

STATUS OF WOMEN LAWYERS IN INDIA

by

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Introduction:

India has seen a tremendous evolution in the involvement of females in the profession of law. From the time when women were restricted to work in the legal profession to the time when they are working as lawyers, judicial officers, scholars, In-house counsel and regulators. The first Indian women lawyer Cornelia Sorabji, who busted well established gender bias and placed the substructure for the descendants of women in the field of law. Regardless of these procurements, female lawyers still deal with remarkable systematic, economic and organisational objections that hamper their skilled upliftment and supremacy prospects. However, the latest legal steps, wellbeing initiatives, and scheme amendments depict the rise in devotion to gender parity, which is pending and is yet to be executed to assure balanced delegation and encouraging proficient workspace. The blog analyses the former progression, current condition, significant constraints, wellbeing measures, and delegation of females in the judicial system. Emphasising on the developments and the modifications required to attain true gender parity in the juridical occupation.

Historical Background:

Cornelia Sorabji was the first female lawyer and first Indian female to attain the degree of law from Oxford University and a graduate from Bombay University. Born in 1866, she served Pardahnashin females. In India females were not allowed to pursue the profession of law before 1923, the year in which the Legal Practitioners (Women) Act was enacted. Visionary females such as Mithan TATA was the first female to exercise before the Hon'ble Bombay High Court and the first female judge in 1937 was Anna Chandy in India who paved the way for the upcoming descendants.

The pace of change following the 1923 Act remained slow for several decades. Despite gaining formal access to the legal profession, women continued to face significant social and institutional barriers that kept their numbers low at the Bar. According to data published by The Print (2026), women now constitute approximately 15 percent of the roughly 1.7 million advocates enrolled in India, a figure that, while reflecting notable progress, also underscores the persistent gap between formal legal access and substantive professional participation. The

concentration of women in early-career and district-court practice, as opposed to senior roles and higher courts, reveals that entry into the profession has not translated equally into advancement through it.

Current condition of female lawyers in lawful occupation:

As per the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) report, Documenting Voices of Women Legal Professionals in India (2026) emphasises that even though females have made crucial growth in getting into lawful careers, they consistently deal with continuous systematic, economic, and organisational obstacles. On the basis of an examination of 2,604 female lawyers from 23 State Bar Councils, the document identified that 81% of participants considered their professional growth as more demanding than that of their male peers, with many undergoing gender discrimination, restricted contact - building prospects, uneven availability to occupational materials, and challenges in creating impartial lawful procedures. The survey also indicates that 83% of the participants were first generation lawyers which makes it more challenging to avail guidance, occupational connections and professional chances. Moreover, obstacles such as work environment mistreatment, work setting unevenness, economic uncertainty and extreme degree of anxiety leads to limited continuation of females in the occupation. The SCBA suggests steps to form a more comprehensive and fair lawful occupation in India.

The financial dimension of these barriers is particularly acute for women entering the profession. The SCBA survey found that economic uncertainty is one of the most significant factors contributing to the attrition of women from the legal profession. Entry-level women lawyers in India frequently earn little to no income during their first years of practice, with many working as juniors without formal stipends or employment contracts. This precarity disproportionately affects women, particularly those from non-legal family backgrounds, who lack the professional networks and financial support systems that help sustain careers through the uncertain early years of practice. The SCBA survey noted that 83 percent of respondents

were first-generation lawyers, making the absence of financial cushions especially consequential for their long-term retention in the profession.

Hurdles for female lawyers in India:

1. **Gender discrimination and Misconceptions:** In spite of development in gender parity, females in law generally deal with persistent preconceptions. Some customers and coworkers may still consider male lawyers as more credible, which makes it challenging for female degree holders to develop reliability. Conquering these preconceptions needs continuous striving and merit.
2. **Work-Life Integration:** The lawful occupation is challenging, with extended hours, strict due dates, and considerable strained surroundings. Many female lawyers endeavour to stabilise work dedication with family duties, which amounts to strain and fatigue.
3. **Insufficient Presentation in Administrative Positions:** More female lawyers are getting into the legal profession, administrative roles persist to be male ruled. Legal firms and commercial lawful groups frequently see less females growing to superior associate, magistrate, or managerial positions.
4. **Uneven Remuneration:** The gender remuneration disparity in the legal domain, with female lawyers consistently emoluments less than their male peers irrespective of alike credentials and expertise.

The gender pay gap in the legal profession in India is compounded by structural factors beyond simple wage discrimination. Research conducted alongside the SCBA survey indicates that women lawyers face reduced earnings due to their disproportionate concentration in lower-paid practice areas, fewer opportunities to secure high-value commercial briefs, and systemic exclusion from informal professional networks through which lucrative work is traditionally distributed. Women from marginalised backgrounds, including first-generation lawyers, are particularly vulnerable to this income gap, as they typically lack access to the established client networks and senior mentors who might channel work their way. A 2026 report by The Print noted that women advocates in district courts form the majority of women practitioners (52.9 percent), a level of the profession characterised by lower fees and less financial stability than practice at higher courts.

5. **Workenvironment Mistreatment and Bias:** Sexual mistreatment and bias persist to be issues in some lawful work settings. Various females feel strained to endure

improper conduct to preserve their occupations, which makes it essential to promote more secure workplaces.

Well - being steps for female lawyers:

Identifying these obstacles, numerous steps have been initiated to foster higher gender fairness in the lawful occupation.

- a) Administration and Participation:** The declaration indicates a beneficial effort by the Indian judicial system to strengthen gender justice in the lawful occupation. The suggestion to assure that at least 50% of appointed lawyers are females seeks to enhance female's contribution in administrative lawful committees and establish equivalent occupational prospects. Even though females comprise a substantial percentage of graduates of law, their participation reduces at higher - level as a result of diverse systematic and administrative obstacles. By encouraging increased integration, this step aims to improve females's occupation growth, management, and presence while enhancing a more different, unbiased and reachable fair framework.

A significant institutional development reinforcing this direction occurred in December 2025, when the Supreme Court of India, in a landmark order, directed that a minimum of 30 percent of seats in all State Bar Councils be reserved for women, with 20 percent to be filled through elections and 10 percent through co-option where elections do not yield adequate representation. This direction came in response to data showing that women, who constitute approximately 15 percent of India's approximately 1.7 million enrolled advocates, held only 2.1 percent of elected positions across 18 State Bar Councils before the intervention. The court issued a stern warning that Bar Associations failing to comply would be liable to be suspended through judicial order. This development represents the most significant structural reform to women's representation in legal governance bodies since the 1923 Act first permitted women to practise law.

- b) Framework and court infrastructure:** Numerous steps have been implemented to develop a more encouraging and diverse workplace. These comprise of diligent sanitary facilities, rest areas, Child care centres, improved safety, gender awareness initiatives, and economic support for female lawyers. Moreover, the Bar Council of India has mandated State Bar Councils to secure that at least 25% of individuals in regulatory and

other panels are females, thus advancing female's involvement in leadership institutions within the lawful occupation.

c) Economic and Wellness Assistance: The Draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025 emphasises significantly on maintaining female and young lawyers by suggesting extensive wellness finances. These steps targets to offer wellness coverage, crisis medicinal assistance, and financial support for entry - level lawyers to connect the monetary disparity initially in their occupations.

d) Non - profit organisation's: Numerous non - profit organisations serve a crucial function in assisting female lawyers and encouraging gender equality in India. Measures such as the PARVAAZ Legal Fellowship (SAWF-IN), iProbono India, Majlis Legal Centre, Lawyers Collective, Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI), All India Federation of Women Lawyers (AIFWL), and Partners for Law in Development (PLD) extend guidance, legal education, financial support, pro bono legal opportunities, legal assistance, and capacity development programmes. These institutions also employ to enhance female's availability to fairness, address gender - related violence, encourage legal literacy, and facilitate strategic litigation and enable female lawyers by means of occupational professional connections and guidance progress, thus assisting substantially to a more comprehensive and Gender - sensitive legal occupation.

e) Participation of females in the judicial system: Females continue to be inadequately represented in India's superior judiciary, consisting of approximately 3% of Supreme Court members of the judiciary and 14% of High court members of the judiciary. Expanding female participation is necessary to maintain the lawful values of fairness and to provide different viewpoints to judicial adjudication. On the other hand, obstacles including gender discrimination, inadequate mentorship, work - life harmony, and absence of open variety attention in juridical selections persist to hamper their growth. Enhancing guidance, strengthening facilities, and fostering gender - balanced selection strategies can help form a more inclusive and fair judicial system.

The scale of the pipeline problem in the Indian judiciary is starkly revealed by data tracking women's participation at successive levels of the profession. While women now comprise 57 percent of CLAT candidates seeking admission to law schools, this figure drops to

approximately 15 percent of enrolled advocates at the Bar, and then further to 14 percent of High Court judges, before reaching a mere 3 percent representation on the Supreme Court bench. This progressive attrition at each career stage is not accidental. It reflects the compounding effect of structural disadvantages, including reduced access to mentorship, the disproportionate domestic burden carried by women at mid-career, the informal and opaque nature of the collegium selection process, and the near-total male dominance of the Bar councils and associations that shape judicial careers. Research by the Centre for Law and Policy Research (2025) further documents that women from marginalised communities, including Dalit, Adivasi, and minority-religion lawyers, are almost entirely absent from the higher judiciary, making the representation deficit both a gender issue and an intersectional one.

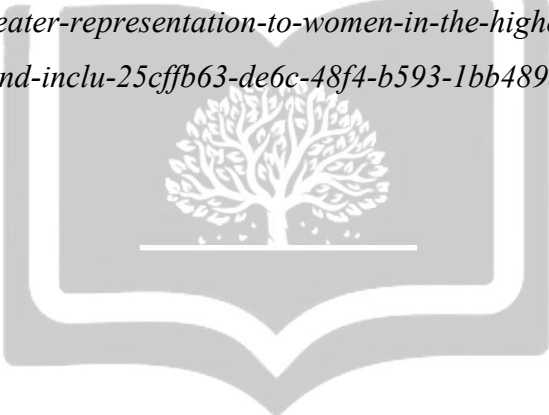
Conclusion:

In India the path of female lawyers is a chronicle of strength, tenacity and steady growth. There has been a significant increase in the presence of female lawyers in the profession of law and substantial landmarks have been attained. Despite this, gender discrimination, uneven prospects, place of work persecution, economic uncertainty and inadequate representation in governance and the upper judicial system remain to cause significant difficulties. The latest steps by the judicial system, Bar Council of India, suggested statutory amendments, and the contributions by many non- governmental organisations display a favourable transition towards forming comprehensive juridical occupation. Attaining real gender parity, nonetheless, needs continuous organisational aid, efficient execution of well- being steps, clear selection methods, and an ethos that gives importance to excellence and variety evenly. Enabling female lawyers is not only crucial for their career growth but also for enhancing the fair execution mechanism and preserving the fundamental values of parity, equity, and means to fairness.

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