



Nirupa Bhatt
Managing Director
India and the Middle East, GIA

“GIA is dedicated to continuous education and research in the field of gems & jewellery”

Nirupa Bhatt is a well-known name in the gem and jewellery industry. She joined Gemological Institute of America (GIA) as managing director – India & Middle East in 2008. In less than a decade, the association expanded to over 60 locations across India, apart from the Middle-East and Turkey. Prior to GIA, she also held a crucial position at Rio Tinto in India, where she developed the Business Excellence Model, a quality initiative that helped establish 'Brand India' in the global markets for diamond and jewellery manufacturing.

She has received several global honours and has also been on the judges' panel for her contributions to the gem and jewellery industry. She is a member of the board of directors of the All India Gems and Jewellery Trade Federation (GJF), Gem and Jewellery Skill Council of India (GJSCI) and invitee to the marketing committee of the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC). That apart, Nirupa is also the founder chairperson of Women's Jewellery Association (India).

In an exclusive e-mail interview with Floroscent, she takes us through GIA's glorious ten years in India, its contribution in the Indian diamond industry and future plans.

Why GIA felt the need to start the laboratory in India 10 years ago and how do you rate the laboratory's performance till today?

India is an important centre for cutting and trading diamonds as well as coloured gemstones. As India was

emerging as a major supplier of diamonds for global markets, GIA decided to extend its independent gemstone evaluation in India that met global quality standards. The decision reinforced the Institute's mission to ensure the public trust in gems and jewellery. I understand this has also helped diamond exporters in expanding their business.

GIA is the most credible organisation in providing grading services to the gem and jewellery industry and is dedicated to continuous education and research in the field of gems and jewellery. Our performance is thus quantified in terms of information and knowledge imparted through our initiatives.

The journey over the last 10 years has been eventful, exciting and satisfactory. During this period, we have grown to a workforce of over 1,200 young male and female staff. The entire grading staff was provided training to meet GIA global standards and help them optimise their potential. This has helped us in meeting the industry's growing demands.

As a research-oriented institute, what significant changes has the GIA brought in the landscape of the Indian diamond industry?

Our extensive research has led to better understanding of diamond's crystal structure, morphology and distinctive features that allowed development of services to identify natural diamonds, separating them from CVD and HPHT synthetics, treated diamonds or simulants. In 2014, GIA introduced DiamondCheck™ to identify untreated natural diamonds in the D-to-N range, referring all others for further analysis. GIA made the instrument available at no cost to global diamond bourses, including Bharat Diamond Bourse (BDB) in Mumbai. In 2016, GIA began offering the fully automated Melee Analysis Service to rapidly and accurately analyse and sort diamonds ranging from 0.90 to 4.00

mm in diameter (approximately 0.005 ct to about 0.25 ct), separating natural, untreated diamonds from simulants and potentially synthetic or treated diamonds and sorting the screened diamonds by colour range. In 2017, the GIA iD100™ was introduced; the iD100 is an easy-to-operate, sophisticated desktop instrument that reliably identifies mounted and loose natural colourless diamonds, giving retailers and others in the trade absolute and immediate certainty that their stones are natural. All these instruments were developed as a result of GIA's decades of research and examination of treated and synthetic diamonds.

How GIA is helping the industry overcome skill development challenges?

GIA organises complimentary seminars to inform and educate trade members about current and relevant topics related to the industry. We also started offering complimentary training programmes for retail sales associates from various retail jewellery outlets across India. These initiatives help GIA India share information and knowledge, allowing the trade to understand the important aspects of the gem and jewellery industry and ultimately, build public trust and consumer confidence.

You have seen the Indian gem and jewellery industry going through various transformational phases over the years. According to you, in which direction the industry is heading now?

There is great potential for all participants in the jewellery industry. The changes that are happening in the manufacturing and marketing landscape will result in exciting opportunities for businesses as well as consumers. I'm really excited for the next phase of the industry because we are starting to see significant changes in the way jewellery is made, marketed and worn.

How GIA is addressing the threat posed to natural diamonds supply chain by synthetic ones?

Lab-grown diamonds are neither new to the industry nor to GIA. GIA has been studying them since synthetic diamonds were first created in the 1950s. In the recent years, laboratory-grown or synthetic diamonds have become more available. With the growing availability of synthetic diamonds in the marketplace, full disclosure and confidence in knowing what you are buying is now more important than ever. Every stone submitted to GIA for diamond grading services is examined to determine if it is natural or synthetic. This expertise helps retailers address their concerns about synthetic and treated diamonds being mixed. Further, the iD100 testing device gives jewellers immediate confidence in their diamonds.



(L to R): Matt Hall, GIA Vice President for Regional Laboratory Operations (Europe, Middle East and Africa); Russell Mehta, Tom Moses; Praveenshankar Bhatia; Nirupa Bhatt, Managing Director for GIA India and Middle East; Susan Jacques; Sriram Natarajan, Vice President of Operations, GIA India Laboratory.

What is your take on the generic promotion of diamonds worldwide?

We are fortunate to be able to work with natural precious gemstones like diamonds and precious metals like gold and platinum. More investment in promoting diamond jewellery is welcome, as it will boost demand. Marketing is the key to industry growth.

You are also the Chairperson of the Women's Jewelry Association (WJA) India Chapter. At present how many members are in the association and what are its core activities?

The WJA is a networking platform that allows professional men and women to connect, learn from each other, share experiences and grow. Today, we have over 130 members who are a mix of entrepreneurs, business owners and consultants. I'm glad I'm able to bring the group together.

What aspects of your work at GIA do you most enjoy?

I'm glad that I'm able to make a difference by bringing international standard grading and lab services that further GIA's mission of protecting the consuming public. We organise panel discussions and seminars to share our knowledge.

How do you envisage GIA's role in India in the next couple of years?

GIA India will open a new laboratory in Surat, India, in the second quarter of 2018. The new laboratory will offer diamond manufacturers based in that important diamond cutting centre direct local access to GIA's laboratory services, including the GIA Melee Analysis Service. We are also working closely with the coloured gemstones industry in Jaipur to understand their needs and determine how GIA India can provide services that will further our mission in this sector.