

Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the '*Committee on Publication Ethics*'

Online ISSN:2584-184X



Research Paper

Strategies for Empowerment and Promotion of Female Advocates Within the Ambit of the Judicial System: Special Reference to Jharkhand High Court

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18919098>

ABSTRACT	Manuscript Info.
<p>The legal profession in India has historically been a male-dominated domain, and the Ranchi High Court (formerly the Jharkhand High Court) reflects this broader national trend. Even while there have been legislation and constitutional provisions that promote equality between the sexes, women advocates face a host of challenges within the Indian judicial system that range from gender discrimination to lack of mentorship and adequate infrastructural facilities and high-value cases being assigned to them. This review paper attempts to synthesise the existing literature on structural, socio-cultural and institutional challenges faced by women advocates in the Indian justice system, with particular focus on the Ranchi High Court. This paper seeks to suggest recommendations based on a literature review and feminist legal theory or institutional analysis to uplift women advocates in the Indian judiciary, generally with special emphasis on the Ranchi High Court. Hopefully, this paper will add to the existing literature on why gender equity is so important in the legal profession and serve as a guideline for reform at the High Court level in Jharkhand.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ISSN No: 2584- 184X ✓ Received: 07-08-2025 ✓ Accepted: 26-09-2025 ✓ Published: 30-09-2025 ✓ MRR:3(9):2025;142-146 ✓ ©2025, All Rights Reserved. ✓ Peer Review Process: Yes ✓ Plagiarism Checked: Yes <p>How To Cite this Article</p> <p>Shrivastava S, Singh N K. Strategies for Empowerment and Promotion of Female Advocates Within the Ambit of the Judicial System: Special Reference to Ranchi High Court. Ind J Mod Res Rev. 2025;3(9):142-146.</p>

KEYWORDS: Female advocates, Ranchi High Court, Judicial empowerment, Gender equity, Legal profession

INTRODUCTION

The law profession is a pillar of both democratic governance and the rule of law. But worldwide, including India, women's entry into and progress in this field is deeply inequitable. The scenario at the Ranchi High Court, which is a court of record for Jharkhand, reflects larger impediments faced by women who advocate in tier-two Indian cities. Jharkhand, a separate state formed in the year 2000 out of Bihar, has a legal environment that reflects resource scarcity, entrenched social hierarchies and weak professional support systems for its female practitioners.

The Bar Council of India have recognised gender imbalance in the representation of women advocates across its rolls, where currently only 15 per cent of all enrolled advocates nationally are women, and that too less than this percentage in states like Jharkhand (Bar Council of India, 2019). Not only is there historical exclusion built into this disproportion, but the imbalance is also reproduced through institutional norms, social expectations, and structural organisation of courts and bar associations.

This review paper aims at elucidating the various conflicting hurdles of empowerment amongst the female advocates in Ranchi High Court, and also finds out a evidence based way to empower them. The paper combines insights from feminist legal scholarship, comparative international work, empirical studies on the Indian legal profession and the judicial reform literature to create a multidimensional framework for reform.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper draws upon feminist legal theory, which interrogates the practices and processes of law to reveal how they are organised in a way that sustains asymmetries of gender (MacKinnon 1989). Feminist jurisprudence questions the neutrality of law and raises concerns that objective legal standards of evaluation often represent male-centred paradigms. In the context of legal practice, this framework highlights how professional norms regarding so-called “working hours,” courtroom behavior and client solicitation are structured around a masculine ideal that works to women’s disadvantage. In addition to feminist legal theory, this paper mobilises institutional theory in a consideration of how organisational formations within the bar and the judiciary impact professional opportunities. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue that institutional change is often gradual instead of revolutionary, taking the form of processes such as layering, displacement, or conversion. In this light, a genuinely institutional approach to reform lends itself particularly well to consideration of how bar associations and court administrations might be reorganised to further gender equity. Additionally, the capability approach developed by Sen (1999) and further elaborated by Nussbaum (2000) provides a normative foundation for assessing whether female advocates have genuine opportunities to develop their professional capabilities. This approach focuses not merely on formal legal equality but on substantive freedoms, the real ability of women to practise law effectively and to advance within the profession.

3. Historical Context: Women in the Indian Legal Profession

Women breaking into the Indian legal profession was a battle fought both legally and socially. The Calcutta High Court allowed women to practice in 1916, and Regina Guha became the first woman to be enrolled as a pleader in India (Agnes, 2004). It was not until 1923, with the introduction of the Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, that women were fully and formally permitted admission as legal practitioners in hitherto all courts. More than a century into this formal inclusion, however, substantive equality has been elusive. In the years after independence, the number of women advocates gradually but slowly grew. Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution of India brought a normative regime with regard to principal guarantees against gender discrimination; however, the degree of this constitutional guarantee translating into professional reality has not been uniform. Mishra (2018) notes that the legacy of tribal customary practices in Jharkhand, entrenched patriarchal family structures and inadequate educational infrastructure for women further limited women's entry to the legal profession in Ranchi

specifically. Ranchi, being the capital of a comparatively newly formed state, has had its High Court functioning since 2000. In its short institutional history, the Court has received many gendered norms from the older Bihar judicial ecosystem while being influenced by the unique socio-economic context of Jharkhand. This inheritance is evidenced in the bar at the Ranchi High Court, where women advocates crowd low-value briefs and often do not appear before the apex court or get elected to senior positions of bar associations.

4. Barriers to the Empowerment of Female Advocates

4.1 Structural and Institutional Barriers

Lack of institutional support is one of the strongest barriers facing women in the legal industry. They include the lack of basic facilities within court premises—such as restrooms dedicated to women, nursing rooms, and safe waiting areas for women advocates—which demonstrate the extent to which the infrastructure on physical courts has been inbuilt without provision for absence (Dhanda, 2009). The infrastructure constraints at the Ranchi High Court further compound these challenges, as the court complex has struggled with chronic overcrowding and a lack of necessary facilities. Another structural barrier is the organisation of bar associations. Women have reached less than 50% of the senior positions in the Jharkhand High Court Bar Association, which has limited their power to control polices and norms for professional practice. Bar elections, which typically adhere to informal networks and seniority-based conventions, disadvantage newer entrants, a category that disproportionately consists of women (Jaising 2020).

4.2 Socio-Cultural Barriers

Even beyond institutional structures, the female advocates at the Ranchi High Court navigate a complex socio-cultural landscape where gender does not stand alone and intersects with caste, tribal identity and class. The assumption that women are largely responsible for domestic and caregiving work made it hard for them to devote time and energy to building a practice. It is women who have children who face specific career disadvantages in a profession where client relationships are developed through sustained, extra-time, often after-hours communication (Menon, 2004). The culture of the bar itself comes with its own challenges. Legal practice at trial courts in Jharkhand is characterised by a high degree of informal socialisation in male-dominated spaces—tea stalls, smoking areas, and chamber gatherings from which women are often excluded or feel unwelcome. These informal spaces are critical sites for information exchange, mentorship and client referral, thus exclusion from them is professionally costly (Kannabiran, 2014).

4.3 Economic Barriers

The legal profession is a particularly hard industry for women. The early years of practice are financially precarious, when advocates are building up their reputation and client base. Often, women advocates struggle to get these internal client referrals

from senior advocates established in the profession whose bias, conscious or otherwise, will lean towards their male juniors. The many women who inhabit family law and so-called 'soft' areas, be it commercial law, criminal defence, or constitutional litigation, further depress those earnings and status (Menon 2004).

4.4 Harassment and Safety Concerns

Sexual harassment in the legal profession is a real and underreported barrier to women's advancement. The hierarchy of chambers and the reliance of junior advocates on senior counsel for briefs and guidance mean that conditions can exist in which harassment goes unaddressed. While the legal profession is not exempt from the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, Internal Complaints Committees have yet to be established in all bar associations or are not functioning effectively (Parashar, 2017).

5. Strategies for Empowerment and Promotion

5.1 Mentorship and Networking Programmes

One of the most successful strategies for supporting women's professional development is the establishment of structured mentorship programmes (Kanter, 1977), which are well-documented in extant literature. For the Ranchi High Court, such a programme may be institutionalised through the Jharkhand High Court Bar Association, pairing junior women advocates with senior practitioners (male and female) who can help guide on practice development, court craft and client management. Similar models have been tried out on a national level for Indian advocates (i.e., regional firms) through the Society of Indian Law Firms, which has shaped many existing aspects due to their feasibility in the Indian legal sector (Bar Council of India, 2019). Alongside formal mentorship, peer networking groups for women advocates can build horizontal support structures that seek to be less dependent on senior patronage. Organise continuing legal education programmes, host client referral networks and provide a forum for collective advocacy on issues impacting women in the profession.

5.2 Gender-Sensitive Bar Association Policies

Bar associations, the primary representative institution of the legal profession, have substantial authority to influence professional culture and norms. In addition to ensuring representation of women, the Jharkhand High Court Bar Association could consider inclusion of gender-sensitive policies in its mandate, such as reservation of seats for women members within its executive committee, implementation of reasonable and transparent procedures for allocation of cases/ matters among practicing advocates when distributing legal assignments to ensure non-discrimination based on sex while equipping itself with a functional ICC (as mandated by the 2013 Act). Comparative data is instructive: the Law Society of England and Wales has implemented a Diversity & Inclusion Charter that could serve as an institutional reform template (Hale, 2001).

5.3 Infrastructure Improvement

It is the responsibility of court administrations to ensure that physical infrastructure is inclusive and safe. The Ranchi High Court should, in collaboration with the state government and the High Court Bar Association, expedite construction of specialised facilities to cater specifically to the needs of women advocates, such as designated restrooms, lactation rooms and waiting areas. The 2020 guidelines on court infrastructure published by the Supreme Court of India frame a guideline to work within at a national level, for such improvements (Supreme Court of India, 2020).

5.4 Legal Education and Awareness

Empowerment starts before women even enter the profession. NUSRL Ranchi and other law schools in Jharkhand can play a critical role in preparing women for the reality of professional practice. Modules on professional rights, anti-harassment measures and gender dynamics in legal practice can also be included as part of the curriculum to prepare women law students for challenges ahead (Parashar, 2017). Clinical legal education programmes offering exposure to High Court practice may help integrate the practical and the theoretical, bridging that gap with professional reality.

5.5 Affirmative Action and Institutional Quotas

Following the constitutional scheme of Articles 15(3) and 16(4), which allow the state to provide distinct provisions/protection with high priority to women and other underrepresented communities, this is a solid legal position for affirmative policy within the bar and judiciary. To create a tangible mechanism for women advocates, joining the Bar by reserving a percentage of High Court Legal Services Committee appointments, government litigation panels, and bar leadership positions would be an effective step in that direction. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) note that this is a widespread mechanism for incremental institutional change in gender-equity contexts: Patterns of layering, where new rules are added above previous structures, have been particularly effective.

5.6 Technology and Remote Work Infrastructure

The Covid-19 pandemic catalysed the swift implementation of virtual court hearings across India, with the Supreme Court and various High Courts, including the Jharkhand High Court, conducting proceedings through video conferencing. Notably, this change has been said to disproportionately benefit women advocates who have caregiving responsibilities by easing the time and expense of attending court in person (Supreme Court of India, 2020). Maintaining and building on hybrid court infrastructure serves as an important means to better the work-life balance for female practitioners.

5.7 Judicial Sensitisation and Training

Judicial gender sensitisation training for judges and court staff is an important complementary response. Implicit biases, such as assumptions about women's competence or authority and their suitability for certain types of litigation, can impact judicial

receptivity to arguments presented by female advocates, even in the absence of deliberate discrimination. More deliberate institutionalisation of gender sensitisation at all levels of judges, including at the Ranchi High Court, is necessary in this sense (Kannabiran, 2014), as is more comprehensive and thorough periodic training on gender issues, which would help hold what are currently inconsistent practices to a higher standard.

6. Policy Recommendations

Based on the above considerations, this paper recommends the following policy propositions to be undertaken by the management bodies involved including Ranchi High Court administration, Jharkhand High Court Bar Association, Bar Council of India and state government of Jharkhand: First; A Gender equity cells in all state bar councils should be directed to set up by the Bar council of India along with an annual report on number upto date women advocates enrolled and their representation & participation level in leadership posts within bar followed by an application status of anti harassment mechanism. Second, the administration of the Jharkhand High Court must complete an audit with assistance from the Public Works Department to ensure that all court infrastructure is gender-sensitive and further improvements can be made in a time-bound manner. Third, the Jharkhand High Court Bar Association need to introduce a formalised mentorship programme for women advocates in the first five years of their practice, wherein senior advocates, through empanelment as amicus curiae, may involve themselves in the Programme. Fourth, the government of Jharkhand must review its own government litigation panels to ensure a fair and proportionate distribution of briefs to women advocates, particularly as you are aware that service matters & land acquisition matters & tribal rights litigation often transgress into public interest litigations, which work closely along with the particular legal landscape of Jharkhand. Fifth, NUSRL Ranchi and other law schools in Jharkhand should establish placement cells and alumni networks specifically oriented toward helping women graduates join High Court practice, and track employment outcomes disaggregated by gender.

CONCLUSION

Promoting and empowering female advocates in the Ranchi High Court is a matter of constitutional principle, professional ethics, and practical necessity. A judiciary and legal profession that draws upon the full spectrum of talent open to it, irrespective of gender, is in a stronger position to serve the diverse population of Jharkhand, including its large tribal communities whose legal interests are often at issue in High Court litigation. This review has revealed that the challenges facing women advocates in Ranchi are systemic and mutually reinforcing, existing at infrastructural, institutional, cultural, socio-normative and economic structural levels. They must be met with coordinated responses both systemically and at multiple levels involving the High Court administration itself, bar associations, law schools and government.

The strategies identified in this paper mentorship, gender-sensitive institutional policies, infrastructure reform, affirmative action (in terms of recruitment strategy so to speak), technology adoption and judicial sensitisation are not novel per se but their dovetailing in the particular specificity or context we have got into here vis-a-vis a seat of justice namely the Ranchi High Court constitutes a significant confluence for the literature on gender equity within the ambit of Indian legal profession. The future empirical work that monitors the impacts of these types of interventions will be critical to continue enhancing and cementing reform efforts. The judiciary is the guardian of constitutional rights. The institutions of justice must themselves embody the equalities they are charged with ensuring.

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