

# Women's power in the logistics industry

Despite the fact that the logistics industry is a growing one and has opportunities for advancement, there are not many women who join this industry. While the demand for qualified personnel exceeds the supply in the logistics and supply chain sector, it has become imperative to attract and include women, especially since they are good in multitasking, an ability that enables them to handle a myriad of tasks as planning, implementing and controlling the efficient flow and storage of goods in supply chain management.

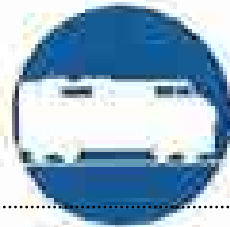
**Abeer Ray** deals with the travesty of the female talent being unutilised to the disadvantage of the companies and the industry as a whole.

In a majority of the companies that deal with providing logistics services, the number of women working at the top levels or in the operations department is far less than the number of men despite the fact that women have it in them what it takes to face the unique challenges of logistics and supply chain management by developing and implementing innovative solutions and optimising strategies that touches almost every aspect of a company and affect the various levels of an organisation. It is ironical that women, though involved at every step, with issues affecting the logistics sector, thereby, making a vital contribution to the growth of the industry are not employed in positions that require decision making. Despite having examples demonstrating women succeeding not only in sectors where traditionally they have had a strong presence, but also reaching leading positions in sectors that were previously believed to

be the exclusive domain of men, the women find themselves disadvantaged in finding and keeping their jobs in this sector.

With women representing around half the population of the world, yet the analysis of their role in the male-dominated logistics sector remains one-dimensional.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, though, is witnessing a change in the status of women due to the roles they have played in bringing about fundamental changes, but the number of women at various levels of the logistics industry resembles a pyramid with many women attracted to these sectors but are not many while moving up the ranks due to the workplace culture and their failure to balance their life and work. So apart from the problem of attracting women to work in the male-dominated logistics sector, the problem



lies in retaining them and encouraging them to move up the ranks. As **Bhairavi Jani**, Executive Director, SCA Group puts it, "I feel extremely privileged to be a part of an industry that literally 'moves the world'. Logistics contributes almost about 14 per cent to India's GDP and if you include all service providers and modes of transport, it is also the industry with the largest employment base and maximum opportunities for jobs. So the gender difference (male or female) is not the issue; just being part of the logistics industry I feel extremely honoured and powerful. As a woman, who has been in logistics for 15 years now, I have seen a huge change in acceptance of women and also many women leaders rise in the industry to the top most positions, and that has been the most encouraging sign. When I saw women, in our warehouses, operate complex MHEs such as a very narrow aisle machine, I knew that the gender divide in the logistics industry was coming to its end."

Going further on the same issue, **Poroma Rebello**, Head Commercial, North Central Region, APL India Pvt Ltd, says, "My father always told me that nobody can ever take away one's education and experience. I have brought that thinking to whatever I do, and it has always worked for me. I have neither felt more nor less influential or powerful than anyone

else. I suppose if the gender differentiation doesn't exist in my mind, it's irrelevant for me if it exists in someone else's mind. What drives me to continue in this sector are the fascinating possibilities it unfaillingly throws up; no matter how many years you put in, there's always something unexpected to tackle, something new to learn, some new goal to be accomplished. Being a senior manager in the infrastructure domain in India, we continually have to expect the unexpected, and have to take decisions without precedence, unlike our counterparts in more developed geographies."

**Sunila Yadav**, Managing Director, **Anil Mantra Logistix Pvt Ltd** emphasises, "Feelings per se are intrinsic and not established by outward exhibition of the same. Same goes for feeling powerful. Since I am confident about my work, when it comes to getting my job done and most importantly the right way, I feel powerful enough to make my way. Yes, by the standards I have set for benchmarking my performance, it can be said with some sense of achievement that I have made my own identity in this male-dominated world of logistics."

**Seema Bhaskar**, Deputy General Manager-Operations, **Mahindra Logistics** reiterates, "Dealing with transporters and

customers in an industry that consists of 90 per cent men has never bogged me down. I believe that hard work and aptitude are the ultimate qualities, which guarantees one's survival, growth and success in any industry. I think it is for this reason that I was welcomed by the logistics industry and given due respect and appreciation. The guidance and cooperation of able bosses and colleagues also helped me climb up the ladder gradually and attain leadership position eventually."

**Kruti Jobanputra**, Director, **JWC Logistics Park Pvt Ltd** goes a step further and says, "The logistics industry has always been known as a male-dominated industry; also today in the 21st century, this is one of the only industries where still 70 per cent is dominated by men. But, I am happy to say that the rest 30 per cent which is women-dominated is very powerful. All the women in this industry today are at powerful positions and are at par with the men. I am very confident that in times to come this percentage will only increase."

**Shruti Suman**, Head-Incity Operations, **Delex Cargo India Pvt Ltd** explains, "As an employee, sometimes situation forces you to feel that your efforts are being judged as a woman. Many a times, you will even



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feel that your inputs are not being thought through seriously but I have always believed that a winner is someone who is noted for outstanding and unusual accomplishments. This belief has helped me to stand out powerfully in my area of operations at Delex. What drives me is the will to implement and achieve best achievable process efficiencies in Delex’s Air Cargo operations, which should eventually go on to become the industry standard. This vision drives me to stick to the logistics industry.”

Puja Nanda, Director, Mercurio Pallia Logistics Pvt Ltd believes, “If we talk about the current situation of women in the logistics industry, logistics sector is still male-dominated and, unfortunately, women have been underrepresented in this sector, though they are doing well in other sectors. This has been caused by mainly two reasons: First being women’s lack of interest in working in such environments (for example, transport) and different barriers that limited their access to male-dominated working environments. Still, the number of women in the logistics industry barely reaches expected level. Working environment, working hour and dealing with drivers makes this field

more complex to work rather than banking or teaching job (service industry).”

Divya Jain, CEO, Safeducate explains, “Logistics today in India is one of the most important and relevant sectors of our economy. With the country looking at the Modi government to again start driving double-digit growth, it is essentially the supply chain & logistics industry that will be the backbone for this development trajectory. Being a part of this sector in itself at this point is exhilarating and being one of the few women makes it even more so.”

To attract the women in this industry, it is imperative to educate them of the opportunities available and what this industry has to offer. Women who join the logistics industry need to know that it is a service industry and need to have good verbal and written communication skills, knowledge of logistical processes and procedures, focus on customer service and orientation, have a sharp business acumen along with strong analytical and problem-solving skills. The consideration that logistics industry is not meant for women is contentious as much as there is a growing recognition that there is a need for diversity at

the senior management level in every industry. The rationale behind integrating women into this industry stems from the belief that women have greater aptitude in key skill areas as process improvement, organisation, planning and communication. As Jani expresses her views on the same saying, “I think people believe and have a perception that logistics is a laborious job and, therefore, not meant for women. In a country like India where 60 per cent or more of our agricultural labour force is women, this is something we should not be worried about. Indian women are hard working, committed and capable of any job whether it demands physical, intellectual or emotional strength.” Though belonging to the same industry, Rebello has different views regarding the perception, “There are many women in the shipping and logistics industry, but generally in functional, soft skill or back office roles. Yes, it’s true, there are few senior women in the rough and tumble of commercial and operations field roles. There are many reasons for it, but primarily the reason is the female mindset which is trapped by a million boundaries of what is considered an ‘appropriate’ profession for women. Unfortunately, girls are encouraged to believe that maintaining the status quo