



High Court

In the Indian single integrated judicial system, the high court operates below the Supreme Court but above the subordinate courts. The judiciary in a state consists of a high court and a hierarchy of subordinate courts. The high court occupies the top position in the judicial administration of a state.

The institution of high court originated in India in 1862 when the high courts were set up at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras¹. In 1866, a fourth high court was established at Allahabad. In the course of time, each province in British India came to have its own high court. After 1950, a high court existing in a province became the high court for the corresponding state.

The Constitution of India provides for a high court for each state, but the Seventh Amendment Act of 1956 authorised the Parliament to establish a common high court for two or more states or for two or more states and a union territory. The territorial jurisdiction of a high court is co-terminus with the territory of a state. Similarly, the territorial jurisdiction of a common high court is co-terminus with the territories of the concerned states and union territory.

At present, there are 24 high courts in the country². Out of them, three are common high courts. Delhi is the only union territory that has a high court of its own (since 1966). The other union territories fall under the jurisdiction of different state high courts. The Parliament can extend the jurisdiction of a high court to any union territory or exclude the jurisdiction of a high court from any union territory.

The name, year of establishment, territorial jurisdiction and seat (with bench or benches) of all the 24 high courts are mentioned in Table 30.1 at the end of this chapter.

Articles 214 to 231 in Part VI of the Constitution deal with the organisation, independence, jurisdiction, powers, procedures and so on of the high courts.

ORGANISATION OF HIGH COURT

Every high court (whether exclusive or common) consists of a chief justice and such other judges as the president may from time to time deem necessary to appoint. Thus, the Constitution does not

specify the strength of a high court and leaves it to the discretion of the president. Accordingly, the President determines the strength of a high court from time to time depending upon its workload.

Judges

Appointment of Judges The judges of a high court are appointed by the President. The chief justice is appointed by the President after consultation with the chief justice of India and the governor of the state concerned. For appointment of other judges, the chief justice of the concerned high court is also consulted. In case of a common high court for two or more states, the governors of all the states concerned are consulted by the president.

In the *Second Judges* case³ (1993), the Supreme Court ruled that no appointment of a judge of the high court can be made, unless it is in conformity with the opinion of the chief justice of India. In the *Third Judges* case⁴ (1998), the Supreme Court opined that in case of the appointment of high court judges, the chief justice of India should consult a collegium of two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court. Thus, the sole opinion of the chief justice of India alone does not constitute the 'consultation' process.

Qualifications of Judges A person to be appointed as a judge of a high court, should have the following qualifications:

1. He should be a citizen of India.
2. (a) He should have held a judicial office in the territory of India for ten years; or
(b) He should have been an advocate of a high court (or high courts in succession) for ten years.

From the above, it is clear that the Constitution has not prescribed a minimum age for appointment as a judge of a high court. Moreover, unlike in the case of the Supreme Court, the Constitution makes no provision for appointment of a distinguished jurist as a judge of a high court.

Oath or Affirmation A person appointed as a judge of a high court, before entering upon his office, has to make and subscribe an oath or affirmation before the governor of the state or some person appointed by him for this purpose. In his oath, a judge of a high court swears:

1. to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India;
2. to uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India;
3. to duly and faithfully and to the best of his ability, knowledge and judgement perform the duties of the office without fear or favour, affection or ill-will; and
4. to uphold the Constitution and the laws.

Tenure of Judges The Constitution has not fixed the tenure of a judge of a high court. However, it makes the following four provisions in this regard:

1. He holds office until he attains the age of 62 years⁵. Any questions regarding his age is to be decided by the president after consultation with the chief justice of India and the decision of the president is final.
2. He can resign his office by writing to the president.
3. He can be removed from his office by the President on the recommendation of the Parliament.

4. He vacates his office when he is appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court or when he is transferred to another high court.

Removal of Judges A judge of a high court can be removed from his office by an order of the President. The President can issue the removal order only after an address by the Parliament has been presented to him in the same session for such removal. The address must be supported by a special majority of each House of Parliament (i.e., a majority of the total membership of that House and majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of that House present and voting). The grounds of removal are two—proved misbehaviour or incapacity. Thus, a judge of a high court can be removed in the same manner and on the same grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court.

The Judges Enquiry Act (1968) regulates the procedure relating to the removal of a judge of a high court by the process of impeachment:

1. A removal motion signed by 100 members (in the case of Lok Sabha) or 50 members (in the case of Rajya Sabha) is to be given to the Speaker/Chairman.
2. The Speaker/Chairman may admit the motion or refuse to admit it.
3. If it is admitted, then the Speaker/Chairman is to constitute a three-member committee to investigate into the charges.
4. The committee should consist of (a) the chief justice or a judge of the Supreme Court, (b) a chief justice of a high court, and (c) a distinguished jurist.
5. If the committee finds the judge to be guilty of misbehaviour or suffering from an incapacity, the House can take up the consideration of the motion.
6. After the motion is passed by each House of Parliament by special majority, an address is presented to the president for removal of the judge.
7. Finally, the president passes an order removing the judge.

From the above, it is clear that the procedure for the impeachment of a judge of a high court is the same as that for a judge of the Supreme Court.

It is interesting to know that no judge of a high court has been impeached so far.

Salaries and Allowances The salaries, allowances, privileges, leave and pension of the judges of a high court are determined from time to time by the Parliament. They cannot be varied to their disadvantage after their appointment except during a financial emergency. In 2009, the salary of the chief justice was increased from `30,000 to `90,000 per month and that of a judge from `26,000 to `80,000 per month⁶. They are also paid sumptuary allowance and provided with free accommodation and other facilities like medical, car, telephone, etc.

The retired chief justice and judges are entitled to 50% of their last drawn salary as monthly pension.

Transfer of Judges The President can transfer a judge from one high court to another after consulting the Chief Justice of India. On transfer, he is entitled to receive in addition to his salary such compensatory allowance as may be determined by Parliament.

In 1977, the Supreme Court ruled that the transfer of high court judges could be resorted to only as an exceptional measure and only in public interest and not by way of punishment. Again in 1994, the

Supreme Court held that judicial review is necessary to check arbitrariness in transfer of judges. But, only the judge who is transferred can challenge it.

In the *Third Judges* case (1998), the Supreme Court opined that in case of the transfer of high court judges, the Chief Justice of India should consult, in addition to the collegium of four seniormost judges of the Supreme Court, the chief justice of the two high courts (one from which the judge is being transferred and the other receiving him). Thus, the sole opinion of the chief justice of India does not constitute the 'consultation' process.

Acting Chief Justice

The President can appoint a judge of a high court as an acting chief justice of the high court when:

1. the office of chief justice of the high court is vacant; or
2. the chief justice of the high court is temporarily absent; or
3. the chief justice of the high court is unable to perform the duties of his office.

Additional and Acting Judges

The President can appoint duly qualified persons as additional judges of a high court for a temporary period not exceeding two years when:

1. there is a temporary increase in the business of the high court; or
2. there are arrears of work in the high court.

The President can also appoint a duly qualified person as an acting judge of a high court when a judge of that high court (other than the chief justice) is:

1. unable to perform the duties of his office due to absence or any other reason; or
2. appointed to act temporarily as chief justice of that high court.

An acting judge holds office until the permanent judge resumes his office. However, both the additional or acting judge cannot hold office after attaining the age of 62 years.

Retired Judges

At any time, the chief justice of a high court of a state can request a retired judge of that high court or any other high court to act as a judge of the high court of that state for a temporary period. He can do so only with the previous consent of the President and also of the person to be so appointed. Such a judge is entitled to such allowances as the President may determine. He will also enjoy all the jurisdiction, powers and privileges of a judge of that high court. But, he will not otherwise be deemed to be a judge of that high court.

INDEPENDENCE OF HIGH COURT

The independence of a high court is very essential for the effective discharge of the duties assigned to it. It should be free from the encroachments, pressures and interferences of the executive (council of ministers) and the legislature. It should be allowed to do justice without fear or favour.

The Constitution has made the following provisions to safeguard and ensure the independent and impartial functioning of a high court.

- 1. *Mode of Appointment*** The judges of a high court are appointed by the president (which means the cabinet) in consultation with the members of the judiciary itself (i.e., chief justice of India and the chief justice of the high court). This provision curtails the absolute discretion of the executive as well as ensures that the judicial appointments are not based on any political or practical considerations.
- 2. *Security of Tenure*** The judges of a high court are provided with the security of tenure. They can be removed from office by the president only in the manner and on the grounds mentioned in the Constitution. This means that they do not hold their office during the pleasure of the president, though they are appointed by him. This is obvious from the fact that no judge of a high court has been removed (or impeached) so far.
- 3. *Fixed Service Conditions*** The salaries, allowances, privileges, leave and pension of the judges of a high court are determined from time to time by the Parliament. But, they cannot be changed to their disadvantage after their appointment except during a financial emergency. Thus, the conditions of service of the judges of a high court remain same during their term of office.
- 4. *Expenses Charged on Consolidated Fund*** The salaries and allowances of the judges, the salaries, allowances and pensions of the staff as well as the administrative expenses of a high court are charged on the consolidated fund of the state. Thus, they are non-votable by the state legislature (though they can be discussed by it). It should be noted here that the pension of a high court judge is charged on the Consolidated Fund of India and not the state.
- 5. *Conduct of Judges cannot be Discussed*** The Constitution prohibits any discussion in Parliament or in a state legislature with respect to the conduct of the judges of a high court in the discharge of their duties, except when an impeachment motion is under consideration of the Parliament.
- 6. *Ban on Practice after Retirement*** The retired permanent judges of a high court are prohibited from pleading or acting in any court or before any authority in India except the Supreme Court and the other high courts. This ensures that they do not favour any one in the hope of future favour.
- 7. *Power to Punish for its Contempt*** A high court can punish any person for its contempt. Thus, its actions and decisions cannot be criticised and opposed by anybody. This power is vested in a high court to maintain its authority, dignity and honour.
- 8. *Freedom to Appoint its Staff*** The chief justice of a high court can appoint officers and servants of the high court without any interference from the executive. He can also prescribe their conditions of service.
- 9. *Its Jurisdiction cannot be Curtailed*** The jurisdiction and powers of a high court in so far as they are specified in the Constitution cannot be curtailed both by the Parliament and the state legislature. But, in other respects, the jurisdiction and powers of a high court can be changed both by the parliament and the state legislature.
- 10. *Separation from Executive*** The Constitution directs the state to take steps to separate the judiciary from the executive in public services. This means that the executive authorities should not possess the judicial powers. Consequent upon its implementation, the role of executive authorities in judicial administration came to an end⁷.

JURISDICTION AND POWERS OF HIGH COURT

Like the Supreme Court, the high court has been vested with quite extensive and effective powers. It is the highest court of appeal in the state. It is the protector of the Fundamental Rights of the citizens. It is vested with the power to interpret the Constitution. Besides, it has supervisory and consultative roles.

However, the Constitution does not contain detailed provisions with regard to the jurisdiction and powers of a high court. It only lays down that the jurisdiction and powers of a high court are to be the same as immediately before the commencement of the Constitution. But, there is one addition, that is, the Constitution gives a high court jurisdiction over revenue matters (which it did not enjoy in the pre-constitution era). The Constitution also confers (by other provisions) some more additional powers on a high court like writ jurisdiction, power of superintendence, consultative power, etc. Moreover, it empowers the Parliament and the state legislature to change the jurisdiction and powers of a high court.

At present, a high court enjoys the following jurisdiction and powers:

1. Original jurisdiction.
2. Writ jurisdiction.
3. Appellate jurisdiction.
4. Supervisory jurisdiction.
5. Control over subordinate courts.
6. A court of record.
7. Power of judicial review.

The present jurisdiction and powers of a high court are governed by (a) the constitutional provisions, (b) the Letters Patent, (c) the Acts of Parliament, (d) the Acts of State Legislature, (e) Indian Penal Code, 1860, (f) Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, and (g) Civil Procedure Code, 1908.

1. Original Jurisdiction

It means the power of a high court to hear disputes in the first instance, not by way of appeal. It extends to the following:

- (a) Matters of admiralty, will, marriage, divorce, company laws and contempt of court.
- (b) Disputes relating to the election of members of Parliament and state legislatures.
- (c) Regarding revenue matter or an act ordered or done in revenue collection.
- (d) Enforcement of fundamental rights of citizens.
- (e) Cases ordered to be transferred from a subordinate court involving the interpretation of the Constitution to its own file.
- (f) The four high courts (i.e., Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Delhi High Courts) have original civil jurisdiction in cases of higher value.

Before 1973, the Calcutta, Bombay and Madras High Courts also had original criminal jurisdiction. This was fully abolished by the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973.

2. Writ Jurisdiction

Article 226 of the Constitution empowers a high court to issue writs including *habeas corpus*, *mandamus*, *certiorari*, prohibition and *quo-warrento* for the enforcement of the fundamental rights of the citizens and for any other purpose. The phrase 'for any other purpose' refers to the enforcement of an ordinary legal right. The high court can issue writs to any person, authority and government not only within its territorial jurisdiction but also outside its territorial jurisdiction if the cause of action arises within its territorial jurisdiction⁸.

The writ jurisdiction of the high court (under Article 226) is not exclusive but concurrent with the writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court (under Article 32). It means, when the fundamental rights of a citizen are violated, the aggrieved party has the option of moving either the high court or the Supreme Court directly. However, the writ jurisdiction of the high court is wider than that of the Supreme Court. This is because, the Supreme Court can issue writs only for the enforcement of fundamental rights and not for any other purpose, that is, it does not extend to a case where the breach of an ordinary legal right is alleged.

In the *Chandra Kumar* case⁹ (1997), the Supreme Court ruled that the writ jurisdiction of both the high court and the Supreme Court constitute a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Hence, it cannot be ousted or excluded even by way of an amendment to the Constitution.

3. Appellate Jurisdiction

A high court is primarily a court of appeal. It hears appeals against the judgements of subordinate courts functioning in its territorial jurisdiction. It has appellate jurisdiction in both civil and criminal matters. Hence, the appellate jurisdiction of a high court is wider than its original jurisdiction.

(a) Civil Matters The civil appellate jurisdiction of a high court is as follows:

- (i) First appeals from the orders and judgements of the district courts, additional district courts and other subordinate courts lie directly to the high court, on both questions of law and fact, if the amount exceeds the stipulated limit.
- (ii) Second appeals from the orders and judgements of the district court or other subordinate courts lie to the high court in the cases involving questions of law only (and not questions of fact).
- (iii) The Calcutta, Bombay and Madras High Courts have provision for intra-court appeals. When a single judge of the high court has decided a case (either under the original or appellate jurisdiction of the high court), an appeal from such a decision lies to the division bench of the same high court.
- (iv) Appeals from the decisions of the administrative and other tribunals lie to the division bench of the state high court. In 1997, the Supreme Court ruled that the tribunals are subject to the writ jurisdiction of the high courts. Consequently, it is not possible for an aggrieved person to approach the Supreme Court directly against the decisions of the tribunals, without first going to the high courts.

(b) Criminal Matters The criminal appellate jurisdiction of a high court is as follows:

- (i) Appeals from the judgements of sessions court and additional sessions court lie to the high court if the sentence is one of imprisonment for more than seven years. It should also be noted here that a death sentence (popularly known as capital punishment) awarded by a sessions court or an additional sessions court should be confirmed by the high court before it can be executed, whether there is an appeal by the convicted person or not.
- (ii) In some cases specified in various provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code (1973), the appeals from the judgements of the assistant sessions judge, metro-politian magistrate or other magistrates (judicial) lie to the high court.

4. Supervisory Jurisdiction

A high court has the power of superintendence over all courts and tribunals functioning in its territorial jurisdiction (except military courts or tribunals). Thus, it may—

- (a) call for returns from them;
- (b) make and issue, general rules and prescribe forms for regulating the practice and proceedings of them;
- (c) prescribe forms in which books, entries and accounts are to be kept by them; and
- (d) settle the fees payable to the sheriff, clerks, officers and legal practitioners of them.

This power of superintendence of a high court is very broad because, (i) it extends to all courts and tribunals whether they are subject to the appellate jurisdiction of the high court or not; (ii) it covers not only administrative superintendence but also judicial superintendence; (iii) it is a revisional jurisdiction; and (iv) it can be *suo-motu* (on its own) and not necessarily on the application of a party.

However, this power does not vest the high court with any unlimited authority over the subordinate courts and tribunals. It is an extraordinary power and hence has to be used most sparingly and only in appropriate cases. Usually, it is limited to, (i) excess of jurisdiction, (ii) gross violation of natural justice, (iii) error of law, (iv) disregard to the law of superior courts, (v) perverse findings, and (vi) manifest injustice.

5. Control over Subordinate Courts

In addition to its appellate jurisdiction and supervisory jurisdiction over the subordinate courts as mentioned above, a high court has an administrative control and other powers over them. These include the following:

- (a) It is consulted by the governor in the matters of appointment, posting and promotion of district judges and in the appointments of persons to the judicial service of the state (other than district judges).
- (b) It deals with the matters of posting, promotion, grant of leave, transfers and discipline of the members of the judicial service of the state (other than district judges).
- (c) It can withdraw a case pending in a subordinate court if it involves a substantial question of law that require the interpretation of the Constitution. It can then either dispose of the case itself or determine the question of law and return the case to the subordinate court with its judgement.

- (d) Its law is binding on all subordinate courts functioning within its territorial jurisdiction in the same sense as the law declared by the Supreme Court is binding on all courts in India.

6. A Court of Record

As a court of record, a high court has two powers:

- (a) The judgements, proceedings and acts of the high courts are recorded for perpetual memory and testimony. These records are admitted to be of evidentiary value and cannot be questioned when produced before any subordinate court. They are recognised as legal precedents and legal references.
- (b) It has power to punish for contempt of court, either with simple imprisonment or with fine or with both.

The expression ‘contempt of court’ has not been defined by the Constitution. However, the expression has been defined by the Contempt of Court Act of 1971. Under this, contempt of court may be civil or criminal. Civil contempt means wilful disobedience to any judgement, order, writ or other process of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court. Criminal contempt means the publication of any matter or doing an act which—(i) scandalises or lowers the authority of a court; or (ii) prejudices or interferes with the due course of a judicial proceeding; or (iii) interferes or obstructs the administration of justice in any other manner.

However, innocent publication and distribution of some matter, fair and accurate report of judicial proceedings, fair and reasonable criticism of judicial acts and comment on the administrative side of the judiciary do not amount to contempt of court.

As a court of record, a high court also has the power to review and correct its own judgement or order or decision, even though no specific power of review is conferred on it by the Constitution. The Supreme Court, on the other hand, has been specifically conferred with the power of review by the constitution.

7. Power of Judicial Review

Judicial review is the power of a high court to examine the constitutionality of legislative enactments and executive orders of both the Central and state governments. On examination, if they are found to be violative of the Constitution (*ultra-vires*), they can be declared as illegal, unconstitutional and invalid (null and void) by the high court. Consequently, they cannot be enforced by the government.

Though the phrase ‘judicial review’ has nowhere been used in the Constitution, the provisions of Articles 13 and 226 explicitly confer the power of judicial review on a high court. The constitutional validity of a legislative enactment or an executive order can be challenged in a high court on the following three grounds:

- (a) it infringes the fundamental rights (Part III),
- (b) it is outside the competence of the authority which has framed it, and
- (c) it is repugnant to the constitutional provisions.

The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 curtailed the judicial review power of high court. It debarred the high courts from considering the constitutional validity of any central law. However, the 43rd Amendment Act of 1977 restored the original position.

Table 30.1 *Name and Jurisdiction of High Courts*

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Year of establishment</i>	<i>Territorial Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Seat</i>
1.	Allahabad	1866	Uttar Pradesh	Allahabad (Bench at Lucknow)
2.	Andhra Pradesh	1954	Andra Pradesh	Hyderabad
3.	Bombay ¹³	1862	Maharashta, Goa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	Mumbai (Benches at Nagpur, Panaji and Aurangabad)
4.	Calcutta ¹³	1862	West Bengal and Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Kolkata (Circuit Bench at Port Blair)
5.	Chhattisgarh	2000	Chhattisgarh	Bilaspur
6.	Delhi	1966	Delhi	Delhi
7.	Guwahati	1948 ¹⁰	Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh ¹⁴	Guwahati (Benches at Kohima, Aizawl and Itanagar)
8.	Gujarat	1960	Gujarat	Ahmedabad
9.	Himachal Pradesh	1971	Himachal Pradesh	Simla
10.	Jammu and Kashmir	1928	Jammu and Kashmir	Srinagar and Jammu
11.	Jharkhand	2000	Jharkhand	Ranchi
12.	Karnataka	1884 ¹¹	Karnataka	Bengaluru
13.	Kerala	1958	Kerala and Lakshadweep	Ernakulam
14.	Madhya Pradesh	1956	Madhya Pradesh	Jabalpur (Benches at Gwalior and Indore)
15.	Madras ¹³	1862	Tamil Nadu and Puducherry	Chennai
16.	Manipur ¹⁵	2013	Manipur	Imphal
17.	Meghalaya ¹⁵	2013	Meghalaya	Shillong
18.	Orissa ¹⁶	1948	Odisha	Cuttack
19.	Patna	1916	Bihar	Patna
20.	Punjab and Haryana	1875 ¹²	Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh	Chandigarh
21.	Rajasthan	1949	Rajasthan	Jodhpur (Bench at Jaipur)
22.	Sikkim	1975	Sikkim	Gangtok
23.	Tripura ¹⁵	2013	Tripura	Agartala
24.	Uttarakhand	2000	Uttarakhand	Nainital

Table 30.2 *Articles Related to High Courts at a Glance*

<i>Article No.</i>	<i>Subject-matter</i>
214.	High Courts for states
215.	High Courts to be courts of record
216.	Constitution of High Courts
217.	Appointment and conditions of the office of a Judge of a High Court
218.	Application of certain provisions relating to Supreme Court to High Courts
219.	Oath or affirmation by judges of High Courts
220.	Restriction on practice after being a permanent judge
221.	Salaries etc., of judges
222.	Transfer of a judge from one High Court to another
223.	Appointment of acting Chief Justice
224.	Appointment of additional and acting judges
224A.	Appointment of retired judges at sittings of High Courts
225.	Jurisdiction of existing High Courts
226.	Power of High Courts to issue certain writs
226A.	Constitutional validity of Central laws not to be considered in proceedings under Article 226 (Repealed)
227.	Power of superintendence over all courts by the High Court
228.	Transfer of certain cases to High Court
228A.	Special provisions as to disposal of questions relating to constitutional validity of state laws (Repealed)
229.	Officers and servants and the expenses of High Courts
230.	Extension of jurisdiction of High Courts to union territories
231.	Establishment of a common High Court for two or more states
232.	Interpretation (Repealed)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. These three high courts were set up under the provisions of the Indian High Courts Act, 1861.
2. With the creation of three more new states in 2000, the number of high courts increased from 18 to 21. Again, with the creation of separate high courts for the three north-eastern states of Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura in 2013, the number of high courts increased from 21 to 24.
3. *Supreme Court Advocates v. Union of India* (1993).
4. *In re Presidential Reference* (1998). The president sought the Supreme Court's opinion (under Article 143) on certain doubts over the consultation process to be adopted by the chief justice