

Taxsutra Women's Day Special: In Conversation with Ace Litigator Pallavi S. Shroff

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By Pavan Lall

As Managing Partner of full service corporate law firm **Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas, Pallavi S. Shroff** is a high-profile lawyer with 40 years of extensive experience, and has represented Indian and international companies before



several Indian courts. Recognised as one of the Most Powerful Women in India for her contributions to law, she specializes in litigation, white collar crime, trade law and competition law. She started her work with anti-dumping and the erstwhile MRTP Act, among others. Later she worked alongside the government of India and then CCI to formulate regulations and participated in the early advocacy efforts, especially in the international jurisdictions. She has also advised on several cases before the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and the NCLAT (including its predecessor, COMPAT), as well as high-profile mergers, which have been scrutinised by the CCI, since merger control became effective in 2011. She counts having mentored and helped build a world-class and diverse team as one of her greater contributions to the industry.

On Women's Day, Shroff, in a tete-a-tete with **Taxsutra**, shared insights and learnings from being a business leader for over 30 years, as well as tips for younger women professionals for navigating the corporate landscape.

Q: Do you see gender equality in the professional realm as reality or myth?

A: We may see some equality in firms such as ours but it's very difficult to find women leaders in industries such as steel, automotive or other hard manufacturing industries and to be fair it's less even internationally. There are only so many Indra Nooyis. There is so much awareness however that there is pressure on business societies to do something about it and that makes some difference today.

Q: Please share how you went about breaking the glass ceiling in your organization/profession?

A: I started practice at a time when there were very few women in the industry. I had to stick it out in court as a litigator every single morning irrespective of parents being unwell and children needing attention. I had to be in court regardless to demonstrate that I meant business. It does take a toll but I had a supportive family with my mother-in-law and husband and even my children. There was zero social life, however. And I made that choice as all my free time was for my children. One thing women professionals can do is of course, subject to their confidentiality, share what's happening in their work with their families because they should know what has been achieved and what you've gone through. That makes them partners in your success. At that point they will tell you to continue working because they understand what you're doing. The second thing is for corporations to have a family day where they (children) can visit the office and see what's going on which will be productive in the long-term.

Q: Is the world today more accepting/ready for ambitious professional women in the business

world?



A: Yes, far more so, in the 40 years that I have worked.

Women are more accepted in the C-Suite today. There are different reasons why this has happened. One is because men have accepted that women can be competent leaders and are here to stay; the second that women have proven that they are so, and also the constant recognition of women through awards and felicitations has in a widespread manner shown other women what is possible. Which is why also in many ways most women also see these awards as responsibilities

Q: Your advice to young women executives and working professionals?

A: First don't get disheartened by what you see around you. Then find your role models or mentors within an organization and if there are none then find them outside the organization . There is so much unconscious or subconscious bias in treating women equally even by other women at times that means you have to reach out and ask for what you think you deserve and can do. You have to reach out and say you are willing to travel for work, or take certain responsibilities. Of course you don't need to thump the table to scream and shout because that's a roadblock but one can always make a case that will be heard.