

Women can also ‘Man’ the Marine Outfits

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Ancient Thoughts

Sea faring dates back to Prehistoric era. Thousands of years ago Daredevil sea farers braved the seas for maritime trade and also for expansion of possessions. This is regarded as one of the oldest professions in the human civilization. Since the earliest days of sailing the sailor used to coin the term “Man the Ship”; which meant that the crew of the ship should take up their duty post. It is understandable that they assumed that only man would be courageous enough and physically strong to take up such a challenging and rigorous profession like sea voyage.

Impact of Industrialization

This isn't true anymore. Nowadays women are venturing into all professions including seafaring. With the progress of civilization women are exploring the challenging frontiers which were once unknown to them. Especially after the

industrial revolution, the women folk discovered many professions where they are more adept and suitable. Hence we have witnessed ever expanding participation of womenfolk into all types of profession including the arduous enterprises. Two world wars paved the way for the women to venture into more challenging professions infested with risk of life including participating in combat duties at various echelons. With further advance of technology we are experiencing a new era of greater participation of women in almost all the conceivable fields of professions including seafaring.

Let me highlight the issue from a different and more exciting perspective. Many of you might have witnessed the final of the women world cup soccer match. I was glued to the television for the whole duration of the match. The match was simply outstanding and gut-

wrenching. All the 22 women footballers of United States and Holland did put up a spectacular and breathtaking show of epic football. Their strength, skill, stamina and determination was evident in every move of the game. They were no way less than any of their male counterpart. The last goal shot from a distance of 31 meters entered the net with a thunderous power and lightning speed. It reflects the cumulative force that was applied while shooting the ball. They not only displayed power, but also endurance, skill, strategy and temperament. It would not be an exaggeration to state that today's women are ready to man any duties they are entrusted with, including seafaring.

Participation of Women and Excellence

There is ample evidence that investing women is the most effective way to lift communities, companies and even countries. It has been experience that countries with more gender equality have better economic growth. Companies with more women leaders perform better. Peace agreements that include women are more durable. Parliament with more women enact more legislation on social issues such as health, education anti-discrimination and child support. The evidence is clear. Equality for women means progress for all.

Participation of Women in the Maritime Fields

As per the record of international maritime organizations only two percent of the employed manpower in the maritime industry are women. Of them 94% are employed for tourism duties mainly in the service sectors. This is highly disproportional. Considering the fact that the women are excelling in their

academic pursuit, their employment in the maritime industry is highly insignificant.

There are many avenue in the maritime fields where women can easily contribute. It is not necessary that personnel working in the maritime fields would have to be employed in the ships only. There are many opportunities in the shore assignment also. As a matter of fact for every sea vacancy there are more than four to five shore support facilities which are needed to be manned. Women can be employed effectively in the field of administration, education and training, traffic control and communication, logistic issues, legal matters, financial management, trade and commerce and information management and control. In those fields they are likely to perform better than their male counterparts. As far as ship's duties are concerned modern ships with advanced machineries and equipment are more user friendly. The ships do not have huge wheels and large chains anymore which would require lot of strength and endurance to operate. Today women can operate modern ship's equipment very comfortably and conveniently. Furthermore the habitability and comfort standard of the modern ships are conducive for the women. Women would surely love and enjoy to work in that environment.

Ongoing Multilateral Efforts

Concerned agencies are needed to overcome this situation and open up the opportunities for women employment in the maritime industries. United Nations sustainable development goal (SDG) have laid specific focus on women empowerment. SDG five encapsulate dedicated agenda for women empowerment. Ongoing global women

empowerment drive is a conspicuous game changer with an all-encompassing visibility. Hence there is no reason that maritime field should be excluded from the spirit and drive of the ongoing empowerment campaign. Many nations and organizations are launching efforts at their own level. But much are needed to be done. Most of these initiatives are undertaken in isolation without having much co-ordinations with other similar initiatives of the sister organizations.

Regional and global co-operation with specific focus on women participation would have been ensured. Some of the developing countries of Asia and Africa including Bangladesh are pioneering the vision of gender equality in their respective societies with stupendous success. Bangladesh is certainly in the forefront in empowering their women. We have had lady Prime Ministers who had ruled the country for 22 years. There are many other high ranking constitutional and governmental posts attended by women including Speaker, leader of the Opposition Party and Secretaries in the Ministries. Many women are also finding employment opportunities in the Armed Forces of Bangladesh and also in the shipping sector. There are more than few dozens of women who are serving as the Captains in the Merchant Ships in many countries in the world. Number of women employed in other jobs at sea and ashore are encouragingly high and increasing. There are 53000 women who are serving in US Navy alone of which 36000 are officers and 21 of them have risen to the rank of Admiral. In addition there are many international organizations for the women seafarers which are spearheading the advancement of women as a key resource in the maritime industry.

International Women Seafarers Foundation, Nautilus International women's Forum , MENA & Africa Arab Women's international Maritime forum and Sea Sister are few notable one among the many who are serving the interest of women seafarers in different parts of the world.

Initiatives of International Maritime Organization

International Maritime Organization and World Maritime University are taking the drive a step further. IMO has taken a strategic approach towards enhancing the contribution of women as key maritime stakeholders. IMO is strongly committed to helping its member states achieve the UN agenda for sustainable development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) particularly Goal 5 to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". IMO's gender programme was initiated in 1988. Since then IMO gender and capacity building programme has helped put in place an institutional framework to incorporate a gender dimension into IMO's policies and programmes and procedures. This has supported access to Maritime training and employment opportunities for women in maritime sectors.

In the year 2000 international maritime organization has launched a 15 points agenda to enhance participation of women folk in the maritime industry. The organization has been conducting workshops and seminars to grow awareness among the decision makers of maritime industry to accommodate more number of women in the maritime sectors. Maritime university has been offering a greater number of courses for the aspiring women seafarers.

Current Thoughts

The ice is melting. But it would need much stronger commitment and dedicated efforts from every corner. With this spirit, international maritime organization has very rightly chosen the theme of this year world's maritime day which is "Empowering women in the maritime industry." The theme is certainly timely and deserve appreciation. But let us not stay abound with the theme of this year maritime day

only. Let us make this a pressing agenda in our "to do" list. Every nation that uses the sea should promote, facilitate and recruit more women in the maritime sector. This is not to promote women but to promote global prosperity. This would make the industry more competitive, productive and highly proficient. We must believe women can also "man" the maritime outfit. This will benefit the industry and benefit the world.