
A STUDY ON PROCEDURAL REFORMS AND JUDICIAL MODERNIZATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TAMIL NADU CRIMINAL PROCEDURE RULES, 2025

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ABSTRACT

The Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules, 2025 mark a transformative shift in the administration of criminal justice, introducing a modernized procedural framework that responds to evolving legal, technological, and societal needs. Replacing outdated procedural conventions, the 2025 Rules aim to create a more transparent, efficient, and uniform system across all criminal courts in Tamil Nadu. These reforms align with national developments under the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), ensuring procedural harmony and strengthening constitutional mandates under Articles 14 and 21 of Indian Constitution. Central point to the 2025 Rules is the integration of digital systems e-filing, digital signatures, QR-based authentication, standardized audio-video recording, and digital preservation of records which enhances accountability and reduces procedural delays. The Rules also adopt a victim-centric approach, incorporating safeguards such as structured timelines, confidential handling of sensitive information, improved witness-protection measures, and systematic tracking of case progress. These provisions collectively aim to minimize trauma, enforce procedural fairness, and uphold the rights of both victims and the accused. Furthermore, the 2025 Rules emphasize timely completion of investigations and trials, thereby addressing longstanding systemic issues such as adjournment misuse, non-production of records, and uneven district-level implementation. However, the success of these Rules depends heavily on infrastructure preparedness, digital literacy among stakeholders, and supportive administrative mechanisms. While the reforms hold significant promise, their practical effectiveness will require coordinated efforts between the judiciary, police, prosecution, and court administration. This paper evaluates the evolution, structure, impact, and policy implications of the 2025 Rules, demonstrating how Tamil Nadu's updated procedural framework serves as a modern, rights-oriented, and technology-driven model for criminal justice reform in India.

Keywords: Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules 2025, BNSS, Judicial Reform, Digital Justice, Victim-Centric Process.

INTRODUCTION

The *Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules, 2025* represent a major milestone in the modernization of criminal procedure and court administration in the State. For decades, criminal courts in Tamil Nadu functioned under fragmented procedural guidelines, manual record-keeping, and inconsistent practices across districts, contributing to delays, inefficiencies, and procedural uncertainty. The introduction of the 2025 Rules responds to these systemic challenges by establishing a unified, technology-driven, and rights-oriented procedural framework. These Rules emerge at a crucial moment when India has transitioned from *Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), 1973* to the restructured *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023*, necessitating synchronous reforms at the state level. The 2025 Rules aim to bring Tamil Nadu's criminal courts into alignment with this national transformation, ensuring procedural uniformity, timeliness, and transparency. Central to these reforms is the integration of digital processes including e-filing, digital signatures, electronic service of summons, QR-based document authentication, and mandatory audio-video recording of evidence which enhances accountability and minimizes human error.

Additionally, the Rules reflect a conscious shift toward victim-centric and witness-sensitive justice. By mandating structured case-flow management, confidentiality protocols, timelines for investigation and trial, and secure handling of electronic evidence, the Rules strengthen procedural fairness under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. The focus on technology, coordination between police and courts, and standardized courtroom practices also ensures greater predictability and uniformity in judicial functioning. However, the Rules are not merely administrative directions; they represent a deeper commitment to improving access to justice, reducing pendency, and protecting the rights of all stakeholders in the criminal justice system. Through the 2025 Rules, Tamil Nadu positions itself as a leader in judicial reform, setting a model for other states seeking to modernize their criminal justice procedures in line with contemporary legal developments and technological advancements.

BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION OF CRIMINAL PRACTICE IN TAMIL NADU

The evolution of criminal practice in Tamil Nadu reflects a gradual transition from colonial procedural structures to more structured and technology-supported judicial processes. Historically, criminal courts in Tamil Nadu functioned under the broad framework of the *Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973*, supplemented by local circulars, administrative orders, and

High Court directions. While these mechanisms provided foundational procedural guidance, their fragmented nature resulted in significant inconsistencies between courts across districts. Over time, the rise in case pendency, delays in investigations, and inconsistent courtroom practices revealed the limitations of relying solely on disparate administrative instructions without a consolidated set of criminal practice rules. These systemic weaknesses became increasingly evident in matters involving procedural fairness, such as delayed filing of charge sheets, inconsistent adherence to case flow norms, and difficulties in managing electronic evidence issues that courts across India acknowledged in judgments such as *Hussain v. Union of India*¹, where the Supreme Court stressed the need for structural reforms to ensure speedy trials under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution².

The shortcomings of the pre-2025 procedural framework were also reflected in the uneven adoption of technology. Prior to the digital reforms introduced through e-Courts initiatives, most criminal courts relied on manual filing, physical service of summons, and handwritten records, creating opportunities for delay, manipulation, and loss of documents. The absence of uniform rules governing digital signatures, electronic submissions, video-conferencing, or authentication of electronic evidence made it difficult to implement modern procedural safeguards envisioned under laws such as the *Information Technology Act, 2000* and evolving evidentiary principles concerning electronic records (as recognized in *Anvar P.V. v. P.K. Basheer*³). The lack of consistency also imposed challenges on victims and witnesses, whose protection depended largely on judicial discretion rather than standardized rules.

The *Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules, 2025* were thus introduced to overcome these longstanding gaps by providing a unified, technology-integrated, and transparent procedural framework for all criminal courts. These Rules institutionalize digital filing, structured timelines, standardized evidence management, and victim-sensitive procedures, aligning Tamil Nadu's criminal justice system with national reforms under the BNSS and constitutional mandates of fair trial to confirm the rule of Law and role of law and speedy justice.

TAMIL NADU CRIMINAL PROCEDURE RULES, 2025: GENESIS AND PURPOSE

Institutional initiative behind the 2025 revision

¹ *Hussain v. Union of India*, (2017) 5 SCC 702

² Article 21 <https://share.google/9LQl6QBWWntfpLxec>

³ *Anvar P.V. v. P.K. Basheer*, (2014) 10 SCC 473)

The 2025 Rules grew out of a recognized need for a uniform, state-wide procedural Rules that would translate constitutional guarantees into day-to-day court practice. Rather than relying on ad-hoc circulars and uneven local practice, the State adopted a consolidated rules framework to provide clarity and predictability across all criminal courts. The initiative was driven by administrative review of court functioning, empirical evidence of procedural delay and post-investigation lapses, and a policy decision to synchronise state practice with recent national criminal law reforms. The Rules were framed as binding practice directions for subordinate criminal courts, designed to be implementation-ready and administratively enforceable. Their institutional genesis reflects an administrative exercise in procedural consolidation — converting best practice, institutional consultations and statutory imperatives into a single, operational Rules for criminal adjudication in Tamil Nadu.

Objectives and guiding principles

The 2025 Rules rest on four interlocking objectives:

- (1) **Speedy and fair trials** — instituting time-bound case-flow management to reduce pendency and avoid undue adjournments;
- (2) **Transparency and accountability** — introducing audit-trails (digital logs, QR-authenticated documents) and mandatory reporting to judicial registries;
- (3) **Victim-centricity and witness protection** — standardising confidential handling of sensitive material, in-camera procedures, and secure recording of statements; and
- (4) **Technological integration** — institutionalising e-filing, electronic service and authenticated digital evidence preservation⁴.

These guiding principles aim to operationalise Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) and Article 14 (equality before law) by converting constitutional standards into enforceable courtroom protocols. The Rules emphasize procedural parity across session divisions, clear responsibilities for police and prosecutors in evidence preservation, and judicial oversight mechanisms for compliance.

⁴ Section 173 of BNSS

Alignment with national criminal law reforms (BNS/BNSS)

A key purpose of the 2025 Rules is harmonisation with the central legislative framework introduced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. The Rules map state practice on to central mandates — for example, by institutionalising digital evidence preservation, timelines for investigation and victim-sensitive procedures that BNS/BNSS advocate. They translate central statutes' broad policy aims into concrete procedural steps at the ground level: operationalising mandatory registration and recording practices, enabling admissibility standards for electronic records (chain-of-custody and metadata preservation), and providing mechanisms for expedited handling of categories prioritised by national law (such as sexual offences and child exploitation). In doing so, the 2025 Rules reduce the risk of procedural friction between state practice and central law and create a practicable template for ensuring that legislative reforms are effective in actual courtrooms.

In sum, the 2025 Rules are an institutional instrument: they convert constitutional obligations and national legislative objectives into mandatory, administrable court practice — designed to make justice faster, fairer, and more technologically resilient across Tamil Nadu.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE 2025 RULES***Procedural reforms in filing, case-flow management, evidence handling.***

The 2025 Rules create a uniform, mandatory workflow for criminal proceedings: standardized e-filing formats for charge-sheets and other applications; compulsory early disclosure of prosecution material to the accused; calendared pre-trial conferences to identify issues and limit contested facts; and strict protocols for marking, indexing and preserving exhibits. These measures convert ad-hoc practices into auditable processes that reduce adjournment abuse and procedural surprise, thereby safeguarding the accused's right to a fair defence and the public interest in timely disposition under Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution⁵. The Rules also require contemporaneous inventorying of material evidence and detailed docket notes, making court records sufficiently transparent for appellate and supervisory review.

⁵ Articles 14 and 21 <https://share.google/9LQl6QBWWntfpLxec>

Technology integration: e-filing, digital signatures, QR codes.

A central innovation is mandatory **e-filing** with verified digital signatures, secure storage of filings, QR-authenticated certified copies of orders, and encrypted archival of audio-visual recordings. The Rules obligate courts and investigating agencies to maintain metadata and chain-of-custody logs for electronic material, and to follow admissibility standards consistent with **Section 63 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) 2023**. These provisions strengthen probative value of electronic evidence and reduce scope for tampering, while also requiring robust data-security protocols to protect sensitive material⁶.

Victim-centric and witness-protection measures.

The Rules institutionalise victim-sensitive practices: audio-visual recording of statements in a trauma-informed manner, female-examiner options for sexual-offence cases, in-camera proceedings where necessary, and restricted access to sensitive recordings⁷. Formal witness-protection procedures (anonymisation, secure testimony rooms, pseudonymous filing where needed) are built into routine case management to reduce intimidation and encourage reporting. These steps operationalise the judiciary's duty to minimize secondary victimisation while preserving due process for accused persons, guided by safeguards against compelled self-incrimination under Article 20(3) of the Indian Constitution⁸ and respect for dignity as affirmed in *Nandini Satpathy v. P.L. Dani*⁹.

Mandatory timelines for investigation and trials.

The 2025 Rules prescribe enforceable timelines for key stages investigation completion, filing of charge-sheets, framing of charges and closure of trials within category-specific windows and require recorded judicial reasons for any adjournment. Non-compliance triggers supervisory reporting to the registry and potential administrative review. The Rules balance expedition with fairness by preserving implicated rights (e.g., adequate time for defence preparation and disclosure obligations). At the same time, technology and standardized procedures make timeline compliance verifiable, moving procedural speed from aspiration to an operational norm.

⁶ Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules, 2025 - 2(j), 2(k), 2(l), 2(Y) which says electronic records, audio-visual recording, digital signature, QR code authenticated documents

⁷ Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules, 2025 - 2(h)

⁸ Article 20(3) <https://share.google/9LQl6QBWWntfpLxec>

⁹ *Nandini Satpathy v. P.L. Dani* (1978) 2 SCC 424

Together, these features reframe criminal practice in Tamil Nadu: they integrate technological safeguards with procedural discipline and victim protection, while embedding mechanisms for accountability and judicial oversight to preserve constitutional fairness.

Illustratively: Gold jewel theft case, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, Justice Mr. Pugalendhi, held that the unidentified jewel theft case victims were entitled to compensation, from the State Government. This decision serves as notable example of the victim-centric approach reflected newly enacted criminal legislations such as BNS/BNSS.

STRUCTURAL AND PROCEDURAL INNOVATIONS INTRODUCED IN 2025

The 2025 Rules move beyond form-based harmonisation and introduce structural innovations that reshape the lifecycle of a criminal case from pre-trial stages through trial to post-trial record transmission. They convert discretionary practices into mandatory, auditable steps (electronic disclosure, indexed exhibits, calendared hearings) and thereby aim to make procedural fairness and expedition measurable and enforceable in everyday court functioning.

Pre-trial procedures and digital disclosure.

Pre-trial under the 2025 Rules is transformed by mandatory electronic disclosure and structured pre-trial conferences. Investigating agencies must upload indexed investigation packages (including charge-sheets, witness statements and digital exhibits) to the court portal within prescribed windows, and defence counsel receive secure access with certified metadata. The Rules operationalise early issue-management: pre-trial hearings fix the points in controversy, rule on preliminary legal questions, and set timetables for evidence to prevent “trial by ambush.” These steps reflect the constitutional requirement that procedure must be fair and reasonable; the broad principle laid down in *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*¹⁰ that procedure cannot be arbitrary if it affects personal liberty underpins the Rules’ insistence on early, transparent disclosure and defined pre-trial processes.

Changes in trial Procedure.

Trial conduct is standardised: electronic cause-lists, QR-authenticated orders, and contemporaneous electronic indexing of all exhibits become mandatory. The 2025 Rules require

¹⁰ *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978) 1 SCC 248

certified audio-visual recording of witness testimony in categories of cases (especially sexual offences, child matters, complex financial crimes) and mandate metadata retention and chain-of-custody logs for digital evidence, consistent with admissibility safeguards such as Section 63 of the BSA. Judges must give reasoned orders for adjournments, and recordkeeping obligations ensure appellate courts have complete digital dockets. By institutionalising these practices, the Rules reduce opportunities for lost or tampered records and enhance the integrity of trial Procedure.

Post-trial and appellate documentation improvements.

Post-trial processes are expedited by automated generation of appellate bundles and certified electronic transmission of records to higher courts. The Rules prescribe timelines for transcription, certified copy issuance, and consolidation of digital case records to speed up first appeals and reduce pendency. Where custodial or procedural irregularities arise, the Rules require supervisory reporting and enable prompt interlocutory review. The emphasis on timeliness and verified digital records also aligns with judicial concerns about undue delay and the right to effective remedy the 2025 framework thus seeks to operationalise speedy and accountable appellate access through practical, technology-backed mechanisms.

Collectively, these innovations make the 2025 Rules a blueprint for contemporary criminal case-management: early digital disclosure, standardised trial documentation, authenticated recordings, and streamlined appellate transmission. Properly resourced and implemented, they materially improve transparency, preserve evidentiary integrity, and promote fair, timely adjudication consistent with constitutional guarantees.

COMPARATIVE STUDY: PRE-2025 FRAMEWORKS AND 2025 NEW RULES

The shift from the pre-2025 criminal procedural rules to the *Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedural Rules of Practice, 2025* marks a clear departure from a largely manual, discretion-driven system to a uniform, technology-enabled and accountability-oriented structure. Under the earlier framework, criminal courts depended on a patchwork of circulars, administrative instructions and practices varying from one session division to the session division, resulting in inconsistent filing norms, unpredictable adjournment patterns, weak record management and limited mechanisms for monitoring compliance. In contrast, the 2025 Rules introduce structural uniformity by mandating e-filing, digital signatures, QR-based authentication, standardized

exhibit indexing and audio-visual recording, thereby replacing fragmented practices with codified digital procedures. Procedurally, the pre-2025 era lacked early disclosure obligations, structured pre-trial hearings, and strict timelines; investigations often extended without effective oversight, and trials were prolonged due to inadequate case-flow management — issues repeatedly highlighted by courts while interpreting Article 21's speedy-trial requirement, such as in *P. Ramachandra Rao v. State of Karnataka*¹¹, where the Supreme Court acknowledged systemic delay but urged procedural reform rather than judicial time-limits and accountability. The 2025 Rules respond directly by embedding enforceable calendars for investigation, witness examination, and trial completion, requiring written reasons for adjournments and enabling supervisory audit trails for delays. Most significantly, accountability and compliance mechanisms, previously weak or absent, are strengthened through metadata-preserved digital records, automatic generation of appellate case bundles, and mandatory reporting of non-compliance to administrative authorities. These features create measurable transparency, reduce scope for manipulation, and ensure evidentiary integrity—a sharp contrast to the earlier reliance on paper files susceptible to loss, tampering, or inconsistent certification. By merging structural uniformity, procedural discipline and technology-backed verification, the 2025 Rules transform Tamil Nadu's criminal practice from a system dependent on individual court culture into a standardized, transparent, and constitutionally aligned model consistent with national reforms under the BNS/BNSS.

JUDICIAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The *Tamil Nadu Criminal Procedure Rules, 2025* carry significant judicial and policy implications by positioning state criminal procedure in alignment with the broader national framework under the CrPC's successor statutes—the *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)* and *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)*—while ensuring that constitutional guarantees remain at the center of all procedural innovations. The Rules harmonize state-level practices with BNSS provisions on digital processes, timelines for investigation, electronic service, and victim-sensitive handling, thereby reducing interpretational friction and strengthening cooperative federalism in criminal administration. Importantly, the 2025 Rules embed procedural safeguards that give concrete expression to Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution by mandating fair, reasonable, and non-arbitrary procedures, consistent with the jurisprudential standards articulated

¹¹ *P. Ramachandra Rao v. State of Karnataka*, (2002) 4 SCC 578

in *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India*¹². Their emphasis on authenticated digital evidence, standardized examination of witnesses, and structured trial calendars ensures that speedy justice does not compromise procedural fairness. In addition, the Rules require courts to record reasons for adjournments, preserve metadata, and maintain digital audit trails, thereby promoting transparency and enabling meaningful appellate review key elements of constitutional compliance. From a policy standpoint, successful enforcement demands sustained investment in technological infrastructure, stakeholder training, cybersecurity protocols, and district-level monitoring mechanisms. Policymakers must also address digital divides across regions, ensure linguistically accessible e-platforms, and establish grievance redressal systems to protect vulnerable litigants. The Rules therefore not only modernize criminal practice but also impose a policy obligation on the State to build institutional capacity, revise administrative workflows, and promote inter-agency coordination, ensuring that the promise of the 2025 framework is fully realized in practice and remains consistent with the constitutional vision of accessible, efficient, and dignified justice.

CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL OBSTACLES

The ambition of the 2025 Rules collides with hard realities on the ground infrastructural, human, legal and administrative which must be confronted if the reforms are to deliver meaningful change.

Infrastructure & digital-readiness. Many district courts still lack reliable high-speed internet, secure servers, uninterrupted power, functioning AV suites and document-scanning facilities. E-filing, encrypted storage of audio-visual evidence¹³, and QR-authenticated certified copies¹⁴ presuppose robust hardware and disaster-resilient backup. Without investment in data centres, network redundancy and local ICT support, digital workflows will create new bottlenecks rather than remove old ones. The Rules therefore require concomitant budgetary allocations and a staged rollout so that technology becomes an enabler, not a source of fresh procedural failure¹⁵.

Human resource gaps & training. Technology alone cannot replace procedural competence. Court staff, judges, prosecutors and police need hands-on training in e-filing portals, digital chain-of-custody, metadata handling, and cyber-forensics. The defence bar and legal-aid services also

¹² *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978) 1 SCC 248

¹³ Section 2(1)(d) of Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023

¹⁴ Section 59, 63 & 76 of Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023

¹⁵ Section 105, 107, 172(1A), 180, 183 & 530 BNSS

require capacity building so indigent accused can effectively access electronic records. Shortfalls in trained forensic labs, transcription services and victim-support personnel will frustrate the timelines the Rules prescribe; hence, comprehensive, recurring training programmes and certified skill-benchmarks are indispensable.

Data security & privacy concerns. The 2025 Rules increase collection and storage of sensitive personal data witness testimonies, medical records, CCTV footage which raises risks of unauthorized access, leaks or misuse. Constitutional privacy principles require strong safeguards: encryption standards, role-based access controls, audit logs, retention and deletion policies, and statutory remedies for breaches. Adherence to principles established in privacy jurisprudence requires both technical safeguards and a clear legal framework for data protection, oversight and remedies.

Uniform implementation across districts. Tamil Nadu's urban districts may quickly operationalize the new systems; rural and remote districts may lag, creating a two-tier justice delivery where procedural advantages accrue unevenly. Administrative measures — phased implementation, minimum infrastructure standards, mobile court units, and centralised tech support are necessary to prevent geographic inequality. Monitoring mechanisms (periodic audits, public dashboards of compliance metrics, and escalation procedures for persistent non-compliance) will be key to translating rules into practice.

CONCLUSION

The Tamil Nadu Criminal procedure Rules, 2025 represent a landmark reform in the administration of criminal justice, offering a comprehensive framework that blends procedural modernization, technological integration, and rights-oriented principles. By replacing fragmented practices with a unified set of rules, the 2025 framework addresses longstanding inefficiencies, delays, and inconsistencies that have historically undermined the fairness and effectiveness of criminal adjudication in the State. Its emphasis on digital workflows mandatory e-filing, QR-authenticated orders, audio-visual recording of evidence, and metadata-preserved exhibits not only enhances transparency and accountability but also strengthens the probative value and integrity of judicial records, reducing the scope for manipulation and error.

Equally significant is the victim-centric orientation of the Rules. Structured timelines, confidential handling of sensitive material, and formalized witness-protection measures

operationalize the judiciary's obligation to minimize secondary victimization while maintaining procedural fairness for the accused. By integrating these safeguards, the Rules give practical expression to constitutional guarantees under Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution, ensuring equality before law, equal protection before law, rule of laws, principal role of laws and the right to speedy and fair trial. Furthermore, the institutionalization of pre-trial conferences, case-flow management, and appellate digital transmission represents a structural shift from discretionary practices to enforceable, auditable processes, thereby promoting consistency and predictability across all criminal courts.

However, the successful implementation of these reforms depends critically on infrastructural preparedness, human resource capacity, and data-security safeguards. Gaps in digital infrastructure, uneven technological literacy, and challenges in rural or resource-limited districts could impede the uniform adoption of the Rules. Addressing these practical obstacles through phased rollout, comprehensive training programs, robust cybersecurity protocols, and ongoing administrative oversight is essential to ensure that the Rules achieve their full potential.

In the Tamil Nadu Criminal procedure Rules, 2025 set a new benchmark for state-level criminal Justice administration in India. They exemplify how a coordinated approach combining technology, procedural discipline, and rights-protective measures can transform criminal justice delivery. By fostering efficiency, transparency, and fairness, the 2025 Rules position Tamil Nadu as a model for judicial modernization, demonstrating the potential of innovative, constitutionally anchored reforms to create a criminal justice system that is both effective and humane.

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