



## Rural BPOs give women a fair deal

Padmaja Shastri | TNN

**Hyderabad:** If you thought gender bias was loaded against women in rural areas, it does not seem to reflect at least in one area — rural business processing organisations (BPOs). In fact, most BPOs in rural India declare that over 60 per cent of their employees are women and in some cases, it is even 100 per cent.

"While in terms of skill-sets and their understanding a task/project, women are as good as men. But women tend to stay on for loyalty sake and are less likely to jump ship," said Ashwanth G, HR manager of Desicrew Solutions, a rural BPO promoted by Ashok Jhunjhunwala of IIT Madras.

And in the rural set-up, there are few such other jobs on offer, said Ashwanth. He spoke to TOI on the sidelines of a seminar on rural BPOs organised by Byrraju Foundation, which operates GramIT, a rural BPO.

About 80 per cent of the employees of Desicrew, which is operating in seven villages of Tamil Nadu, are women and it also has two all-women centres.

According to Mithun Chittilapilly, director of Vintes, rural boys have more opportunities to go out to cities for better pay-



ing jobs, while girls usually stay back in the village because of societal/family reasons, even if they are educated.

All 100 people working with Vintes, operating in three Kerala villages, are women.

But lack of other opportunities is not the only reason why women are more in number in rural BPOs.

"We give the same entrance test for both boys and girls and have no gender discrimination in our intake policy. But somehow girls seem to be more successful in our test and 75 of our 125 people are girls," said C S Gopinath, senior vice-president of HDFC Bank, who set up the bank's first BPO at Nellore in Andhra Pradesh through its subsidiary Atlas Development Facilitators Company.

For Source for Change (SFC), an all-women BPO founded by IndiCorps Fellows and incubated by the Piramal Foundation at Bagar, a village in Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan, the focus on women is a way of tapping dormant talent.

"While there is a high rate of female literacy in the area, they are not employed due to lack of opportunities and social reluctance," said Karthik Raman of SFC.

While empowerment of rural women is

the driving factor for some rural BPOs, JSsoft Solutions, part of the JSW Group, which currently has an all-women BPO "The Data Hali" at Bellary in Karnataka, it is also a matter of necessity.

"Many fathers do not like the idea of sending their daughters to work along with boys. And if perchance, any girl goes out with a boy for a movie, the social stigma is so high that the

whole village will boycott us. So, it made sense to have a women-only BPO," said Madhukar Rajagopal, CEO of JSsoft.

In fact, Ashwanth says that everytime he has to interview a girl, he has to undergo an interview by her family and once they are satisfied, the chances of the girl staying on are much higher.

And as other women see the change in personality, self-esteem and social status after taking up the BPO job, they too want to join in, creating a ripple effect, according to most rural BPOs.

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SOURCE FOR CHANGE, AN ALL-WOMEN BPO