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BREAKING BOUNDARIES: AN INSPIRING JOURNEY IN LEADERSHIP

IN CONVERSATION WITH VINITA SINGHANIA, VICE CHAIRPERSON & MANAGING DIRECTOR, JK LAKSHMI CEMENT LTD – A TRAILBLAZER IN THE CEMENT SECTOR

BY SUJATHA VISHNURAJ

VINITA SINGHANIA, VICE CHAIRPERSON AND Managing Director of JK Lakshmi Cement Ltd, stands as an inspiring figure who has defied societal norms and emerged as a trailblazer in the cement industry.

Coming from a prestigious industrial background, Vinita took on the challenge of leading the family business after her husband's untimely passing. Despite lacking prior experience, her unwavering determination to make a meaningful impact led her on this remarkable journey. Vinita is a proud exemplar, the sole female entrepreneur in the Indian cement sector. Her triumph is a guiding light, motivating women in India and globally to shatter the glass ceiling and assume leadership roles in cement companies.

Vinita Singhania firmly believes that as women's access to higher education expands, underrepresented sectors will witness a growing number of women leaders. She advocates for national policies and initiatives that genuinely

promote and support female entrepreneurship across all trade and industry sectors.

In a conversation with Manufacturing Today, Vinita shared her journey, the invaluable lessons she has gleaned, and her vision for empowering women in unconventional sectors.

Can you tell us about your journey entering the cement industry and taking over JK Lakshmi Cement Ltd?

My journey into the cement industry and taking over JK Lakshmi Cement Ltd. in 1988 was a challenging but deeply rewarding experience. This transition followed the untimely demise of my husband, Sripati Singhania, who had been at the company's helm. At that time, I had no experience in the cement industry, which made the journey all the more daunting. However, I am inherently curious, and I decided to dive deep into understanding the intricacies of the business and market dynamics. I was fortunate to have a dedicated and capable team

by my side, who provided invaluable support and guidance throughout this journey. Over the years, I have had the privilege of handling a wide portfolio of responsibilities and, with the collective efforts of my team, have successfully led the organisation to excellence in the cement industry.

What motivated you to enter the cement sector despite lacking industry experience?

A profound sense of responsibility and vision motivated my decision to enter the cement sector. Following the untimely demise of my husband, I saw it as a moral obligation to carry forward his legacy and dreams. The JK Lakshmi Cement Ltd. team looked up to me with hope and trust, expecting guidance and leadership. Moreover, during that period, India was embarking on a remarkable journey of infrastructure development, and JK Lakshmi Cement was eager to play a pivotal role in this nation-building process. I firmly believed that we could make JK Cement the preferred choice for India's infrastructure projects. I was confident in my ability to succeed, driven by my determination to honour my husband's legacy and contribute to India's growth and development. I am happy to see that my efforts yielded encouraging results.

As the only woman entrepreneur in India's cement sector, what challenges did you face while establishing your presence in a male-dominated industry?

Undoubtedly, establishing my presence in India's cement sector as the only woman entrepreneur was a formidable challenge. I carried the dual responsibilities of nurturing my family and the company, a juggling act that demanded unwavering commitment. It was common to encounter scepticism in a male-dominated industry, where questions arose about how a woman could succeed in a traditionally masculine field. However, I was determined to forge ahead and achieve the company's goals. I was fortunate to have the unwavering confidence and support of my family, who believed in my capabilities and encouraged me every step of the way. Additionally, my dedicated team supported my endeavours, helping me overcome gender barriers and carve out a meaningful presence in the cement industry. It's incredibly heartening to see women joining this industry, doing commendable jobs, and changing perceptions.

How do you view your role as an inspiration for women striving to break the glass ceiling in various industries?

As a leader, my journey can serve as a beacon of hope and encouragement for women aspiring to achieve their goals and overcome barriers. With

my unflinching determination to accomplish career goals, I aim to show other women that they, too, can rise above limitations and stereotypes.

Moreover, I'm committed to fostering an inclusive environment within my organisation. By promoting diversity and gender equality, I intend to create spaces where women feel empowered to showcase their talents and contribute meaningfully. This benefits women executives and enriches the industries they work in by bringing a wider range of perspectives to the table.

Women need to see that balancing career aspirations with personal responsibilities is possible. I aim to inspire confidence, promote inclusivity, and provide a roadmap for women aspiring to reach leadership positions in their respective industries. By doing so, I hope to contribute to a future where gender barriers are shattered, and women's potential is fully realised.

Coming from an esteemed industrial family, how have your family's values influenced your leadership approach in running the business?

My family's values have profoundly influenced my leadership approach in running the business. Primarily, they serve as the foundation of my decisions and actions. My family's values are founded on a strong commitment to integrity and ethical conduct. I have always been committed to honesty, transparency, and holding the highest moral standards in all my business dealings. These principles guide me in maintaining the trust of stakeholders, fostering long-term relationships, and ensuring the company's high reputation.

Moreover, my family has always taught me to focus on innovation and adopt a futurist approach. I have learnt that embracing change and staying at the forefront of industry trends is essential for sustainable growth. I have also learnt the significance of long-term vision and sustainable





practices. Rather than pursuing short-term gains, I'm driven by a commitment to building a legacy that spans generations. These ideals helped me develop JK Lakshmi Cement into what it is today.

Can you share your perspective on the role of education in empowering women in underrepresented sectors, as you mentioned?

Education has long been acknowledged as a powerful tool for empowerment, and its impact on women's participation in underrepresented sectors cannot be overstated. When we invest in education for women, we are investing in the progress of our nation. In underrepresented sectors, such as manufacturing and heavy industries, women have historically faced barriers to entry, often due to societal norms and gender biases. Education is a transformative force that enables women to challenge the existing norms and barriers and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in these sectors. It equips them with the confidence to break through glass ceilings and become leaders, innovators, and drivers of change. We must invest our time, effort, and capital to educate and empower women.

What steps should be taken nationally to encourage and support women entrepreneurs across all industries?

It's genuinely heartening to witness more women stepping forward to embrace entrepreneurship. Their growing presence in the business world is a testament to their potential and capabilities. Nevertheless, this progress's pace remains relatively slow and needs to be pushed.

We must encourage women to dream of becoming an entrepreneur and taking up entrepreneurship with targeted efforts, such as mentorship programs, access to resources,

establishing funding avenues tailored to women-led businesses, streamlining regulatory processes, promoting technological access, collecting data to inform targeted interventions, increasing visibility through recognition programs, cultivating supportive ecosystems for collaboration, and initiating campaigns to challenge cultural norms. These comprehensive efforts will collectively contribute to dismantling barriers, enhancing opportunities, and empowering women entrepreneurs, thereby fostering economic advancement, innovation, and a more inclusive entrepreneurial landscape.

How has JK Lakshmi Cement embraced technological advancements to enhance productivity and efficiency?

Embracing technological advancement in JKLC is a concept that has been introduced previously. The use of automation/upgrading to the latest technologies has been the DNA of our company.

We have been using SPRS, VFDs, DCS, Online Analyzer, and Energy Management software since the Plant's inception. We have utilised the feature of DCS in creating OPTIMA for achieving Plant's optimum productivity and efficiency. Also, Regular replacement of assets with upgraded version to achieve optimum utilisation of resources has always been at the forefront and as –

- (a) Installed Latest Generation IKN Cooler, ITICA Seal, Latest generation Five combustion burner, Latest Generation CPG Classifier, and high-efficiency fans.
- (b) Latest Generation WHR

Can you provide specific examples of how technology has positively impacted the cement manufacturing process or customer experience?

Some of the new Technology adoptions are -

1. The use of DCS system auto PID loop tuning functions has limited the variation of critical parameters as Cyc-6 temperature is below 1%. It helps in achieving operational stability.
2. The use of SAP PM modules helps improve Predictive maintenance activities.
3. Using AI & ML-based optimisation software helps achieve operational efficiency.
4. The use of the latest technology boiler helps in the enhancement in green energy from WHR.
5. Use of Accsys technology for printing of customers' codes on cement bags for easy identification
6. Use of Customer relationship portal (CRM) for easy downloading of invoices & quality certificates.
7. Automation of packing plant & smart dispatches for timely delivery of material.

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