
A HISTORICAL-INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF NARI ADALAT IN GUJARAT FROM 1995 TO 2025

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ABSTRACT

Nari Adalat or Women's Community Justice Forum of Gujarat is one of the earliest forums set up in India for promoting women's justice through alternative dispute resolution. This paper studies the institutional trajectory of Nari Adalat of Gujarat from its inception in 1995 to 2025. The paper employs the lens of Feminist Institutionalism and is also supported by the existing literature on legal pluralism. The institutional trajectory of Nari Adalat of Gujarat can be traced out into two phases – the first being the civil-society phase under the Mahila Samakhya programme (1995-2012) and the second being the state-directed phase where the forum was transferred to the Women and Child Development Department in 2012 and subsequently the Gujarat Rajya Nari Adalat Society (GRNAS) was set up in 2019. This paper addresses three key questions: 1. How has the institutional design changed across these two phases? 2. What do available performance data reveal about the effectiveness of Nari Adalat over the years? 3. How does statisation affect the institution's ability to deliver justice for women? The findings of the paper indicate that while statisation of Nari Adalat of Gujarat has increased from 42 centers in 2012 to 270 centers with 60,000 plus cases registered and resolved, it has also brought about reversal of accountability; a shift from focusing on quality of process to mere quantification of outputs; and the most fundamental issue of Nari Adalat having no formal legal authority remains unresolved.

Keywords: Nari Adalat, Women Justice, Mahila Samakhya, Gujarat, legal pluralism, GRNAS

1. Introduction

Women in rural India face significant barriers to access justice for a variety of reasons including structural, procedural and social and cultural. Formal courts are generally far from where women live and cost too much to access. Justice delivery systems are designed without women in mind and conducted in languages that women cannot speak. Justice delivery systems that deal with crime are generally male dominated and do not take the complaints of women seriously. In the face of this 'justice deficit' that women experience an innovative experiment in justice delivery has been going on since 1995 in Waghodia Block, Vadodara district, Gujarat under the Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, called Nari Adalat or 'women's court'. This entirely informal, community-based dispute resolution forum is constituted and conducted by rural women for rural women with the objective of conciliation rather than adjudication.

Nari Adalat in Gujarat has undergone significant changes in the last three decades and can be broadly categorized into two distinct phases. In the first phase, Nari Adalat functioned as civil-society institutions promoted through the Mahila Samakhya programme supported by Sahiyar Stree Sangathan and such other organizations. The second phase, which began in 2012, saw its transfer to the administrative control of the state through the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department. Subsequently, a formal launch took place on June 20, 2019, via Government Resolution No. MHY/102016/2065/A (Government of Gujarat, 2019) under the Gujarat Rajya Nari Adalat Society (GRNAS), through which it currently operates independently. Some civil society organizations have their own Nari Adalat in parallel to the state structure and are being referred to differently but carrying similar structure to function. At present, the Centre has deployed Nari Adalat under Mission Shakti at a national level, piloted in the state of Assam and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Gujarat has not yet been integrated in national project.

This research seeks to address three core research questions. First, what was the institutional design of the Nari Adalat during the Mahila Samakhya era and how did this differ from the GRNAS-era and what were the reasons for these changes. Second, what available data or information reveals about the effectiveness of the Nari Adalat forum in the two different stages of its institutional existence and what are the limitations of said data or information. Third, in what ways has stigmatisation affected the ability of the Nari Adalat to deliver justice to women in

Gujarat as it is now a part of state administration and has been absorbed into structures of government.

This paper traces the institutional trajectory of Nari Adalat, an innovation in justice that has its origins in the state of Gujarat. This paper is particularly relevant to the countries of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa where models of community-based justice forums for women have been adapted and are currently being experimented with or set up. By studying the case of the state of Gujarat where Nari Adalat originated, was set up in largest numbers and has the longest track record of functioning, this paper explores the institutional changes that have taken place in the form of transfer from Mahila Samakhya to setting up of GRNAS in the state. The key question that this paper attempts to answer is what happens to community-based justice forums for women when these are being absorbed into the structures of the state's administrative system. This paper uses the framework of Feminist Institutionalism to study the above-mentioned transition in the context of Gujarat and what has been lost in the process.

2. Theoretical Framework

Feminist Institutionalism (FI) is taken as primary framework of analysis for this study. From a FI perspective, we study institutions and how they can reinforce and reproduce gendered power relations or how actors interact within or try to change institutions (Rai & Waylen, 2008; Krook & Mackay, 2011). Three contributions of FI scholarship are particularly relevant here. First, FI highlights the difference between formal rules and the informal norms that shapes how institutions and practices of daily management of said institutions functions (Mackay, 2014). Second, FI introduced the concept of "institutional conversion". Here, an institution is transformed for new purposes while the formal structure of the institution in question is maintained (Krook & Mackay, 2011). Third, FI also provides insight in the changes that so-called community-based institutions undergo once they are incorporated into the state. According to Waylen (2014), the process of incorporation of institutions into the state is a "double-edged sword". On the one hand, the outreach and resources of said institutions are extended by incorporating them into the state. On the other hand, these community-based institutions are exposed to more bureaucratic ways of management within the state, which may displace the informal norms of deliberation and collective agency that gave it its original character.

Secondary framework for Nari Adalat is based on legal pluralism. As Merry (1988) pointed out, legal pluralism addresses the situation where more than one set of norms as well as more than one structure for dealing with disputes coexist in the same social field. Thus while formal state law is one of the sets of norms that govern the lives of people in India, customary panchayat norms and other structures of informal justice are also an integral part of the larger normative structure. Formal state law operates in a hierarchical structure alongside other customary norms that have been studied by legal anthropologists such as Galanter (1989) and Baxi (1986). Thus Nari Adalat is an instance of vernacular justice (Merry, 2006) that makes women's legal rights a real possibility within the structure of community-based justice. This form of justice is praiseworthy in many respects but is not without its limitations. As noted by scholars of legal pluralism, community-based justice depends upon community norms not all of which are always progressive and that of absence of formal legal authority can render settlements unenforceable (Vatuk, 2013).

Linking the two approaches gives us the concept of 'statistisation'. Elaborating on this concept, statistisation refers to the process of an institution in civil society being 'taken over' by the state. In the process, the institution gets more resources and a wider area to work in. (Menon, 2004; CBPS, 2016). However, in the process of statistization, the informal accountability structures of the institution are destroyed. Also, the process-oriented nature of the institution is lost. The extent of statistization is a continuum. This paper uses statistisation as an analytical heuristic to evaluate whether Nari Adalat's two-phase trajectory represents an institutional deepening or an institutional conversion.

3. Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Nari Adalat as a research object remains limited but substantive. Vatuk (2013), in the most theoretically developed study to date, situates Nari Adalat within an ethnographic examination of women's courts across India, arguing that such forums provide a 'secure, non-intimidating setting' for the resolution of disputes that formal courts routinely fail to address equitably. Her analysis highlights the gendered limitations of adversarial procedure procedural rigidity, male-dominated spaces, and the financial costs of formal litigation as the structural conditions that make community-based forums necessary. Vatuk's contribution is comparative, however, and does not examine Gujarat's distinct institutional phases.

Agrawal and Hai (2016) document Nari Adalat's emergence as a 'community response to impunity' within the MS programme, corroborating the view that the Sangha-based, process-oriented character of the forum was central to its effectiveness in its founding phase. Potthoff (2019), drawing on fieldwork in Gujarat, reads Nari Adalat's dispute-resolution logic as one of 'social harmony and restorative dialogue', characterising its approach as substantively distinct from both adversarial adjudication and customary panchayat processes. Neither study, however, analyses the governance transformations that are the focus of the present paper. Shekhar (2025) engages with Nari Adalat as a legal empowerment mechanism, arguing that grassroots forums of this kind deliver faster and more accessible outcomes for women than formal courts; his analysis does not distinguish between the forum's institutional phases.

The Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS, 2016) produced the most comprehensive evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya programme, arguing that its value resided not in measurable outputs but in the cultivation of women's 'collective agency' the capacity of Sangha members to define their own problems and devise their own responses. The report looks at the risk that activities under the MS program will be swallowed up by target-driven state department which will focus on more on number of cases rather than in justice. Empowerment and focus on positive shifts in social relations will be overlooked.

Menon (2004) explains how community-based projects of women are co-opted by the state. Further describes how such projects are neutralized when their aims are shifted from ones of radical change to ones of measurement and administration.

Baxi's (1986) analysis of the colonial inheritance of Indian legal institutions, and Galanter's (1989) account of the coexistence of multiple normative orders in Indian society, establish the broader structural context: formal justice has long been inaccessible for marginalised women, and community-based mechanisms fill a gap that the state has not been able to close.

The existing literature leaves four gaps that this paper addresses. First, no study has applied the FI framework systematically to the two-phase institutional trajectory of Nari Adalat in Gujarat. Second, the 2019 establishment of GRNAS as an autonomous state society has not been subjected to critical scholarly analysis. Third, no longitudinal study traces the consequences of the civil-society-to-state transition for the forum's capacity to deliver justice for women. Fourth, the ongoing independent operation of some Nari Adalats by civil society organisations alongside the GRNAS network and its implications for institutional diversity has not been

examined. This paper addresses all four gaps through historical-institutional analysis spanning 1995 to 2025.

4. Phase I: Community Origins under Mahila Samakhya, 1995–2012

4.1 Mahila Samakhya Programme

Nari Adalat emerged within the Mahila Samakhya programme, a Government of India scheme launched in 1989 under the National Policy on Education 1986, distinguished by its commitment to women's collective agency over conventional service-delivery targets. MS operated through autonomous state-level societies funded by the Government of India but kept at arm's length from the state bureaucracy and through a federated network of village-level women's collectives (Sanghas), block-level federations (Mahasanghs), and district coordination bodies (CBPS, 2016). In Gujarat, MS operated across six districts characterised by high rates of gender-based violence and female illiteracy: Vadodara, Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Surendranagar, and Dang. Its institutional partners included Sahiyar Stree Sangathan (Vadodara), SEWA, and the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) civil society organisations that provided training, legal literacy inputs, and community linkages that the state apparatus could not replicate.

4.2 Origins and Structure of Nari Adalat

The first Nari Adalat was constituted in 1995 in Waghodia Block, Vadodara, as a spontaneous response by the local Sangha network to the inadequacies of both formal courts and caste panchayats in addressing domestic violence (Best Practices Foundation, n.d.). The initiative came from the women themselves, not from a government directive: members of the Sangha, having developed through the MS process sufficient collective awareness of the justice gap they faced, devised an institutional response suited to their community context. This organic genesis is relevant for analytical reasons. The Nari Adalat is a project of its members and not something that has been imposed on them from outside.

Nari Adalats are held on a fortnightly or monthly basis at the block level and are fed by village Sanghas who refer cases up through the MS structure to district Mahasanghs that provide a mechanism for oversight and link to formal legal structures. The panels are comprised of Sakhis (village-based activists) and Sahyoginis (cluster coordinators) trained by Sahiyar Stree

Sangathan, the NGO that runs the MS program. Importantly, these women are accountable to both the Sangha structure and the local community which they serve as opposed to state officials. The training received by these women is of a high standard and includes legal literacy, mediation skills and an understanding of the root causes of gender-based violence (Agrawal & Hai, 2016).

4.3 Mandate and Case Procedure

The Nari Adalat of the MS era addressed a range of issues including cases of domestic violence, marital harassment, bigamy, child custody cases, property and land disputes, cases for maintenance and desertion etc (Best Practices Foundation, n.d.). It followed a restorative justice procedure like cases were registered by the complainant themselves; hearings of cases were held in front of the full panel; fact-finding missions were sent to the relevant villages to collect information; and the resolutions were then reached by due deliberation and signed by a village elder or other authority in the village (Bosneag, 2013). The Nari Adalat did not have any coercive legal authority or power and therefore the forum had no power to make the parties attend the hearings and to ensure that the parties comply with the agreement reached among parties. However, it was embedded in the moral economy of the village and community life and therefore it had practical authority in handling disputes.

Performance of Nari Adalats between 1998 and 2000 is patchy but it does provide picture. For instance, Merry (2006) notes that by 2000, 23% of cases listed in women's forums had been resolved through intervention of Nari Adalat. One such example of the Nari Adalat, based in Padra, Vadodara, and associated with Vikalp NGO, recorded 64 new cases, 197 hearings, and conducted 56 fact-finding missions in a single year. Of the total cases brought to the Nari Adalat, 95% were accepted by the forum to be dealt with by the Nari Adalat (Bosneag, 2013). This indicates that the Nari Adalat were heavily used and that there were perceptions that it was legitimate channel to access justice and with this the lack of legal standing of the Nari Adalat was overlooked.

While the numbers of cases resolved by Nari Adalat may not be significant enough to highlight the importance of the procedures followed by Nari Adalat in resolving disputes, there are several reasons why these procedures are very important. Firstly, the fact-finding mission that the panel of Nari Adalat conducts before holding a hearing to resolve a case provides an independent evidential basis for the decisions reached by the panel in the hearing. Nari Adalat's

fact-finding is unique and lacks in formal courts. Fact-finding missions are conducted in the complainant's village and involve interaction with the community, including witnesses and neighbours. Thus, the due process of law is achieved. As mentioned earlier, while formal courts take years to dispose of cases similar to those resolved by Nari Adalat within weeks or at most months, the procedures followed by Nari Adalat in resolving disputes are very important for the accessibility of these procedures to women without the resources, literacy and social capital required to go through formal legal processes and thus for access to justice of women such as them.

4.4 Civil Society Architecture and Structural Limitations

The model of Nari Adalats that was created and sustained by civil society architecture of the MS era continues to exist. Sahiyar Stree Sangathan set up in Vadodara District in 1984, a separate autonomous entity, continued to work with the model of training, legal aid and philosophy to work with women members to set up their own Nari Adalats. In addition, SEWA and KMVS continued to work with the mobilization structures created in communities. Sahiyar Stree Sangathan continues to function as an independent entity in Vadodara District and some of the Nari Adalats set up with the support of civil society organizations continue to function as part of the state architecture of GRNAS in some places. However, the two sets of institutions work separately and are not captured in official statistics.

When MS model of women's empowerment was initiated it had some structural limitations. First was the model was restricted to six districts of the State and therefore many women from rest of Gujarat could not access this platform. Secondly funding for the MS model was woefully inadequate. In 2005 one Nari Adalat held in Padra had to depend on alternate NGO for funds when MS funding fell short (Bosneag, 2013). The biggest limitation was lack of formal legal recourse. The decisions taken by women in meetings of the forum have no legal binding on the community till they are adhered to by the community. These limitations such as geographic restriction, financial precarity, and lack of legal enforceability constituted the principal drivers of the transition to state management.

5. Phase II: State Formalisation, 2012-Present

5.1 Transfer to the WCD Department

The transition from Phase I to Phase II was driven by the administrative restructuring of the

Mahila Samakhya programme nationally. As questions arose about MS's institutional sustainability within the Education Department, state governments including Gujarat absorbed its constituent schemes into the Women and Child Development apparatus. In 2012, the Gujarat government formally adopted the 'Nari Adalat Scheme' under the WCD Department, incorporating the 42 MS-era Nari Adalats into a state-directed scheme (Government of Gujarat, 2019). Funding, oversight, and policy direction now flowed vertically from the WCD Department through the Gujarat State Commission for Women (GSCW), reversing the horizontal, community-upward accountability that had characterised Phase I.

The institutional consequences were immediate. Where the MS forum had been embedded in networks of trained, community-accountable women animators, the WCD-administered scheme was embedded in a bureaucratic structure oriented towards scheme compliance and measurable outputs. The informal norms of deliberative process that the CBPS (2016) had identified as MS's core institutional achievement faced their first systematic challenge from the logic of performance management.

5.2 The 2019 GRNAS Formation: Structure and Governance

The most consequential act of institutional redesign in Phase II was the establishment of the Gujarat Rajya Nari Adalat Society (GRNAS) through Government Resolution No. MHY/102016/2065/A dated 20 June 2019. GRNAS was constituted as an autonomous society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and the Gujarat Public Trust Act, 1950, with its registered office in Gandhinagar (Government of Gujarat, 2019). By the time of its formation, the Nari Adalat network had expanded from the original 42 units to 270, covering every district of Gujarat a more than six-fold increase in institutional footprint.

The governance structure of GRNAS is diagnostically significant. The Governing Body of GSCW is headed by the Chairperson of GSCW. The governing body comprises of Secretary of WCD Department, Joint Secretary (Women Welfare) of WCD Department, Joint Secretary of Legal Department, Additional Commissioner of Commissionerate of WCD and Financial Adviser of WCD Department. Member Secretary of GSCW is Member Secretary of the Society (Government of Gujarat, 2019). No representation is accorded to grassroots women's organizations, former Nari Adalat members and community users. From a feminist-institutionalist standpoint, GRNAS is a state apparatus wearing the formal clothing of an

autonomous society: its accountability runs entirely upward to senior officials, not downward to the communities it serves.

The GRNAS resolution does retain the language of community justice in its statement of objectives: it commits to creating 'an alternative system for fair, quick, and affordable justice for women, founded on feminist ideology,' empowering women to 'challenge male-dominated societal norms,' and redefining women's societal roles (Government of Gujarat, 2019). The preservation of this language is not insignificant it signals that the founding justice-orientation of Nari Adalat has not been wholly discarded. However, as the CBPS (2016) evaluation of MS warned, a rhetorical commitment to empowerment is not the same as the structural conditions that make empowerment possible. Whether the GRNAS's stated objectives are matched by its institutional mechanisms is the central question this paper addresses.

5.3 Institutional Architecture and MIS

GRNAS then formalized a three tiers of structures – State Level Nari Adalat (SLNA) at the top followed by District Level Nari Adalats (DLNAs) in every district and Taluka Level Nari Adalats (TLNAs) in every taluka. In terms of structural form, GRNAS thus mirrors the three tier MS structure consisting of village level Sanghas, block level Mahasanghs and district level bodies. However, this institutional structure is just the opposite of how the MS structure functions. MS structure is a bottom up structure. Deliberations at the village level are followed by district level coordination among district level bodies. GRNAS structure is top down. SLNA at the top sets policy for DLNAs. DLNAs are supervised, monitored and finances managed by DLNAs on behalf of TLNAs (Government of Gujarat, 2019). Thus accountability is turned upside down.

The resolution also made it mandatory to use a Management Information System (MIS) that would enable monitoring and accountability by having a standardized case registration format along with output indicators and stipulating the frequency and level of reporting at taluka, district and state level (Government of Gujarat, 2019). Given the nature and spread of the program with 270 functional units across the state, MIS is a rational system of accountability. From the perspective of the present analysis, it marks a significant shift in what counts as institutional success: from process quality (did deliberation produce just outcomes?) to output quantity (how many cases were registered and resolved?). By 2021, the cumulative case

resolution figure across Gujarat's Nari Adalats had exceeded 60,000 (Gujarat State Commission for Women, as reported in Loksatta News, 2021).

5.4 Mission Shakti: National Context and Gujarat's Independent Path

In 2021, the Government of India launched Mission Shakti, an umbrella scheme for women's protection and empowerment under which a national Nari Adalat component was developed as part of the Sambal sub-scheme. The national model prescribes groups of seven to eleven women nominated by gram panchayats as 'Nyaya Sakhis' at the village level, and has been piloted in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir (Indian Express, 2025). As of 2025, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has invited other states to submit proposals for establishing Nari Adalats under the national framework (Indian Express, 2025).

Gujarat has not integrated its Nari Adalat network into Mission Shakti. The state's 270-unit GRNAS system, established under its own statutory basis and governance structure, operates independently of the national scheme. This institutional divergence is consequential: the Gujarat model predates the national design by several decades and reflects a more developed institutional architecture. The question of whether Gujarat's experience should inform the national design rather than the reverse is one that policymakers have not yet publicly engaged.

6. Analysis

The first research question asks what institutional design features distinguished the MS-era Nari Adalat from the GRNAS era, and what drove the transition. The analysis reveals an 'inversion' in the institutional set up of the forum between Phase I and Phase II. In Phase I the institutional set up of the forum was organized around the community's authority; in Phase II the authority was reorganized around the state. The panel members of the forum in Phase I were accountable to the Sangha network and the communities they worked in. The training was given by civil society organizations with local knowledge. The legitimacy of the forum was embedded in the social structures of the forum's members. In Phase II the accountability of the forum was upwards to the GSCW officials. The training was a standardized state function. The legitimacy of the forum was based on formal registration under the Societies Act.

Using Krook and Mackay's (2011) concept of institutional conversion, Nari Adalat has not been completely abolished but given new direction: its name, format of meeting, and

community-dealing character have been preserved, whilst the institutional logic governing it has been fundamentally altered. The transition was driven by two forces. Externally, the wind-down of the Mahila Samakhya programme removed the institutional home and funding base that had sustained Phase I. Internally, the state's growing ambition to extend access to community justice across all of Gujarat beyond the six MS districts required the administrative and financial capacity that only the state apparatus could provide.

The wind-down of MS had particular consequences for the civil society organisations that had sustained Nari Adalat from the inside. Sahiyar Stree Sangathan, established in 1984 in Vadodara and central to the training and ideological continuity of the forum in its founding decades, did not dissolve when MS was absorbed into the state: it continued to operate independently, and continues to do so. Vikalp and other NGO partners similarly maintained their own Nari Adalat operations. The result is a dual institutional landscape in present-day Gujarat: a state-administered network of 270 GRNAS Taluka Level Nari Adalats, operating under MIS-based performance monitoring and vertical accountability to the WCD Department; and a smaller, less visible set of NGO-run Nari Adalats, operating under the traditional civil society model with horizontal accountability to their communities.

The second research question asks what can we learn from the performance data that has been collected in both phases? Due to the incommensurable evaluative frameworks, a comparison between the two phases is not feasible. As mentioned before, Phase I was evaluated by the NGOs involved in the phase as well as by external researchers and academics throughout the phase. The assessments were qualitative in nature and focused on the process, community participation and a deliberative approach in decision making. In contrast, Phase II is evaluated on the basis Management Information System (MIS) generated aggregate statistics - number of cases registered and resolved.

The most substantive comparative finding available is Iyengar's (2019) evaluation, which documents across both phases a persistent 'pressure on women to reconcile rather than assert their legal rights'. This finding is significant for two reasons. First, it suggests that the fundamental structural vulnerability of Nari Adalat its lack of formal legal enforceability has not been resolved by the formalisation of the institutional architecture surrounding it. Second, it raises questions about what the 60,000-plus case resolution figure actually represents: whether those resolutions were genuine justice outcomes or pressured settlements that MIS

monitoring cannot distinguish. The shift from qualitative to quantitative evaluation has not produced better evidence about outcomes; it has produced more data about outputs.

There is also a spatial dimension to this evaluative problem. Phase I operated in six districts with established communities of trained women animators and a pre-existing culture of Sangha-based deliberation. The 270-unit GRNAS network extends to districts with no such history. Whether a TLNA constituted in a district without prior MS organising produces the same quality of deliberative justice as one embedded in three decades of Sangha practice is a question the aggregate data cannot answer. The official evaluative framework makes this question invisible.

The third research question asks to what extent statisation has altered Nari Adalat's capacity to deliver justice for women. The answer is not a simple profit or loss judgment: it is an observation about what statisation has traded off.

The case for statisation is real. The expansion from 42 to 270 units represents a genuine expansion of access to community justice for women in districts previously not available. The Mahila Samakhya Society, operating in six districts with already chronically low funding, could not have achieved this scale. The statutory basis of GRNAS also provides greater institutional durability than the MS model: it survives funding cycles and administrative changes that would have threatened the precarious Phase I model.

The case against statisation is equally substantive. The replacement of horizontal community accountability with vertical state accountability has structurally altered who the forum serves and who it answers to. The GRNAS Governing Body composed entirely of senior officials encodes this shift at the governance level: there is no structural mechanism ensuring that the women who use Nari Adalat have any voice in how it is governed. The retention of justice-oriented language in the GRNAS resolution objectives does not substitute for the structural conditions trained women animators, civil society partnerships, community deliberation that gave the MS-era forum its capacity to deliver substantive outcomes. Also, during the field work, what have been observed is that the office of Nari Adalat is run by an individual appointed coordinator. It is poorly incentivized job too. It impacts the functioning of Nari Adalat run by state.

What is absent from the GRNAS model is a mechanism for reproducing these conditions over

time. In Phase I, this mechanism was provided organically by the Sangha network and the training programmes of civil society organisations. In Phase II, it is at best rhetorically committed to in a policy document. The ongoing independent operation of some civil society-run Nari Adalats alongside the GRNAS network suggests that the community-based tradition has not been entirely displaced. However, it also underscores the state's failure to institutionalise the conditions of that tradition within its own design.

The absence of civil society representation on the GRNAS Governing Body is particularly consequential in this regard. The Body includes the Secretary and Joint Secretary of the WCD Department, the Additional Commissioner of the Commissionerate of WCD, and the Financial Adviser of the WCD Department all of whom are senior state officials whose primary accountability is to the administrative hierarchy, not to Nari Adalat's user communities (Government of Gujarat, 2019). Organisations such as Sahiyar, which possess decades of experience in training women mediators and have sustained the forum's justice-oriented character through periods of institutional instability, have no formal voice in the governance of GRNAS. The exclusion of institutions of civil society from GRNAS is an expression of the thesis of statisation. It is to be noted that the justice forum of thousands of women has now been scaled up to 270 talukas and the administrative capacity of the State has been put into action to make this possible. However, this increased administrative capacity has not been supported by the necessary choices of institutional design to imbed civil society within this scaled up model of the forum for justice. Therefore, although on paper the GRNAS are bigger and more durable than the civil society led Nari Adalats, on the structural level, they are less equipped to reproduce the deliberative practices and the community-based nature of justice for women that this earlier Nari Adalat had established for itself. One of the obvious steps that therefore would flow from this research is that civil society's institutions be made a part of the governing body of GRNAS. It would also be necessary to ensure that Taluka Level Nari Adalat members are trained and oriented sufficiently.

7. Conclusion

This paper has traced the change that the Nari Adalat has undergone from being a community-based justice mechanism facilitated by the Mahila Samakhya (1995-2012) to a state directed gender justice mechanism under the GRNAS framework (2012-present). Using Feminist Institutionalism as the lens, the paper argues that even though Nari Adalat today retains justice

and community legitimacy, it has gone through an institutional change. The paper argues that the three structural features of community accountability, civil society training and horizontal deliberation which were substantive for the above-mentioned characteristics of Nari Adalat as a gender justice mechanism were systematically displaced by the logics of state bureaucracy and output management.

Three analytical conclusions follow. First, the institutional design shift from MS to GRNAS involved not merely a change of administrative home but a fundamental inversion of the direction of accountability from communities upward to the state. Second, the available performance data are insufficient to determine whether the 60,000-plus case resolution figure represents genuine justice outcomes or pressured settlements, because the evaluative shift from process quality to output quantity has made that distinction invisible. Third, statism has produced a genuine gain in geographic coverage but at the cost of the structural conditions that made the Phase I forum most effective.

The paper makes three contributions to the scholarship. It provides the longitudinal institutional analysis of Nari Adalat in Gujarat distinguishing two phases with distinct accountability logics. It applies the FI framework to the Nari Adalat case generating a theoretically grounded account of statism in Indian community justice

The policy implication is clear: scale and durability, whilst valuable, are not sufficient conditions for effective community justice. The GRNAS model requires structural reform specifically, the inclusion of grassroots women's organisations in its Governing Body and the institutionalisation of substantive training for Taluka Level Nari Adalat members if the justice-oriented character of the forum's founding vision is to be preserved within the state apparatus that has inherited it. Adding more members for effective resolution of cases. As members are hired and not voluntarily incorporated, incentives become focal point of productivity.

The dual institutional landscape that persists in present-day Gujarat a state-administered network of 270 GRNAS Adalat operating alongside a smaller set of independently run NGO forums is a concrete expression of the unresolved tension at the heart of the statism process. A productive institutional settlement one that genuinely serves women seeking justice in Gujarat would draw on both capacities rather than treating them as alternatives. Until the GRNAS governance architecture is reformed to embed civil society expertise at its core, the

forum will continue to expand in footprint whilst remaining structurally limited in the depth of justice it is able to deliver.

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