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ICA Symposium on **WHERE WOMEN LEAD, JUSTICE FOLLOWS**

7th March, 2026 | Federation House, New Delhi



Programme & Concept Note

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TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

Opening Session	
04:00 PM-5:00 PM (IST)	Welcome Address Mr Arun Chawla, Director General, ICA & Former DG, FICCI Opening Address Ms. Poonam Sharma, National President, FICCI FLO, Director, Ayurvedant Pvt. Ltd. & Founder, Veerganga Foundation Special Addresses: Hon'ble Ms. Justice Mini Pushkarna, Judge, Delhi High Court Keynote Address: Hon'ble Ms. Justice B.V. Nagarathna, Judge, Supreme Court of India Vote of Thanks: Ms. Geeta Luthra, Sr. Advocate Supreme Court of India & Vice President, ICA
Panel Discussion on: "Breaking Barriers: Gender Diversity in Legal Profession, Challenges & Opportunities"	
05:00 PM-06:00 PM (IST)	Moderator/ Discussant: Dr. Pinky Anand, Sr. Advocate, SCI ; Judge, Bahrain International Commercial Court & Former Addn. Solicitor General of India Discussants: Ms. Shirin Khajuria, Sr. Advocate & Mediator, Supreme Court of India Prof. (Dr.) Ruhi Paul, Professor & Registrar, NLU Delhi & Chairperson, UNESCO Chair for Legal Dimensions of Clean Sports Ms. Mehak Oberoi, Legal Head (Hydro- APAC) GE Vernova Ms. Sujatha Balachander, General counsel, EY India
06:00 PM (IST) onwards	High Tea



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CONCEPT NOTE

As Justice Ms. Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the United States Supreme Court observed, "Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception."

This powerful assertion captures the essence of inclusive leadership. Representation is not merely about presence; it is about meaningful participation that shapes justice, policy, and progress. When women occupy positions of influence, institutions become more responsive, governance becomes more equitable, and development becomes more sustainable.

In India, while there has been steady progress in women's education and professional participation, representation in leadership positions across social, economic, and legal systems remains disproportionately low. Persistent structural and institutional barriers continue to limit women's access to spaces where critical decisions are shaped and power is exercised.

At the same time, India's growth trajectory reflects significant gains in women's economic participation. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate has risen from approximately 23% in 2017-18 to over 41% in 2023-24, with a national aspiration to reach 55% by 2030. Yet increased participation in the workforce must be accompanied by greater representation in positions of authority and influence. Women currently constitute only about 14% of the Lok Sabha members and around 11-12% of ministerial positions, despite forming nearly half of the population.

As a point of reference for policy intervention efficacy, the **Companies Act (2013)**, implemented in 2015, marked a turning point for women's presence in corporate India. The Act mandated that all listed firms have at least one woman on their board. Within a year, the percentage of listed firms without women on boards dropped from 53% to under 10%, and the share of women on boards doubled from 5% in a single year. Today, women hold approximately 18%-21% of board seats in top Indian companies.

Despite this progress, India still lags behind global benchmarks. By 2021, the average share of women on boards in India was just over 17%, below the global average of nearly 20%, and significantly behind countries like France, where women hold over 43% of board seats. Moreover, the "one-woman" rule often acts as a ceiling rather than a floor: 77% of BSE 200 companies have only one or two women on their boards, and while 95% of NIFTY 500 companies comply with the mandate, women remain underrepresented in executive, chair, and key committee roles.

The legal sector reflects a similar pattern. According to the India Justice Report 2025, women constitute approximately 38% of judges in the district and subordinate judiciary. However, representation drops sharply to around 14% in the High Courts. At the apex level, gender diversity remains extremely limited: of 34 sanctioned Supreme Court judges, only one is a woman currently in office, and historically, only 11 women have ever been appointed. These figures underscore the urgent need for sustained, institution-led efforts to promote visibility, leadership, and equal participation of women within dispute-resolution ecosystems.

Together, these statistics reveal that while policies and reforms have catalyzed progress, structural and institutional gaps remain, making it imperative for institutions like ours to actively promote gender diversity and inclusion. By building platforms that foster women's leadership, we can ensure that the promise of justice and equitable decision-making becomes a lived reality.

Building on this imperative, diversity remains a core pillar of the Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA), enhancing the quality, legitimacy, and relevance of the arbitral process and its outcomes. ICA has consciously embedded inclusion across its institutional framework, with 25% women representation on its Governing Board and an average of 30% women representation on arbitral tribunals as sole arbitrators or co-arbitrators. This commitment goes beyond numerical representation; by fostering diverse perspectives within tribunals, ICA promotes balanced decision-making while creating meaningful opportunities for professional advancement of women in arbitration. The proposed Symposium seeks to further this objective by honouring women who have demonstrated outstanding excellence in law and arbitration, while also encouraging dialogue on mentorship, visibility, and institutional best practices.

Envisioned as a largely women-led and women-attended event, the Symposium will serve as a platform for leadership, inspiration, and action. By spotlighting ICA's commitment to inclusion, from its secretariat and governing body to arbitral tribunals the event aims to reinforce a future-oriented vision where women are not only participants but leaders in shaping arbitration in India and beyond, ensuring that where women lead, justice follows.

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