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Vedanta director Priya Agarwal Hebbar's message to women: 'Call yourself a leader, not a woman leader!'

By Lopamudra Ghatak, ET Online Last Updated: Mar 09, 2023, 11:28 AM IST

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Synopsis

The Vedanta Limited director plans to make the mining field more inclusive in the long run.



Change doesn't always happen overnight, says Priya Agarwal Hebbar.

[Priya Agarwal Hebbar](#) is currently the director of [Vedanta Limited](#), a natural resource company with a global presence. She has been one of the key proponents of making women's voices feel heard and bringing about a cultural shift in a traditionally male-dominated field - the mining and natural resources sector. Under her aegis, [Vedanta](#) Resources is on track to emerge as an ESG (Environment, Social & Governance) leader in the field of natural resources.

A Warwick University alumna, Hebbar has been at the forefront in strengthening the ESG and HR policies of the organisation and making the culture as well as the brand more inclusive and in-tune with progress.

In an interaction with *ETPanache Digital*, Hebbar elaborates on how the workplace culture can be made inclusive organically and how the C-Suite can celebrate diverse voices, from all walks of life.

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Lopamudra Ghatak: It's 2023. How do you think as a country we can become more inclusive?

Priya Agarwal Hebbar: It's a process. I believe we have made much progress. Today, we have a woman from a remote tribal area of Odisha who is the President of India, occupying the highest office in the land. We have had a woman Prime Minister, several women as chief ministers, senior women ministers, CEOs, start-up founders ... the list of women achievers is long. And it's important to have these role models.

The Government's policies are also actively promoting education and health of women and also providing them with seed funds for entrepreneurship. Women are 50% of India. Imagine the economic or moral progress of our country if we include 100% of our population towards achieving it. Once we, as government, business and society, work together and empower each one of them, we will have achieved our end goal of inclusivity. It's not far away in time.

LG: You are a board member at Vedanta Limited. What do you think can be done to have more women in the boardroom? How can corporations improve the ratio?



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PAH: This year the International Women’s Day theme is ‘Embrace Equity’ and I do hope that its spirit will make its way to corporate boardrooms. I believe the empathy and compassion women bring to the boardroom, in addition to their skills and knowledge, make them natural leaders. And over the years, we have seen many women lead multi-national conglomerates, blazing the trail. That said, we have to do better.

Change doesn’t always happen overnight. In corporate India, we need to develop a senior leadership pipeline which has enough women who can eventually occupy board positions. We also need to build a talent pool of eminent women who can serve as independent directors. Now that there is a consciousness about this, you will see significant change in this decade.

LG: Tell us a bit about the changes that you have implemented at Vedanta.

PAH: I strongly believe that business is not just about profits but also purpose. That is what motivated me to lead the ESG transformation at Vedanta. As a business, we must ensure that the planet and nature are preserved. We must focus on engaging constructively with our communities and ensure they grow with us. And we must be transparent in all that we do.

Linked to the ESG transformation is our entire “Give Back” philosophy. My father has pledged 75% of his wealth for philanthropy. I am leading the process of giving it a structure via the newly-created [Anil Agarwal Foundation](#). Our focus is very much on the vulnerable and empowering their future—women, children and my own passion, animals. We have launched The Animal Care Organization (TACO), a first-of-its-kind initiative, which will take a holistic approach to animal welfare, from shelters, to hospitals to quality education and advocacy.

I am also working on transforming our approach to communications, with a particular focus on reaching out to the youth using the platforms they use. They are the most important stakeholders in India’s future. As someone who has grown up in an era of great digital and technological change, I also want to ensure that we adopt these across our businesses. The value they can unlock is

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enormous.

LG: What is your advice to women joining the workforce?

PAH: Break your internal bias - Call yourself a leader, not a woman leader! Break the bias within yourself to ensure you are treated at par with all genders in the workforce. Moreover, any individual must learn to first become a good team member before moving into a leadership position.

LG: What kind of support system can help more women stay on in the workforce?

PAH: The first step to inclusion is a change in mindset. What we need to do is create workplaces which are sensitive, respectful, and truly believe in equality. Of course, women may need some specific support systems, like creches at the workplace and flexibility when they have young children. Organisations must look at those needs.

LG: What are the common areas of interest that you share with your father?

PAH: Music is our common love. Obviously, the genres we listen to are very different, but music forms an integral part of our lives and our conversations. I think my love for music stems from him. As a child I remember how he used to wake me up by turning on some old Hindi songs or how he often had music on in the background as he worked or even during the evenings when the family got together.

LG: Have you ever felt at a disadvantage - being the daughter of a famous person?

PAH: Not at all. My father's journey from a modest family in Bihar to a business icon is so inspiring for me. Growing up, I have watched him work harder than anyone and I learned determination. I watched him face obstacles with a single-minded focus, and I learned grit. And most importantly, I watched him care for his employees and learned compassion. I hope I can continue the path my father set out on.



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LG: You are very active on social media and post regular updates on LinkedIn. So is your dad these days as he posts a lot of throwback pictures and shares anecdotes about his life. Does he consult you in this?

PAH: We reminisce while seeing old photos or when he posts an anecdote from his life. He sometimes does call, and we discuss work, but most of our discussions revolve around my daughter who my father absolutely adores. He is a man driven by his convictions, and his social media timeline is a reflection of the stories he feels he needs to put out.

LG: Any money/investment advice for women?

PAH: Money or income is an indicator of empowerment and independence. So, women must take it seriously. What we need is 100% financial literacy for women in India. Through education and awareness we need to make women understand the various opportunities available to them and the ways in which they can earn, save & invest their income. That is the first step towards financial independence for women. Furthermore, work towards finding employment where you learn rather than one that just may be more financially rewarding – this can be fruitful in the long run.

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