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More than a room

Sometimes, the path to equality begins with something as basic and as essential as a room of one's own.




Women's Bar Room Karnataka High Court

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The increasing numbers of women entering litigation is extremely encouraging, but are our courts ready for them and equipped to support women's full and equal participation in the legal profession?

Karnataka has a large number of women lawyers practicing in the High Court and this number is only growing. In order to provide a safe working and meeting space for women advocates in the High Court, many women lawyers sought for a Women's Bar Room that is central and accessible.

On April 26, 2026, under the leadership and support of the Justice **Anu Sivaraman** – the senior-most woman judge in the High Court – and Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru, both of whom immediately responded, a Women's Bar Room was opened in the Karnataka High Court.

Over the last 2 months, the room has become a place of rest, work and safety for women advocates, especially the younger ones, who often do not get a place to sit in the two large, overcrowded advocates rooms in the High Court. The Advocates' Association, Bangalore has provided the required infrastructure of staff to maintain it, to ensure that it is clean and airy. It is equipped with a court listing board for women advocates to keep a watch on court matters and has comfortable seating, storage facilities and work tables for drafting and video conferences.



during a hectic court day. Some of the testimonials shared by the young women lawyers show what an important space this has become in the short time that it has opened.



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Interestingly, just after the Women's Bar Room in the Karnataka High Court was inaugurated, the Supreme Court on June 19 passed an order in [Sarika Tyagi & Ors v. Union of Indian](#), recognising the need for bar rooms and infrastructure for women lawyers. This was a public interest litigation filed by women advocates from across the country seeking women's bar rooms to be set up in all courts and also seeking financial assistance for younger lawyers to enable them to sustain their practice. The petition, on the basis of a survey, had documented that in a majority of High Courts, district courts, taluka courts, tribunals and commissions all over India, dedicated women's bar rooms either do not exist or lack basic amenities such as sufficient seating, clean washrooms, changing spaces, nursing facilities and other amenities necessary for the effective discharge of professional responsibilities by women members of the Bar.

The Supreme Court stated in its order that while there is a steady increase in the participation of women in litigation, in order for their participation to be made meaningful, it must be accompanied by the creation of conditions that enable women advocates to discharge their professional responsibilities effectively, safely and on equal terms.

The availability of adequately equipped spaces for women professionals within court complexes is one such indispensable condition. The Court acknowledged that courts are workplaces where substantial portions of lawyers' professional lives are spent and, not infrequently, assume the character of a second home. It recognised that advocates spend long hours preparing matters, interacting with clients, consulting colleagues and discharging their duties within court premises. They rely on such common amenities because many advocates cannot afford to maintain their own offices, appoint staff and purchase the required digital and physical resources. It held that the absence of a designated area where such basic facilities



women lawyers has a direct nexus to the fundamental guarantee of life and dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution and includes those conditions which enable an individual to live and work with dignity. When women advocates are required to spend substantial portions of their day within court premises, the availability of basic infrastructure necessary for their comfort, privacy, safety and professional functioning assumes utmost significance. The provision of these basic infrastructure facilities touches upon values that lie at the heart of the constitutional guarantee of dignity and equal participation in public life.

A women's bar room becomes the space where women can prepare for hearing, interact with colleagues and other lawyers and build professional networks that have been traditionally limited only to men, as the court has traditionally been a male-dominated workspace. For women advocates who are pregnant, nursing mothers and have to balance child-care responsibilities, the presence of facilities such as feeding rooms, creches, changing areas and clean restrooms can determine whether continuing litigation practice is practically feasible. With many High Courts including the Karnataka High Court having transgender advocates also starting to practice, the Women's Bar Room would make the Court a gender-inclusive space.

Gender-inclusive infrastructure in the form of women's bar rooms with accessible washrooms are fundamental to ensure that women not just enter the legal profession but also to remain, thrive and eventually lead within it. The Karnataka High Court, by setting up the Women Lawyers Bar Room, has recognised the needs and demands of women lawyers for equal access in the legal profession. Sometimes, the path to equality begins with something as basic and as essential as a room of one's own.

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The Central government is yet to clear several of the recommendations made by the Supreme Court collegium in this period.