

In a first, collegium picks woman lawyer

If appointed, Ms. Malhotra would be the seventh woman judge in the Supreme Court's 68-year-old history.

Justice M. Fathima Beevi was the first woman SC judge appointed 39 years after the apex court was established in 1950. The second woman judge was Justice Sujata V. Manohar, who was appointed in 1994 for a five-year tenure in the Supreme Court.

The other four women judges are Justices Ruma Pal, Gyan Sudha Misra, Ranjana Prakash Desai, who was part of the Bench which confirmed the death penalty of the lone 26/11 Mumbai attacks convict Ajmal Kasab, and R. Banumathi, who was one of the judges who confirmed the death sentence for four convicts in the Nirbhaya gangrape appeals.

Women-centric cases

Justice Banumathi is the sole woman among the 25-strong Supreme Court judiciary. The court has been facing criticism for not bringing more women judges into its fold even as more and more gender-sensitive and women-centric cases reach the Supreme Court for adjudication.

Recently, all the direct elevations from the Supreme Court Bar have been men. Justices Rohinton Nariman, U.U. Lalit and L. Nageswara Rao were recent inductions to the Supreme Court from the Supreme Court Bar. Earlier, Justices S.M. Sikri, who became the 13th Chief Justice of India, S.C. Roy, Kuldip Singh and N. Santosh Hegde were appointed to the Supreme Court Bench directly from the Bar.

If cleared, Ms. Malhotra would be the eighth lawyer to be directly appointed to the Supreme Court Bench.

Justice K.M. Joseph was once described as an outstanding judge by Supreme Court judge and SC Collegium member Justice J. Chelameswar, who had urged the collegium to elevate him to the apex court.

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