

# IWIA NEWSLETTER

Volume 2  
January 2025



Indian  
**W**omen in  
International  
**A**rbitration





# Indian Women in International Arbitration

IWIA began as a vision—to empower and elevate Indian women in the global field of international arbitration. Today, we are thrilled to celebrate our journey so far, where connection, knowledge, and support have turned into tangible milestones:

- A community of nearly 3,500 followers and 645 members strong
- In-person events in Delhi, Frankfurt, London, New York, and Mumbai, along with engaging webinars and conference support
- The launch of the IWIA Blog and our bi-annual Newsletter, featuring voices and insights from our members
- A dedicated social media campaign amplifying the achievements of IWIA



**The Indian Women in  
International Arbitration  
was nominated for the  
2024 Global Arbitration  
Review's Equal  
Representation in  
Arbitration Pledge Award**

# 2024 Events and Reflections

## IWIA Webinar

**In Retrospect and Prospect: Examining the Landscape of International Arbitration**

18 February 2024



Indian Women in International Arbitration hosted its first-ever webinar on 18 February 2024 bringing together a community of professionals to explore key topics in arbitration. This vibrant session featured renowned speakers Inbavijayan Veeraraghavan, Mahnaz Malik; Manini Brar, and Sundra Rajoo, who shared valuable perspectives on institutional arbitration, current trends, lessons from the past, and navigating first appointments as an arbitrator. Moderated by Sameena Syed and Niyati Ahuja, the event fostered lively discussion and thought-provoking insights, with high levels of participation and enthusiasm from the attendees.

## Arbitration in an Equal World: Addressing the Gender Gap

8 March 2024  
New Delhi



Supported by



On the occasion of International Women's Day, we warmly invite you to a roundtable discussion on

### ARBITRATION IN AN EQUAL WORLD: ADDRESSING THE GENDER GAP

#### Guests of Honour



Justice Prathiba M Singh  
Judge,  
Delhi High Court



Justice (Retd.) Indu Malhotra  
Former Judge,  
Supreme Court of India

IWIA celebrated International Women's Day with an in-person event that brought together distinguished leaders and rising voices in arbitration. Held at JSA and supported by the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, the event featured esteemed guests of honor, Justice Prathiba M Singh and Justice Indu Malhotra, who shared their insights on gender diversity and empowerment within the legal profession.

The roundtable discussion brought together an exceptional panel of experts: Ashwita Ambast, Dharshini Prasad, Gitanjali Bajaj, Gautam Bhattacharyya, Kevin Nash, Koh Swee Yen, S.C., Maninder Acharya, Manini Brar, FCIArB, Manish Aggarwal, Niyati Ahuja, Rajshekhar Rao, Rebecca James, Sapna Jhangiani KC, Shwetha Bidhuri, Sherina Petit, Sweta Kakkad, and Timothy Cooke.

Moderated by Pragya Chauhan, Anjali Anchayil, and Pallavi Kumar, the discussion centered on current challenges and future pathways in international arbitration, emphasizing diversity, advocacy, and career advancement for women. The event provided an inspiring platform for meaningful dialogue and networking, reinforcing IWIA's commitment to supporting women in international arbitration.

# IWIA Webinar

## Business Development for Lawyers: Building a Book of Business

30 October 2024



In an insightful webinar on 30 October 2024, Niyati Ahuja, engaged with Megan Senese, Co-Founder and Principal of Stage, to discuss essential strategies for lawyers aiming to build and sustain a book of business. The conversation focused on practical approaches to business development while underscoring the need for authenticity and alignment with individual working styles. Megan emphasized that maintaining client relationships requires intentional efforts, such as regular follow-ups and end-of-matter debriefs, which provide invaluable feedback to refine services. She also discussed the role of networking, highlighting the value of proactive outreach—such as making connections before events—to nurture meaningful professional relationships. Additionally, the importance of personal branding emerged as a central theme, with an emphasis on authenticity and visibility. The webinar also addressed how lawyers can differentiate themselves during pitches by offering tailored, value-driven solutions that resonate with clients' specific needs. The discussion reinforced that effective business development requires a thoughtful, individualized approach. Lawyers were encouraged to develop sustainable strategies that reflect their unique strengths, ensuring not only professional success but also long-term satisfaction.

**Coffee  
Connections: A  
Brewing  
Experience**  
6 November  
2024  
Mumbai



On November 6, 2024, IWIA and FTI Consulting co-hosted an interesting networking session combined with a coffee brewing and tasting experience organised by Trove Experiences in Mumbai. The event was attended by leading women practitioners in the city, including several independent counsels and partners in Mumbai's top law firms. The experience started with a crash course for all attendees from the experts at Trove Experiences on how coffee is grown, harvested, roasted and brewed in myriad forms. Participants also learnt some interesting facts about coffee. Did you know that, contrary to popular belief, dark roast coffees actually have lesser caffeine than light or medium roasts? This is because the beans lose water and mass as they are roasted and therefore also, the caffeine content. Who knew!

The participants even tried their hand at brewing their own perfect pour overs and AeroPress coffee. Over the next hour, everyone binged on snacks and cold brew shots while engaging in conversation with other participants.

## What in-house counsel wish external arbitration counsel knew

21 November 2024  
Frankfurt



On 21 November 2024, Freshfields hosted a webinar in Frankfurt, where in-house counsels shared their insights on engaging external arbitration counsel. The discussion, moderated by Brigitta John of Signature Litigation, highlighted key expectations for external counsel in the areas of communication, budgeting, and relationship management.

Hannah emphasized the importance of selecting firms with experience in the relevant industry, particularly in specialized sectors like pharmaceuticals. Companies prefer firms with a local presence to avoid additional costs for local counsel, particularly for smaller disputes, where cost-efficiency and long-term collaboration are key priorities. Shengming stressed that successful partnerships depend on clear, effective communication. External counsels should understand their clients' business and sector-specific nuances to align legal strategies with company goals. Laura highlighted the need for external counsels to present legal strategies in clear, concise terms that are easily understood by non-lawyer decision-makers within the company. This ensures trust and facilitates quicker decision-making. Abhira called for transparency in billing, including detailed invoices and clear distinctions between junior and senior staff time.



Predictability in costs is crucial, and companies expect external counsels to communicate promptly if budgets are exceeded. The use of AI tools like Brightflag to monitor billing consistency was also discussed. Both Abhira and Hannah emphasized the importance of honesty, particularly when mistakes are made. In-house counsels rely on external advice, and undisclosed errors can damage trust. Additionally, counsels should aim for efficiency in dispute resolution, avoiding unnecessary delays or costly enforcement actions when settlement is a viable option.

The webinar concluded with a consensus that transparency, clear communication, cost management, and realistic advice are essential for building lasting, trust-based relationships between in-house and external counsels.

# Behind the Tribunal: Stories, Strategies and Success

In this edition of the IWIA Newsletter, we are thrilled to feature **Poornima Hatti, Partner** at **Samvad Partners**, Bengaluru, and a trailblazer in the world of arbitration. With a remarkable career spanning years of advocacy, leadership, and mentorship, Poornima has consistently demonstrated her expertise in navigating complex disputes and advancing the practice of arbitration in India and beyond. Through this interview, Poornima shares invaluable insights into her professional journey, the challenges and triumphs she has encountered, and her vision for the future of arbitration. Join us as we explore the career of one of arbitration's leading lights and gain a deeper understanding of what it takes to thrive in this dynamic field.



***Poornima Hatti,  
Partner, Dispute Resolution  
Samvad Partners***



### **What inspired you to specialize in international arbitration over other areas of law?**

It isn't so much a singular specialization as it is an attraction to the diversity of work that dispute resolution offers. My practice is a mix of domestic and international arbitration, litigation across various courts in India and abroad, and mediation. What draws me is the variety – whether I'm arguing before the High Court of Karnataka, the Supreme Court of India, an arbitral tribunal in Singapore, or arbitrating a complex case, there's always something new to learn. The multiplicity of contexts, and the different ways of thinking and approaching resolution, keeps me engaged.

### **Did you encounter any unexpected challenges early on that shaped your perspective on the field?**

Dispute resolution is unquestionably demanding. In the early stages of my career, I realized success comes from resilience and hardwork, in addition to having strong legal acumen. Hindsight has also allowed me to recognise that greater challenges emerge as you transition to taking on leadership roles. I learned early on the importance of surrounding myself with the right team and finding meaningful mentorship. My advice to young professionals would be to work hard, find your allies, and be open to learning. Every day is a new day. As you progress, challenges evolve – balancing professional aspirations with personal responsibilities, managing health, and family commitments become increasingly complex.

## **Mentorship & Influences**

### **Who have been the most influential mentors in your career, and what impact did they have on your professional journey?**

I have always been more focused on learning from experienced professionals rather than being constrained by gender. As I said earlier, you can learn from many places, many colleagues, partners, and friends outside the law can help you introspect and grow. Each of us has our own journey. So I would not say that there is one individual that shaped my journey. It is important to create a network of allies, both within and outside the legal profession. My approach has been to look for role models who demonstrate how to balance professional excellence with personal fulfilment. Technology has been invaluable in this regard, allowing me to observe and learn from women who are carving their own unique paths. An important lesson I have learned is to be careful about personal partnerships too. Choose a life partner who will support your professional journey. Without the support from my husband and family, I often would not be able to come in to work or travel.

### **In your opinion, what is the importance of mentorship for young arbitration professionals, and what qualities should they look for in a mentor?**

The key is finding a mentor who genuinely has time for you, while being mindful of the time you're requesting from them. Be clear about what you want to learn, and equally important, think about how you can add value to the relationship.

## **Perspectives on Arbitration's Future**

**What do you foresee for the future of international arbitration in the next decade, particularly with the rise of mediation?**

I am very optimistic about mediation, especially with the new Singapore Convention on Mediation. Mediation offers a more consensual, party-owned approach. It is inherently more flexible and can help preserve business relationships – something international arbitration often struggles with. International arbitration can be expensive, complex and involved.

**How do you see international arbitration adapting to technological advancements, such as AI and virtual hearings?**

Technology is here to stay. It will undoubtedly transform arbitration by reducing costs and increasing efficiency. At the same time, we must explore greener, more mindful ways of using technology as it comes with its own costs, namely carbon footprint. That said, technological advancements have brought the international arbitration community closer together, and the community is more interconnected. It also shows that more people access dispute resolution options because these are available.

## **Advice for Young Professionals**

**What advice would you give to young professionals entering international arbitration?**

Work hard and keep an open mind. Don't view disputes in isolation – understand the broader context of what you're trying to resolve. Develop a perspective that goes beyond the immediate legal arguments. Relationships whether person or professional are important, if they can be preserved, do everything to help. Ensure that you give your client the right advice.

**What qualities or skills are critical for success in arbitration that aren't typically taught in law school?**

Beyond legal knowledge, success in arbitration requires cultural sensitivity, and good communication skills. You must develop the ability to read people and navigate interpersonal and cross-cultural interactions. Beyond this, there is critical thinking, adaptability, and the capacity to quickly process a large volume of text. These skills are refined through experience, exposure, and a genuine curiosity about the world beyond legal textbooks.

## **Gender and Diversity in Arbitration**

### **As a leading woman in a field historically dominated by men, what personal challenges have you faced, and how did you navigate them?**

Thank you. I am unsure about the label of “leading woman.” Dispute resolution remains predominantly male-dominated, no matter the specialisation. The challenges are multifaceted – from earning the trust of a client, to securing arbitral appointments and presenting arguments before judges. We need more women arbitrators, judges, more women in leadership roles at the bar and as senior counsel. There are days when it is difficult to juggle home and work- you would have planned every detail and life throws a completely different curve ball. It is difficult to dust it off and get up and go to Court. We are now a closer knit community than ever before. Technology has helped us inspire and have each other’s back. You realise that many challenges that you face or not yours alone Women often struggle with networking due to disproportionate family and childcare responsibilities. It’s vital to create networks that transcend these traditional limitations. It’s about finding allies – both men and women – who understand and support professional growth. Technology has made this easier, allowing us to observe and learn from each other’s journeys while maintaining our unique paths.

### **What are your views on the current state of gender diversity in the appointment of arbitrators and how do you think gender diversity and inclusivity impact decision-making processes in arbitration?**

In India, there is still a long way to go. Very few women lawyers are appointed in ad hoc arbitrations. We see a few more women being appointed as judges, but these are still far and few between. The most promising progress is happening in institutional arbitration. These institutions are actively motivated to create gender-balanced panels and meet diversity goals. They are the drivers of change.

## **Balancing Career & Personal Life**

### **What strategies do you use to maintain a work-life balance in the demanding field of international arbitration, specifically for women?**

Balance is a daily tug-of-war. My approach is to plan for the worst while hoping for the best. Remember that there is life beyond work. It helps enormously to work with like-minded people who understand this philosophy. Life will always throw unexpected challenges, so be prepared and maintain flexibility. Have alternatives ready and approach each day as a new opportunity.

### **How has your work in arbitration influenced your personal philosophy on conflict and resolution?**

Arbitration has taught me the value of efficient, amicable dispute resolution. Unlike court proceedings, which can be time-consuming despite good infrastructure, arbitration offers a more timely and nuanced approach. It allows you to seize the opportunity to do your best for the client while understanding the importance of maintaining relationships.

# Meet and Greet

 **New York**  
**2 October 2024**



 **London**  
**11 July 2024**

# Steering Committee 2024-25

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