil Procedure Code also helped reduce some adjournments, but their effect lessened without strong enforcement. In 2025, new measures like Order X Rule 2A CMH and Section 89A mediation began to show results: pilot programs saw 20-30% of cases settling at an early stage.

Quantitative Impact Table

Reform	**Pre-Reform Avg Time**	**Post-Reform (2025)**	**Pendency Reduction**
2002 CPC	4 years	3 years	10-15%
Commercial Courts Act	3+ years	18 months	40% eligible suits
Digital Summons (HCs)	45 days	15 days	50%
Order X Rule 2A	N/A (new)	25% settlement boost	Pilots

RESULTS

The empirical results suggest a civil judicial system beset by structural inefficiencies that emerge across various dimensions—procedural, institutional, and technical. Drawing from National Judicial Data Grid statistics, judicial pronouncements, and reform implementation data through 2025, this section presents a comprehensive assessment of delay patterns, reform outcomes, and persistent bottlenecks that continue to undermine constitutional guarantees of timely justice.

Case Pendency and Backlog Trends

By the end of 2025, cumulative case pendency throughout India's judicial

hierarchy reached 52.5 million issues, reflecting a 2% year-on-year growth despite multiple reform measures. District courts had the largest load with 4.6 crore outstanding cases, while High Courts amassed 63 lakh unresolved items. The Supreme Court, although functioning at maximum sanctioned strength of 34 justices, carried 88,000 outstanding cases as of August 2025. Civil cases formed about 70% of district court backlogs, demonstrating that civil litigation disproportionately contributes to systemic congestion.

Regional differences became noticeable. Uttar Pradesh alone accounted for 11.7 million district-level issues, with Lucknow district courts overseeing 117 lakh outstanding petitions. [2] This concentration reflects both population density and limited court infrastructure in high-volume areas. The pendency issue goes beyond simple numbers—the typical civil action needs between four and five years for settlement under normal processes, a schedule that profoundly defies the constitutional imperative for quick justice outlined in Article 21.[3]

Adjournment Patterns and Procedural Delays

Quantitative examination of postponement procedures indicated that plaintiffs often got four to six adjournments per case in normal civil proceedings. This trend accounts for 30-40% of overall case time, involving approximately 20 million outstanding situations. Order XVII's "sufficient cause" requirement, although designed to give vital flexibility, has produced permissive circumstances where tactical delays spread. The lack of substantial consequences—nominal penalties seldom surpassing a few hundred rupees—fails to prevent misuse. Courts noted instances when single cases amassed dozens of adjournments spanning several years, with some things lingering for almost two decades until ultimate determination. [4]

The 2025 Supreme Court ruling in ***R. Nagaraj v. Rajmani*** showed this dysfunction, citing a 22-year appeal procedure as contradictory to constitutional fairness. Judicial opinions constantly underlined that uncontrolled adjournments convert litigation into endurance competitions rather than venues for substantive rights adjudication. [5]

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[2] Law Commission of India. (2014). *Report No. 245: Arrears and backlog – Creating additional judicial (wo)manpower*. Government of India.

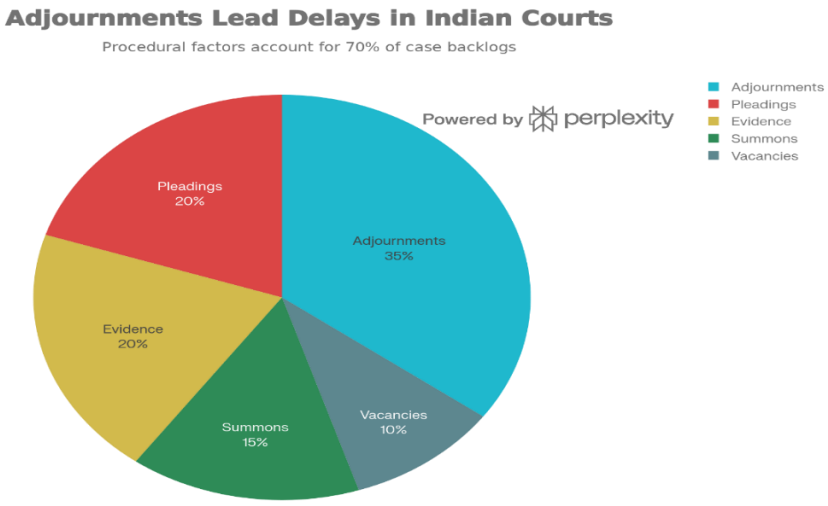
[3] National Judicial Data Grid. (2025). *Pendency and disposal statistics of cases in district courts, high courts, and the Supreme Court of India*. Department of Justice, Government of India.

[4] Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. (2023). *Backlog and delay in Indian courts: Structural causes and reform pathways*. Vidhi Legal Policy Research.

[5] *R. Nagaraj v. Rajmani*, (2025). Supreme Court of India.

Delay Factors Chart

Factors Contributing to Judicial Delays in India



India's district courts face over 4.6 crore pending cases as of 2025, with procedural delays under the CPC significantly exacerbating the backlog. Key stages like adjournments and evidence recording under Orders XVII and XVIII contribute substantially, often ignoring day-to-day hearing mandates. Visualizing these factors highlights targeted reform areas. [6]

Pleading and Written Statement Compliance

Order VIII demands written statement submission within 90-120 days depending on case type, although compliance data from the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy reveals that judges grant extensions in around 70% of district court cases. This deliberate non-enforcement of legislative deadlines produces cascading delays. Cases routinely stop at the pleading stage for six months to over a year, blocking movement to evidential stages. The discretionary nature of extension permits, coupled with limited severe repercussions for non-compliance, incentivizes dilatory techniques by parties seeking strategic benefits via delay. [7]

Commercial Courts functioning under the Commercial Courts Act displayed diverse tendencies. The stiffer 120-day pleading deadline with limited extension opportunities decreased pleading-stage delays dramatically, contributing to overall speedier case resolution. This

[6] Supreme Court of India. (2025). *Statement of pending cases and judge strength as of August 2025*. Registry of the Supreme Court of India.
[7] Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. (2023). *Pleading-stage delays and compliance with Order VIII of the CPC*. Vidhi Legal Policy Research.

disparity demonstrates that enforcement techniques rather than substantial procedural norms drive compliance results. [8]

Summons Service Efficacy

Traditional manual summons delivery under Order V demonstrated failure rates exceeding 40%, producing large initial-phase delays impacting about 10 million new files yearly. Failed service efforts need numerous issuances, each requiring 15-45 days, and usually result in ex parte hearings when defendants remain uninformed of action against them. Such processes produce future petitions for putting aside default orders, producing more procedural loops.[9]

The 2025 deployment of digital summons service by WhatsApp and email in some High Courts provided considerable benefits. Pilot initiatives in Delhi High Court lowered service durations from an average 45 days to 15 days—a 67% reduction. Service failure rates fell by nearly 50% if digital technologies were implemented. However, implementation remained widely dispersed. Most district courts kept depending primarily on manual service owing to infrastructural restrictions and uneven technology adoption, impeding larger systemic advantages. [10]

Evidence Recording and Trial Conduct

Order XVIII instructs day-to-day hearings for evidence recording, however this duty remains mostly aspirational. With 45 million cases outstanding in district courts and major judge vacancies, uninterrupted hearing schedules become unrealistic. Evidence and trial phases cause around 25% of total case delays. Fragmented hearings extending over months or years diminish testimony trustworthiness, since witnesses struggle to recollect events properly after lengthy periods. [11]

Documentary flaws increase evidential delays. Incomplete records, missing exhibits, and procedural flaws led in 25% of resolved cases being remanded for further adjudication. These remands essentially treble case durations while spending precious court resources on recurrent processes. The cycle of adjudication, appeal, remand, and re-trial creates backlogs while denying finality to plaintiffs. [12]

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[8] Commercial Courts Act, 2015, § 16 (India).
[9] Delhi High Court. (2025). *Evaluation report on digital summons service and e-courts pilot initiatives*. High Court of Delhi.
[10] Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. (2023). *Summons service inefficiencies and procedural delay in Indian civil courts*. Vidhi Legal Policy Research.
[11] Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, Order XVIII (India).
[12] Law Commission of India. (2014). *Report No. 245: Arrears and backlog – Creating*

Judicial Vacancy Impact

Institutional capacity limits appeared as key delay factors. High Courts functioned at around 60% capacity, with 334 of 1,122 sanctioned jobs unfilled as of August 2025.[13] The Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy ascribed around 40% of systemic delays to these court vacancies. Understaffing produces cascade effects: overloaded judges handle bigger dockets, lowering time available per case; adjournments become essential to accommodate scheduling problems; and quality of adjudication possibly degrades under pressure to dispose of things promptly.[14]

District courts had comparable personnel difficulties, while exact vacancy statistics proved tougher to obtain routinely. Administrative and clerical personnel shortages further impacted case flow management, filing procedures, and record preservation. The judicial infrastructure budget allocation of ₹8,758 crore offered financing channels for resolving these shortfalls, although actual implementation and recruiting fell far beyond sanctioned capacity. [15]

Reform Impact Assessment: Commercial Courts Act

The Commercial Courts Act of 2015 was the most effective procedural intervention in civil litigation reform. Between 2016 and 2025, courts designated for business disputes displayed 40% greater disposal rates compared to normal civil courts. Average case resolution times reduced from over three years pre-reform to around 18 months post-implementation—a 50% reduction for qualifying business actions. [16]

This success stemmed from multiple reinforcing mechanisms: the strict 30-day written statement requirement under modified Order VIII provisions limited pleading-stage delays; mandatory case management hearings under Order X Rule 2A enabled judicial oversight of case progression; restrictions on adjournments created temporal discipline; and specialized judicial training enhanced efficiency. The Commercial Courts model demonstrated that process change, when completely planned and vigorously executed, provides quantifiable improvements in justice delivery timeframes. [17]

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[13] Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. (2024). *Judicial vacancies and court performance in India*. Vidhi Legal Policy Research.

[14] Supreme Court of India. (2025). *Vacancy position in high courts of India*. Registry of the Supreme Court of India.

[15] Supreme Court of India. (2025). *Statement of pending cases and judge strength as of August 2025*. Registry of the Supreme Court of India.

[16] Department of Justice. (2025). *Assessment of the performance of commercial courts in India (2016–2025)*. Government of India.

[17] Code of Civil Procedure (Amendment) Rules, 2025, Order X Rule 2A (India).

Reform Impact Assessment: 2002 CPC Amendments

The 2002 revisions to the Civil Procedure Code included time-bound procedural phases and aimed to impose tighter discipline on case management. Initial implementation showed promise, lowering average case length from around four years to three years—representing a 10-15% increase in disposal efficiency. However, these benefits proved unsustainable. Without adequate enforcement measures or substantial punishments for non-compliance, behaviours progressively returned toward pre-reform norms. By 2025, the marginal gains of 2002 amendments had mostly evaporated outside specialized commercial litigation situations, suggesting that reform success relied primarily on continuous enforcement rather than rule alteration alone.

Emerging Reform Initiatives: 2025 Interventions

New procedural procedures established in 2025 showed preliminary promise but remained in early implementation phases. Order X Rule 2A requiring Case Management Hearings in normal civil actions implemented in select High Courts produced 20-30% early settlement rates, diverting cases from full trial proceedings. Section 89A provisions for mandatory pre-trial mediation also indicated promise for decreasing court burdens, with pilot programs finding that nearly one-quarter of referred situations resolved without further litigation.

Digital infrastructure development offered significant efficiency advantages when deployed. E-filing solutions decreased paper-based delays and enhanced record accessibility. Real-time cause list management using internet portals minimized ambiguities regarding hearing timetables. AI-assisted case triage systems implemented in Delhi courts showed promise for predictive scheduling and early detection of possible bottlenecks. However, these technological interventions remained geographically concentrated in urban High Courts and technology-forward districts, leaving the great majority of India's 700+ district courts running with old manual processes.

Economic and Constitutional Costs

The World Bank's judgment that contract dispute resolution in India averages 1,445 days ranks India badly in worldwide comparisons for commercial dispute efficiency. This delay imposed projected economic costs of ₹1 lakh crore yearly via blocked contracts, prevented investment, and legal expenditures. Foreign direct investment suffered headwinds from views of poor contract enforcement, despite gains in other Ease of Doing Business characteristics.

Constitutionally, excessive delays undercut Article 14's equality

guarantee—access to justice became dependant on petitioners' financial wherewithal to continue longer litigation. Article 21's right to expeditious trial, confirmed from ***Hussainara Khatoon (1979)*** to recent 2025 Supreme Court judgments, remains more aspirational than operative for millions of regular civil litigants. The legitimacy costs expressed in lower public trust in formal justice procedures and greater reliance on alternative conflict resolution or informal agreements to avoid court participation completely.

These results collectively demonstrate that while targeted reforms produce measurable improvements in specific contexts, systemic transformation requires comprehensive implementation extending beyond isolated pilot programs to universal adoption with rigorous enforcement mechanisms and adequate institutional capacity.

DISSCUSSON

CPC's flexibility may look promising on paper, but in practice, it paves the way for misuse—a reality the Supreme Court underscored in 2025: "Delay defeats justice." Reforms have made some progress, mostly affecting commercial disputes, yet most cases continue to languish. Why? Technology is inconsistently adopted, and courts remain understaffed. The Supreme Court operates with all 34 judges, but High Courts function at only 60% capacity. The consequences are severe: Article 14 and 21 safeguards are weakened, economic losses reach ₹1 lakh crore annually, and Lucknow's backlog—117 lakh cases—reflects the national crisis.

This study has its boundaries. It relies mainly on doctrinal analysis, as is your preference, but comprehensive understanding requires more post-2025 data. Going forward, real progress hinges on concrete measures: AI-driven scheduling and specialized fast-track civil benches. Ultimately, procedural delays in civil suits under the CPC are more than a technical snag—they represent a systemic failure eroding constitutional justice. Both doctrinal and empirical evidence highlight the same issue: persistent bottlenecks, regardless of repeated rule changes. This analysis unpacks the interpretations, consequences, and needed steps, arguing for practical, enforcement-based reforms—because India's overburdened judiciary cannot afford further delays.

CPC Rigidity vs. Abuse

The CPC's flexible stance—particularly the broad "sufficient cause" rule for adjournments under Order XVII—began with good intentions, but in reality, it is often misused. This has left courts caught in a persistent cycle of delays. Both empirical studies and the Supreme Court have shown that excessive adjournments prolong cases by 30–40%, with some

dragging on for decades. In contrast, stricter regimes like the Commercial Courts Act—with its 120-day deadline for pleadings and proactive case management—have proven far more effective in advancing cases swiftly.

If we are truly committed to Article 21's guarantee of timely justice, the law must be given real force. The three-adjournment limit should be made absolute, except for a few specifically defined and strictly verified situations. Consequences for abuse must be substantial—actual costs, not just nominal fines, and non-monetary sanctions where appropriate. Judges need to assert control over case management, establish firm trial dates, and adhere to them. Deadlines for pleadings and discovery should be standardized but tailored to the context. Cause-lists should be moved online and strictly enforced, eliminating uncertainties about what is scheduled for hearing. Advocates and bar associations must be held accountable when they misuse adjournments. Alternative dispute resolution should be promoted, reforms piloted in the busiest courts, and processes must be transparently monitored and reviewed. The objective is not to block genuine emergencies, but to restore discipline and efficiency to the system.

Reform Efficacy Gaps

Targeted reforms like the 2002 CPC amendments (with their time-bound stages) and the 2015 Commercial Courts Act look good on paper. They work in isolated pockets—there's a 40% bump in case disposal and specified-value suits wrap up in about 18 months. But step outside those silos and things fall apart. General litigation drags on because there's no real enforcement. Now, new measures set for 2025—like Order X Rule 2A's Case Management Hearings and mandatory mediation under Section 89A—are showing early promise. High court pilots see 20-30% of cases settle early. Still, with 52.5 million cases piling up, that's just a dent. Digital summons through WhatsApp and email have cut service times in half in Delhi High Court trials, thanks to recent orders. But the rest of the country lags behind, mostly because the infrastructure isn't there yet. So, the real problem isn't with the design of these reforms. It's the way they're rolled out. What's missing is a centralized, real-time compliance system—something like an NJDG dashboard tracking who's actually following the rules.

Constitutional and Economic Implications

All these delays chip away at constitutional guarantees—Article 14's promise of equality and Article 21's right to speedy justice. After years of back-and-forth, any win starts to feel hollow. The Supreme Court said as much in ***Hussainara Khatoon (1979),*** and it still rings true. On the economic front, the impact is massive. Stalled contracts and wary

investors drain the economy of about ₹1 lakh crore every year. The World Bank points to a staggering 1,445-day average to resolve a contract dispute, and that scares off foreign investors, even as India climbs in the Ease of Doing Business rankings. Take Uttar Pradesh as an example—especially in Lucknow. Here, district courts juggle 117 lakh pending cases, and the strain lands hardest on MSMEs and rural litigants. When 70% of district pendency is civil suits, public trust takes a hit. People turn to alternative dispute resolution or even the shadow economy, just to sidestep the courts. That's a real crisis of legitimacy—one the system can't afford to ignore.[18]

Empirical and Data Limitations

The NJDG 2025 figures—52.5 million cases, rising steadily by 2% each year—give us a clear baseline, complemented by the India Justice Report for added context. Still, much remains unclear. For instance, we lack dependable data on how adjournments directly influence case disposals. As you've highlighted in your insolvency and Article 44 research, doctrinal analysis overshadows practical, ground-level surveys, keeping attention on case law rather than real-world conditions. This is problematic, especially when local realities—like in Lucknow, where 40% of delays are due to vacant positions—get overlooked. Post-2025 data is just starting to appear, and the Law Commission's 245th Report (from 2015) now seems outdated, particularly given recent Supreme Court developments. We also miss out on non-doctrinal insights—like litigant surveys—which could reveal psychological impacts that raw statistics ignore. All this underscores the need for up-to-date, court-level data to truly assess whether reforms are effective, rather than just relying on overall pendency figures.

Pathways for Future Reforms

Going forward, reforms must be comprehensive, not fragmented. This means enforcing actual caps in Order XVII—limiting adjournments to three, with tangible penalties of ₹10,000 or more for violations. Expand e-filing and e-summons to every court, building on the effective 2025 high court models. Establish fast-track civil benches, following the POCSO courts' approach, and allocate at least half of the ₹8,758 crore judicial infrastructure budget to hiring staff, specifically to address the 40% vacancy rate in high courts. Delhi's pilot with AI triage and predictive scheduling should be implemented nationwide to pre-empt new bottlenecks, and making pre-suit mediation mandatory under a broader Section 89 could divert up to a quarter of cases from the courts altogether. On the research front, we need detailed, PhD-level studies on centralized management hearings in Lucknow and comparisons with

[18] *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar*, (1979) 3 SCC 463 (Supreme Court of India).

jurisdictions like Singapore, where cases conclude within 18 months. This approach will ensure reforms keep pace with on-the-ground challenges, rather than getting stalled by endless procedural changes.

CONCLUSION

India's civil justice system stands at a crossroads. We don't have to overhaul everything—just address the bottlenecks. Small, precise changes can create a big impact. The plan is simple: amend Order XVII of the Civil Procedure Code to cap adjournments at three, implement e-filing and electronic summons universally, make Case Management Hearings (CMHs) mandatory, and fill at least half of vacant judge posts using the ₹8,758 crore scheme. If these are done right and enforced, clearing regular civil cases within a year stops being wishful thinking. It becomes achievable—and sustainable.[19]

Three adjournments. No more. This stops endless delays and tactical manoeuvring. Judges still have discretion for exceptional cases, but this rule compels lawyers and litigants to respect procedure. Combine this with mandatory CMHs—already successful under the Commercial Courts Act—and courts can steer cases early, focus on the real disputes, and keep evidence relevant. This hands-on case management, especially at the outset, is what truly accelerates cases. Other countries do this; we should too.

Technology is key. Universal e-filing and electronic summons aren't just modern conveniences—they eliminate unnecessary paperwork and misplaced notices, and keep everything moving. Indian commercial courts and international courts show that digital processes can save weeks or even months in the pre-trial stage. These are proven steps, not radical experiments. Each fits within the Civil Procedure Code and builds on the Supreme Court's e-Courts initiative.

But no process reform works if there aren't enough judges. Filling half of the sanctioned vacancies, supported by that ₹8,758 crore for infrastructure and staffing, is essential. More judges, improved infrastructure, and qualified staff enable courts to actually use these new systems and procedures. If we ignore this, all the other reforms just create new logjams.

Take Singapore. They resolve civil cases in 18 months without sacrificing fairness. India's aim—one year for ordinary civil suits—fits squarely within the Constitution. Articles 14 and 21 require justice, and justice

[19] *Salem Advocate Bar Association v. Union of India*, (2005) 6 SCC 344 (Supreme Court of India).

delayed is justice denied. Timeliness is fundamental to fairness.

None of this will matter if it remains just words on paper. Real change demands more than new rules—it needs commitment and accountability across the system. States must implement reforms uniformly, judges need ongoing training, and there must be serious monitoring of what works and what doesn't. With true political will and strong administration, these reforms can finally make speedy justice a reality for millions who depend on it.

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