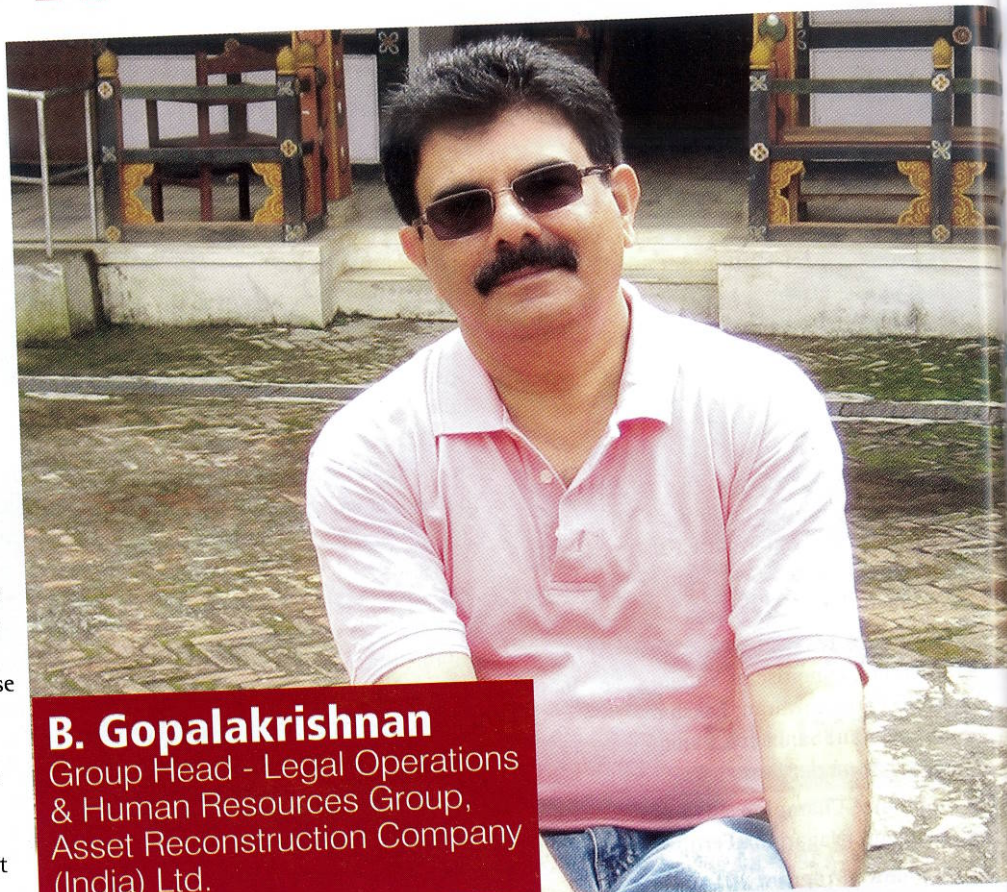


# THE PROFESSIONAL TRIUMPH

Briefly, tell us about your role in the organization and the mandates you handle, and something about your journey so far as a General Counsel in India?

I was born into a family of traders wherein from both mother side and father side all the family members were into trading. From the maternal side my grandfather and mama's were established distributors for all the leading brands in India like Britannia, Tata's, Cadbury's and others. They were known for their uprightness and integrity in the business field. Therefore, law was never in my horizon. When I went to the college I wanted to be a college lecturer and therefore I took up English Literature for my graduation. I had to join law after my graduation because my father was a leading income tax and law tax lawyer. He never dealt in anything other than income tax and sales tax. He was more known as auditor. He also chose the said field because of his business background. Even though my father wanted me to become doctor since I could not fulfill the same therefore the next best option was to make me join the law. I took law very reluctantly. After completing law I joined my father I did not have any dearth of opportunities in learning tax laws from the horse's mouth. I have from a very young age appeared along with my father and subsequently on my own before the Tax Tribunals, that gave me lot of confidence to present my case. Later I wanted to explore more of company law and corporate law therefore, I joined the erstwhile Unit Trust of India, a public sector institution as Manager Legal which is equivalent to 'c' grade officer of RBI. This was in 1989 When I left practice to join services many eyebrows were raised and many criticized me for leaving behind a legacy and good practice. I left UTI in the January, 2000 when I was a DGM Law of UTI to join the then UTI Bank now known as Axis Bank to set up the law department



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of the said Bank. At that point of time I had no in-depth knowledge of banking laws. When I joined the said Bank it had only 34 branches, however, when I left Axis Bank I was the President and Head of Law Department on September, 2013 it had more than 2000 branches. The journey and the learning and the matters which I have dealt as a General Counsel of Axis Bank cannot be described in words. It gave me a big platform and I snatched to the said opportunity and learned the entire gambit of banking which was alien to me. The variety of subject dealt by me in Axis gave me a wide canvas and a glimpse into the other branches of law and made me a

complete lawyer. This made me feel that I should do something on my own.

When I was in Axis and even today I have not given up my academic pursuits. I never said no to any opportunity which came to me for teaching or speaking in a form because I believe that going back to school and facing the younger generation and also facing an eager and knowledge hungry students will keep one in the toes. Today I am the Legal Advisor to Arcil and I am dealing in the various facets of a law known as SARFAESI apart from that I am dealing in HR related issues. HR was always a passion for me. While at Axis Bank as a General Counsel I have had the opportunity

## ON A CASUAL NOTE

### Favourite Gadget

My favourite gadget is my Iphone and my Ipad. I feel left out if my Iphone is not working.

### Favourite Application

I am very active in Facebook and I write my personal views on non-legal issues and on what I feel strongly on general issues in the Facebook. I have a lot of friends who carefully read the same and comment on the same. I use it as a medium to express myself on non-legal issues. Technology has made life better and allows me the freedom to move around.

### Favourite Automobile Brand

My favourite automobile brand is Mercedes. I drive a Mercedes sports to office even though such vehicles are not suited for Mumbai roads. I am a driving enthusiast and I have also a Mahindra XUV 500 and I have taken long drives from Mumbai to Kanyakumari all alone in the said vehicle. I love to be on the move.

### Favourite Writing Instrument

My favourite writing instruments are an ink pen Scheffers brand. I have a lot of pens.

### Favourite Holiday Destination

My favourite holiday destination is the UK especially the country side of UK. I love woods and I love to take a long walks in the parks whenever I am in London. Since I was born and brought up and lives near the sea, green pastures excites me. I like to travel a lot and I would love to explore countries which I have not visited and get to know their culture. I would love to visit many unseen cities and parts of India and understand the cultures. I have a dream to travel the length and breadth of India in a jeep with like minded people.

### Favourite Cuisine

I am not at all a foodie I prefer south Indian dishes for breakfast and tandoori rotis for lunch. I don't eat meat, but even though I prefer veg food that too oil free but spicy I do sometimes indulge in two types of fish. My main weakness as regards food is concerned is namkeens or fried items which I am trying to cut down. Equally I love nuts and dates. I love green tea.

### Favourite Reads

I read a lot of fiction and my favourite are Jeffrey Archer, John Gresham and literature still remains a passion for me. I also listen to a lot of Indian classical music apart from old Hindi and Malayalam and Tamil songs. I am permanent resident of Mumbai for the last 25 years.

to deal with human behaviour through a large number of cases referred to me and that was a big lesson for me. I am still a learner and I do not profess to be a lawyer who knows everything. Each case and each day is a learning for me.

**Do you feel that the role of General Counsels is evolving in today's business scenario? And if so, how?**

The role of General Counsel evolving in today's business scenario is that of a

solution finder and a business partner. Gone are the days when General Counsels can get away from quoting sections and be comfortable in the role of advisor. He has to be a risk accessor and taker and as well as risk mitigator. By this I do not mean to state that the General Counsel has to play with the tunes of the business department and do what he believes is not good for the company. In my career as a General Counsel I am always a solution finder and a risk accessor and risk mitigator and a risk

taker. I continue to be so. Be open and be prepared for changes. No ego should come in between.

**What are the key challenges that General Counsels have to deal with on a regular basis, irrespective of the industry sector?**

In my view their inability to firmly but politely put forth their views and inability to think out of box and a fear to accept changes and be an agent of change is the biggest challenge they have to face.

**What are your thoughts on improving synergies between law firms and corporate in-house legal teams?**

Never ever approach a law firm without doing the homework, understanding the facts and issue involved in the reference which is made to them for which they are consulted. Further based on the facts of the case or \_\_\_\_ General Counsel should have a view on the issue. It is the General Counsel who will know the facts much better than the law firms and the background and reason for which the reference is sought. While approaching the law firm all the facts should be informed to them and nothing should be hidden from them. General Counsel should not act as a post office. It is also necessary that the legal firm to whom you are referring should be receptive to the General Counsels views and the concerned partner at a senior level should be available to the General Counsel for clarifying their doubts. Accessibility to the partners of law firm is the most important issue.

**What are some of the key tools that General Counsels can use for continued learning education (CLE)?**

General Counsel should always be a good researcher. General Counsels should never take anything for granted. They should spend a lot of time in reading, researching and attending conferences and should always be alert on the changes which are happening in the field of law. Regulatory changes should be at their fingertips and they should also be open to accept a different view than what they have. General Counsel has to be a good learner. They should have the ability to learn and unlearn.

This is my advice to all the in-house Counsels. **W**