Inclusive Leadership Takes Center Stage at EKAM Retail Summit 2025

EKAM - The All Inclusion Summit 2025, jointly hosted by the Retailers Association of India (RAI) and Trust for Retailers and Retail Associates of India (TRRAIN), was successfully held on November 20th, 2025, at The Westin Mumbai Garden City, Goregaon. The summit's theme, "Equity In Action - Moving from Intent to Impact," emphasized practical approaches to uncover and address systemic inequities in recruitment, compensation, promotion, and access to opportunities. It aimed to help organizations move beyond symbolic efforts and integrate equity into their core policies, systems, and culture.

Bringing together thought leaders, policymakers, and industry experts, the summit featured compelling discussions on topics like "From Pledges to Progress: Building Measurable DEI Outcomes" and "Retail for All: Making Stores, Services, and Supply Chains Inclusive." Attendees gained valuable real-world examples and actionable insights for developing a retail ecosystem that effectively serves diverse consumers and communities at every interaction point.

Eminent speakers at the summit included leaders and experts such as Harish Iyer, Sr. VP & Head - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Axis Bank Ltd. Rohith Kumar, CHRO, Arvind Fashions Ltd.; Neelam Ahluwalia, VP - Learning & Inclusion, BigBasket, G R Venkatesh, CHRO, Reliance Retail Ltd.; Anjali Goel, Head - HR, V-Mart Retail Ltd. among others.

With a commitment to advancing these vital conversations, RAI and TRRAIN are dedicated to creating a more inclusive retail landscape that not only enhances business performance but also enriches the communities they serve.

Emphasizing the vital role of inclusion in the retail sector, Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO of the Retailers Association of India (RAI), said, *"Inclusion in India is both a social need and a core business strategy for retail. Our stores and supply chains bring together people from many regions, identities and abilities, yet many still face barriers of safety, access and confidence. When retailers invest in fair hiring, accessible workplaces and supportive managers for women, persons with disabilities, queer colleagues and people from underserved communities, they build teams that understand customers better and create more human experiences in store. The evidence is clear that inclusive workplaces strengthen engagement, reduce attrition and enhance employer branding, especially on the frontline. The opportunity now is to move from individual good practices to sector-wide standards, so that dignity and equity become the norm across Indian retail."*

At EKAM, the significance of inclusivity in the retail industry took centre stage. Highlighting this, BS Nagesh, Founder of TRRAIN and Chairman of Shoppers Stop, said, *""Retail has always been about people. For inclusion to thrive, we must move beyond intent and rebuild our systems so that every individual — irrespective of gender, disability, socio-economic background, or identity — has a fair chance to contribute and grow. Over the years, we have seen that when frontline employees feel respected and supported, their confidence and performance rise dramatically. EKAM demonstrates that the industry is ready to take the next step: embedding equity into everyday practice. The journey is long, but every inclusive workplace brings us closer to a more humane and future-ready retail sector."*

On the same lines speaking on inclusivity in retail, ***Ameesha Prabhu (CEO, TRRAIN),*** *said, "Inclusion in retail is not an abstract ideal. It directly shapes how people experience work, earn livelihoods, and build confidence. At TRRAIN, we see every day how access, training, and a supportive environment can transform the lives of women, persons with disabilities, and individuals from marginalised communities. EKAM is a reminder that inclusion becomes real only when organisations invest in capability, empathy, and long-term commitment. When retailers design systems that work for everyone, the benefits extend far beyond the workplace and into the communities they serve."*

Harish Iyer (Senior Vice President & Head – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Axis Bank) *further expressed on the DEI scenario in retail sector, "In India, inclusion must begin with the understanding that diversity has always been present; it is society that has not always recognised it fully. A meaningful DEI agenda acknowledges the realities faced by women, persons with disabilities, members of the queer community, and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, and works consciously to remove the barriers that limit their participation.*

True inclusion is achieved when organisations align their policies, language, infrastructure, and everyday behaviours to ensure dignity and access for all. When workplaces uphold these principles, they move beyond compliance and contribute to a more compassionate, equitable, and future-ready India."

Dr. Niru Kumar, CEO, Ask Insights | D&I Consultant | Advisory Board Member, Election Commission of India, expressed, *"Inclusion in India must recognise the rich diversity of our people and the structural barriers that often prevent them from participating fully in work and public life. Effective D&I is not about isolated initiatives. It requires a consistent, systems-led approach that addresses bias, builds accessibility and strengthens psychological safety. When organisations prioritise fairness for women, persons with disabilities, queer colleagues and individuals from varied social and cultural backgrounds, they create workplaces where people feel valued and able to contribute with confidence. This is not only the right thing to do. It also leads to better decision making, greater trust and a healthier organisational culture that reflects the true spirit of an inclusive India."*

The Summit touched upon various aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion, with discussion and insights around topics such as as From Pledges to Progress: Building Measurable DEI Outcomes which focused on showcasing how organizations can move beyond symbolic DEI pledges to deliver measurable, data-driven impact, as well as Retail for All: Making Stores, Services, and Supply Chains Inclusive, exploring how inclusion can be embedded across the retail ecosystem—from store design and customer experience to product choices, supplier diversity, and ethical sourcing.

Inclusion in India must act both as a human imperative and a strategic business asset: according to Boston Consulting Group's India report, when employees feel included the share who say they are happy rises by 31 percentage points and motivation increases by nearly 25 points while attrition is cut in half; meanwhile, the Deloitte 'Women @ Work' survey of 5,000 women found that those working at Gender Equality Leader organisations scored loyalty at 76/100, productivity at 75/100 and belonging at 71/100—three times higher than women in less-inclusive firms. These findings underline that when organisations build workplaces where women, persons with disabilities, queer colleagues and others from diverse backgrounds feel valued, supported and safe, they not only foster dignity and purpose but also unlock better decision-making, stronger customer connection and healthier, more resilient organisations.

About RAI:

Retailers Association of India (RAI) is the unified voice of Indian retailers. RAI works with all the stakeholders for creating the right environment for the growth of the modern retail industry in India. It is a strong advocate for retailing in India and works with all levels of government and stakeholders to support employment growth and career opportunities in retail, to promote and sustain retail investments in communities from coast to coast, and to enhance consumer choice and industry competitiveness.
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About TRRAIN

Founded in 2011 by Mr. B. S. Nagesh, Trust for Retailers and Retail Associates of India (TRRAIN) is a 12A, 80G, public charitable trust that aims to catalyse a change in the retail

industry by empowering people through retail and allied sectors, creating sustainable livelihoods for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and young women from marginalised backgrounds.