

Women picking up baton in traditionally male-dominated manufacturing space



As manufacturers wake up to the advantages of diversity in promoting creative output, women are making an impact in traditional industrial workspaces | EXPRESS

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IF you envisaged a factory as a man's world, think again. As manufacturers wake up to the advantages of diversity in promoting creative output, women are making more of an impact in traditional industrial workspaces. A trickle of women has already begun to infiltrate factories, even occupying supervisory posts.

Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Limited has set a target to employ 30 per cent women in its workforce in the immediate term, while taking it up to 33 per cent in next two years, five times more than the national average for manufacturing companies.

Currently, women professionals constitute 10.3 per cent of the

total workforce. At its manufacturing unit in Jharsuguda, there are 474 women professionals, a 24 per cent upswing in their number a year ago.

At the group-level, Vedanta has two female directors — Lalita Gupte as an independent director and Priya Agarwal as non-executive director.

Considering Vedanta's sister firms, Deshnee Naidoo heads the Africa Base Metals division (Konkola Copper Mines, Zinc International and Copper Mines of Tasmania) as Vedanta Resources' first woman CEO.

"We also have female staff deftly operating cranes, looking after power operations, raw material procurement, and other critical roles," said Dilip Ranjan Sahoo,

VP & head business HR — Aluminium & Power Sector, Vedanta Limited. That women in manufacturing are suited for only specific roles is a regressive perception, he adds.

It's all the same at the 111-year-old Tata steel, which aims to increase participation of women in its workforce to 20 per cent from the current 11 per cent. Beyond campus placements, the diversity thrust also includes hiring of experienced women.

The company's Take Two Policy aims at filling the gaps due to extended maternity and child care leaves by hiring experienced women willing to return to work.

With just about 6-8 per cent female staff, the pace of inducting women remains a relatively dis-



mal show for JSW Group. But the numbers reflect the definite changes in a once male-dominated workforce. JSW targets to deploy 20 per cent female staff by 2020.

Given the pace of change over the past three-four years, experts say breaching the targets by 2020 seems like a tall order.

"It is great to see such ambitious targets, but the companies should also focus on bringing in more women across all domains. If you have no woman in the factory floor environment, while you have a lot of them in the corporate ladder — it clearly doesn't qualify as true diversity," said Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive VP of Teamlease.