

# Affirmative Action

**EMPOWERING SOCIETY FOR  
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW**



**Confederation of Indian Industry**

# AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BY INDIAN INDUSTRY

## BACKGROUND

- Till early 2007, private sector Indian industry was caste blind, unlike the public sector which had job reservations for SC/ST youth. Several Indian companies had a significant number of employees from the SC/ST communities but there were no figures as industry had no data on the caste affiliation of its employees.
- However, after Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's call to CII in 2006 to pro-actively adopt an Affirmative Agenda to obviate the need for legislation, CII set up a Task Force, a National Council and companies began implementing their Affirmative Action from January 2007.
- Indian industry had assured Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh that it would draw up a robust Affirmative Action plan and, two years later, it is Indian industry's contention that an encouraging beginning has been made. Awareness has been created in Industry of the importance of Affirmative Action to further social stability and cohesion, so necessary for business. A beginning has been made in many companies to embed Affirmative Action for the SC/ST communities in their HR and business processes.
- Nearly 100 CII member companies have drawn up Affirmative Action agendas for SC/ST youth under four heads: **Employability, Entrepreneurship, Education and Employment**, already making a difference to the lives of over 37,054 SC/ST youth in all regions of India.

## EMPLOYABILITY

- Enhancing the employability of SC/ST youth has been the major focus of activity by CII member companies, with 48 companies sponsoring/creating customized training modules for over 32,635 youth. The training has been imparted in a host of trades in demand in the job market as also in soft skills like English and IT, in association with the country's top trainers, like Dr Reddy's LABS and the CAP Foundation. Financed entirely by companies, the training has been accompanied, in most cases, by help in placing the students in jobs.

Among the companies with active vocational training programmes for SC/ST youth are **Infosys, Tata Steel, Thermax, HSBC, Mahindra and Mahindra, Crompton Greaves, Cummins India, Godrej and Boyce, Forbes Marshall, Trent, JUSCO, Hero Group, and Bharti Airtel**. Noteworthy among the initiatives are:

The **Infosys-STP** programme, **CII-Finishing School & LABS** training programme. Approximately 800 SC/ST candidates have been imparted training in English, communications, basic IT, hospitality, customer relations & sales, bed side patient assistance etc.

**Tata Group** companies initiatives -- **Tata Steel** schemes: Training 300 SC/ST girls to be community health providers and operation theater assistants; Coaching 240 SC/ST youth to appear in entrance examinations for apprentice schemes; Coaching for 40 SC/ST graduates annually in a residential course to appear for

competitive exams **JUSCO's** vocational training in five trades for 190 school drop-outs. **Tata Tea's** partnership with 11 colleges in Kerala to train 3,130 SC/ST students in communicative English and basic IT skills. Also **CII** with **TCS** to impart English speaking and basic IT skills to batches of around 20 SC/ST youth drawn from rural areas around Kolkata.

**Bannari Amman Apparel** imparted on-the-job training for over 2,000 of its SC/ST employees in sewing to enhance their skill sets, with 70 among them becoming Team Leaders in less than a year of operations.

Finally, under Employability, 160 CII member companies have partnered with the Government of India to upgrade 247 ITIs, whose student bodies have significant representation from the SC/ST communities.

### **ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

- Under **Entrepreneurship**, the CII and, separately, **Tata Communications**, have partnered with Ahmedabad's Entrepreneurship Development Institute to train 270 SC/ST youth in the fundamentals of entrepreneurship; of these, over 100 youth have already become entrepreneurs.
- CII has also encouraged its members to make companies owned by members of the SC/ST communities as part of their supply/vendor chain and a beginning has been made by half a dozen companies, most notably **Forbes Marshall** which has appointed three SC/ST vendors and **Bannari Amman Apparel**, which has engaged two SC/ST civil contractors in facilities management.

### **EDUCATION**

- Under **Education**, the focus has been on increasing the number of scholarships. The most notable of these initiatives by CII member companies is the granting of **scholarships of over Rs 6,000 a month to 162 bright but poor SC/ST students** for study in top-ranking professional institutions like the IITs and NIITs. Finance for this, amounting to over Rs 1.3 cr per year, comes from the CII, HSBC and the Tata Group.

### **EMPLOYMENT**

- Under **Employment**, 636 CII member companies have signed a Code of Conduct committing to no discrimination in their employment policies, while the **Tata Group** has gone a step further and committed itself to positive discrimination in favour of meritorious SC/ST youth in terms of jobs and creation of business associates, a philosophy which has begun to show early results in some Group companies. Accordingly **Bannari Amman Apparel** has employed only members of backward castes in their unit in Kanchipuram district out of 1300 socially disadvantaged women 65% belong to SC & ST communities

## **CONCLUSION**

Indian industry had assured Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh that it would draw up a robust Affirmative Action plan and it is Indian industry's contention that a beginning has been made to address a challenge which is very novel for industry and which addresses a blot on the Indian society which goes back several millennia.

It would be counter-productive, in this context, for political expediency to revive the demand for job reservations in the private sector. For one, such a measure will not amount to many jobs on the ground

While Indian industry commits itself to employing many more SC/ST youth, it believes the most urgent need is to ensure that the pool of employable SC/ST youth continues to keep growing. This realization explains the CII's emphasis on initiatives under the Employability agenda.

Indian industry is clear that any compromise on merit will restrict its competitiveness in this era of increasing globalization and any attempt to circumscribe its right to hire on merit would be resisted with all the resources at its command. Indian industry shares the nation's resolve to address the deprivation suffered by the SC/ST communities and commits to stepping up its Affirmative Action agenda in the years to come to ensure that India becomes a land of equal opportunity.