

FEW WOMEN MAKE IT TO THE TOP: CJI

Relevant for: Polity | Topic: Judiciary in India: its Structure, Organization & Functioning, Judges of SC & High Courts, Judgments and related Issues

Chief Justice of India (CJI) N.V. Ramana on Saturday lamented that “very few women find representation at the top” and admitted that even a “mere” 11% representation of women on the Bench of the Supreme Court was achieved with “great difficulty”.

Ideally, women should have got at least 50% representation at all levels after 75 years of Independence, he said.

The CJI’s remarks come within days of the Supreme Court Collegium led by him scripting history by successfully recommending three women judges to the court in one go. The court has four women judges now, the highest ever.

“After 75 years of Independence, one would expect at least 50% representation for women at all levels, but I must admit, with great difficulty, we have now achieved a mere 11% representation of women on the Bench of the Supreme Court,” he stated at an event organised by the Bar Council of India to felicitate him.

Women lawyers’ woes

A majority of women lawyers suffered within the profession and continued to face significant challenges even after they reached the top. Women lacked basic amenities in court complexes.

“Women do not have restrooms in lower courts... It is difficult for them to wait for long hours in the court corridors,” the CJI pointed out.

The reality remained that the legal professions was yet to whole-heartedly welcome women into its fold, he noted.

The CJI refused to accept sole credit for the recent appointment of nine judges to the Supreme Court in one shot. The Collegium, led by the CJI, had followed this feat by recommending a whopping 68 judges to 12 High Courts, again in one go. Lawyers had referred to him as “Sachin Tendulkar” for repeatedly creating history within so short a time of taking charge as top judge in April 2021.

“A while ago, I was referred to as Sachin Tendulkar. I must correct the perception here. Like any game, it’s a team effort. Here, I must place on record my sincere thanks to my colleagues in the Collegium – Brothers U.U. Lalit, A.M. Khanwilkar, D.Y. Chandrachud and L. Nageswara Rao – who have become active and constructive partners in this endeavour,” he observed.

Judicial appointments was an “ongoing process”. The Collegium intended to “live up to the herculean task of filling up 41% of vacancies existing in all the High Courts”, he asserted.

At one point, commending the “young and dynamic” Law Minister, Kiren Rijiju, who was present on the dais, and the government, for quickly approving the nine names recommended for the Supreme Court, the CJI said “in another one month, we expect 90% of the vacancies filled in this country”.

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