

1 lakh, and counting: TCS is now top employer of women

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In a landmark for India Inc, the number of female employees at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has crossed the one-lakh mark, making it the country's biggest employer of women in the private sector. Women now comprise one-third of the IT major's 3.06 lakh workforce. This makes TCS, also the most valued company in India, one of the top employers of women in the technology sector globally. The top slot is held by IBM, which has an estimated 1.3 lakh women out of a workforce of 4.31 lakh.

In terms of market cap, the next two players in the domestic IT market are Infosys (54,537 women employees) and Wipro (45,276) but the female workforce of TCS is more than the two combined. The IT and BPO sector collectively employs about 3.1 million, of which nearly one million are women, according to industry body Nasscom.

The Mumbai-headquartered IT giant's achievement has also given a boost to the \$103-billion Tata Group's female employee strength, which now stands at more than 1.4 lakh. "We have a lot of female talent in India, especially in the technology space. It's great to see that the company has been able to attract them. From 10,000 to 1,00,000, that is a growth of about 10x in 10 years," N Chandrasekaran, CEO and MD, TCS, told TOI.

In India, across companies and sectors, the gender ratio is undeniably skewed towards male employees. However, India Inc has been stepping up efforts to bridge the gap by implementing progressive policies and creating innovative solutions to hire, retain and encourage women talent. "Diversity challenges homogeneity in thinking, which is a good thing. There is no doubt that we want to be a rich and diverse organization," said the TCS boss. There have been several research reports which indicate that women think differently than men, and bring more empathy and intuition to leadership.

Within TCS, a major chunk —over 40% — of its women employees are either new recruits or at junior levels, while about 11% are in the senior management.

Though the tech giant has improved its gender diversity, it sees significant attrition after women rise to the mid-management level. To check this trend, the company has introduced steps like extended maternity leave options, flexi-work hours and onsite child-care facilities. It also has re-orientation courses that help women integrate seamlessly into the workforce on their return from a career break. Besides, it has mentoring programmes to groom women candidates with high potential for leadership roles.

"While the one lakh figure may sound good, it is important for me to create a mechanism that ensures women continue to pursue careers. Because women diversity comes down as you go higher," said Chandrasekaran. Women are scarce at the company's leadership rank and non-existent at the

board level. The government mandates at least one woman director in listed companies like TCS by March 31, 2015.

Besides attrition, women's safety is another matter of concern. "We are creating emergency technology applications. We have also informed our employees to not leave alone in case they are working till late as a precautionary measure," said Chandrasekaran, who has set an internal target of zero incident. TCS has launched a safety app which automatically sends distress messages along with location details to a set of pre-designated contacts and also calls up one of them.