

# WOMEN LEADERS: THE ROCKET FUEL POWERING INDIA'S NEXT GROWTH ENGINE

> *India's future growth trajectory relies profoundly on female talent and leadership*

India's trajectory towards becoming a global economic powerhouse rests fundamentally on unlocking the potential of its human capital, and no demographic is more central to this ambition than its women.

Across Asia, women have long served as the quiet architects of societal balance, but that strength is now translating into powerful, transformative leadership that is reshaping boardrooms and business strategies.

This collective shift demands more than mere policy; it requires a deep, cultural commitment to equity, resilience, and purpose. It is within this strategic context that Most Preferred Workplace for Women 2025-26 operates, a crucial industry platform that serves as a crucial benchmark, honouring organizations that have transcended transactional gestures to invest in meaningful, inclusive transformation.

This unique platform celebrates workplaces that have effectively countered high attrition rates, dismantled systemic pay gaps, and mastered the balance of professional ambition with life's caregiving responsibilities. Through rigorous, insight-led methodology, we spotlight the companies that are not just adapting to, but actively defining, the future of work for women.

**We are proud to recognize those embodying this spirit, including**

Abbott India • Dexian India Services Private • Meril Life Sciences Pvt. Ltd.



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abbott India</li> <li>• ABBVIE</li> <li>• Ajanta Pharma Limited</li> <li>• Alembic Pharmaceuticals Ltd</li> <li>• Anaptyss</li> <li>• Apna.co</li> <li>• Ashwin Sheth Group</li> <li>• Avery Weigh-Tronix (India)</li> <li>• Beiersdorf India Pvt. Ltd.</li> <li>• BHARAT PETROLEUM CORPORATION LIMITED</li> <li>• Central Bank Of India</li> <li>• CMR Green Technologies Limited</li> <li>• Collabera Talent Solutions Pvt Ltd</li> <li>• Consero Global</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dexian India Services Private Limited</li> <li>• Epiroc Mining India Private Limited</li> <li>• FLEX</li> <li>• Goldi Solar</li> <li>• Gujarat Fluorochemicals Limited</li> <li>• Hindustan Unilever Limited</li> <li>• IIFL Capital Services Ltd</li> <li>• Imagine Marketing Limited (boAt Lifestyle)</li> <li>• Innodata India Private Limited</li> <li>• JK Cement Ltd.</li> <li>• KARAM Safety Private Limited</li> <li>• Lumina Datamatics</li> <li>• M&amp;S</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meril Life Sciences Pvt. Ltd.</li> <li>• Meyer Organics Pvt. Ltd</li> <li>• Mondelez International</li> <li>• Navnit Group</li> <li>• Nexus Select Malls</li> <li>• NLB Services</li> <li>• PVNA Group</li> <li>• Sanofi</li> <li>• Shoppers Stop Ltd</li> <li>• Shriram Properties Ltd</li> <li>• Shyam Steel Industries Limited</li> <li>• The New India Assurance Company Ltd</li> <li>• TVS Motors Company</li> <li>• WELLA COMPANY</li> <li>• Xoxodav</li> </ul> |
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*Their dedication is building the definitive playbook for a more equitable, purpose-driven, and prosperous future of work in India.*

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> **Girija Subramanian, Chairman-cum-Managing Director of The New India Assurance Co. Ltd.,** explains how the organisation ensures equitable opportunities and an optimal environment for its talent pool

At The New India Assurance Company Ltd., ensuring equitable opportunities and a safe, enabling environment for our women employees is a foundational commitment, deeply embedded in our governance practices and organisational culture. As one of India's largest general insurers, operating through more than 1,600 offices across the country and in over 25 global markets, we recognise that true inclusion must be implemented consistently across every location, irrespective of geography, size, or business volume.

## Our commitment to gender equity

Our commitment to gender equity begins at the highest level. Five out of seven members of our Board, including the Chairman-cum-Managing Director, are women. We also have two female Executive Directors, five of nine General Managers, and a steadily increasing proportion of women in senior leadership roles. This representation ensures that gender equity is not an abstraction, but a lived organisational value. The presence of women in leadership positions across diverse functions directly influences workplace culture, providing visible role models and shaping decision-making with an inclusive lens.

We follow a uniform and non-negotiable governance structure to ensure safety, dignity, and equal opportunity across all offices:

- **POSH Compliance Across the Network:** Every office, regardless of size or region has a fully functional Internal Committee (IC) as mandated under the POSH Act. These committees are actively trained, empowered, and monitored through statutory reporting and review by corporate HR.
- **Zero-Tolerance for Harassment:**

Our Corporate Policy on Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment ensures a safe, confidential, and accessible grievance mechanism.

- **ESG Policy Oversight:** Our Board-level Risk Management Committee reviews the ESG framework annually, reaffirming our commitment to diversity, inclusion, and ethical conduct across all locations.
- **Transparent HR Processes:** Recruitment, promotions, postings, and training opportunities are all gender-neutral and governed by centralised HR standards, which are uniformly executed by regional and divisional offices.

We ensure that women across all office including smaller and remote centre have equal access to learning and career growth opportunities:

- **Training Participation:** Over 50% of our women employees participate annually in skill upgradation and leadership programmes conducted through our zonal, regional, and agent training centres.
- **Women Managers' Development Programmes:** Specialised MDPs at premium institutes such as IIMA, IIRM, MDI, and ISTM equip women officers with leadership and managerial capabilities.
- **Career Mobility:** Our promotion system is gender-neutral, and lateral or vertical movement is strictly merit-based. Transfer requests on family welfare grounds, especially for women are considered sensitively to support work-life harmony.
- **Return-to-Work Support:** We maintain a 100% return and retention rate for women following maternity leave.

enabled by a supportive managerial culture and flexible postings.

Through gender-sensitisation programs, structured POSH training, and continuous behavioural awareness at all levels, we reinforce safety and dignity across the organisation. Our training centres and HR units ensure that every employee is aware of the company's standards on respectful conduct.

- Women constitute nearly one-third of our total workforce.
- Representation of women in senior management has risen steadily over the last three years.
- Importantly, there has been zero voluntary attrition among women in senior leadership, demonstrating the strength of our culture and the trust women place in the organisation.

Our expansive network is unified by strong governance, consistent policies, empathetic leadership, and a culture that values diversity and equitable opportunities.



**Mrs. Anuradha Kulkarni**  
Managing Director

**NEW INDIA ASSURANCE**  
दि न्यू इन्डिया एश्योरन्स कंपनी लिमिटेड  
The New India Assurance Co. Ltd

> **Poppy Sharma, CGM-HR, Central Bank of India**, illustrates how the bank's commitment to "Swadeshi" values translate into policies that empower and uplift women in the workforce

The concept of **Swadeshi** at the Central Bank of India is more than a historical sentiment, it is a living philosophy that defines who we are and how we lead. Established in 1911 as India's first commercial bank wholly owned and managed by Indians, the Bank was founded on the belief that true independence comes from self-reliance, inclusion, and empowerment. This ethos continues to guide us, particularly in championing women's advancement within the organization.

At the heart of our Swadeshi values lies the conviction that national progress is inseparable from women's empowerment. The Central Bank of India has long exemplified this belief, being the first institution in India to hire women employees as early as 1926 and now, over a century later, the first and only Public Sector Bank to have a woman Chief Human Resource Officer (CHRO). This legacy underscores our deep commitment to gender equity, leadership diversity, and inclusive growth.

Our initiatives reflect both heritage and modernity:

- **All-Women Staff Branches:** Functional across 90 regions, these branches amplify women's leadership visibility and build community trust in women-led financial services.
- **Cent Sanskriti:** This flagship social engagement platform involves employees' spouses (particularly women) in community and CSR initiatives, nurturing inclusion beyond the workplace.
- **Cent Mamta:** A comprehensive maternal care and well-being initiative, Cent Mamta offers pre-


**सेंट्रल बैंक ऑफ़ इंडिया**  
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➤ **Sameer Kanodia, MD and CEO of Lumina Datamatics Limited**, outlines the pathway being created for women to ascend into leadership roles.

We believe true progress can only be achieved when women professionals are given equal opportunities to lead, innovate, and thrive in a rapidly transforming global economy. Ensuring gender equality is not just a commitment for us, but a crucial aspect of how we shape our culture and the future at Lumina Datamatics.

We have implemented focused initiatives to build an inclusive work environment where women can advance without barriers. This includes structured mentorship programs, leadership training, and continuous upskilling opportunities in emerging technologies and digital-first practices. By equipping women with technical expertise and leadership capabilities, we ensure they are well-prepared to

and post-natal support, wellness workshops, and guidance to women employees through every stage of motherhood, reinforcing our culture of empathy and care.

- **Leadership and Mentorship Programs:** Our structured training and mentorship networks groom women officers for senior leadership roles, strengthening internal succession pipelines.
- **Supportive HR Policies:** Provisions such as rotational transfer exemptions for mothers, child-care allowances, sabbaticals for higher studies, flexible postings, and maternity counseling reinforce work-life balance and retention.
- **Safe Work Environment:** The Cent Shakti POSH portal, mandatory sensitization programs, and robust redressal

systems uphold dignity and safety for all.

- **Transparent Promotions:** Mandated representation of women on promotion panels ensures fair, unbiased career progression.

By integrating these gender-inclusive initiatives into digital HR systems like HRMS and AI-assisted recruitment, we ensure accountability and measurable outcomes.

Our **Swadeshi** spirit thus lives on, not just in our history, but in our people. By empowering women to lead with confidence and compassion, the Central Bank of India continues to stand as a symbol of India's resilience, inclusivity, and enduring strength.



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take on senior roles and responsibilities.

Our flexible work policies and hybrid models are designed to support women at various stages of life, facilitating them to pursue ambitious career paths while balancing their personal priorities. Moreover, we promote equal access to high-visibility projects and ensure that women have the same opportunities as their peers to showcase their capabilities on a global platform.

Most importantly, we continue to track diversity metrics, encourage open dialogue, and actively challenge unconscious bias through our sensitization programs. These measures help create an environment where women's contributions are recognized and valued.





## A BOLD DRIVE TO MAKE WHAT'S GOOD EVEN BETTER

➤ **Nicklas Nilsson, VP (HR), Epiroc India**, elucidates the specific initiatives being implemented to attract and retain top talent, for the present and future



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Our approach is simple yet transformative; to ensure that our long-standing legacy in chemicals and renewables serves as a springboard for a modern, equitable workplace. At INNOXFL Group, women are not just participants in this journey; they are leaders shaping its direction. We are proud that our legacy has become a launchpad for inclusion, making us not just a stable organization, but a progressive and equitable one.

We firmly believe in an open job market where everyone is welcome to apply and compete for opportunities. To strengthen gender diversity, we actively work with our hiring managers to ensure that diverse candidates are represented among the final shortlist. One of the examples I often share with hiring teams is about fairness and equal

At Epiroc, that's the kind of environment we continuously strive to build for all our employees.



At Collabera, we see technology and people as partners in progress. Our journey has always been about balancing digital transformation with human transformation.

The Collabora Global Talent Center (GTC) reflects this belief, a powerhouse built on inclusive leadership, digital fluency, and care for people. Technology is not just a tool; it's a platform for our people to evolve, innovate, and lead.

We've built a culture where diversity fuels ideas and technology amplify human potential. Women professionals thrive not because of policies alone, but through trust, access, flexibility, and opportunity. Today, over 36% of our workforce

For women, many leading in roles that didn't exist a few years ago. Initiatives like AI-first recruiting, return ship pathways, and career mobility programs ensure growth is defined by potential, not position.

What makes us future-ready is staying deeply human in a world driven by algorithms. We use AI, data, and analytics to make decisions smarter, never at the cost of empathy. Technology empowers people, helping us design better experiences and personalize growth journeys.

At Collabera, we don't just build systems, we build belief. A tech-enabled, trust-driven, inclusive culture makes us resilient today and ready for tomorrow.



At Shyam Steel, our six-decade journey has been built on a strong foundation of trust, resilience, and inclusivity. As we evolved from a single-product entity to a multi-product steel organization, our workforce philosophy has also transformed to reflect the needs of a modern, dynamic generation.

We firmly believe that diversity fuels innovation. Today, our policies go beyond compliance — they focus on creating a culture of belonging, respect and empowerment. From structured recruitment drives encouraging women in technical roles to leadership

development programs designed for high-potential female professionals, we're steadily breaking traditional barriers in a male-dominated industry.

Safety and equality are at the heart of our operations. We've implemented strict anti-harassment protocols, gender-sensitization workshops, and mentorship programs that enable women to thrive across both plant and corporate environments.

Our D&I vision is simple yet powerful – to create an ecosystem where every employee feels valued and heard. Shyam Steel continues to set benchmarks for inclusion in Indian



manufacturing.

As we move forward, we aim to build not just strong steel, but also strong, inclusive teams that reflect the future of India's industrial landscape.

Together, we remain committed to nurturing a workplace where every voice matters, every talent is celebrated, and every individual grows—fueling a future defined by unity, progress, and unwavering collective strength.

As a leading global occupational safety brand, we are deeply committed to fostering a secure and inclusive environment for all, especially our female professionals in industrial settings. Our safety framework rests on strong policies and active programs designed for empowerment and well-being of female professionals.

Policy-wise, we ensure comprehensive support by strictly adhering to the Maternity Benefit Act, and going further by offering one additional paid holiday every month for six months following the standard maternity leave.

Crucially, our workplace is supported

by a strict Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) policy. This policy is reinforced by mandatory, annual training for all workers and executives. This training is unique, which requires participants to pass a final test, ensuring genuine understandability and application of the principles, rather than mere procedural compliance. Awareness is maintained through pervasive posters placed throughout the organization, including washrooms.

In terms of active programs, we run 'K-Divas'- a dedicated monthly forum where female professionals meet to discuss challenges and areas for improvement. This forum also serves as the established, confidential channel



  
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enabling any female employee to address issues related to any member without fear of reprisal. The Minutes of Meeting (MOM) are directly shared with the CHRO to ensure rapid action. This commitment has driven tangible results: our female workforce strength has risen in the last five years, a clear indicator of our success in building a safe and welcoming industrial workplace.

**MAR. 2026**  
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