PENDENCY OF CASES IN INDIAN JUDICIARY- A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

By Shivangi Bhattacharya
From KIIT School of Law

JUSTICE DELAYED IS JUSTICE DENIED

The Justice System in India is governed by the Common Law System. This System of legal jurisdiction is mostly based on precedents and case laws. The decisions of the courts and tribunals serve as a backbone of the Justice System in India. India, being the seventh largest country in the world boasts of second largest population and the largest Constitution. One of the consequences of huge population is the staggering amount of cases that are pending in the dockets of its judicial system. The judiciary system is planned as per the requirements of the citizen at large and with proper allocation of courts. One of the major failures faced by the Indian Judiciary system is the enormous number of pending cases in each division of courts. This issue of Pendency has made the process of administering speedy trial and providing justice to the mass very sluggish. The main purpose and objective of this study is sharing the knowledge of the uprising issue of declining efficiency of the Judiciary in India and the various legal and administrative ambiguity responsible for such delay in providing justice. There are many case laws that support the need of fair and speedy trial and there are petitions filed against delay in proceedings of one court in another court. This obstacle of pendency acts as a shackle, holding back the Indian Judiciary to make a difference. It is known, that India falls under the concept of developing country but to be distinguished under the notion of first world country, India has to ameliorate the speed and process of delivering justice.

The Supreme Court of India is the highest court of appeal in the Hierarchy which is at the national level established under Article 124 of Constitution of India. The Supreme Court acts as the apex court, the court of records situated at New Delhi. According to the figures provided by the Law Ministry, the Supreme Court had approximately 59,468 cases as on February 2016. A recent data released by the same source notes the latest pendency figures which shows nearly 48,418 Civil cases are pending in Supreme Court out of which 1,132 cases are pending more than 10 years. A data published by the Press Information Bureau says that there are roughly 11,050 Criminal cases pending as on 19.02.16.

At State level we have High Courts for the respective states. There are currently 24 High Courts in India out of 29 states. The High Courts accept appeals from lower courts, District Courts and writ petitions in terms of Article 226 of Constitution of India. When speaking about pending cases in High Courts, Allahabad High Court has the largest Number of pending cases exceeding 9,00,000 cases in 2016 and 2017.

1 48,418 civil cases and 11,050 criminal cases
3 A nodal agency of Government of India.
4 Article 226 gives the High Court power to issue writs.

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According to National Judicial Data Grid\(^5\), there were over 4.2 million cases pending in 24 High Courts of India as on February 2018, among which 49% of the cases are more than five years old. In terms of increase in number of pending cases, Karnataka High Court is the most stressed court with an increase in pendency of 36,479 cases, followed by Hyderabad, Punjab and Haryana. By a report released by Ministry of Law and Justice, 31,16,492 civil cases are pending in the High Courts of which more than 5,89,631 cases are pending for more than 10 years. The number of criminal cases pending in high courts for more than 10 years is 18,799. It is stated that the Chief Justices’ Conference held on 3\(^{rd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) April, 2015 has resolved that each High Court shall establish an Arrears Committee to clear the backlog of cases pending for more than 5 years. According to a report released by Centre for Public Policy Research and British Deputy High Commission, a total of 16,884 commercial disputes are pending in High Courts with original jurisdiction. Out of which Madras High Court tops with 5865 cases, around 2.7 crore cases are pending in District and Subordinate Courts. Figures provided by National Judicial Data Grid as on December 2015, 2.6 crore cases are pending in Lower Courts of which 41.38% cases have been pending for less than two years and 10.83% have been pending for over 10 years.

There are numerous reasons, both direct and indirect, which contribute to the enormous pendency within courts and tribunals, and the lengthy process of seeking justice in India\(^6\). Some of these reasons are captured as below:

**AMBIGUOUS LEGAL PROVISIONS:**
Prime Minister Modi rightly said addressing a valedictory function of the Advocates Association of western India, “At the root of pendency of cases are laws that have 10 interpretations. There is shortage of quality manpower for drafting laws”\(^7\)

We have several Indian legal provisions which are vague and ambiguous, they have more than one interpretations and hence it takes time for the judge to interpret it the correct way as applicable to the respective case. The provision of Section 497 of Indian Penal Code which is currently a topic of debate if the provision is vague or not. The mentioned law of Adultery violates Article 14 of the Constitution. Under the said section, only men will be liable for committing adultery and not the woman. This provision is said to be a sexist provision. On the other hand Adultery is also a ground for filing divorce for a woman hence it violates the right to Personal life and Liberty. In the vast field of Indian law, this provision is very much debated on.

**RECI PROCITY IN TERMS OF MULTIPLE CASES FILED AND JUSTICE SERVED:** Sometimes there are multiple cases filed for one cause of action. There should be a proper data base to compound

\(^5\) A public access portal launched by the SC as a step towards demystification of judicial process for the ordinary citizen so as to find out what ails the justice delivery system across India.

\(^6\) Description of the pendency and figures associated with it are provided in Introduction of the project at pg-1

\(^7\) Published Feb. 14, 2015. (Aug, 02, 2018, 10:15 AM)  
such cases filed in accordance to the cause of action required which will thereby help the judiciary to stop accepting such repetitive cases. For an example if there is a case for Section 378, Theft and there is another case for Section 351, Assault; where it was seen that both the offenses took place together and there is one cause of action for both the cases. In such a situation there should be only one case. If there is a record provided then more than one cases file for the same cause of action can be rejected straightaway by the judge and justice would be served in no time. This would help in speeding up the trial as well as reducing the burden of cases on judiciary.

UNFILLED VACANCIES IN COURTS:

There are not enough judges in the courts provided to administer justice and settle disputes among the citizen. In 2014 the ratio of judges to population was reportedly 17.48 judges to per million people. The Law Commission Report in 1987 recommended at least 50 to 1 million and the population has increased by over 25 crore since 1987. The Centre says that the State should take the lead in increasing the number of judges on the other hand the State says that the Centre should do so. As the tug-of-war goes on, judges remain in scarcity and litigant remain in jail. There has always been a power battle between the Judiciary and Executive regarding appointment of Judges to Supreme Court and also some High Courts. A new Memorandum of Procedure was established which gave the Centre the power to reject any name on the ground of national security, this memorandum was shot down by the Supreme Court. Consequently, the disposal rate of high courts and subordinate courts decreased over the past years. To end the delay it was decided to stick by the old procedure of selection wherein the selected names would be sent to the Information Bureau (IB) for vetting. It is only after the IB vets and approves the recommendations that the list reaches the Centre for a final approval.

Addressing this process, the then Chief Justice Of India, T.S. Thakur said:

“While we (judiciary) remain keen to ensure that judges’ appointments are made quickly, the machinery involved with the appointment of judges continues to grind very slowly. The confidence of people on the judiciary has, over the years, multiplied. Over three crore cases are pending in various courts across the country. Access to justice is a fundamental right and the government cannot afford to deny the people their fundamental right”.

A major loophole that is being ignored amongst everything is that only 170 names were provided as opposed to the need of 462 judges.

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11. Investigate thoroughly in order to ensure that a person is suitable for a certain job.
TECHNOLOGICALLY VOID & INADEQUATE COURT ROOMS: India needs more court rooms and more benches. Indian Judiciary has insufficient resources. Both Centre and States have not shown interest in spending with respect to Judiciary. Modernization and computerization have not reached all courts. There are huge number of cases pending in Supreme Court, High Courts as well as in Lower Courts for more than 10 years in India as evident from the previous figures, and simple logistics suggests that with more number of courts and judges the problem of pendency could be mitigated. For an increase in the same, the Judiciary needs fund and for decades now the Indian Judiciary has survived on low monetary allocation ranging from 0.2% to 0.4% of the Annual Budget. Moreover, the fund available has never been utilized properly for example, The Union Budget for 2017-2018 had earmarked Rs. 1174/- crore for the Judiciary and the Supreme Court was allocated only Rs.247.06 crore, which included administrative expenditure, salaries and travel expenses for Chief Justice and other Judges, Office and Security equipment, Maintenance of CCTV and court rooms and preparation of annual report of the court. Senior advocate and former President of Supreme Court Bar Association, Rupinder Singh Suri told India Legal:

“Has the judiciary utilized whatever funds it has been allocated? The answer is ‘no’. They have not even spent the meager amount that has come. If you spend less than what has been allotted to you, then next year that much less amount is allotted to you in the budget. How can they justifiably ask for more money when they have not spent the amount allotted properly and sensibly?”

VEXATIOUS LITIGATION: An interesting reason behind the cause is rise in number of Vexatious Litigation. Somewhere at some point, increase in literacy and living standards of people give rise to the growth of aimless lawsuits being filed daily. Where the right to justice is misused by filing cases just for the purpose of personal rivalry or to satisfy ego problems or in some case family issues, where court has merely any participation, is nothing but means of wasting time of the court by indiscriminate use of writ jurisdiction. Courts in all over India has millions of cases pending which suggests that there are millions of people who are actually waiting for justice, people who are in jail for more than what their punishment should have been, people who are fighting day and night for their land and getting nothing for years, and on the other hand we have people who waste the time of the court by filing false cases. Laws against vexatious litigation already exist in 2 states - in Maharashtra as Maharashtra Vexatious Litigation (Prevention) Act, 1971 and in Tamil Nadu as Madras Vexatious Litigation (Prevention) Act, 1949. The Law Commission had proposed a similar legislation for the whole country, but the arguments rooted in the idea that a Court’s time should not be taken up by those who persistently litigate without a justifiable

13 Annual financial statement presenting the Government’s proposed revenues and expenditure for a financial year.

cause. India’s high courts and Supreme Court already have certain basic safeguards against petitions that have no reasonable ground. Indian Law has incorporated provision to strike out civil plea that may be unnecessary, frivolous, or vexatious, or that may abuse the process of court by the Code of Civil Procedure. If a criminal litigation is filed before the magistrate without a reasonable cause, Section 250 of the Code of Criminal Procedure enables the magistrate to order the magistrate to pay compensation to the accused. The official litigation fee is usually around Rs. 2000 but the Bombay High Court at times charge Rs. 50,000 as a potential fine for filing vexatious petitions and for wasting the court’s time. The 2005 Law Commission report claimed that a national law to prevent vexatious litigation is important for “public good” because such a law would impose restrictions on a “vexatious” person’s “access to justice”.

FREQUENT ADJOURNMENT: The Civil Procedure Code, 1908 mentions and directs about the rule of adjournment in Section 309, Order XVII Rule 1 which says that: The Court may, if sufficient cause is shown, at any stage of the suit grant time to the parties or to any of them, and may from time to time adjourn the hearing of the suit for reason to be recorded in writing: Provided that no such adjournment shall be granted more than three times to a party during hearing of the suit.

The laid down procedure of allowing maximum of three adjournments per case is not followed in over 50% of the matters being heard by courts, leading to rise in pendency of cases. The task forces set up by the government to suggest changes in judicial procedures for faster disposal of commercial disputes and to improve the country’s ranking in the World Bank Index of doing business. According to a news data, in Rajasthan, the average number of adjournments granted in district and subordinate courts range from 12-42 in civil cases; In Odisha it is 151 in civil cases and 33 in criminal cases. Adjournments on fragile grounds are one of the reasons for heavy pendency of cases. By granting daily adjournments, the judges degrade the importance of the needed remedy. It is no more called justice when the justice is not delivered in proper time and at a proper pace.

An official of Ministry of Law and Justice said, “Imposing costs and fixing a time-frame for disposing of cases will overcome the challenges in the system”.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT- THE LARGEST LITIGANT: The government is the largest litigant in India, responsible for nearly half of the pending cases. Many of them are actually one department of the government suing another, leaving decision making to the courts. Also in most of the cases when the government files a case it is

15 Commercial dispute means material disputes relating to price, invoice, terms, quantity, delivery of claims or arising out of any transaction.

16 Lawsuits usually dealing with contracts or torts related matters. E.g Negligence.

seen that the government side fails to prove the point. Justice T S Thakur, the senior most judge of the Supreme Court criticized the government for being the “biggest litigant” saying that large number of cases against it “cannot be a good sign of good governance”. The government faces 369 \(^{19}\) contempt cases across courts in India as the biggest litigator in the country. According to June 2017 data, a total of 135060 government cases and 369 contempt cases were pending in the courts. The Railway Ministry tops the chart with the maximum number of contempt of court cases pending against it. After the Railways, which has 241 cases it has the Ministry Of Home Affairs with 68 cases and the Ministry Of Communication has 21 cases of contempt pending. As per a data released by a news channel on June 2017, Railways have the highest number of cases pending, 66685 cases followed by the Ministry of Finance with 15646. The Ministry Of Panchayati Raj with only 3 pending cases is the least of all.

Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said “Government must cease to be a compulsive litigant...the judiciary has to spend its maximum time in tackling cases where the government is a party, and the burden on the judiciary can only be reduced if the cases are filed after taking a careful and considered view.”\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) Example of contempt cases are willful disobedience of the order of the court.

working of the Supreme Court leisurely and clumsy which leads to pendency of important cases for decades.

IS JUSTICE DELAYED AN INFRINGEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT?

Article 21 of the Constitution of India protects the right to fair and speedy trial. It reads as: “Protection Of Life and Liberty: - No person shall be deprived of his life and personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.”

Every citizen of India has the right to have a fair and speedy trial. This saying has been even strengthened by the judgment pronounced by the landmark case of Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India. The apex court said that article 21 imposed restriction upon the state where it prescribed a procedure for depriving a person of his personal life or liberty. Pendency of cases in one of the causes due to which the fair and speedy trial policy is highly hindered. Due to lakhs and crores of cases pending in the courts of India, a major percentage of citizen of India does not get the privilege of speedy trial which is justice delayed. In reference to pending appeals of bail, the case of Smt. Akhtari Bi v. State of Madhya Pradesh, which said that if an appeal is not hears for 5 years, not including the delay for which accused himself is responsible, the bail should be granted normally. When talking about denial of speedy trial, the landmark case of Abdul Rehman Antulay and ors v. R.S. Nayak and ors. must be spoken of. Under the mentioned case it was held that right to speedy trial is a fundamental right being a part and parcel of Article 21. It also added that in case of violation of right to speedy trial, a higher court can direct conclusion of proceedings in a fixed time other than quashing it. With regard to the issue of denial of fair trial, a very important quote from the judgment of Hussainara Khatoon Case 1979 is:

“The poor in their contact with the legal system have always been on the wrong side of the law. They have always come across law for the poor rather than law of the poor.”

The Hussainara Khatoon judgement also cited the very important Maneka Gandhi Case. The brief fact of the Hussainara Khatoon case is an issue regarding release of under-trial prisoners in Bihar, some of whom had been imprisoned for a longer term than the maximum period of punishment under the law, waiting for the trial. The court ordered immediate release of the prisoners so mentioned. This appeal for which this case is regarded as a landmark is in the light of Article 21. There is no doubt that under trial prisoners should not be neglected in jails because of their bail refusal or their monetary incapacity. Trials

26 Provision for Right to personal life and liberty.
of these accused should be disposed of early as possible by orders from subordinate courts where such functioning is overseen by the High Court of the respective state. Destituted of personal liberty and not ensuring speedy trial in inconsistent with Article 21. Even though liberty can be hampered for some period once an accused is arrested but that period must not last long if he is proven not guilty. Lastly, mention must be made of Noor Mohammed v. Jethanand and anr\(^\text{27}\) where it is mentioned that timely delivery of justice is a part of human right and denial of such right is a threat to public conference in the administration of justice.

The Indian Democracy today has a population of 133.42 crores\(^\text{28}\) approximately as on 2016 which is the second largest in the world after China and a total of 29 states & 7 union territories. Against the entire 133.42 population there is only one Central Judiciary (1Apex Court, 24 High Courts & few more than 5000 subordinate courts) to cater to their needs. This makes the ratio of judges to the population severely low. In addition to this as discussed earlier there are vacancy of judges and the present acting judges of Supreme Court and High Courts stay on leave fir the majority of their working period. As a result, the judicial system though capable enough, fails drastically in administering justice and amounts to a huge number of backlog cases. There is no doubt upon the integrity of the judiciary, it has the lengthiest constitution with all possible criminal laws and civil laws, new amendments and new acts evolved with changing times. Among all other constitutions, Indian constitution has been amended the most as laid down by the landmark Keshvananda Bharati Judgment\(^\text{29}\) that Indian Constitution can be amended to an extend which does not destroy its basic structure. If we take a look at the history, the Supreme Court since its establishment in 1950 has given 25000 judgments reportedly. With a rise in new and modern provisions like provisions for women and children (POCSO Act\(^\text{30}\), Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace \(^\text{31}\), MTP Act\(^\text{32}\), Section 498A of IPC\(^\text{33}\), Dowry Death provisions\(^\text{34}\), etc.) there has also been a rapid growth in misuse of the provisions through vexatious litigation. Indian Judiciary is also known for its record of corruption which is by far the leading reason for the downfall of not only the judiciary but also the legislature and the executive. Corruption is not only concentrated at the central level but it has now spread its wings also at the state and district levels. If these severe issues can be mitigated then we can see a new judiciary in India which people have hardly seen since 1947. The first thing that has to be done is increase the number of judges per 1000 of people. While most developed democracies all over the world has 50-100 judges per million population, India has only 13 judges. There is a

\(^{30}\)Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.
\(^{31}\)Enacted by the Parliament of India in 2013 to protect working women from sexual offences.
\(^{33}\)Provision of protection of women against cruelty and misbehavior from husband and in-laws
\(^{34}\)Protected and prohibited under Section 304B of IPC.
deficiency in our legal system from the initial stage which starts with the number of law schools both national and private. To increase the number of judges first of all there has to be a growth in the number of law students passed out every year and number of lawyers. If the lawyers at the subordinate courts and Sessions courts increase, the judge bench in High Courts can increase and the best judges from the high court can be used to fill up the vacancy at the apex court. This process would enhance the quality of lawyers and judges, this can take a while but would prove to be a good method to reduce pendency.

The step that should be taken by the government after having stabilized the number of judges, is increase the working day of the court. It will certainly be a waste to expect the courts to work all the 365 days of the year but it will be a lot easier if the vacations are reduced. At least during the time of heavy work load or pending cases, the working time of the courts could be expanded to speed up trial. An implementation of night shift magistrates for handling emergency situations would be a good try to strengthen the judiciary. Stalling of cases by the lawyers is a primedrawback of Indian lower courts. Dates are missed almost on every occasion which causes the delay in justice delivery. A bench of retired judges can be implemented to look after the causes for stalling and who can take necessary actions to avoid hindrance in delivering judgment. Cases like Ajmal Amir Kasab v. State of Maharashtra, Salmon Salim Khan v. State of Maharashtra are destined for the superior courts then why waste time of the lower courts? These types of cases can be directly passed to the Supreme Court. Such cases should be identified and straightway sent to the superior judges without making any further delay in giving the verdict. An addition of all the necessary measures as mentioned should be able to eradicate the delay in judgment and the time would be saved, process would speed up and justice would be done to all. Definitely, the courts should garner resources and modernization should be taken care of. There should be enough space for accommodation of the people and proper ventilation. Maximum states of India experience a hot and humid climate throughout the year hence there should be facility for air-conditioned court rooms. This should be taken care of especially at the district and subordinate levels.

In US, the President appoints judges to the US Supreme Court, on the contrary in India, the judges appoint themselves. This is a very disturbing tradition that has been followed for years. Where the Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly are representatives of the people then why not the judges as well? If the judges themselves elect each other then of-course there will be corruption in the process. Everybody is unfair until he is answerable to someone. Hence to make the system better in India, we need innovative and time-bound solutions. Shortage of judge in Indian courts is an ancient problem and the delay in justice is also eminent by observing the huge leap in the two dates: Date of filing of petition and the date of the judgment.


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Despite several shortcomings, there are efficient judges and lawyers who are recognised for their hard work and achievements in the history of Indian Law. Internal loopholes are long term changes which will take time to be restructured but the external changes will bring interest of the people to work for the managing the internal, long term solutions. Hence to make the a better place to live in, reform has to start from the lower court and with the immediate problem can be dealt by simply reproducing established technical alteration.

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