

The CEO Magazine®

RNI No. DELENG/2015/70020

Vol. 11 | Yearly Edition | October - 2025

Rs. 999/-

BUSINESS
WOMAN
OF THE YEAR
2025

**SUSHILA
RAM VARMA**
ADVOCATE, CO-FOUNDER
AND CHIEF CONSULTANT
AT THE INDIAN LAWYER &
ALLIED SERVICES

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*Defying Convention, Empowering
Women and Leading a New Era in Indian
Legal Practice*

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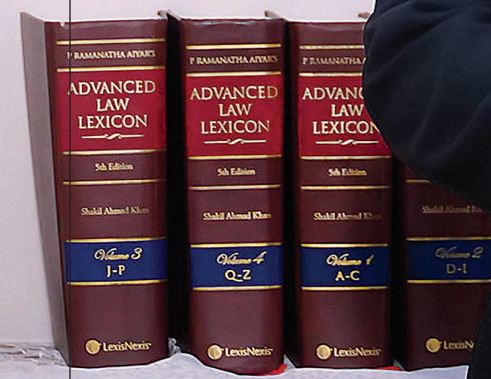
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Sushila Ram Varma

DEFYING CONVENTION, EMPOWERING WOMEN AND
LEADING A NEW ERA IN INDIAN LEGAL PRACTICE

Shweta Singh | The CEO Magazine

For decades, the image of a lawyer in India was almost always male, a stark reflection of the country's deeply ingrained biases. From classrooms of law schools to the courtrooms, women always remained a minority. But that picture is changing. Slowly, yet decisively, strong-willed women refusing to be confined by tradition have stepped into the courtroom. And in doing so, they are redefining what justice looks like in a country where equality has long been delayed.



SUSHILA RAM VARMA

Advocate, Co-Founder
and Chief Consultant at
The Indian Lawyer &
Allied Services



One such voice of change is Advocate Sushila Ram Varma. With over 30 years of experience in law, her career spans both transactional work and litigation, including international arbitration. She appears before the Supreme Court of India, multiple High Courts across the country and tribunals such as NCLT, NCDRC and FEMA. Her expertise extends beyond India, advising foreign clients and companies on corporate and business matters. Today, she leads The Indian Lawyer & Allied Services, a full-service firm combining legal expertise with business strategy, helping clients navigate complex challenges while ensuring long-term growth.

THE MAKING OF A LEADER

The moment you meet Sushila Ram Varma, the first thing that strikes you is her presence. There is a quiet strength in the way she carries herself. She is confident without being overpowering and knowledgeable yet humble. This balance of authority and humility is hard to find and exactly what sets her apart. Her journey began in the small, picturesque town of Darjeeling in West Bengal, famous for its tea gardens, where she studied in the boarding schools and completed here graduation from Loreto College, Darjeeling. Growing up in a business family, she was always exposed to entrepreneurship, but her father encouraged her to pursue law. He believed that understanding the law was essential for business and suggested she complete her legal education before pursuing management studies.

Destiny, however, had other plans. When the opportunities came, she chose to step into a male-dominated profession as a first-generation lawyer from a completely non-legal background. It wasn't easy, but her determination, resilience and vision helped her build a career that today stands as a trusted name in the Indian legal fraternity.

After finishing her law degree, she moved to Delhi to gain practical experience. While she had initially planned to return to Calcutta to work at the High Court, Delhi offered opportunities she could not ignore. Early in her career, she had the privilege of working with some of the country's top lawyers, whose mentorship shaped her legal thinking, courtroom presence and professional ethics.

She also spent her formative years working in Mumbai, running a law firm that operated out of both cities. These experiences laid the foundation for what would eventually become The Indian Lawyer & Allied Services www.theindianlawyer.in

THE INDIAN LAWYER & ALLIED SERVICES: HOW IT BEGAN

"When I first thought of The Indian Lawyer, the idea was very simple," Sushila recalls. "Most people come to lawyers only when they're in trouble. This element of fear is what I wanted to take away."

Back in 2011, she launched The Indian Lawyer as an online platform, thinking that virtual access would make legal help less intimidating. But as the work grew, she realised legal issues can't always be solved online. People needed a full-service firm that could step in, guide them and handle everything end-to-end. That was the moment when The Indian Lawyer & Allied Services truly came into being.

The idea behind The Indian Lawyer and Allied Services was built on three guiding principles: be reliable, be responsible and be resourceful. Being a lawyer means you have to find a solution that actually works for the client. Laws can be archaic and business realities keep changing. Lawyers have to think outside the box, not just about what the book says. Sushila's approach often surprises people.

"CLIENTS LOOK AT ME STRANGELY WHEN I TELL THEM NOT TO GO TO COURT, BUT I KNOW THE REALITY. LITIGATION IN INDIA IS PAINFULLY SLOW. MOST DISPUTES HAPPEN BECAUSE OF EGOS RATHER THAN ACTUAL BREACHES. MY FOCUS IS ALWAYS ON IRONING THAT OUT AND ENSURING THE BUSINESS KEEPS RUNNING,"

Today, The Indian Lawyer & Allied Services has grown into a PAN-India, full-service law firm, having its offices in New Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai & Darjeeling. The team works across corporate and commercial law, dispute resolution, compliance and business consultancy. What makes them different is their ability to combine legal expertise with a practical business outlook. From drafting fool proof contracts and guiding companies through complex regulatory frameworks to handling high-stake disputes through arbitration, mediation, or litigation, they give clients solutions that are legally sound and commercially viable.



With Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi

"We don't view cases as files; we see them as responsibilities towards individuals, businesses and communities," she says. This culture of responsibility, foresight and empathy defines The Indian Lawyer & Allied Services.

PREVENTIVE LAWYERING

For Sushila Ram Varma, the true strength of law lies not only in resolving disputes but in preventing them from arising in the first place. She often calls contracts the "mother of civil law", pointing out that every commercial relationship begins and ends with them. "If your contracts are properly drafted, proofread and compliant at the initial stage, it prevents major disputes later," she says. This preventive approach has become the cornerstone of her practice. Rather than viewing lawyers as crisis managers, she believes businesses should see them as guardians of business strategy who safeguard continuity. Legal teams, she explains, shield companies from risks in all directions, regulatory, contractual, financial and reputational, thereby ensuring a smooth road for development. Strong legal oversight contributes directly to the stability of companies and stable companies, in turn, drive economic progress. In that sense, when a corporation is safeguarded, it also contributes to the larger growth of the nation. Litigation, in her view, is rarely the ideal solution in India's protracted judicial system. "Modern businesses require out-of-court settlements, arbitration, mediation and conciliation, which save time, reduce costs, preserve relationships



With Prime Minister Mark Rutte of Netherlands



and protect reputations,” she says. This philosophy of “preventive lawyering” has become a defining feature of her practice, enabling clients to focus on growth instead of being drained by prolonged conflict.

NURTURING LIFELONG CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

For Sushila Ram Varma, the strength of a corporate lawyer’s work is best reflected in the relationships they build. Many of her clients have stayed with her for decades, some even across generations. In corporate law, she believes, the strength of one’s practice is measured not just in cases won but in trust won and sustained. “Success for me is not only in terms of being a good professional. It also means being recognised as a good person, a trustworthy professional. That trust is my biggest earning, far beyond monetary rewards,” she says. Several milestones mark her journey, from building a PAN-India firm as a first-generation lawyer to being invited to speak at national and international platforms and seeing her writings and videos reach people who otherwise have little access to legal guidance. These recognitions, she feels, indicate that she is on the right path.

Her approach goes beyond reactive problem-solving. “In corporate life, advice and compliance is not a one-time task but a continuous process. From advisory to negotiations, contracts and governance issues to regulatory filings

and dispute resolution, businesses require constant legal supervision. That is why having professionals as retainers is indispensable,” she explains. Retained counsel ensures that minor issues are corrected before they grow into major crises. It is in cases like this that the maxim ‘a stitch in time saves nine’ squarely applies.

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN LAW

Being a woman lawyer in the 1990s came with its own set of challenges. Courtrooms were intimidating, biases were real and building a practice from scratch without a legal legacy was an uphill task. “There were times of financial uncertainty and professional doubt, but perseverance, encouragement by my parents and the guidance of several mentors, such as senior advocates like the late Mr. Ram Jethmalani and the late Mr. Arun Jaitley and inspirational lawyers like Mr. Harish Salve, kept me going. My biggest mentor was my professional guru, Mr. M.S. Ganesh, Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court, who taught me what meticulous work meant,” Sushila recalls. She credits her early success to sticking to fundamentals: hard work, consistency, honesty and trust-building. “Obstacles are part of the journey; it is resilience that shapes your future,” she adds.

Having carved her space in a male-dominated field, Sushila is deeply committed to diversity, equity and inclusion. In her firm, women lawyers are offered equal



“INCLUSION IS NOT TOKENISM; IT IS ABOUT CREATING A CULTURE WHERE TALENT AND MERIT ARE THE ONLY CRITERIA FOR GROWTH.”

-SUSHILA RAM VARMA

Integrity, accessibility and knowledge-sharing form the backbone of Sushila Ram Varma’s leadership philosophy. In her Firm, young lawyers are mentored and encouraged to take on challenging roles,

opportunities for leadership roles and challenging cases. Hiring from diverse backgrounds and supporting flexible work arrangements are part of her ethos, empowering young professionals, especially women, to balance career and personal life.

irrespective of gender. Every team member is accountable not just to clients, but to society. Her commitment extends to social initiatives, particularly for women and underprivileged groups, ensuring that access to justice is not limited to the privileged few. For her, mentorship and community



With Dr Mogili Shrikanth Varma, our Co-founder and International Business Consultant

service are as integral to her work as legal practice itself. Looking back on her own journey, she reflects, “From being a first-generation woman lawyer to building a full-service law Firm, every stage was about growth, learning and resilience. Today, I see women not just participating but leading the change in business and society. Leadership is no longer about breaking into spaces; it’s about reshaping them entirely. For me personally, it’s about leaving a legacy of knowledge, empowerment and ethics — so that the next generation starts from where we leave off, not from scratch.”

BEYOND THE COURTROOM

Sushila Ram Varma extends her work beyond the courtroom through writing and public education. She, along with her team, runs a blog called The Indian Lawyer blog <https://theindianlawyer.in/blog/> that has a national ranking in the top 20 legal blogs in India. She edits around 30-35 articles every month, written on the latest judgements that are shaping the law. The blog endeavours to simplify complex legal concepts and spread awareness among the masses. These judgements are mostly of the Supreme Court of India.

They also run a YouTube channel called ‘The Indian Lawyer Legal Tips’ <https://www.youtube.com/@theindianlawyerlegaltips>, where they explain everyday legal issues in easy-to-understand insights. Sushila says, “The idea is to empower people with legal knowledge because informed citizens make better choices and better choices strengthen society.”

WHAT LIES AHEAD

At present, Sushila Ram Varma is expanding her preventive lawyering model by offering corporates structured compliance audits, contract management services and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. At the same time, she is focused on growing her legal awareness platforms to reach a wider audience.

Her long-term vision for The Indian Lawyer & Allied Services is to establish it as a globally recognized Indian law firm, known for innovation, ethics and impact. Personally, she envisions her role evolving from that of a lawyer to a mentor and thought leader, guiding the next generation of legal professionals and women entrepreneurs. Passing on knowledge and building enduring institutions is central to her mission.

LEADERSHIP MANTRA

Advising aspiring entrepreneurs, Sushila says, “I always say, be very honest in your intentions. It doesn’t matter what you do. You can be a lawyer, a doctor, or an editor. Just be honest in your intentions. Do your work with the kind of honesty that is required and everything will fall into place.”

She also reflects on the inevitability of challenges, “Never give up. You will always face obstacles; everyone does, every day. No one has a completely problem-free



Sushila Ram Varma seen receiving award from GLOBAL LEX-FALCON by LEXTALK WORLD CONFERENCE IN DUBAI, UAE.

day. Challenges are part of life and you have to find the strength to resolve them from within. No matter how much support you have, if a problem affects you, you are the one who can resolve it.” On professional growth and self-belief, she adds, “Do not wait for validation. Believe in your vision and don’t let societal stereotypes define your path. Surround yourself with mentors, stay disciplined and don’t fear failures. Every setback is a stepping stone if you treat it as a learning experience. Success is not about competing with men or women; it’s about competing with yourself to become a better version every day.”

PARTING THOUGHTS

“My message to CEOs, business leaders and young lawyers is simple: the role of a lawyer today goes far beyond courtrooms. We are strategic partners who align legal solutions with business goals, prevent crises before they occur and create frameworks that enable sustainable growth.

With over three decades of experience, a PAN-India presence and a multidisciplinary team, I stand committed not only to guiding corporates through challenges and towards opportunities, but also to passing on my knowledge to the next generation of lawyers. Because ultimately, law is not just a profession — it is a legacy we build for the future.

Lastly, I would like to conclude by saying that success is never individual; it is always a result of joint efforts at different levels. In my case, the biggest contribution to my success has been that of my husband and co-founder of the Firm, Dr. Mogili Shrikanth Varma, who has always pushed me to achieve greater heights. I would also take this opportunity to thank my team, who always stands by me in helping the Firm achieve the goals that we have set for ourselves. Signing off, I would like to say that though success may have one face, it is always the result of the hard work of several people who helped you to get there.”

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