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# Women Empowerment at Ajanta Manufacturing Limited

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The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity for sustainable economic and social development in any country. The case study highlights AML's (Ajanta Manufacturing Limited) women empowerment process. This case is about AML, a company forming a part of Ajanta Group of Companies based at Morbi India. Shri O. R. Patel, after whom the ORPAT brand is named, decided to employ women workforce in 1985 with the belief that 'women are more efficient and productive as they are disciplined, dedicated, and focused.' Out of nearly 4000 employees working in the organization 90% are female employees belonging to small villages. Group chairman gives credit to the thousands of women that contributed to the growth of company for being the biggest manufacturer of wall clocks in the world. The case discusses problems and challenges faced by organisation while recruitment, retaining the employees and the safety and security of women workforce. The case also highlights the issues related to motivation, training and development, compensation, reward-recognition and working culture in the company. The case also briefly discusses the innovative strategies to building confidence in women workforce.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Ajanta Manufacturing Limited

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## **Introduction**

**T**he constitution of India secures to all citizens its Fundamental Rights. The Principle of Gender equality grants equality to women and various measures are adopted in favor of women. As per census (2001) population of India was 1027 million where 496 million were female inhabitants, i.e. it total counts to 48% of population consist of women. And the female literacy in the country was 54.16%

For sustainable economic and social development to take place in any country, it is necessary that all sections of the population take part effectively in the economic, social, political and democratic processes of society. Presence of women in corporate India was increasing gradually, still the ratio of their participation in corporate was negligible. In such a scenario where acceptance of female workforce in corporate India was negligible, the case of Ajanta Manufacturing Ltd. should be appreciated as a case for women empowerment.

## **Ajanta group of companies**

Ajanta group was set up by Mr. Odhavjibhai Patel (O.R.Patel) who founded the business in 1971, and started manufacturing clocks in the name of 'Ajanta Transistor Clocks Manufacturing Company'. In 1987 Mr. Jaysukhbhai Patel and Mr. Pravinbhai Patel took over their family business. The businesses were jointly managed by the promoters till the year 1992.

Phase I: AML was set up jointly as a partnership firm in 1992 as M/S Ajanta Electronics Inc.

Phase II: As a private entity AML was established in the year 1994 in the name of Ajanta Electronics Pvt. Ltd.,

Phase III: Thereafter in 2004 it was converted into public limited company as Ajanta Manufacturing Limited.

## **About AML**

As a part of family arrangement, Mr. Jaysukhbhai Patel took over AML since 2004. The company was based at Morbi in the state of Gujarat. The philosophy was to give 'Value for Money', products, which help in maximizing the customer's satisfaction from the cost, benefit perspective. Based on these principles, AML employed more than 4000 employees, and was the largest manufacturer of Ajanta Clocks in India. The company was market leader of producing and distributing compact fluorescent lamps (CFL – Power Saver lamps), vitrified tiles and aluminum composite panels (ACP'S). The group had a strong penchant and expertise in creating excellent

brands. Brands which were offered by AML were, “AJANTA QUARTZ”, “OREVA” AND “ORPAT”.

### **Women Power in AML: Recruitment**

Till 1985 the group had only male employees in the organization. Promoters observed that men were wasting their time by moving here and there which led to less productivity. Morbi was a small town of Gujarat. Generally girls used to work on farms. Neither those girls were educated, nor self sufficient. Therefore Mr. O.R.Patel thought of uplifting that segment of society and making them self sufficient. So they decided to employ women workforce since 1985 with the belief that “women are more efficient and productive as they are disciplined, dedicated, and focused.”

The promoters believed, “unlike men who waste their time at work by moving here and there, women are more disciplined and serious in performing their duties. Besides, their nimble fingers are ideal for the precision of work that clock manufacturing requires”.

It was an uphill task to convince parents to allow their young daughters to step out of their homes on to a shop-floor. Ajanta Group of companies were carrying good name in region of Morbi. To recruit women workforce at AML Mr. O. R.Patel firstly recruited Mrs. Vanitaben Patel, wife of his elder son Mr. Pravinbhai

Patel in the organization to build the trust among the parents of the young girls. That helped them to attract female workforce gradually. They believed, “in today’s world it is not *Human Resource* but it is *Human Relations* that counts in any organizations”.

The promoters took pride in recruiting such women work force, who were denied access to formal schooling. Those girls got the opportunity to acquire skill based training at AML. Such causation toward gender equity sought to empower women so as to take decision making about themselves, their families and their communities.

The uniqueness of such women workforce was that, even few female employees used to drive buses to bring women from over 100 villages in the area of 65 km radius in Morbi to the factory. Women almost left men behind in all the areas within the premises of Ajanta Manufacturing Ltd.

To quote with one of the example of a women employee “the group felt very proud in saying that being the only bread earner from the family, she feeds a family of four people by working 8 hour

shift a day". It was also seen that women have even crossed the Maslow's hierarchy of needs by climbing one ladder higher.

"We brought a Color T.V. for the family" said the proud father of women employee who was basically a farmer.

**"Group chairman gave credit to the thousands of women that contributed to the growth of company for being the biggest manufacturer of wall clocks in the world."**

It was being observed that AML was the leader in providing employment in Saurashtra, Gujarat region. At AML the major competencies required for the jobs were more of behavioral competency and skill efficiency rather than technical one.

While selecting the candidates AML gave emphasis on good attitude. They were evaluating the inner qualities like integrity, honesty and loyalty for each established job position.

### **Employee Enrichment**

Apart from creating trust and safety on workplace, AML also provided best terms of employment in its region. AML was known in the market for reward and motivational system.

It would not be exaggerated to say that one can easily differentiate AML's employees with that of employee of other organizations from the region. The company was attractive pay masters as well as an excellent training provider. The company considered employees as its strength or pillar for the success. Promoters gave prime importance to employee enrichment for the smooth working in the organization. The company was equipped with latest office equipment and was the first movers in that region to adopt new things. That gave them excellent opportunities to learn new technologies.

The promoters felt that, "if your employees are happy, motivated then nobody can take away success from you". As good a saying "Happy Workers' are Productive Workers".

### **Retention**

The main problem in recruiting women workforce was then, retention of talent. The attrition rate of women was very high at AML as well. AML took that challenge and started recruiting and training 2<sup>nd</sup> layer of the job requirement.

The reason for such high attrition was that, as a part of social system the girls used to get married at age of 20-25 and they tend to leave the organization. Along with the attrition, another big challenge faced by AML was the rapid changes in the technology. AML were an excellent trainer as they provided on- the- job training to all its employees.

The time when the company used to get the information about the marriage of any girl the new girl was immediately recruited and was made to work with the departing employee to take over the job without any hindrances. Overstaffing was never a problem but embedded in the culture of the company.

Retention efforts were focused on the core group of employees who provide the stability and knowledge base for the organization. When retention went below the lower limit, appropriate actions were taken by management to reframe strategies for retaining the key staff

### **Work Culture**

Leaders deployed the vision, mission, and values in variety of ways, including AML's open communication process and the strategic planning process. Being majorly women oriented unit, women safety was of prime importance. In recent times one could see significant contribution of female employees in banking, IT and teaching. Still in male dominated society incidents of molestation and exploitations may observe on the workplace. AML adopted open communication process. There was an atmosphere like a close knit family prevalent at all levels and this had helped the group in improving its safety and productivity on consistent basis.

AML provided a great environment and a tradition to treat every one with respect and dignity. Promoters and seniors managers had regular visits to the plants, administrative offices and always spared time and having one to one communication with all the female workers in the organization. Women employees were given equal opportunity to resolve the issues related to them with top management.

It was a very big challenge for AML to keep smooth threads of relationship between the female work force and other managerial staff in the organization. The sense of due respect was always found towards all the female workers within the premises of AML. Girls were given right to share and discuss any of the work related problems with the promoters and board of directors. It was not only about sharing or telling the difficulties, but the girls were even assured action against the accused irrespective of her position. Girls were not allowed to work beyond their working hours (8 hours a day).

## **Rewards and Recognition**

AML's motivational programs for its employees consisted of a special blend of employee benefits. They majorly focused on the physical emotional, mental, and creative aspects of each individual. The link between emotional-psychological needs, their untapped abilities and future organizational performance was very well seen at AML.

The company used to offer a comprehensive benefits package to the people working in the organization. On festivals like Diwali, bonus and gifts were distributed to all the workers irrespective of their contribution and tenure of working in the organization. Providing them with safety uniforms, transportation facilities, food etc. were some of the policies and practices observed at the company. With such humble effort and initiative a sense of being in the family was created among all workers and the employees were empowered in the organization.

As a part of social responsibility the company gave community support in key areas that were aligned with its vision and mission. For instance at the time of the marriage of the female employee irrespective of the period of service, all necessary house hold items along with the monetary benefits were given. Women were also given the opportunity to work even after their marriage. Since girls belonged to families from villages around Morbi social system didn't permit them to continue with the job.

As the girls were from the lower income group families, they did not have any scope of leisure or entertainment at their villages. So to keep them energetic and enthusiastic at work AML used to organize picnics, and get together at nearby places. At times they were shown some of the movies and videos at the factory auditorium.

AML provided free Canteen and accommodation with all basic amenities, like TV facility on master screen for all the girls working in the organization. Telephone facility on each floor of the hostel was also provided at free of cost. Workers were also reimbursed for their medical bills. Infrastructure at AML comprised of, hospital, Reva Township and Oreva party plot.

Various innovative ways were taken in the company to motivate the employees, like "*The day's target is achieved, Congratulations!!!*" were some of the quotes placed on the company's notice boards.

## **Participative Management**

Since the group gave credit to all the women employees for its success, it believed that unless and until employees were not participative in setting of the standards and the objectives they would

not be able to achieve success. AML believed in the concept of participative Management through which they tried to empower women workforce.

“Without our women employees we wouldn't have been able to achieve the distinction of being the largest manufacturer of wall clocks in the world.”- Mr. O. R. Patel, Group Chairman.

AML believed in the strategy that the most successful leaders were those who form an intense and timeless reverence for the people, create a 'culture of sustainability', centered on people, not their products, services, or even the bottom line. AML believed in ethics,

honesty, and integrity. Its principles and values were non-negotiable requirements of employment. It had committed people to support the organization values and family culture with team work.

#### **Hormonal Industrial Relations:**

In spite of being labor intensive organization, there were no union and there were no strikes or labor unrest since inception of the company. It was observed that few employees were working with the company since its inception. There was no discrimination among the employees. Girls were seen on the shop floor as well as holding key positions in the company

#### **Product Diversification and recruiting women:**

Moving further to expand the vision of the company, the company decided to set up its own comprehensive CFL – 'power saver lamps' manufacturing unit. The overwhelming success of the new product made OREVA brand the number one company and the leading manufacturer of CFL lamps.

Diversifying more on investment opportunities AML had launched ELECTRIC BIKES popularly known as 'E-bikes' under the banner of OREVA. Needless to mention the basic philosophy remained the same. They continued to recruit women workforce for their CFL and E-Bikes units.

#### **Future challenges**

In India 'Women Empowerment' is still an idea if one looks to the poor and illiterate segment of the society. Because of social issues, corporate female employees cannot climb the ladder and achieve strategic positions. With the increased literacy level in India, organization may face different challenges in women empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

AML chose the strategy of employing women work force as a medium to achieve its organizational goals. The emerging scenario towards breakage of 'glass ceiling' was very well seen at AML. It would not been exaggeration to say that AML provided platform to that segment of society called as women workforce for its upliftment, dignity and wellbeing.

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## **Questions for Case Analysis:**

1. Has women empowerment being achieved at AML? Justify.
2. Had you been in place of Mr. O.R.Patel , what else would you suggest further in women empowerment process ?

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