

Justice Fathima Beevi, India's first female Judge, dies at age of 96

A mournful note was shared through the halls of justice in India on November 23, 2023 as the country mourned the passing of a judicial icon, Justice Fathima Beevi, at the age of 96. As India's first female justice, she made significant contributions to the legal landscape. In this blog article, we consider Justice Fathima Beevi's life, accomplishments, and enormous impact, along with the situations around her death and the impact that she leaves behind.

Justice Fathima Beevi's death leaves a significant vacuum in the legal world. It provides an opportunity to reflect on her significant career and the groundbreaking role she played in equal rights for women and women's empowerment in India.

The Dawn of Justice Fathima Beevi

Fatima Beevi was born on April 30, 1927, in a tiny town in Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India. Her path to becoming a Supreme Court judge was distinguished by her dedication and unflinching conviction. Her father urged her to get a legal degree. She passed the Bar Council test and became the first woman to obtain a gold medal from the Bar Council in 1950.



[Source: LiveLaw]

Fathima Beevi's life and career were defined by a series of innovative achievements. Each of these contributed to transforming the landscape of India's judicial system. Justice Beevi's career was one of tenacity and resilience, from her early schooling at the Catholicate School in Pathanamthitta to her graduation in Chemistry from Women's institution and later studies in law at a government law institution in Thiruvananthapuram.



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Justice Fathima Beevi: A Trailblazing Career

Fatima Beevi's legal career was as impressive as her academic accomplishments. She began her legal career at the Madras High Court, where she quickly became known for her strong legal acumen and unshakable dedication to justice. She argued in a number of instances, frequently representing marginalised people and campaigning for their rights.

- Justice Beevi became a High Court Judge in 1983 and a Supreme Court Judge in 1989.
- She was also the first Muslim judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court.
- After retiring, Justice Beevi became a member of the National Human Rights Commission before being named Governor of Tamil Nadu.
- During her stint as Governor of Tamil Nadu, Justice Beevi also served as Chancellor of Tamil Nadu University.
- She received the Bharat Jyoti Award and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the US-India Business Council (USIBC).

Justice Fathima Beevi: An Inspiration of Justice on the Supreme Court

Justice Fatima Beevi's achievements demonstrated her determination and scholastic prowess. She was the first student to finish a law degree with full marks in all courses in 1950. This accomplishment predicted her future trailblazing achievements in the legal profession. Eight years later, she won the Public Service Commission's competitive exam, which led to her appointment as a munsiff in the judicial services. This was only the start of her groundbreaking career.

Her nomination as the first Muslim woman judge in India's Supreme Court is noteworthy historically and symbolically. Her appointment as a judge in the Kerala High Court in 1983 broke down boundaries and opened the way for subsequent generations of female lawyers. She changed women's roles in the Indian court and continued to make history when she became the first woman judge on the Supreme Court of India six years later.

The life and achievements of Justice Beevi serve as an inspiration to the entire society, particularly women. Her unusual ability to overcome obstacles, as well as her knowledge of constitutional topics, were on display during her stint as Governor of Tamil Nadu from 1997 to 2001. During this time, she made significant decisions that would leave a lasting legacy.

Justice Fathima Beevi: Judgements

Mary Roy v. State of Kerala (1986): In this case, Justice Fatima Beevi handed down a decision with far-reaching repercussions for women's property rights. The court ruled that Christian women in Kerala have the same right to family property as men. This verdict was critical in challenging discriminatory practices against women in inheritance disputes.

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Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997): This historic decision was issued by a bench led by Justice J.S. Verma, however, Justice Fatima Beevi played an important role. The case dealt with the topic of workplace sexual harassment of women. The court established the "Vishaka Guidelines" to combat and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. These recommendations were a huge step towards making the workplace safer for women.

Justice Fathima Beevi: A Legacy of Empowerment and Inspiration

Justice Fathima Beevi's influence extended beyond her position as a judge. She was regarded as a role model for gender justice and women's empowerment, inspiring women to pursue legal careers and overcome cultural barriers that hampered their educational and professional goals. Her life's work emphasises the critical role of women in broader societal and institutional reform. Her devotion to gender justice and empowerment beyond her lifetime, left an indelible mark on future generations.

As India mourns the death of Justice Fathima Beevi, it is important to recall her lasting legacy. Justice Fathima Beevi's death serves as a painful reminder of the importance of pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of society.

- Kerala's Health Minister Veena George condoled her death by saying that the demise of Justice Beevi was extremely painful.
- The minister said that Justice Beevi made a mark as the first woman judge of the Supreme Court and as the Tamil Nadu Governor.
- "She was a brave woman who had many records to her name. She was a personality who through her own life, showed that willpower and a sense of purpose can overcome any adversity," George said in a statement.

In conclusion, Justice Fathima Beevi's life and work will be recognized as a model of tenacity, perseverance, and commitment to justice. Her legacy continues to encourage people, particularly women, to tear down barriers and pursue their aspirations without reservation. As we grieve her loss, let us take comfort in knowing that her extraordinary contributions will be remembered and treasured forever.

Justice Fathima Beevi's contributions to the Indian legal system, as well as her lasting impact on gender justice and women's empowerment, are inscribed in Indian history. Her life, defined by great accomplishments and established paths for future generations, continues to inspire and serve as a light for progress and equality. As India bids farewell to a judicial trailblazer, it also celebrates the enduring legacy of a woman who transformed the narrative of women's participation in the judiciary and inspired generations of young women in India and abroad.

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