

Rising stars, unsung heroes

A survey of India's lesser-known law firms unveils a rich universe of high-quality legal solutions. Until now, clients may have been unaware of the depth and diversity of services on offer

Alfred Romann reports



Finding and choosing the right Indian law firm is a daunting task. The legal market is rich and diverse. There are hundreds of thousands of lawyers working in thousands of firms, well over 100 of which undertake work for foreign clients. Most international corporates seeking India-related legal advice are well-acquainted with the largest firms: Amarchand Mangaldas, AZB & Partners, J Sagar Associates and others have become familiar names on the international stage. But many corporate clients are unaware of the large number of accomplished Indian law firms that occupy positions just below the international radar.

Some are small, specialist firms, offering high-quality advice targeted at particular niche markets. Others are medium-sized general practice firms that routinely work for prestigious foreign clients, but have yet to gain the level of international recognition afforded to the country's largest firms.

India Business Law Journal is proud to introduce some of India's most promising rising stars, and equally, its unsung heroes. The firms highlighted are often well known and respected within their respective circles, but may be known to a lesser extent, if at all, among the global legal community.

Many of these law firms have honed their skills to become leaders in their fields of specialty, undertaking groundbreaking work and providing advice that is sharp and effective and often comparable in quality to the services offered by the largest and best-known Indian firms. Clients may enjoy the added benefits of lower hourly billing rates, more attentive service and greater levels of partner attention.

Access, attentiveness and efficiency

Sandeep Farias, managing director of Unitus Equity Fund, which focuses on investing in companies that provide services to the poor, says: "For me, size does not matter. It is depth of experience, responsiveness and client focus that matter."

Farias' company is a client of Indus G&D Law, a firm created by the 2004 merger of Indus Law and G&D Law Chambers. He says he is "more than happy" with the service he receives.

In large Indian law firms there is very little scope to interact with their partners directly

Piyush Bhagat
Managing Director
Space Group



One of the key attractions of many small and medium-sized firms is the accessibility of senior partners. Piyush Bhagat, managing director at Space Group, which is a client of R Ginodia & Co, says his company prefers to use "law firms where we can get constructive and meaningful advice without much hindrance."

"In large Indian law firms, there is very little scope to interact with their partners directly," he says.

Given the restrictions on advertising, clients often stumble across firms they are comfortable with in the course of doing business or through referrals.

"We were on the lookout for a firm which could handle both contentious and non-contentious matters," says Samir Ganguli, vice-president (legal) at Birla Corporation. "I had occasion to interact with R Ginodia & Co in a matter where we were not their clients. We were impressed by their capability and proactive approach and this led to our association with them as clients for future legal work, which is still continuing."

According to Kabir Nasser, the assistant vice-president for legal affairs at Strides Arcolab, small firms also offer the advantage of efficiency. "A large firm would not show the same urgency and turnaround time a smaller firm does," he says.

Since receiving a recommendation from a friend, and subsequently arranging a meeting with the firm, Nasser has given much of his legal work to Narasappa Doraswamy & Raja.

Ajith Muralidharan, executive director of Niko Resources, describes himself as a "delighted customer" of another medium-sized law firm, Hariani & Co. "In my 20-year career handling business operations for various companies, Hariani is one of the most professional firms that I have dealt with," he says. "I was thoroughly impressed with how accessible the people involved were – a rare occurrence with most businesses today."

Hariani & Co was founded in 1991 and has grown to nine partners, including two equity partners, each of whom leads a team of senior associates and associates. With offices in Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune and Goa, the firm prides itself on youth, dynamism, speed and limited use of "legalese".

Mumbai-based LawQuest offers services to both domestic and international clients. Launched in December 2003 by Poorvi Chothani, the practice was set up to serve a wide range of areas such as intellectual property, immigration, corporate and commercial law, dispute resolution, real estate, personal and family law and employment.

Sugesh Sheth, the compliance officer of Padmakshi Financial Services, says his company uses LawQuest because larger firms have a tendency to "be lax in terms of concentration on the minute needs of the clients."

"The level of attention that attorneys are required to give their clients is given at 100% at a small or medium-sized firm as compared to large ones, which tend to focus on bigger clients," Sheth says.

Veteran practitioners

Many of India's small and medium-sized firms are relatively new establishments, driven by young, well-trained lawyers with plenty of international savvy. Others have thrived for decades and offer a combination of new talent and deeply entrenched expertise.

One of the oldest firms surveyed, Tyabji Dayabhai, was founded in 1872 as a litigation and property specialist. Over the years it expanded to banking and corporate law.

"It is probably the oldest firm of solicitors in the city of Mumbai. It has been a family firm started by Mr Tyabji and Mr Dayabhai," says Nimish Vakil, one of the three current partners and a fifth-generation descendant of the original Dayabhai.

Another century-old firm operating in Mumbai is Solomon & Co. Founded in 1909, the firm is "dedicated to the diverse legal needs of individual entrepreneurs, private and public companies, domestic as well as multinational companies," says associate Kinjal Champaneria. The firm is affiliated with Solomon & Roy, a specialist IP firm that focuses on multinational companies and high-net-worth individuals.

Mitesh Haria, general legal counsel at ING, says he has typically worked with larger Indian firms such as AZB & Partners, Amarchand Mangaldas, Mulla & Mulla and Crawford Bayley & Co. However, Haria acknowledges the quality input and good advice provided by Solomon & Co and says that "they do not attempt to suggest things that would increase the cost to the client."

Dating back to 1918, Manilal Kher Ambalal & Co (MKA) has six partners and 27 associates. According to managing partner Vikram Trivedi, the firm services a range of clients from *Fortune 500* companies to banks, financial institutions and local media celebrities. MKA has four

Hariani is one of the most professional firms that I have dealt with

Ajith Muralidharan
Executive Director
Niko Resources



offices, all in Mumbai, and has correspondent relationships with firms in New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Bangalore.

"MKA is quick to react, incisive and provides the right advice at the right time," says Venkateswarlu Bongarala, a representative of Kotak Mahindra Bank.

Vikramjiet Roy, managing director of Maccaferri India, also works with MKA. He says: "The advantage of small and medium-sized [firms] is that you can get far more

SINGHANIA & PARTNERS

SOLICITORS AND ADVOCATES

Singhania & Partners is a full service national law firm with offices at New Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Noida. The firm comprises of a team of over 70 professionals in-house including Chartered Accountants and Company Secretaries with dual qualification of Law. Some of the firm's practice areas are as under:

- Aviation
- Banking
- Business Process Outsourcing
- Corporate & Commercial
- Information Technology & Telecommunication
- Insurance
- Joint Venture & Technology Transfer
- Labour & Employment
- Litigation & Arbitration
- Mergers & Acquisitions
- Patents, Trademarks and Copyrights
- Pharmaceuticals
- Privatization / Disinvestment
- Project Finance
- Rail, Road & Port
- Real Estate
- Taxation
- Trade & Customs
- Water, Oil, Gas & Power

The Firm is empanelled with the Ministry of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs for providing legal services in support of public private partnerships transactions for both central and state agencies.

Ravi Singhania, Managing Partner along with other partners of the firm Dipak Rao, Sunil Kumar, Shilpa Shah, Tarun Dua have been nominated as the leaders in the field of Corporate Commercial, Project Finance, Tax, Dispute Resolution by Asia Law Leading Lawyers, and Chambers & Partners.

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K LAW
KRISHNAMURTHY & CO.

Krishnamurthy and Co. (**K Law**), established in 1999, is a full service law firm, providing a wide spectrum of sophisticated legal services in various business sectors. The primary focus of the firm is on corporate, intellectual property, real estate laws and litigation, where it has niche expertise and skills.

The specialized areas include

- **Information Technology;**
- **Entertainment and Media;**
- **Oil & Gas;**
- **Power;**
- **Telecommunication;**
- **Banking and Insurance;**
- **Life Sciences; and**
- **Bio-technology.**

Sensitive to our clients' needs, we at the firm, work with clients knowing we can make a difference. We work closely with each client and believe each client is important, deserving equal, meticulous and professional attention. We, therefore, provide unfailing top quality work, short turn-around time and easy accessibility to clients with focus on attention to detail.

K Law takes pride in its winning combination of professional, experienced, dedicated and dynamic team. We continue to expand in stature sharing mutual trust and respect with our distinguished clients.

Partners:

1. Ms. Naina Krishna Murthy - Managing Partner (naina@klaw.in)
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[Solomon & Co does not]
attempt to suggest things
that would increase the
cost to the client

Mitesh Haria
General Legal Counsel
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attention and dedicated service with better time management. Cost is definitely an issue.”

A Bangalore-based firm with deep roots is Sundaraswamy & Ramdas. It was founded in 1926 by SD Ganesha Rao, who was later joined by his son SG Sundaraswamy. Two others sons joined later to create the firm as it is today. With four partners and 10 associates, it handles the full range of corporate and commercial law matters.

BN Anand is another long-established name in India's legal market. The firm was founded by BN Anand in 1951 as an independent practice in Lucknow. The original focus was trial law. Anand died in 2001, but the firm continues under his son, Ajesh Anand, who joined in 1984. With a small team – Anand and three juniors – the firm focuses on civil litigation and recovery but, according to Anand, it can provide services in virtually all branches of law. “We have

done tremendous work in title searches for credit appraisals and due diligence,” he says.

MV Kini & Co was established as a full-service firm in Mumbai in 1978. With 10 branch offices and 175 lawyers, the firm works with corporate clients around the world as well as governments. It routinely drafts and vets agreements regarding highway toll collections and regularly advises the National Highways Authority of India, the Airports Authority of India and other government or private entities on construction projects. Led by sole partner MV Kini, the firm is run along traditional lines, with the rest of its lawyers being salaried associates.

Evolving traditions

“In the maze of the legal world, firms are lost from sight,” says AG Kharkhanis, managing partner of India Law Services. “This is partly due to restrictions against advertising under Indian laws and partly due to their inability to spend time promoting themselves.

“Whatever the cause, the fact remains that such firms are efficiently run and provide cost-effective advice.”

India Law Services was set up in 1997 by two former executives from the Industrial Development Bank of India. The firm has five partners and 20 associates and paralegals working out of offices in Mumbai, New Delhi and Chennai. Its main strength is project finance.

India Law Services has drifted away from the traditional family-run model and all of its partners hold

KRCCO

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K. R. Chawla & Co. (“KRCCO”) is a leading law firm in India, with office(s) in Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, San Francisco (U.S.A.) and a representative office in Singapore.

The firm focuses on providing comprehensive business, financial and legal services of high professional standards. The firm works closely with number of well-known international law firms and is a part of global legal association(s) such as Law Exchange International, which is a very close knit network of law firms in U.S. and Europe. Corporate transactional practice of the firm includes cross-border as well as domestic mergers, acquisitions, Private Equity. The members of our firm have been engaged in very prestigious and complex transactions in the past and have been advising on all facets of acquisition and related corporate issues. The firm has successfully handled numerous Euro Issues of Indian companies in diverse sectors on international exchanges such as DIFX, Dubai; Luxembourg Stock Exchange; Alternative Investment Market (“AIM”) of the London Stock Exchange.

Key Practice Areas of the Firm: Foreign Investment in India, Securities and Exchange Board of India [SEBI], Banking & Finance, Listing / International Offerings, Mergers and Acquisitions, International Taxation, Telecommunications, Hotel & Tourism, Aviation, Real Estate & Property Laws, Intellectual Property, Alternate Dispute Resolution, Litigation.

Contact Person: Sumes Dewan Partner and Head of Transactional Practice. Mr. Dewan has been nominated by AsiaLaw Leading Lawyers survey 2007 and 2008 as one of the most highly-acclaimed legal experts in the Asia-Pacific region in the practice area - Capital Markets & Corporate Finance.

I like the personal attention and hands-on practice that is offered at Phoenix

Gail Negabur
Attorney
Air Liquide



equity. A board of governors helps identify future growth opportunities. "We believe this is the first time in India that any law firm has separated its management issues from the day-to-day working, which we believe will help us in achieving our goals quickly and efficiently," says Kharkhanis.

India Law Services' adoption of an international-style structure and management technique is indicative of the changes sweeping the country's legal profession.

"Traditionally, the legal practice in India was individualistic," says Amarjit Singh, founder and managing partner of Delhi-based IP boutique Amarjit & Associates. It subsequently "matured to the state of family law firms."

"With the change of economic policies in the past decades, family law firms grew into mid-sized law firms," Singh continues. Now, "the interest shown by foreign law firms in the Indian legal market has encouraged some of the mid-sized law firms to grow, either through hidden partnerships, affiliations or associations."

Something different

"We are very different from a traditional Indian law firm, even though I am the sole principal partner right now," says Priti Suri, the proprietor of PSA Legal Counsellors. "We recognized that the success or failure of a firm is due to its pool of talented people. People at PSA learn early that their economic prosperity within the firm is entirely in their hands."

"The firm has a very open style of functioning with a fanatical, obsessive focus on client commitment ... We are probably the first law firm in India which developed a continuing legal education programme."

Suri established PSA in 2004. Based in Delhi, it has a team of 12 associates. In February, the firm organized India's first conference for women business lawyers, which in Suri's words aimed "to create a platform where women lawyers could come together and address diverse issues ranging from business development, work-life balance, networking and the increasing influence of law firms". (See **News**, page 6.)

Another firm that claims to break the mould of the traditional legal establishment is Mumbai-based Udwadia & Udeshi. The firm was established in 1998 by Dilip Udeshi, who has five decades of legal experience, and Darius Udwadia, who has been practising law for 44 years. Both are former partners of Crawford Bayley & Co, a large Mumbai firm. Udwadia & Udeshi has offices in Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai.



MANILAL KHER AMBALAL & CO.

ADVOCATES, SOLICITORS & NOTARY

Established in 1918

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Asset acquisitions, Admiralty, Banking & Finance, Capital Markets & Securities, Anti-Trust & Competition Law, Criminal Litigation, Corporate & Commercial, Cyber Law, Dispute Resolution, Domestic/foreign Arbitration, Guidance to overseas clients in Legal and regulatory aspects, Insurance, I.P., Infrastructure, Media & Entertainment, Mergers and Demergers, Takeovers and Acquisitions Project Finance, Real Estate, Telecommunications (in contentious and non-contentious areas).

About us:

The Firm traces its roots back to 1918 in the erstwhile State of Bombay and is one of the few firms to be inaugurated by a High Court Judge, Justice Sir FCO Beaman. The Firm offers a rich blend of experience and creativity topped with the vigor of youth.

The Firm acts as Indian legal counsel for several Fortune 500 Companies, leading Indian and international MNCs, financial institutions, celebrities, industry associations, hospitals, trusts, insurers and broking houses. Individual partners have core focus on different areas of law. The Firm has been selected thrice-in-a-row by the Asia Pacific Legal 500 as "Preferred Lawyers" in the areas of "Corporate: M&A" and "Dispute Resolution" since 2006 till date.

The Firm's Managing Partner, Vikram Trivedi lends his vast experience of over a quarter of a century to the Firm. His formula based litigation practice and his transactional practice along with his acumen in project finance is well recognized in business circles.

He is a member of the 'Law Review Reform and Rationalization' Committees of the Indian Merchants' Chamber as well as the Bombay Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In addition, he is also on the Editorial Board of 'M&A Critique', a magazine specializing in the mergers & acquisitions in India.

Total Number of Partners: 7

Total Number of Associates: 27+

Languages spoken: English, French, Hindi, Marathi Gujarati, Sindhi, Urdu, and most Indian languages

"Unlike traditional Indian law firms which are, by and large, family firms where partnerships are generally inherited, our firm has a purely professional background where the only legacy is the experience, values and standards of the seniors," says partner Margaret D'Souza. The firm has worked with JM Financial Asset Management, Nitesh Estates and Emaar Properties and is known for its projects, M&A and dispute resolution practice.

With three partners and 12 associates, Premnath Rai Associates is a general practice firm that operates in offices in New Delhi and Bangalore. Managed by three equity partners, each lawyer has functional autonomy. "It is a first-generation law firm, owned and managed by professionals," says managing partner Premnath Rai.

Young, ambitious and determined

With thousands of Indian law graduates entering the profession each year, it is no surprise to see the exponential rise of new firms and new talent in the country.

Set up in October 2008, Phoenix Legal is a full-service firm with about 20 lawyers. It was launched by three Trilegal alumni and a senior lawyer from Kochhar & Co, and has offices in Delhi and Mumbai.

Phoenix Legal's most significant deals revolve around infrastructure. The firm secured a US\$425 million financing deal for a liquefied natural gas plant in Kerala for Petronet LNG, and is advising Pranav Construction System on a US\$10 million private equity investment from Nine Rivers Capital.

"We truly believe that we exist because of our clients and their interests come first," says partner Abhishek Saxena.

A personal touch can go a long way. Gail Negabur, an attorney at French company Air Liquide, says she chose Phoenix in order to work with Manjula Chawla. "Like in all markets, it is a question of 'who', not whether it is a big or small firm.

"I like the personal attention and hands-on practice that is offered at Phoenix," says Negabur. "The only advantage of a bigger firm would be for major litigation or an acquisition where we needed more staff but, frankly, I work with Manjula, not a firm, so whether she was with a small or large outfit would not make a difference to me."

Founded just two years ago, Alliance Corporate Lawyers has quickly gained a foothold in the market. Its managing partner, RS Loona, is the former executive director for law at the Securities and Exchange Board of India. Alliance has an office in Mumbai and is in the process of opening two more, in New Delhi and Chandigarh. The firm, which handles the full range of corporate and commercial matters, is widely respected for its deep regulatory experience.

ARA Law, since its establishment in February 1996, has grown into a firm with three partners and 15 associates. Managed by Rajesh Begur, ARA is a full-service commercial and corporate law firm based in Mumbai with a small operation in Bangalore and a relationship office in Delhi. Among the firm's key areas of expertise are broadcast, satellite, cellular and basic telephony – areas in which Begur says the firm has "a formidable reputation".

India Law Alliance is also located in Mumbai. It has

Singhania & Partners has assisted us on countless issues that have arisen from the fact that we are a majority holder of an Indian corporation

Jeffrey Mitnick
Associate General Counsel
McGraw-Hill



two partners, 10 lawyers and four paralegals. The firm focuses on indirect taxes and capital markets. It names Thomas Cook, Zicom Electronic Securities and General Motors among its clients.

Manoj & Ashok Associates is a small firm that has spread across Mumbai since it was set up in 2000. From a single office in the central Fort area, the firm now has a head office in Dadar and branches in Fort, Vile Parle and Ghatkopar, which allow it to provide timely services in all parts of the city.

Narasappa Doraswamy & Raja, based in Bangalore, is another relatively new firm. Set up in 2005, it has three partners, five associates and one counsel. The associates have between one and four years' experience.

None of the three equity partners is tied to any particular associate: "In other words, none of the partners has a 'firm-within-a-firm'," says founding partner Siddharth Raja, "although they each have functional specializations working in strong and mutually complementary teams.

"We are a professionally run outfit – a true partnership," Raja says.

Just one year older than Narasappa Doraswamy & Raja is Indus G&D Law. The firm has eight partners and 32 associates, who work in offices in Bangalore, Delhi, Bhubaneswar and Hyderabad. Indus has worked with Macmillan India, advised on a Shariah-compliant US\$60 million real estate fund and counselled Accel's India Venture Fund.

"Every young Indian firm is different from the traditional firms in their own way," says partner Srinivas Katta. This firm, says Katta, is not family owned or controlled, and it believes in providing associates with a path to partnership.

Mohammed Abdullah from Chatsworth India says his company chose Indus for its experience and approach, noting that its needs have been addressed successfully.

Established in 1999, Krishnamurthy & Co (K Law) focuses on intellectual property and real estate from its offices in Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai and Mysore. It also offers consultancy services and advice on company formation, regulatory approvals and corporate and commercial law. The firm has grown in strength to four equity partners and more than 50 associates.

"K Law believes in an open-door policy for all its lawyers and staff. Everyone at the firm is aware that I am accessible to them," says managing partner Naina Krishnamurthy.

"We don't believe in hierarchy when working on an assignment. Senior partners work with entry-level associates and these decisions are based purely on performance and the potential of a lawyer; not how long they have worked at the firm."

UDWADIA & UDESHI

Solicitors and Advocates

Founded in 1997

Key practice areas:

Mergers and acquisitions; commercial structuring; general corporate and commercial documentation; banking and finance; litigation and dispute resolution; intellectual property; capital markets; real estate; equity and asset acquisition; infrastructure projects; antitrust & competition; indirect taxation; trusts and company establishment & corporate due diligence.

Number of Partners: 7

Number of associates: 45

Principal office: Mumbai

Other offices: Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad

As one of India's leading law firms combining a vast litigation exposure ranging from the Supreme Court of India, High Courts of various States and subordinate courts, Tax Authorities & Tribunals and large corporate practice. We deliver a broad range of quality legal services in a manner satisfactorily to meet the requirements of clients and contribute meaningfully to their success.

Our practice areas include foreign investments, private equity and joint ventures, antitrust /competition law, intellectual property law, international law and finance related transactions and financial instruments, securitization, domestic and off-shore mutual funds, direct and indirect taxation, media and entertainment, information technology, infrastructure projects including under Public Private Partnership; international franchising; legal audits; equity and asset acquisition & sale of businesses.

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Premium clients

Many small and medium-sized Indian law firms have succeeded in building significant portfolios of international clients. Titus & Co, for example, has 48 *Fortune* 500 companies on its books. The firm is headquartered in New Delhi, but has associate offices in Bangalore, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Jabalpur, Jalandhar, Kolkata and Mumbai. It has 10 fee-sharing partners.

"We take pride in the talent, depth of expertise and the teamwork employed in responding to clients' needs," says managing partner Diljeet Titus.

Titus & Co represented Maratho Power in its acquisition of Essar Power; Caterpillar on the development of a power plant; and Japan's Itochu Corporation on the development of a US\$2.14 billion telephone network. Titus founded the firm in 1997 following a seven-year stint at Singhania & Co. Partners at the firm have represented clients as diverse as Hard Rock Café, IKEA, Tata Consultancy Services, UPS and Franklin Templeton Investments.

Fellow Delhi-based firm Seth Dua & Associates has five partners and 25 fee earners. The firm works with many multinational clients and typically focuses on corporate and commercial law relevant to commercial transactions including international M&A. It also wins praise for its work in IT, media and telecommunications. Seth Dua's clients include Seacom, Emaar MGF Land, Foster's and Laing O'Rourke.

Dr Kainth & Associates has a magnificent reputation in India as well as in Germany

Kai Bendix
Managing Director
Nivea India



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Vishal Gandhi of Mumbai-based Gandhi & Associates, says his firm has been involved in deals worth US\$200 million, often working opposite India's largest firms such as AZB & Partners. "In fact, some clients have chosen us over the older firms," he says.

Established in 2003, Gandhi & Associates has a single partner and 15 associates, who focus on corporate law, M&A, capital markets, and venture capital and private equity deals.



Legal Counsellors

A law firm with a difference – PSA is a broad-based full service, solution-driven, pragmatic business law firm that has carved a special niche in the Indian legal market by the quality of its legal service, responsiveness and client commitment. At PSA, we have a fanatical, obsessive focus on client commitment. A firm whose firm belief, objective and philosophy is to focus on forging long-term relationships with clients across the globe which is demonstrated by the fact that we have been working with several of them for over a decade. An in-depth knowledge and understanding of the business goals and concerns of the client's businesses permits our lawyers to formulate creative solutions to difficult contractual, legal and business issues.

Though established in 2004, the New Delhi based firm's professionals have 50 plus years of collective experience, engaged in providing legal services in an efficient, timely and, most importantly, a cost-effective manner. Our key practice areas include:

Arbitration and Litigation, Corporate and Securities, Commercial Law, Environmental Law, Information Technology and Telecommunications, Intellectual Property, Labour and Employment, Mergers and Acquisitions, Outsourcing, Private Equity, Project Finance, Real Property, Regulatory Matters, Taxation

We encourage the entrepreneurial ability of the lawyers and our staff. The entire team understands the need for providing pragmatic, legal advice, and the firm has nurtured an atmosphere where pro-activeness and initiative is deeply valued and rewarded.

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[Ramni Taneja is] very talented and will ensure the needs of her clients are first and above all other issues

Jasjeev Kandhari
Director
AI Dobowi Group



Singhanian & Partners is a Delhi-based firm with international connections. It is the India representative of TerraLex, a global network of independent law firms. The firm has 12 partners (five equity and seven salaried) and 54 associates.

Two key specializations of Singhanian & Partners are infrastructure and project finance. The firm is known for its professional management style and even has a chief executive officer, Manju Mohotra. It has worked with the National Highways Authority of India, advised Railtel Corporation on a transfer of assets from Indian Railways and worked with the Punjab State Electricity Board on two major projects. Other clients include the Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation and the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Jeffrey Mitnick, associate general counsel at McGraw-Hill in New York, says his company has been using

Singhanian & Partners for years on a variety of complex corporate transactions. "Singhanian & Partners has assisted us on countless issues that have arisen from the fact that we are a majority holder of an Indian corporation," he says.

Another firm with a string of high-profile clients is New Delhi Law Offices (NDLO). Established in 1992, it has offices in New Delhi, Gurgaon, Pune and Hyderabad.

The firm has four equity partners, three salaried partners and about 30 associates. Senior partner PS Dasgupta is also a chairman or director at companies such as Cummins India, Timken India, Otis Elevator and Maral Overseas. The firm is not a family concern but a partnership of four lawyers, each of whom practised law for at least seven years before co-founding NDLO. It is particularly well known for its mergers and acquisitions work.

NDLO's Gurgaon office, known as NDLO (South), was opened in 1990. "I set up the Gurgaon office as an independent partnership to service our Gurgaon clientele," says Ranjeev Dubey, managing partner of NDLO (South). "In our firm, you get all the face time you want with an equity partner and nothing goes out till an equity partner has read it in detail."

Local intelligence

"The use of a local mid- to large-sized law firm with a local focus is the best answer, particularly when dealing

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CATEGORIES OF WORK

- Acquisitions and mergers
- Insurance
- Arbitration
- Litigation
- Aviation
- Project Finance
- Banking and finance
- Real Estate
- Collaborations and joint ventures
- Information Technology/ Outsourcing
- Corporate law

with local government representatives,” says Edward Roder, a US tax executive with 38 years of experience at four different multinationals.

Roder’s choice of India counsel is Delhi-based Associated Law Advisers, which he praises for its ability to explain Indian culture and customs, making it easier for clients to deal with government officials. Local firms, says Roder, can provide insight into local practices and customs that multinational firms lack.

Associated Law Advisers was established in 1993 and has four partners. Several of the firm’s lawyers have dual qualifications in India as well as the US or UK. The firm counts a number of *Fortune 100* corporations among its clients, including Boeing, Coca-Cola, ExxonMobil, General Electric and Mattel. It has worked with insurance companies and banks across Europe and North America. Although a full-service firm, it is perhaps best known for its taxation work.

Associated Law Advisers “is refreshingly different from a traditional law firm,” says founding partner OP Bhardwaj.

Laware Associates, led by managing partner Sunil Malhotra, is a full-service firm based in south Delhi. With 17 fee earners, it focuses on dispute resolution, real estate and infrastructure. It works with the Indian Council of Arbitration and the Tehran Regional Arbitration Centre, and has completed real estate deals worth over Rs1.5 billion (US\$29 million).

Another firm reputed for its dispute resolution work is DH Law Associates. With a litigation office in central Mumbai and a transactional office in the city’s emerging business district, DH Law has worked with clients including Accenture, Coca-Cola and Motorola.

Parekh & Co, meanwhile, handles a wide range of legal work from its two offices in New Delhi. The firm works in arbitration, construction and infrastructure, and corporate and commercial law, and also has a team of associates dedicated to criminal law. It has been involved in hostile takeovers, labour and service legislation, taxation issues, intellectual property, insurance and media. Parekh & Co has drafted regulations for the Bombay Stock Exchange and represents both HSBC and Axis Bank.

International capabilities

Part of the appeal of international law firms is the access they offer to experts in multiple jurisdictions. This is a significant advantage for transactions involving assets and holdings in various countries.

While international law firms remain prohibited from setting up in India, several Indian firms have attempted to fill this void, either through the establishment of their own offices outside the country or through tie-ups with foreign law firms.

Founded in 2007 by former Crawford Bayley lawyer Suresh Talwar and Shobhan Thakore of AZB & Partners, Mumbai-based Talwar Thakore & Associates has a referral arrangement with Linklaters.

The firm, which has two partners, two managing associates and 14 associates, focuses on general corporate law. It counts Vodafone and Barclays Capital among its clients. One of the firm’s lawyers, Feroz Dubash, worked at Linklaters for eight years before joining Talwar Thakore.

[Rajeev Ginodia’s] advice is commercially sound and not purely legalistic

Samir Ganguli
Vice-President (Legal)
Birla Corporation



Rather than tying up with a foreign firm, Delhi-based KR Chawla & Co has chosen the strategy of international expansion to meet the multi-jurisdictional requirements of its clients. In addition to its India offices in New Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore, KR Chawla has established a representative office in Singapore and an office in San Francisco, which is headed by a New York lawyer.

Founded in 1997, the firm continues to grow in size and reputation. It has more than 45 lawyers divided into specialist groups focusing on corporate law, arbitration, litigation, general practice and intellectual property. KR Chawla receives particular praise for its real estate and capital markets work.

“The firm works closely with a number of well-known international law firms and is a part of global legal associations such as Law Exchange International, which is a very close-knit network of law firms in the US and Europe,” says Sumes Dewan, a partner and head of the transactional practice.

Skilled communicators

AKS Law Associates, by comparison, has developed capabilities to serve international markets from within India. The firm’s lawyers speak Spanish, Italian and German and regularly handle matters involving China, Singapore and Europe from their office in Bangalore. AKS was founded by Ajesh Kumar in 1999.

German-language legal advice is also available at Dr Kainth & Associates, a firm that works with several of the largest corporate names in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It also advises large UK and US companies such as Cable & Wireless, Pall Corporation and BS&B.

With four equity partners and four senior associates, Dr Kainth has offices in Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai, as well as a representative office in Hamburg.

“Dr Kainth & Associates has a magnificent reputation in India as well as in Germany,” says Kai Bendix, managing director of Nivea India, noting that the firm provides a one-stop shop for all the company’s legal needs.

Catering to the demands of overseas corporate clients is a preoccupation of many law firms. However, Delhi-based International Law Affiliates has gone a step further and carved itself a niche representing overseas governments.

With 18 lawyers, including two partners and four junior partners, the firm has worked with the governments of Australia, Canada, France, Singapore, Greece and the European Union, as well as the European Commission and its directorate general for humanitarian aid.

Like most other firms in India, it is a general practice firm, but it does not handle family law or criminal cases unconnected with economic matters or taxes.

“The standards set in this firm have evolved mostly from work performed for multinational companies and

foreign governments. Foreign governments in particular require very high standards of service,” says managing partner Amir Singh Pasrich.

Anita Kathpalia, the CFO of Fab India, is one satisfied client. International Law Affiliates provided the personalized service the company needed, she tells *India Business Law Journal*.

Honourable traditions

Mumbai-based Singhanian & Co (not to be confused with the Delhi-based firm of the same name) has two partners, two of counsel and 13 associates in its offices in Mumbai and New Delhi. It is a general practice firm that specializes in aviation, international arbitration, joint ventures and intellectual property, as well as obtaining permissions from the Reserve Bank of India and the Foreign Investment Promotion Board. The firm is run by KG Singhanian, whose brother Ravi is the managing partner of Delhi-based Singhanian & Partners (see page 46).

The brothers' father, DC Singhanian, is regarded as one of the early pioneers of modern business law in India. He is the founding member of the original law firm to carry the name Singhanian & Co, which still practises and is based in New Delhi.

A fourth-generation lawyer, OP Khaitan founded his firm in 1990 after practising with his family's firms, Khaitan & Co and Khaitan & Partners, since 1967. The current managing partner is Gautam Khaitan, the son of

[Tuli & Co is] among the best in the country for legal advice on insurance matters

Govinder Kapoor
Managing Director
Cunningham Lindsey
International



the founder and a fifth-generation lawyer. OP Khaitan & Co has six partners based in New Delhi, who specialize in corporate and commercial law as well as dispute resolution. The firm is the exclusive Indian member of the Advoc Asia network.

Small and focused

International Investment & Law Consultants has three partners and its focus is on regulatory approvals, negotiating agreements and setting up joint ventures, as well as corporate and tax issues, environmental law and real estate. Senior partner Badri Nath describes the firm's specialization as “professional services”.

Nachiketa Associates is a small firm managed by Sudhakar Joshi. It handles litigation and corporate work, including litigation in the Supreme Court and high courts.



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Solo practitioners are not uncommon in India, but few achieve the level of recognition of Ramni Taneja. She founded her firm – Law Office of Ramni Taneja – in August 2006 after leaving a position with Little & Co following its merger with Fox Mandal. Taneja is qualified both in India and in England and Wales, and has done a substantial amount of work in the Middle East. She says that unlike many other firms, hers “does considerable pro bono legal work in areas involving family law, succession law, inheritance issues, property law and occasionally criminal law too”.

Jasjeev Kandhari, a director of the Al Dobowi Group in the United Arab Emirates, says Taneja is “very talented and will ensure the needs of her clients are first and above all other issues”.

Kandhari has worked with other small and medium-sized firms in India, including Hariani & Co, and has been happy with the experience. “The main difference has been the personal input and access of the partners to discuss our issues. We have been most satisfied with the small and medium-sized firms.”

Another client of Taneja’s is Visheh Bhatia, group director at Dubai’s Al Futtaim Group. He says her firm has always provided first-rate service and advice.

Away from the bright lights

For corporate clients seeking law firms outside the bustling mega-cities of Delhi and Mumbai, there are several practices to choose from.

Among them is Surana & Surana, a Chennai firm with 10 partners and 50 full time fee earners that include lawyers, accountants and other specialists. The firm is divided into seven practice areas: corporate law, technology, dispute resolution, infrastructure and real estate, industrial relations, finance and compliance.

According to Vinod Surana, the firm was the first in the world to be certified under both ISO14000 and SA8000, and the first in Asia with ISO9000 certification. “Our firm is in the process of shifting to a modern fully owned high technology building,” he says, “an important step towards our firm’s ‘Vision 2020’ of becoming a top five professional services provider.”

R Ginodia & Co is a Kolkata firm set up in 1967. The firm currently has three partners and eight associates and is expanding. Its focus is the usual range of corporate and commercial law issues, including M&A, foreign investments, joint ventures, property and real estate, and dispute resolution.

R Ginodia & Co seeks to fill a gap in the market: “Most of the larger Indian law firms with offices in several cities do not have their own office in Kolkata, or have only a limited presence here,” says Rajeev Ginodia.

Ganguly at Birla Corporation says Ginodia offers workable solutions that go beyond simple legal advice: “His advice is commercially sound and not purely legalistic.”

Specialist practices

Corporate clients seeking Indian counsel with specialized skill sets will not be disappointed by the acumen demonstrated by some of India’s smaller firms.

These practices have invested years in training in order to provide highly specialized advice in various niche fields.

Often, an initial contact may be through seeing lawyers present at conferences

Rebecca Ordish
Senior IP Counsel
Asia & Pacific
Cadbury



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Founded in 2004, Lex Counsel is a New Delhi-based firm that has expanded to 44 lawyers, with associates in various cities including Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Goa, Kolkata and Pune. The firm has a domestic and cross-border practice in a wide range of areas, but has also developed niche practice areas in the fields of clinical trials, telecommunications and satellites, education and retail.

“Acquiring in-depth industry understanding and knowledge prior to advising clients is a must and enables the firm to provide customized and effective legal advice,” says partner Seema Jhingan.

Perhaps unique in its level of specialization, Tuli & Co focuses exclusively on insurance. According to managing partner, Neeraj Tuli: “The firm was established with the specific objective of servicing the legal needs of the Indian insurance market.”

Tuli & Co’s first office was in Delhi but the firm opened a second office in Mumbai in 2004. Most of its work comes from insurance centres such as Pune, Chennai and Bangalore, as well as overseas clients in New York, Dubai, London, Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney.

The firm operates strictly in the insurance field, working in product development, regulatory guidance, claims advice, representation to insurers and reinsurers on lack of coverage issues, and disputes and subrogation (recovery of payouts from third parties).

“Our focus has remained constant since we were formed,” says Tuli. “That focus means we have had to implement strict rules concerning the avoidance of potential conflicts, such that we will turn away work that would involve us acting [against] the interests of any of our insurance clients, regardless of whether that client has chosen to send us work in relation to that particular claim.”

“They are among the best in the country for legal advice on insurance matters,” says Govinder Kapoor, managing director of Cunningham Lindsey International.

The continuously growing field of information technology is also attracting legal practitioners. Among them is Seth Associates, a full-service firm established in 2003. The firm recently established its own Cyberlaws Consulting Centre to offer cyberlegal consultancy and forensic services.

The advice we get [from Lall & Sethi] is short, precise and business oriented – just the way we need it

Nicholas Studler
Trademark Counsel
Coca-Cola



“We are able to handle matters in most countries through our network of competent associates, which gives us an edge over the traditional law firms that concentrate on India’s territory,” says the firm’s chairperson, Karnika Seth.

IP in a word

The most obvious area of specialization among mid-market firms is intellectual property. “IP protection in India is a challenge and requires creative thinking and problem solving,” says Rebecca Ordish, senior IP counsel at Cadbury, which uses the services of Lall & Sethi for its India-related IP issues.

“I usually decide to work with a firm based on a recommendation from another in-house counsel ... Often, an initial contact may be through seeing lawyers present at conferences,” says Ordish. “For example, I recently saw a lawyer from Luthra & Luthra speak at a conference in Singapore. If I need another firm in India, I would definitely consider exploring working with him as I was very impressed with his knowledge and practical approach.”

Another client that has been impressed by the participation of Indian lawyers in international conferences is Nicholas Studler, trademark counsel for the Eurasia and Africa Group at Coca-Cola. “I spoke to some very interesting people [at last year’s International Trademark Association meeting in Berlin] and have a sense that there are very good law firms out there,” he says.

Coca-Cola has worked with Lall Lahiri & Salhotra for decades; however, it has recently given some of its IP work to Lall & Sethi, which is run by the son of the former firm’s founder.

“The turnaround time is tremendously fast,” says Studler of Lall & Sethi’s work, “and the advice we get is short, precise and business oriented – just the way we need it.”

Aside from Cadbury and Coca-Cola, Lall & Sethi’s clients include Warner Bros, Twentieth Century Fox and Newscorp.

Another intellectual property specialist is SKS Law Associates, which was established in 2007. “Our strength lies in patent law,” says partner Sunita Sreedharan. “We are one of the very few firms in India that advise our

clients with an eye to helping put their IP house in order by conducting IP audits, IP orientation, advising, drafting and vetting agreements.”

Amarjit Singh founded his IP boutique, Amarjit & Associates, in 1999 after separating from Anand and Anand, which remains India’s most prominent IP firm. Amarjit & Associates focuses on IP and information technology law. It has three equity partners and 12 associates based in offices in New Delhi, New York and Zurich.

Altacit Global is an IP boutique with offices in Chennai and Bangalore. The firm has two partners and 15 associates and was founded in February 2003. It offers a range of IP-related services that go beyond legal consulting to training and enforcement.

Amitabha Sen & Co is a full-service firm that places strong emphasis on IP, construction law, engineering and litigation. The firm’s best-known practitioners are from the intellectual property field. Ajay Sahni is a senior standing counsel for the government of India and is compiling a reference book on all IP cases in India, KK Modak is a retired deputy controller of patents and designs and SC Malhotra is a patent agent. The firm’s owner, Amitabha Sen, is both an engineer and a lawyer.

One of India’s older IP firms is Chadha & Chadha. It was launched in 1967 by SC Chadha and reorganized in 2000. The firm has one equity partner and 18 associates. It is based in New Delhi, with a branch office in Kochi and satellite offices in Kolkata and Pune.

“In the last decade, the firm has carved a niche in patents as well, and particularly in electronics and biotechnology,” says partner Chetan Chadha. “The firm’s ability to adapt to changing times has given it success over the past four decades, the most recent being its five-year-old outsourced patent practice.”

IPR International Services is an IP boutique that has been providing services in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka from its office in Delhi since 1971. The firm is led by GD Chugh, one of the earliest patent attorneys, and Neha Chugh, a patent attorney with an engineering background.

Another Delhi-based IP firm is Intl Advocare. The firm has associate offices in Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad and Bangalore, and in the words of managing partner Hemant Singh, “has a strong intellectual property enforcement practice as well as an intellectual property prosecution practice”.

Fast and personal

Aditya & Associates is based in Mumbai and has additional offices in Chennai, Pune, Nasik and Indore. The firm has successfully advised a variety of clients, including individual innovators, small and medium-sized enterprises and renowned corporations such as Starbucks. It has also represented Hong Kong’s PCCW in trademark disputes in India and on copyright issues in the US.

Savithri Parekh, head of legal at VFS Global Services, says he works with Aditya & Associates “on all matters relating to intellectual property rights.”

“Small and medium-sized firms have a personal approach and, hence, are much faster in turnaround, but this does not imply that the large firms do not meet the needs,” says Parekh.

“It actually depends on the nature of the work too.” ■