

ONGC's first woman CMD more exception than rule

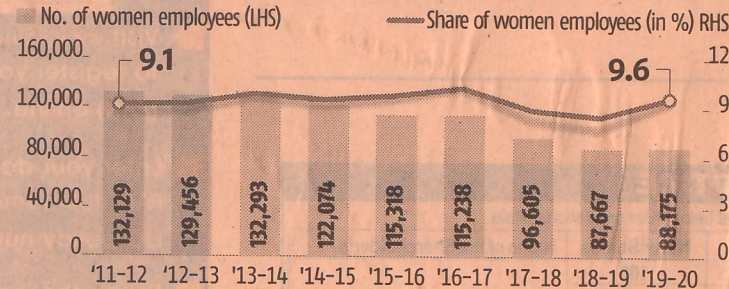
Women make for just 10% of PSE staff; ratio stagnant since FY12

SACHIN P MAMPATTA
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While Alka Mittal became the first woman to head public sector major Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) following her appointment as the chairman and managing director, women rising to top positions in public sector companies appear few and far between.

An analysis of past years' data shows that public sector companies are less likely to have women directors on their boards. The gap with their private sector counterparts has only been widening. In the previous fiscal year (FY21), around 33.3 per cent of NSE-listed public sector companies lacked women directors, against 3.2 per cent of companies outside the public sector, data from primeinfobase.com shows. The public sector has also had less success in increasing women's

FEWER WOMEN, HIGHER REPRESENTATION



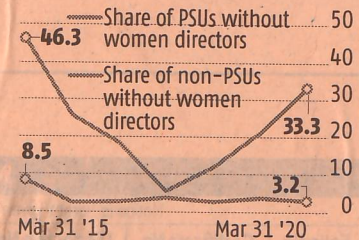
Source: Public Enterprises Surveys

representation over time.

Around 46.3 per cent of listed public sector companies did not have a single woman director as of FY15. While the number improved in the intervening years, it abruptly began to drop again from FY19. The share of private sector companies without women directors was already lower at 8.5 per cent of the listed space in FY15. They managed to more than halve it to 3.2 per cent as of FY21. The pandemic year saw an improvement in representation even as the public sector representation became worse.

The government decides on the appointments to the boards of public sector companies, which may have a bearing on their ability to close the gap, according to experts. But the government has been slow in making such decisions. Mittal's appointment as ONGC's chief came after her predecessor retired without a succession announcement by either the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet or the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Her predecessor Subhash Kumar was the director (finance).

PUBLIC SECTOR LAGS (in %)



Note: Data for companies listed on the National Stock Exchange; Sources: primeinfobase.com, Business Standard calculations

He took additional charge as the chairman and managing director after the last full-time head Shashi Shanker retired on March 31, 2021.

Another factor behind not having more women at top positions could be their number lower down in organisations. Of every 100 public sector employees, less than 10 are women. This has been more or less the same in central public sector enterprise (CPSE) employment since at least FY12, shows a *Business Standard* analysis of annual Public Enterprises Surveys. The latest one is for FY20. It shows that there are

88,175 women employees in CPSEs as of FY20. This accounts for 9.6 per cent of the overall employment. This is higher than 8.5 per cent in FY19, despite the number of women employees actually shrinking during the year. In fact, there are now over 43,000 fewer women employed at CPSEs than in FY12. The near constant share in total employment, barring minor fluctuations, comes because of an overall decline in public sector employment.

The total number of CPSE employees has dropped from 1.4 million in FY12 to under one million (9,19,648) at present. This was the first time since at least FY12 that CPSEs employed less than 1 million people. A number of major companies, including Bharat Sanchar Nigam (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam (MTNL), saw exits through the voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) route. Exits by women have mostly been at the lower end of the employment pyramid. The share of women in supervisory, executive or managerial positions have risen to 42 per cent from 29.6 per cent.