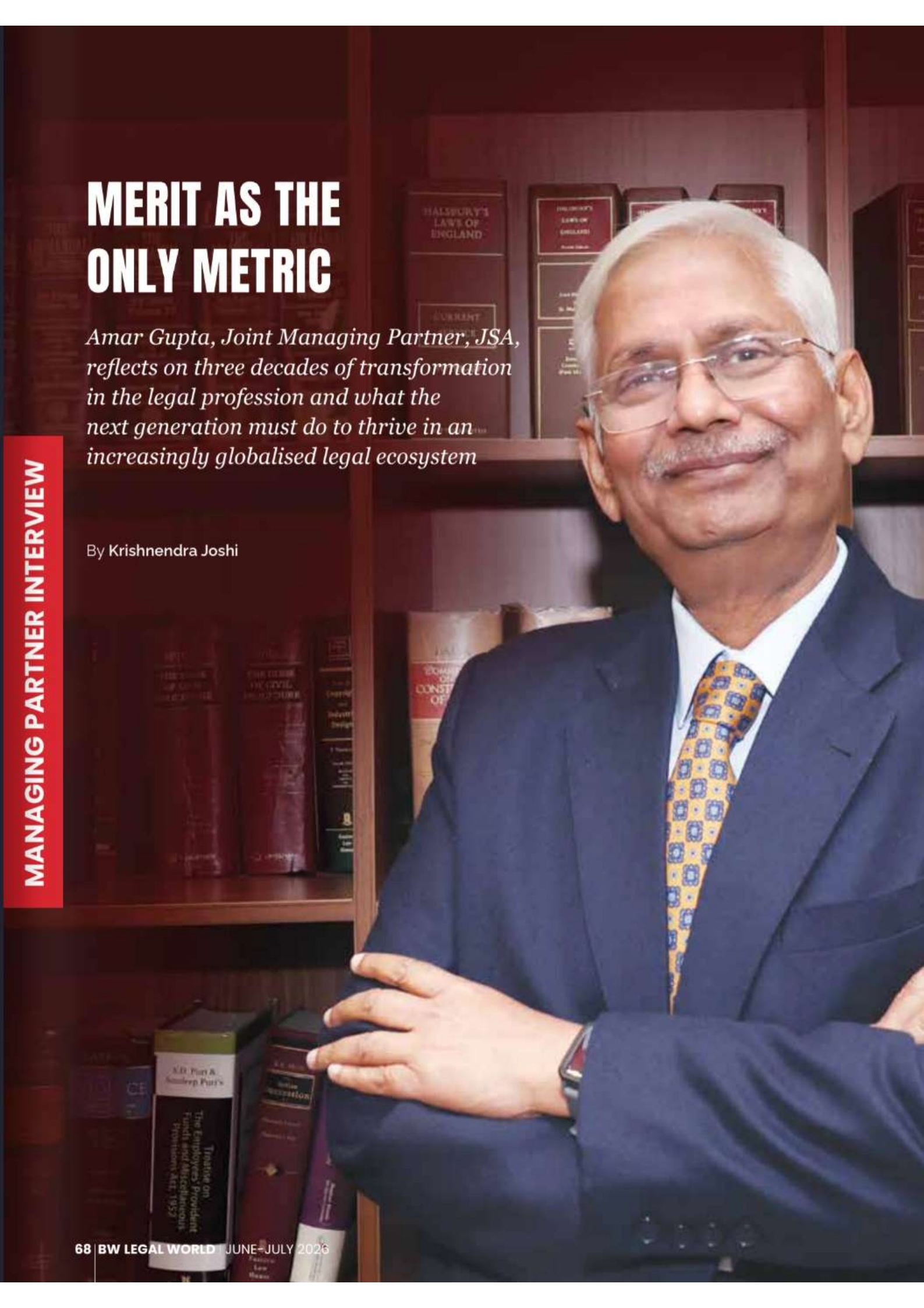


MERIT AS THE ONLY METRIC

Amar Gupta, Joint Managing Partner, JSA, reflects on three decades of transformation in the legal profession and what the next generation must do to thrive in an increasingly globalised legal ecosystem

By Krishnendra Joshi

MANAGING PARTNER INTERVIEW



Q Indian law firms have evolved over the last three decades from promoter-driven models to more structured and institutional frameworks. How do you view this journey?

That evolution has been rather slow in this part of the world when compared to the constitutional frameworks of law firms elsewhere globally. In some ways, JSA was a pioneer in this form of law firm constitution. We were one of the first law firms in India to be based entirely on merit, without any family control, and with a clearly defined retirement age for partners. In that sense, JSA has been a leader in this evolution, and we take pride in that.

Q What, in your view, marks the most pivotal shift in how modern law firms are built and structured today?

Technology has become a very important part of a law firm's workflow. With the evolution of artificial intelligence, there is a great deal of excitement and urgency to integrate it into the execution of assignments. It is a powerful enabler. Equally important is the shift in aspirations of younger lawyers entering the profession. Their ambitions are no longer bound by traditional structures. This has challenged law firms that are owned or controlled by promoters or families to rethink their structures. Young lawyers need to see a clear growth path, and the ability to aspire to equity participation. Firms that cannot offer that risk losing talent.

Q Would it be fair to say that leadership in law firms is becoming more collaborative rather than personality-driven?

Yes. Law firms, particularly JSA, have always insisted on teamwork and collaboration. This is a key quality we look for in all our attorneys. It is reflected in the way we work across locations. We service clients through seamless collaboration between partners and teams across offices. That culture of teamwork is something we have consciously built and nurtured.

Q When one speaks of leadership and legacy at JSA, the founding philosophy always comes up. What continues to define the firm's DNA?

From a modest beginning, with a single office and a handful of attorneys—we have grown into a full-service law firm with a pan-India presence, trusted by clients across the country. That journey has been both rewarding and fulfilling. The founding vision was clear: to create an institution rather than an

individual-driven practice. The idea was to build a merit-based firm without control by any one person. I take pride in saying that, in substantial measure, that vision has been achieved and continues to guide how we operate professionally.

Q JSA is often cited as an early proponent of institutionalism in Indian law firms. How significant was that approach?

JSA was the first firm to be entirely merit-based without any equity buy-in or buy-out. An incoming partner does not buy equity, and an exiting or retiring partner is not paid for equity. Equity does not belong to individuals—it belongs to the institution. This was unique at the time the firm was established. While other firms are now adopting similar principles, it was uncommon when JSA was founded.

Q How important has the next generation been in sustaining this philosophy?

The success of JSA is largely due to younger lawyers who joined us and became part of this journey. JSA continues to be an attractive platform for ambitious lawyers because it assures them of a clear career path. At the end of that path lies the possibility of equity participation and ownership in a leading firm, which is a strong motivator.

Q India is at a critical juncture in arbitration and dispute resolution. What are the opportunities and challenges in becoming a true arbitration hub?

I am a strong believer in institutional arbitration. From my experience as a practitioner, institutional arbitration is far more efficient in terms of both time and cost compared to ad hoc arbitration. There is a pressing need to mainstream institutional arbitration in India.

Another important aspect is the broader ecosystem that administers arbitration. There is a need for greater training and awareness, particularly within the judiciary, about arbitration jurisprudence globally and the best practices followed in international jurisdictions. Policymakers and practitioners need to work together to create a cohesive and effective roadmap.

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