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ABHIJIT PATI, CEO –  
VEDANTA, JHARSUGUDA

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# VEDANTA,

# JHARSUGUDA

## TRANSFORMING SHOP-FLOOR CULTURE IN INDIAN MANUFACTURING SECTOR



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By Sujit Vasudevan

### ABHIJIT PATI, CEO – VEDANTA, JHARSUGUDA

Abhijit joined the Vedanta Group in 2008. Prior to heading the Jharsuguda operations as CEO, he was at the helm of affairs as COO of VL-J, leading the mammoth aluminium complex with his wealth of knowledge gained through three decades in the industry. Under his able leadership, Vedanta Ltd., Jharsuguda's became an illustrious member of the prestigious 'Million Tonne Club' of global aluminium producing companies. He is a proud senior management Executive Committee member of Vedanta's global aspiration in its quest to emerge as frontrunner in global natural resource business. He is the lead officio member of Governing Council of Aluminium Association of India (AAI). He is also the nominated representative of India appointed by Government of India for the Indo-Japanese collaboration on PAT scheme for collaboration on energy sector. Currently, he also serves as co-chair of the FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) Odisha State Council.



IN LINE WITH OUR  
CHAIRMAN, ANIL  
AGARWAL'S VISION  
FOR THE COMPANY, WE  
ENCOURAGE ORGANIC  
GROWTH, GROOMING  
LEADERSHIP FROM  
WITHIN AND ELEVATING  
THEM TO HANDLE  
CRITICAL ROLES &  
RESPONSIBILITIES IN  
THE COMPANY

Even while living in an epoch of 'digital-smartness' and 'family-like' work culture, there exist some business sectors that offer resistance to the inevitable change. The manufacturing industry, which is best known for organizations that often carry their legacy from the colonial period, is one among the salient entrants in this index. The moment you evoke a production facility, you would probably picture a 20<sup>th</sup> century portrait – a busy shop-floor flooded by serious-faced blue & white collar veterans, who run the show without a trace of youngsters & women. Well, it's time to scrap the convictions, as Vedanta Limited's aluminium & power operations at Jharsuguda – one of the global leaders in manufacturing high-quality aluminium products – is transforming the typical manufacturing company work culture to the new epoch.

The days in VL's Jharsuguda (Odisha) complex, which is one of India's largest industrial complexes, constitute a sure bet to shred your convictions. When you witness the lively panorama of a pack of youngsters smashing the ball to each other in a swimming pool, friends and



DILIP RANJAN SAHOO,  
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

*“Our vision today is to be the ‘Employer of Choice’ by building an organization of the future. Our workforce today consists of 90 percent millennials with an average age of 27 years. We in HR clearly understand that today’s millennial workforce have expectations of clear connection to social cause, transparency, networking and are fiercely driven by the desire to create change. We recruit talent who are adaptable, encourage and develop them through fast paced high-impact teams to make disruptive innovations, keeping the need for gender diversity at the core of our talent acquisition process”.*

### The X-Factor

“It is time to break the regressive perceptions clouding the potential of Indian manufacturing industry. Today, in the entire domestic manufacturing industry, our team must be the youngest, with the average age of our employees being only 28 years. Nearly 13 percent of our employees are women professionals, who work on the most sophisticated machines on the shop floor and handle critical functions in the company. This is very promising and frankly, quite unprecedented if you look at the history of manufacturing sector,” asserts Abhijit Pati, CEO - Vedanta, Jharsuguda. He adds, “The young minds regardless of their socio-cultural identities are provided with the opportunity to create meaningful careers with us. We encourage organic growth, grooming leaders from within and elevating them to handle critical roles & responsibilities in the company. Young employees with the right attitude and aptitude can easily become leaders and managers in our company at a comparatively younger age, which is a strong motivation for youngsters looking at a successful career in the front end of a booming sector”.

It’s a great omen that VL-J has never tied its approach just around the materialistic benefits. Beyond the six swimming pools, gym complex, sports ground and state-of-the-art auditorium, the cosmopolitan township ‘Vedanta Meadows’ and many other facilities built into the complex, there still lies an X-factor that adds a different tone to VL-J’s

coworkers laughingly unwinding over coffee in the community area in the evenings, and moreover, the energy & the body language of every employee on the state-of-the-art shop floor, you would almost never think that you are standing inside the premises of a decade old manufacturing company. Today, in truth, this strategically built work culture & vibrant township attract the eyeballs of even the other giant manufacturing houses. It has helped put the lesser known city of Jharsuguda on the global map as home to India’s largest single-location aluminium & power complex. With an installed aluminium smelting capacity of 1.75 million tonnes and 3615 MW power generation setup, the facility produces 1.4 million tonnes of aluminium annually, having captured nearly 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the Indian market within the short span of a decade. While global companies typically take around two decades to cross this milestone, Vedanta’s Aluminium & Power operations at Jharsuguda, which is home to nearly 3700 employees, has done it within the first decade of its operations. The facility today contributes significantly to the global aspirations of the natural resources giant Vedanta Resources Ltd., which is home to 65,000 strong workforce spread across India, Africa, Ireland and Ireland.



ASISH KAMATH,  
ASSISTANT MANAGER

*“Vedanta sets-out to transform the lives of people with an elevated sense of purpose and a forward looking attitude towards change. Vedanta Ltd., Jharsuguda, is on a fast-track growth mode embracing changes, adopting new technology and incorporating new skills every day. Employees here have a strong sense of teamwork and empowerment. Having been associated with Vedanta for nearly two years now, I have been impressed by the ‘Can Do’ attitude imbibed by every employee here. Vedanta identifies high-potential candidates and gives them increased exposure to business under tutelage of senior leadership, which is a wonderful motivation for many like me”.*

workplace culture. It is in fact the four pillars of its methodologically built work culture – research-driven Talent Acquisition, an ecosystem complimenting Learning & Development, insightful Talent Management, and gender-neutral Performance Management & Recognition.

If there’s something that doesn’t change amidst this new milieu, it is the need for hand-picking talents with the right skills and attitude. VL-J not only recruits the best talent from the country’s premiere institutions like IITs, IIMs and NITs, among others, it has an increased focus on recruiting women-professionals. This sets the stage for a great time ahead, both for the company and its employees. Having a deep pool of experienced middle-management talents and a strong high-functioning R&D unit, VL-J engenders the perfect ecosystem for its employees to learn, develop, and groom the best version of themselves – both personally & professionally. While having ample space for self-learning, upon induction into the system, new recruits are right away subjected to functional and cross functional trainings, which often play a pivotal role in their career ahead. The company also encourages its employees to undergo distant learning through academic tie-ups with BITS Pilani (for UG & PG) and International Management In-

stitute (for MBA) courses. Wonder how many manufacturing companies send their employees for accomplishing academic courses!

### Talent has No Gender

VL-J also boasts of its remarkable sense of tracing-out the high-potential talents & stellar performers and recognizing them impressively, be it setting them on a faster-paced growth track to climb-up the organizational ladders or recognizing their performance in a memorable way. “We have a performance driven culture, wherein age & gender are never a bar. We have a number of well-devised programs to identify the high-potential talents,” elucidates Abhijit. It’s appreciable the way VL-J makes its performance recognition programs merit-first, flawless, entertaining and unbiased. For instance, one of its programs, ‘Business Stars’, is conducted by external agencies wherein employees undergo thorough and exacting assessment to emerge victorious. Through another talent identification program, ‘CEO’s Workshop’, employees get to showcase their exceptional performance directly to the CEO and propose a strong case for themselves.

Abhijit adjoins, “We have taken special care to develop a thriving women friendly workplace where they get to do meaningful and enriching work shoulder-to-shoulder with their male counterparts in all departments. To every manager at Vedanta Ltd., Jharsuguda, we have given the task to groom two successors – one male and one female employee – under

his/her domain of expertise". The company further strengthens their efforts towards women empowerment through the vibrant Vedanta Women's Council (an all-women committee that acts as a support structure for all women employees of VL-J), and 'Vatsalya', a crèche-cum-playschool inside the township that offers working mothers with a stress-free professional life. Furthermore, as the icing over cake, VL-J conducts a special program 'Pragati', which is dedicated to identifying and nurturing promising women professionals into second-line leadership. The candidates who emerge successful through the stringent assessment programs are entitled to a fast-track career and Individual Development Plan (IDP).

The series of reward & recognition programs deployed by the company further complements the excitement factor. Starting right from spot recognitions on the shop-floor, VL-J conducts weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly reward & recognition programs, giving away meaningful awards to the deserving. Predominantly, most of these awards are presented with the esteemed presence of the families of awardees, taking the pride factor to another level. "We deliberately bring-in this dimension to the picture, as we know how well they (employees) cherish that moment. Not only the employees, the entire family also feels recognized, cherished and motivated," adds Abhijit.

## **The One Big Family of Families**

Keeping the families closer strengthens the bond that VL-J has with employees. On one hand, the company is focused on increasing employee engagement, while on the other, the company strives to strengthen connect with the employees' families in innovative ways. Through a program called 'Proud Parents', every month, VL-J at its own cost, invites the parents of few young employees to visit the company and township, see the functions being handled by their children and experience the level of safety & comfort their children are in. All employee centric facets of the company, be it reward & recognition programs, employee engagement drives, cultural fests or sports tournaments, are conducted involving families.

"All these interventions & policies developed by us over the past decade are taking effect. Our employees are more engaged at and beyond work. They are driven by a 'Can Do' attitude and a performance-based culture. The attrition rate has come down drastically. Today, we are working towards the vision to ramp-up our aluminium production capacity to 2 MTPA. Meanwhile, we are working on multiple in-house R&D projects to expand our product portfolio. We have plans to

develop an Aluminium Park – an ecosystem of downstream industries setup near our plant. The times ahead are going to be very exciting for the business and the people working with us," concludes Abhijit.

The company's senior leadership team embodies the core purpose and very values VL-J stands for – Trust, Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Excellence, Integrity, Care and Respect. No wonder employees become VL-J's brand ambassadors when they go out.

## **Giving Success Back to the Society**

As a manufacturing company, VL-J believes in pursuing the 'Triple Bottom Line' of People, Planet & Prosperity. The company is committed to socio-economic transformation of the people around its operation. It has innovated several brilliant programs in Sustainable Livelihood & Women Empowerment, Quality Education, Health & Sanitation, and Community Infrastructure & Bio-investment. The company's CSR efforts reach-out to 71 villages of Jharsuguda, covering 66000 people annually. It empowers nearly 3800 women of 315 SHGs, provides doorstep healthcare services to about 25,000 people annually, gives educational support to more than 5000 students, has planted more than 1.43 lakh trees in partnership with the community, and built 568+ infrastructural projects at community level.

"CSR is core to our business, not a fringe element. Our CSR efforts follow in the footsteps of our Chairman, Anil Agarwal's vision for giving back to the society. Our care and concern towards improving quality of life for our employees is equally & seamlessly matched by our passionate efforts for the socio-economic development of the community. While our CSR Dept. leads our social outreach efforts, we have strategically designed several programs to ensure the participation of our employees in CSR activities and social-good initiatives. The commitment to give back to society is proudly imbibed in each of our employees," adjoins Abhijit. VL-J alone pledges around Rs. 5 crores towards CSR activities every year, and it ensures that the investment progressively impacts the villagers. For instance, Vedanta promotes one of the largest all-women cooperative societies in the region i.e. Subhalaxmi Bahumukhee Mahila Samabaya Samiti Ltd., which is the product of one of its most innovative & unique livelihood promotion projects - 'Vedanta Integrated Jana Jivika Yojana (VIJJY)'. Started with just 10 women, Subhalaxmi today provides sustainable livelihood opportunities, financial and entrepreneurial support to nearly 3800 women in western Odisha. [CEO](#)