



## MEERA SHARMA

### Fighting for Justice

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Justice Meera Sharma (retd), aged 72, daughter of late Bhola Nath Barpujari of Nazira and late Jayada Barpujari and wife of late Bhupendra Nath Sharma (lawyer) served the state as the Judge of High Court for ten and half years. Her father late Bholanath Barpujari was a Chief Administrative officer of Assam Tea Company at Nazira, and her mother was a social worker and founder member of Nazira Girls' High School and Nazira Girls' College and she was also an active member of Assam Mahila Samiti. She became the mother of four children, -two daughters and two sons. Three of them are lawyers and one son is in government service. Elder daughter Rajashree is a scientist and patent practitioner and second daughter, Krishna, is the Standing Counsel for the State of Assam in the Supreme Court and runs her own law firm 'Corporate Law Group'. Second son Randeep is presently the Assistant Solicitor General of India and another son is an ACS officer.

Her tenure as a judge in the High Court was full of exciting work schedule and thrilling experiences. It was a competitive and a challenging assignment. She

took the status as a challenge to prove herself. Practising as Govt. lawyer both in State and District Council, Karbi Anglong, and in the field of labour Laws, opened avenues for her to learn more and it helped her to use the knowledge and experience as a Judge. She said that she never felt discriminated against on the ground of gender, because her fellow judges always considered her as one among them. She disclosed that she was the first lady advocate from the North East and never faced any trouble during her eventful career as a lawyer. She got cooperation and help from the Senior advocates and in many important and interesting cases she worked as their junior.

The untimely death of her husband in 1983 was a major setback in the personal and professional life of Meera Sharma. She had to singlehandedly bring up her four children and take up the responsibilities of her husband's pending court cases along with her own ones. She had to go to the supreme court and other courts located outside Assam. At this stage, her work load increased a lot that forced her to send away her children outside the state for their education.

But she accepted her career as a challenge to establish herself as an advocate and a Judge and not simply as a woman advocate and a woman judge. Her husband was her friend, philosopher and guide in the profession and with cooperation from both in-laws and parents, she carried on her career and after the death of her husband her children provided her the strength and support to continue her profession and to achieve her goals. After getting her law degree in 1961 she was taken by her brother, late Baidya Nath Borpujari, to the District Court in Sibsagar, and for the first time she saw the proceedings of a court. Her first experience of seeing the Judge, lawyers and procedure of litigation taking place in the court, made her a bit confused. But the seniors and other advocates appreciated her as first lady advocate of the North East—but still she was confused about her career, as to where it would take her to in the future. Her first case in the High Court was in 1964 before Justice Nayak. She remembers that most of the senior advocates advised her to be cautious as the Hon'ble Judge was known to be a tough Judge. Naturally she was nervous and shaky, but she tried her best to prove herself and ultimately the petition was allowed and she won the final hearing of the case. Most of the seniors, Advocate General of the State of Assam and Meghalaya and the senior Advocates late J.P. Bhattacharya, S. Lahiri etc. encouraged her by saying that 'you have made history in this High Court.' As the junior of the senior Advocate J. P. Bhattacharya she assisted him in many cases, particularly in civil cases and that gave her the opportunity to learn a lot. Her first appearance before the Supreme Court was another memorable event as it was a dream for her to appear in the Supreme Court.

Meera Sharma is very optimistic about the status and emerging role of women in the democratic India. In the Indian Democracy there is no place for discrimination among the two sexes who are regarded under the constitution as 'a person'. Ample measures by enacting

laws for the uplift of the Indian Women have been taken under the constitution. In spite of some age old social customs, narrow mindset and crimes against women, Indian women are moving forward to have the taste of socio-economic independence and going ahead in all spheres of democratic life and social and political setup in our country. In her view, there is much more to be achieved, but we are going in the right direction.

Responding to a question about the prime reason for the increasing crime against women she has made her comment that crime against women are becoming rampant and the Indian Society has failed to pick up the positive side of the Western way of life. Discrimination on gender basis results in violence. The main reason for this, she personally believes, is the Indian men not being able to accept the changing patterns of gender relationships in the society. Laws protecting women are sufficient to provide the required protection to women but what is lacking is the will to implement and enforce those laws. Further, the family ties which earlier provided the value based living, are weakening with the result that women are considered only as sex objects. She feels that if the police performs its legal functions honestly and sincerely and investigates the crimes against women promptly with the requisite sensitivity, then anyone involved in such offences would not be spared. The law courts should act as a medium of social reformation. Law should be used as an instrument of social reform intended to establish women rights in the society, she says. □□