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STRATEGIC RECUSALS: CHALLENGES TO JUDICIAL INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract:

Judicial recusal is a fundamental ethical mechanism designed to ensure impartiality and maintain public trust in the judiciary. At its core, it protects the principles of fairness and natural justice by allowing judges to step aside in cases of actual or perceived conflict of interest. However, in recent years, an alarming trend has emerged wherein litigants strategically seek judicial recusals not to ensure fairness, but to manipulate judicial assignments—engaging in forum shopping or delaying proceedings to suit their litigation strategies. Such practices, though ostensibly within the rights of litigants, pose a grave threat to judicial independence and institutional credibility.

The paper critically examines the phenomenon of strategic recusal in India, highlighting key cases such as *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India* and *State of West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak* to illustrate how judicial discretion is being tested by external pressures. It further explores the ethical tensions judges face when balancing their duty to appear impartial with their responsibility to prevent misuse of judicial processes. By drawing comparisons with international legal systems, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, the paper underscores the need for clear statutory guidelines and institutional safeguards in India. It recommends codifying recusal procedures, enhancing transparency, and creating independent oversight mechanisms to maintain judicial autonomy while ensuring accountability.

The paper concludes that unless strategic recusals are addressed through comprehensive reform, the judiciary risks compromising its moral authority and eroding public confidence. A balanced approach—one that preserves judicial discretion while deterring its misuse—is essential to uphold the dignity and independence of the judicial institution.

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Keywords:

Recusal, Forum Shopping, Judicial Ethics, Judicial Independence, Judicial Integrity, Institutional Accountability, Strategic Litigation, Comparative Jurisprudence.

Introduction

It is undeniable that while recusal serves to uphold judicial impartiality, its strategic misuse by litigants can erode judicial integrity and compromise institutional independence. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how recusal is strategically deployed to achieve bench-favorable outcomes, and propose safeguards against its misuse.

An essential element of our system of justice is an independent, impartial adjudicator which is a precursor to the belief that decisions will be made on a fair and impartial basis and that justice has been done.² Judicial independence and judicial impartiality go side by side. Impartiality refers to a state of mind and attitude of the court or tribunal while judicial independence as we understand is specific to the separation of powers in a legal system and also includes independence of the state of mind or attitude. Thus, impartiality implies that the decisions of judges should not be based on any bias or prejudices but on the appreciation of evidence of the relevant facts and law. A person cannot take an objective decision in a case in which he has interests, for as a human psychology tells us, very rarely can people take decisions against their own interest, as observed in *R v. Sussex Justices ex p. McCarthy*³. Lord Woolf said: ‘The independence of judiciary is not the property of the judiciary, but a commodity to be held by the judiciary in trust for the public.’ It is said by Winston Churchill that judges are at the same time ‘privilege’ and ‘restricted.’ Judicial independence was not intended to be a shield from public scrutiny.

II. The Concept of Judicial Recusal

Judicial recusal refers to the withdrawal or disqualification of a judge from presiding over a legal matter due to actual or perceived conflict of interest, bias, or any other reason that may compromise the impartial adjudication of justice. Rooted in the principles of natural justice—particularly *nemo iudex in causa sua* (no one should be a judge in their own cause)—recusal serves as an ethical safeguard to uphold the independence, impartiality, and integrity of the

² *Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Comm. V. McGrath*, 341 U.S. 123,172 (1951)

³ *R v. Sussex Justices, ex parte McCarthy*, [1924] 1 K.B. 256.

judiciary. The primary objective is not only to avoid actual bias but to ensure public confidence in the fairness of judicial processes. As Lord Hewart famously stated in *R v. Sussex Justices, ex parte McCarthy* (1924), “Justice should not only be done but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done.”

In India, the principle of recusal is not governed by any formal legislation but by judicial precedents and conventions, such as the Supreme Court’s Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997) and the globally recognized Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct (2002). While Indian courts recognize the right of litigants to a fair and impartial trial under Article 14 and 21 of the Constitution, the recusal process is primarily guided by a judge’s conscience and self-assessment. Unlike many jurisdictions such as the U.S. (under 28 U.S.C. § 455) or the U.K. (under common law standards of apparent bias)⁴, India relies heavily on the moral and ethical prudence of the judge. The broader purpose of recusal, therefore, extends beyond procedural integrity to encompass the preservation of judicial legitimacy. By withdrawing from a case when impartiality is compromised or appears to be compromised, judges protect the institutional sanctity of the court and reinforce public faith in judicial independence.

Standards of Recusal:

- (a) *Actual Bias*- Actual bias refers to a demonstrable partiality on the part of the judge towards or against a party in the case. It implies that the judge has a personal stake—financial, relational, ideological, or otherwise—that impairs their ability to render a neutral decision⁵. Actual bias is difficult to prove unless the judge explicitly exhibits prejudice or has a documented conflict of interest. Courts in India, following precedents such as *Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India* (1987)⁶, have recognized that the “test of real likelihood of bias” must be applied where actual bias is suspected. In many cases, litigants attempt to impute actual bias, but judicial ethics require high evidentiary standards to uphold such claims, lest they be used to manipulate court composition.
- (b) *Apparent or Perceived Bias*- Apparent or perceived bias exists where, regardless of actual impartiality, the circumstances would lead a reasonable observer to suspect bias. This form of bias is addressed primarily through the lens of public perception. The Supreme Court in *Manoharlal v. Indore Development Authority*⁷ (2020) emphasized

⁴ Cardozo, B. N., *The Nature of the Judicial Process* (Yale Univ. Press 1921).

⁵ Menendez, M. & Samuels, D., *Judicial Recusal Reform: Toward Independent Consideration of Disqualification*, Brennan Ctr. for Justice (2016).

⁶ *Ranjit Thakur v. Union of India* (1987) 4 S.C.C. 611.

⁷ *Indore Development Authority v. Manohar Lal*, (2020) 8 S.C.C. 129.

that even the appearance of bias can be sufficient grounds for recusal if it undermines public confidence in the judiciary. A judge may recuse not because they are actually biased, but because their continued involvement may cast doubt on the fairness of proceedings.

- (c) *Reasonable Apprehension of Bias*- The standard of reasonable apprehension of bias involves a hypothetical “fair-minded and informed observer” who, having considered the facts, concludes that there is a legitimate concern over the judge’s impartiality. This standard is a fusion of subjective and objective tests. In *Ranjit Thakur*, the Court established that the “test is not whether the judge is actually biased, but whether a reasonable man would think he is likely to be biased.” This approach ensures that both judicial dignity and litigant confidence are maintained.

Importance of Self-Regulation in Recusal Decisions

In India, judicial discretion is the cornerstone of the recusal process. Unlike jurisdictions where statutory rules outline specific grounds for disqualification, Indian judges operate within a self-regulatory ethical framework. This discretion is informed by internal codes like the Restatement of Values of Judicial Life and shaped through judicial conscience, allowing judges to recuse when they believe their participation may affect the fairness of the case or public perception thereof. The significance of self-regulation lies in preserving judicial independence—a judge should not be compelled to recuse merely because a party demands it. The Supreme Court has consistently warned against “forum shopping” or “bench hunting,” where litigants seek favorable benches through strategic recusals, as seen in *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India*⁸ (2014). In that case, the Court held that recusal cannot be a tool for litigants to delay or manipulate judicial proceedings. Similarly, in *State of West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak*⁹, the Court noted that frivolous or motivated attempts to dislodge judges from a bench compromise judicial credibility and undermine justice delivery.

However, excessive reliance on individual discretion without procedural clarity poses its own risks, such as inconsistency, opacity, and susceptibility to public criticism. This has prompted scholars and jurists to advocate for a more structured mechanism to support judges in making recusal decisions without external pressure. The judiciary’s credibility rests not only on actual independence but also on the public perception of transparency and fairness. Judicial

⁸ *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India*, (2014) 8 S.C.C. 470.

⁹ *State of West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak*, (1998) 5 S.C.C. 513.

discretion, thus, must be exercised with a balance of prudence and principle, upholding the ideals of both judicial independence and ethical accountability¹⁰.

III. Strategic Use and Misuse of Recusal

Forum Shopping- Forum shopping refers to the strategic attempt by litigants to have their cases heard by a particular judge or court that is perceived to be favorable, while avoiding benches that may be perceived as strict, unsympathetic, or ideologically opposed. While judicial recusal is fundamentally intended to safeguard impartiality and public confidence in the legal system, its misuse in the form of forum shopping represents a serious challenge to judicial independence and institutional integrity¹¹.

In India, this phenomenon has become increasingly evident in high-stakes litigation involving political leaders or corporate interests. By strategically requesting recusal of certain judges, litigants may attempt to dislodge benches perceived to be “unfriendly,” thereby undermining the impartiality and credibility of the judiciary. The Supreme Court in *State of West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak*¹², strongly cautioned against such practices, emphasizing that recusal cannot become a tool for bench hunting or subversion of the judicial process. Similarly, in *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India*¹³, the Court refused to entertain recusal demands designed to delay proceedings or manipulate judicial composition. These cases highlight the judiciary's growing concern over the strategic misuse of recusal petitions, which can distort the fundamental objective of fair adjudication.

Delay Tactics- Another problematic aspect of strategic recusal is its use as a delay tactic. In India's already overburdened judicial system, repeated petitions seeking the recusal of judges have become a tool to obstruct the timely resolution of cases¹⁴. Litigants may file such petitions on tenuous or frivolous grounds, thereby forcing adjournments and procedural delays while the court deliberates on the validity of the bias claims. The result is a significant procedural drag on already protracted litigation. High-profile cases involving political and economic interests often witness such delay strategies, wherein recusal motions are submitted at critical junctures

¹⁰ Dalmia, A. & Panigrahi, S., Viewing Judicial Recusal and Disqualification as a Constitutional Necessity, 14 NUJS L. Rev. 1 (2021).

¹¹ Sathe, S. P., *Judicial Activism in India: Transgressing Borders and Enforcing Limits* (Oxford Univ. Press 2003).

¹² *West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak*, (1998) 5 SCC 513

¹³ *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India*, (2014) 8 SCC 470

¹⁴ Sankaran, R., Judicial Recusal in India: Reforming the Framework, 14 NUJS L. Rev. 245 (2021).

of the trial to disrupt continuity and stall verdicts. This tactic not only wastes judicial resources but also affects the morale of the judiciary, as judges are forced to expend energy on defending their own impartiality rather than focusing on the merits of the case. While Indian courts have generally maintained that judges are the best arbiters of whether to continue on a bench, the lack of a clear statutory mechanism regulating the frequency and manner of recusal requests makes the system vulnerable to manipulation. This also highlights the need for a codified procedure for dealing with recusal motions to differentiate between legitimate concerns of bias and deliberate obstruction of justice¹⁵.

Reputational Attacks- In recent years, the increasing use of social media and sensationalist news coverage has given rise to reputational attacks as a coercive tactic in recusal-related controversies. Public campaigns and orchestrated media narratives may attempt to portray a judge as biased or compromised in order to compel their withdrawal from a case. The reputational pressure created by such tactics undermines the independence of the judiciary and creates a chilling effect on judges who may fear undue public criticism for refusing to recuse. One of the most prominent examples in the Indian context is the controversy involving Justice Kaushik Chanda of the Calcutta High Court in 2021¹⁶. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sought his recusal from hearing her election petition, citing alleged proximity to the ruling BJP. Although Justice Chanda eventually recused himself, he imposed costs of ₹5 lakhs on Banerjee for what he deemed a motivated attempt to malign his impartiality (*Banerjee v. Adhikari*, 2021 Cal HC). This incident exposed the ethical and procedural complexities surrounding reputational attacks, wherein judges are caught between maintaining judicial dignity and responding to public suspicion. It also reaffirmed the importance of shielding the judiciary from populist pressures that may corrode institutional independence and erode the public's trust in unbiased adjudication.

IV. Jurisprudence on Recusal

The case of *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India*¹⁷, is a pivotal judgment in the development of recusal jurisprudence in India. It involved a large-scale financial dispute concerning the Sahara Group's refund of ₹24,000 crore to investors as directed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI). During the protracted proceedings, Subrata Roy, the head of Sahara,

¹⁵ Law Commission of India, 230th Report on Reforms in the Judiciary (2009)

¹⁶ Waldron, J., *The Rule of Law: Standards, Dignity, and Procedural Values* (Princeton Univ. Press 2025).

¹⁷ *Subrata Roy Sahara v. Union of India*, (2014) 8 SCC 470

sought the recusal of Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan from the bench on allegations of judicial bias and unfair treatment. The Supreme Court categorically rejected the plea for recusal, emphasizing that such demands, especially when made mid-proceedings without substantiating reasonable apprehension of bias, risk undermining judicial authority and institutional integrity. Justice Radhakrishnan underscored the judiciary's role in resisting pressures that are strategically applied to influence the outcome of litigation. The Court held that recusal cannot become a tool in the hands of litigants to manipulate bench composition or delay proceedings. This case thus set a precedent for judicial fortitude in the face of litigant coercion and reasserted that judges should not yield to demands for recusal unless legitimate grounds of bias exist (Subrata Roy Sahara, 2014). In *State of West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak*¹⁸, the Supreme Court dealt with politically sensitive litigation involving allegations against senior police officials and the state government. In the course of hearings, there were attempts by litigants to seek the recusal of certain judges, which the Court viewed as a thinly veiled effort to forum shop and steer the case toward a more favorable bench. The judgment is significant for its strong warning against the misuse of recusal as a tactic in politically motivated litigation. The Court stressed that allowing litigants to dictate bench composition would amount to compromising the basic tenets of judicial independence. It reiterated that judges must not be swayed by external pressures or politically charged atmospheres. This case solidified the Court's stance that ethical responsibility includes resisting manipulation and reaffirmed that recusal is a personal judicial decision, not a litigant's strategic right. The case of *Justice Kausik Chanda's Recusal in Mamata Banerjee v. Suvendu Adhikari* is an instructive contemporary example involving the recusal of Justice Kausik Chanda of the Calcutta High Court. Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, challenged the election of BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari from the Nandigram constituency. Banerjee sought Justice Chanda's recusal on the grounds of his past political affiliation with the BJP and his participation in party events before his elevation to the bench. While Justice Chanda ultimately recused himself on July 7, 2021, he issued a strongly worded order criticizing the petition as an attempt to intimidate the judiciary and malign his impartiality. He imposed costs of ₹5,00,000 on Banerjee, framing the recusal demand as a calculated move to influence judicial assignment through public pressure and media narrative. The case highlighted how public criticism, amplified by media coverage, can exert reputational pressure on judges—forcing recusals even in the absence of concrete evidence of bias. It underscores the tension between transparency and the risk of compromising

¹⁸ *State of West Bengal v. Shivananda Pathak*, (1998) 5 SCC 513

judicial dignity when judges are vilified or targeted in politically sensitive cases¹⁹. These cases represent a complex interplay between ethical standards, institutional interests, and litigant strategy in the realm of judicial recusal. They reinforce that while the right to a fair trial is sacrosanct, it does not entail a right to choose one's judge, nor should judicial ethics be weaponized to serve political ends²⁰.

V. Ethical Tensions in Recusal Decisions

Judicial recusal sits at the critical intersection of two foundational judicial principles: independence and public confidence. On one hand, judges must exercise their moral and constitutional duty to adjudicate without fear, favor, or bias. On the other, they must remain sensitive to the perception of impartiality, which is central to sustaining public trust. This tension creates a persistent ethical dilemma²¹. A judge may believe they are unbiased, yet the public may suspect partiality—especially in politically sensitive or high-profile cases. The obligation to preserve judicial independence, thus, can sometimes conflict with the collective demand for transparency and accountability.

Another significant ethical tension lies between judicial autonomy and institutional accountability. Recusal in India remains a matter of personal discretion, with judges rarely providing reasons. While this preserves judicial dignity and autonomy, it also risks appearing opaque or arbitrary, especially when recusals have systemic consequences, such as altering bench compositions or delaying justice. The question arises: should judges be mandated to disclose the rationale behind their recusals? Doing so may promote transparency but simultaneously subjects judicial reasoning to public and media scrutiny—possibly undermining judicial independence and decorum²².

The growing role of media and public commentary further complicates recusal ethics. Judges today face the risk of "media trials" and reputational harm when their recusal decisions—or refusals—become politicized²³. The looming threat of contempt proceedings against critical voices adds another layer of complexity, as it discourages open dialogue while reinforcing

¹⁹ Dubey, Bhavya. "Recusal and Its Development in the Indian Judiciary." *Jus Corpus LJ 2* (2021): 415.

²⁰ Bhongale, Dr Jay Kumar, and Showkat Ahmad Wani. "Post-Retirements Recruitments of Judges, Judicial Recusal and Judicial Accountability." (2022).

²¹ Dubey, Bhavya. "Recusal and Its Development in the Indian Judiciary." *Jus Corpus LJ 2* (2021): 415.

²² Dalmia, A., & Panigrahi, P. Who Judges the Judges?: Viewing Judicial Recusal and Disqualification as a Litigant. *NUJS L. Rev.*, 14, 1. (2021)

²³ Barua, P., Makkar, S., & Hariharan, V. Judicial Recusal: A Comparative Analysis. *GNLU L. Rev.*, 7, 1. (2020).

judicial insulation. These pressures can lead to premature or strategic recusals, damaging institutional credibility. Thus, the challenge lies in striking a delicate balance: fostering openness and trust without compromising the judiciary's independence or subjecting it to populist and partisan influence.

VI. Need for Institutional Safeguards

The current legal framework for judicial recusal in India is primarily governed by unwritten conventions and self-regulation, lacking a codified structure to ensure consistency, transparency, and accountability. While discretion remains essential to uphold the independence of individual judges, the absence of standardized guidelines creates uncertainty, invites speculation, and, in some cases, facilitates strategic manipulation of the judicial process. To fortify judicial impartiality and preserve public trust, the Indian judiciary must adopt robust institutional safeguards that address both procedural inadequacies and the broader ethical implications of recusal²⁴.

One of the foremost needs is the development of a codified framework for judicial recusal. This would include standard operating procedures (SOPs) that outline the grounds for recusal, the process of declaring disqualification, and the timeline within which such decisions should be made. Requiring judges to provide written reasons for recusal—except in rare and exceptional circumstances—can reduce speculation and bolster transparency. While this measure may initially be met with resistance due to concerns over institutional autonomy, it has the potential to promote consistency and discourage baseless allegations or unfounded recusals. Countries like the United States (28 U.S.C. § 455) and the United Kingdom (common law principles post-Pinochet) have already instituted more structured approaches to judicial disqualification, setting precedents for India to consider. Another essential safeguard is the establishment of independent ethics and oversight bodies, such as Judicial Ethics Committees or a National Judicial Ethics Commission, tasked with reviewing recusal-related complaints and ensuring that such decisions align with ethical standards. These bodies could act as advisory and regulatory institutions that evaluate whether recusals were appropriately exercised, investigate allegations of misuse, and offer guidance to judges in ethically ambiguous situations. Such mechanisms could maintain the delicate balance between judicial independence and public

²⁴ Gupta, Konark Pratap, and Kartik Sharma. "Judicial Recusal in India: A Comparative Study with UK and USA." *Issue 6 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.* 4 (2021): 848.

accountability²⁵.

The increasing use of public vilification, media pressure, and strategic litigant behavior underscores the urgency of instituting protective mechanisms for judicial officers. Judges are often subjected to social media trolling, unfounded bias claims, or politicized media scrutiny that not only affect their morale but may also influence judicial decision-making. A clear framework protecting judges from such vilification, perhaps through judicial conduct rules or contempt jurisdiction (with appropriate safeguards), would reinforce judicial dignity and institutional integrity. Additionally, ensuring that recusal is not weaponized to “bench shop” or delay proceedings is critical to preserving the sanctity of the judicial process²⁶. Ultimately, institutional safeguards should reflect a dual commitment: ensuring that judges can act with independence and integrity while simultaneously holding them to the highest ethical standards. As the Indian judiciary continues to evolve amidst increasing public scrutiny and complex socio-political pressures, these reforms are indispensable for sustaining the credibility of the legal system and fortifying democratic values²⁷. The establishment of structured recusal norms will not only reduce ambiguity and inconsistency but also act as a bulwark against the manipulation of judicial processes, thereby strengthening both the perception and practice of impartial justice.

VII. Suggestions

To address the growing complexities and ethical tensions surrounding judicial recusal in India, it is imperative to strengthen institutional mechanisms through well-considered legal and procedural reforms. The current approach—based largely on judicial discretion and in-house conventions—has proven insufficient to consistently deter forum shopping, discourage reputational attacks, and safeguard judicial independence. Therefore, a multi-pronged strategy involving procedural revision, legislative enactment, ethical training, and reputational safeguards is warranted.

1. The existing in-house procedure of the Supreme Court and High Courts must be amended to include reviewable recusal decisions. Currently, the practice of recusal operates in a legal vacuum without clarity on review mechanisms, thereby enabling

²⁵ Barua, Priyadarshini, Sarthak Makkar, and Vasanthi Hariharan. "Judicial Recusal: A Comparative Analysis." *GNLU L. Rev.* 7 (2020): 1.

²⁶ Hammond, R. G. (2009). *Judicial recusal: Principles, process and problems*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

²⁷ Sample, J., & Pozen, D. E. (2007). Making Judicial Recusal More Rigorous. *Judges J.*, 46, 17.

ambiguity, strategic misuse, or inconsistent application²⁸. A system of internal review—perhaps through an ethics committee of senior judges—could assess the validity of recusals, especially in sensitive or politically charged matters. This would ensure that recusals are not left entirely to subjective discretion and are evaluated on principled grounds.

2. India must move towards enacting a codified legislative framework, drawing inspiration from the United States' 28 U.S.C. § 455, which lays down mandatory and optional grounds for judicial disqualification. A similar statute in India would promote uniformity and minimize arbitrary recusal decisions²⁹. The law could detail categories of bias (pecuniary, personal, ideological), establish the scope of disclosure, and prescribe time-bound procedures to avoid disruption of legal proceedings.
3. The judiciary and legislature should take a strong stance against anonymous or unverified public campaigns targeting judges, which are often used to build pressure in high-stakes cases. Judicial independence suffers when public opinion, rather than legal merit, influences judicial participation³⁰. Media ethics and contempt provisions could be harmonized to shield judges from undue influence while maintaining the public's right to critique.
4. The judiciary must prioritize training and sensitization programs for judges—especially at the constitutional court level—on managing ethical dilemmas in politically sensitive or high-profile cases³¹. Regular workshops on ethics, discretion, and public perception, possibly under the aegis of the National Judicial Academy, would enable judges to make more informed and consistent decisions on recusal. This would reinforce the legitimacy of the judiciary while maintaining its core principles of impartiality, integrity, and accountability.

Together, these reforms can ensure that the principle of recusal remains a tool of ethical adjudication, not a weapon of strategic litigation or political maneuvering.

VIII. Conclusion

The issue of strategic judicial recusals embodies a fundamental paradox in modern adjudication: while recusal is intended to preserve impartiality and public trust, its misuse can

²⁸ Rachlinski, J. J. et al., Does Unconscious Racial Bias Affect Trial Judges?, 84 Notre Dame L. Rev. 1195 (2009).

²⁹ Divan, S. & Rosencranz, A., Environmental Law and Policy in India (Oxford Univ. Press 2019).

³⁰ Aggarwal, N., Legal Methods (LexisNexis 2018).

³¹ Kelkar, R. V., Criminal Procedure (Eastern Book Company 2017).

compromise both judicial integrity and the smooth functioning of courts. In recent years, the Indian judiciary has witnessed an increase in litigant-driven efforts to compel recusals under the pretext of bias, often as a tactic to delay proceedings, influence bench composition, or sway public opinion. This emerging pattern threatens to dilute the ethical sanctity of the recusal mechanism, turning a tool of judicial fairness into a weapon of procedural manipulation.

The challenge lies in striking a delicate balance between two equally critical values: the integrity and independence of the judiciary on one hand, and the right of litigants to a fair and unbiased hearing on the other. Judges must be empowered to resist undue pressure while remaining sensitive to genuine apprehensions of bias. Yet, absent a structured framework, decisions on recusal risk appearing arbitrary, and litigants remain vulnerable to perceived judicial favoritism or opacity.

The path forward must involve calibrated reform. Codifying recusal procedures, mandating reasoned disclosures, establishing independent ethical oversight bodies, and protecting judges from reputational attacks are all essential measures. These steps would deter frivolous or strategic recusals without diminishing the right of litigants to challenge real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Ultimately, safeguarding judicial credibility requires a reaffirmation of both ethical restraint and institutional accountability. Strategic recusals must not be allowed to erode the public's faith in impartial justice. Instead, reforms must foster a judicial culture where recusal is exercised judiciously—neither demanded casually nor withheld arrogantly—thus preserving the dignity of courts and the rights of those who seek justice before them.