

A Study of the Haryana Judiciary: The Punjab & Haryana High Court and the District Courts of Haryana

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Abstract: This paper presents an institutional and empirical study of the Haryana judiciary with a dual focus: (i) the Punjab & Haryana High Court (located in Chandigarh) as the constitutional court exercising jurisdiction over the State of Haryana, and (ii) the district judiciary within Haryana (district and subordinate courts). It maps history, structure, and jurisdiction, and administration, access to justice initiatives, technology adoption, and performance trends. Using a mixed-methods design, it proposes indicators for pendency, disposal, case-flow management, infrastructure, representation, and user experience. The paper concludes with targeted reforms to improve timeliness, transparency, and equity.

Keywords: Haryana judiciary, Punjab & Haryana High Court, district courts, pendency, access to justice, e-Courts, NJDG, case management

Introduction: The judiciary plays a vital role in safeguarding the constitutional principles of justice, equality, and rule of law in India. As one of the three pillars of democracy, it functions not merely as an adjudicating authority but also as a guardian of fundamental rights and constitutional values. Haryana, being one of the key states of northern India, has a distinct judicial structure that operates under the jurisdiction of the Punjab & Haryana High Court, located at Chandigarh. The High Court serves as the highest judicial authority for both Punjab and Haryana, as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh, making it a unique institution in the Indian judicial system.

The Punjab & Haryana High Court has a rich history, rooted in the post-independence reorganization of states and the division of Punjab in 1966, which led to the creation of Haryana as a separate state. Since then, the High Court has been instrumental in addressing legal disputes, interpreting constitutional provisions, and ensuring justice delivery for the people of Haryana. Alongside the High Court, the district courts of Haryana form the backbone of the state's judiciary, handling a vast majority of civil and criminal cases at the grassroots level.

The judicial system of Haryana is marked by a network of district and subordinate courts spread across its districts, ensuring access to justice for people from rural and urban areas alike. These courts deal with everyday disputes—ranging from property conflicts, matrimonial issues, and service matters to criminal trials—and thus form the foundation of the justice delivery system in the state.

This study seeks to examine the structure, functioning, and significance of the judiciary in Haryana, with special reference to the Punjab & Haryana High Court and the district courts. By exploring their history, jurisdiction, role in legal reforms, and challenges, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the judicial system in Haryana operates as an indispensable part of India's democracy.

Objectives:

1. Trace the historical evolution and institutional design of the Punjab & Haryana High Court (P\&H HC) and the district courts of Haryana.
2. Examine jurisdiction, caseload composition, and process flows across key case categories.
3. Assess performance on pendency, disposal, timeliness, and user-centric measures (costs, accessibility, language, legal aid).
4. Evaluate reforms in technology (e-Courts, virtual hearings) and management (ADR, case triage).
5. Recommend policy and administrative reforms suited to Haryana's context.

Historical Background of the Haryana Judiciary: The judiciary of Haryana has a unique historical evolution that is deeply connected with the judicial institutions of Punjab. Since Haryana was carved out as a separate state from Punjab on 1 November 1966, its judicial system, including the High Court and subordinate courts, has been shaped by a blend of colonial legacies and post-independence reforms.

- **Judicial Legacy before Haryana's Formation:** During the British colonial period, the territory now known as Haryana was part of the larger Punjab Province. Judicial administration was organized under the British model, with a structured system of civil and criminal courts, overseen by the Punjab High Court at Lahore. After the Partition of 1947, when Lahore became part of Pakistan, the East Punjab High Court was set up at Shimla (1947) and later shifted to Chandigarh in 1955. This court eventually came to be known as the Punjab High Court, exercising jurisdiction over the entire state of Punjab, including the Haryana region (then part of Punjab).
- **Creation of Haryana and the Punjab & Haryana High Court:** When Haryana became a separate state in 1966, a crucial decision was taken to establish a common High Court** for both Punjab and Haryana, known as the Punjab & Haryana High Court, located at Chandigarh. This arrangement ensured administrative convenience, continuity of judicial practices, and efficient use of resources. The High Court thus serves as the highest judicial authority for both states, exercising appellate, supervisory, and constitutional jurisdiction.
- **District Judiciary in Haryana:** Parallel to the High Court, the district judiciary plays a foundational role in administering justice at the grassroots level. Upon Haryana's formation, 11 districts were established, each having its own District and Sessions Court along with subordinate courts (Civil Judges, Judicial Magistrates). Over time, with administrative reorganization and population growth, Haryana now has 24 districts, each equipped with a District Court Complex. The district judiciary ensures access to justice in rural and semi-urban areas, dealing with civil disputes, criminal trials, revenue cases, family matters, and other local judicial concerns.
- **Post-Independence Judicial Reforms and Growth:** The Haryana judiciary has steadily expanded in infrastructure, number of judges, and adoption of technological innovations such as e-courts and virtual hearings. The Punjab & Haryana High Court has played a landmark role in shaping constitutional law, service jurisprudence, and public interest litigation (PIL) in northern India. The district courts have also been strengthened through regular recruitment of judicial officers by the Haryana Public Service Commission (HPSC) and judicial academies for training.
- **Symbol of Judicial Continuity and Federal Spirit:** The Punjab & Haryana High Court stands as a unique judicial institution in India, as it is one of the few High Courts that serve more than one state. It symbolizes not only the continuity of judicial traditions from the colonial era but also the spirit of cooperative federalism in independent India.

The Punjab & Haryana High Court and the District Courts of Haryana: Policy and Administrative Reforms: The Punjab & Haryana High Court and the District Courts of Haryana play a central role in

delivering justice and upholding the rule of law. However, like other parts of the Indian judiciary, they face structural and procedural challenges such as case backlog, infrastructural gaps, digital transition issues, shortage of judges, and accessibility concerns. To ensure that justice is both timely and effective, several policy and administrative reforms can be recommended, specifically suited to Haryana's context.

1. **Judicial Infrastructure Reforms:** Modern Court Complexes, many district courts in Haryana require modern infrastructure with adequate seating, digitized libraries, waiting areas for litigants, and child- and gender-friendly facilities. E-Court Halls, expansion of e-courts for virtual hearings, particularly for rural litigants and under trial prisoners, can reduce delays and travel burdens. Specialized Benches, establish dedicated courts for family disputes, cybercrimes, land disputes, and commercial litigation, given Haryana's unique socio-economic profile.
2. **Human Resource & Capacity Building:** Filling Vacancies, ensure timely recruitment of judges and support staff to reduce pendency. Haryana often suffers from a judge-to-population ratio below the national standard. Judicial Training, regular workshops for judicial officers on new laws (cyber laws, environmental law, commercial disputes) to enhance efficiency. Para-Legal Volunteer, Strengthen para-legal services in rural areas to assist litigants who cannot afford lawyers.
3. **Technology Integration & Digital Justice:** Digitization of Case Records, Speed up the transition from paper-based files to digital records for easy access and transparency. AI-Assisted Case Management, Use artificial intelligence tools to categorize cases, suggest precedents, and prioritize urgent matters. Online Filing System, Strengthen e-filing so lawyers and litigants from remote parts of Haryana can file petitions without traveling long distances.
4. **Speedy Justice & Case Management:** Fast-Track Courts, Establish more fast-track courts for cases of crimes against women, land disputes, and corruption cases. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), Encourage Lok Adalats, mediation, and arbitration, especially in family and property disputes. Haryana, being agrarian, has many land-related conflicts that can be better resolved outside traditional litigation. Case Monitoring Mechanism, Use dashboards to track pendency and disposal rates district-wise.
5. **Accessibility & Inclusion:** Rural Outreach, Mobile courts and circuit benches should be organized in rural districts to make justice accessible to marginalized populations. Legal Aid Expansion, Haryana's legal services authority should expand free legal aid for women, SC/STs, migrant workers, and economically weaker sections. Language Accessibility, Promote bilingual judgments (English and Hindi) so rural litigants can understand the decisions.
6. **Administrative & Policy Reforms:** Coordination with State Government, A joint policy framework between the High Court and Haryana Government to improve court funding, staff recruitment, and infrastructure. Performance Evaluation, Develop objective criteria for assessing district courts on pendency reduction, case disposal, and user satisfaction. Transparency Measures, Public dashboards of pending cases, cause lists, and court performance to enhance accountability.
7. **Socially Relevant Reforms for Haryana:** Land and Property Disputes, Since land disputes dominate Haryana's litigation, specialized tribunals and mediation cells should be created. Cybercrime Preparedness, With increasing digitalization, cybercrime courts and digital forensic support centers are needed. Juvenile & Family Courts, Strengthening child-friendly courts and family counseling units to handle Haryana's growing urban-rural family disputes.
8. **Pendency of Cases:** The Punjab & Haryana High Court has a large volume of pending cases, reflective of both Haryana and Punjab's litigation load. As per recent data, pendency includes a significant backlog of civil, criminal, and service-related cases, some pending for more than a

decade. Reasons for pendency include shortage of judges (vacant positions), frequent adjournments, and rising number of fresh filings. Despite technological reforms (like e-Courts and case management systems), the gap between institution and disposal still creates a pressure on pendency rates.

9. **Case Disposal:** The High Court has improved disposal rates through case triaging, Lok Adalats, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms. Special benches for fast-track hearing of cases related to family disputes, criminal appeals, and senior citizen matters have enhanced disposal in specific categories. Regular monitoring of “long-pending cases” has been taken up, with directions to subordinate courts to prioritize them. However, the annual disposal rate often struggles to match fresh case institution, leading to continued accumulation of cases.
10. **Timeliness of Justice:** Introduction of virtual hearings (especially during and after COVID-19) has helped improve accessibility and reduce delays in urgent matters. Case listing through automated software ensures better scheduling and reduces procedural delays.
11. **User-Centric Measures:** The Punjab & Haryana High Court has adopted several citizen-friendly reforms, e-Filing system to reduce physical paperwork and allow filing from anywhere. SMS/email services to inform litigants about case status. Judgment and order uploads on the High Court website, ensuring transparency. Dedicated help desks and facilitation centers for litigants. Initiatives like video conferencing for undertrial prisoners reduce costs and delays. ADR and mediation centers provide quicker, amicable settlement of disputes. Accessibility measures, including digitized cause lists and improved court websites, strengthen user experience.

Conclusion: Haryana’s judiciary shows strong foundations in constitutional oversight and technology adoption. Yet the everyday experience of justice hinges on predictable listings, reliable service of process, efficient evidence management, and user-friendly court premises. A targeted blend of triage-based case management, data-driven administration, inclusive facilities, and better inter-agency coordination can materially improve timeliness and trust in both the High Court and district courts.

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