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THE PROCESS OF EMPOWERING WOMEN AND ACHIEVING GENDER SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: The recent years have witnessed the rise of a number of prominent female personalities who have broken the glass ceiling and have proved themselves as no less than men. Women have achieved triumph in every field they have set their foot in. In almost every society, initially the role of men and women were socially constructed, restricting women from stepping out; which led to the impeded development of women. Gender sustainability was one of the 17 sustainable development goals of the UNDP. Gender sustainability is a prerequisite for a developed society. Women and men have idiosyncratic brilliance which needs to come out for the betterment of mankind. Restricting women from working outside the household and thus, limiting their roles to household works, is equivalent to suppressing half of the world's population and depriving the world of almost half of the available ideas and thoughts. Women bring with them positivity in the working environment which leads to the increased efficiency of both men and women. Working women are likely to be financially independent which helps them stand against the physical and mental abuse they face in their daily lives. Women also build a work culture that is inspiring and motivating. They bring in with them a healthy competition and a bonding which helps their company or association to grow successfully and potentially.

Keywords: Women, Gender sustainability, Motivating, Healthy competition

Introduction:

"Feminist as a person is the ones who believe in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes."

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichu

Our epics and puranas are known for their plurality of narrative strategies and multiplicity to touch upon all possible aspects of human life. Kalidasa's Shakuntala narrates the story of a woman who, though brought up in a domestic setup, nurtured in patriarchal exclusion and taught the values of docility and domesticity, fought for her moral right, thus, putting the kings to shame. There are other instances of narrative studies of remarkable bhakti by women. Meera and Avvaiyar challenged the patriarchal system by being firm in their opinions and reflecting upon their identity as individuals, rather than being someone's wife or daughter. From time immemorial, women have formed an essential part of the society and its diverse fields. They have performed miraculous tasks and gone to prove themselves in almost all the aspects of life and society.

Role of Women in Armed Forces:

In India, the armed forces, i.e., the army, the air force and the Navy started inducting women for short service commission in the year 1992. Earlier, women were restricted to the medical sector of the army. Women have taken up the posts of fighter pilots and have flown planes to combat zones. The Navy is also getting prepared to induct women as sailors. While the efforts of the air force and Navy are highly appreciable, the army is a startling exception. Women, in the army, have rendered services in almost every field and done almost every job except for combat roles. The army still doesn't allow women to serve in the infantry and armoured corps. Women have rendered services in the army as doctors, nurses, engineers, signallers, and whatnot. On February 17, 2020, the Supreme Court of India cleared the way for women to acquire permanent commission and commanding roles in the Indian army which were earlier restricted to men. The Supreme Court said that women officers will now be on par with the males and will be allowed the "command and criteria appointments". It was seen as a landmark in empowering women and ensuring them equal rights and opportunities. But still combat roles on the frontline are closed for women. In India, at present, only the Air Force allows women in combat roles. Women make up about 3.8% of the world's second largest army, i.e., the Indian army, with 9,449 women personnels. The percentage of women in the Air Force is as high as 13% and 6% in the Navy. In 2019, the Indian army inducted 364 women personnels, whereas the Air Force and Navy inducted 77 and 54 women respectively. Women have played a huge range of roles in the army; they have laid communication lines and disarmed mines and defused bombs.

Women are indeed an irreplaceable part of the Armed Forces. In North Korea, military service has been made mandatory for all women between 17 and 20 years of age till they reach the age of 23. Out of every 100 people in North Korea, 7 are women soldiers and out of every 100 people's army soldiers, 15 are females. They form about 40% of the Korean army, amounting to 380,000. Israel is one of the few nations that mandate military service for women. In Israel, 65% women serve in the army, while 25% opt out due to religious reasons and the rest 10% are exempted on the basis of physical, emotional or marital causes. The US military allowed women in combat in the year 1979. In the fiscal year, 2014, women constituted about 14% of the active duty army, amounting to 476,000, 23% of the army reserve and 16% of the Army National Guard amounting to 74,000. About 35,000 women serve in the Russian army.

Over the years, India and the world have witnessed a number of great female soldiers. One such is General Punita Arora who is the first woman with a rank of lieutenant general in Indian Armed Forces and the first female vice admiral in the Indian Navy. She served for 37 years and received as many as 15 medals for her exceptional service to the nation. The all-women crew of INS Tarini probed their mettle when they successfully became the first Indian women crew to circumnavigate the globe. A number of women have done exceptionally well despite the problems they face.

Working in an all-men environment and doing a job in a field that is considered the epitome of a man is a colossal challenge in itself. But, discrimination and under representation are not the only issues they face, social, behavioral and psychological problems also obstruct their path. They are also confronted by medical issues; they are forced to take long leaves due to pregnancy and childcare. They also gave the shortage of tampons and sanitary napkins out there in the field. Sexual harassment is the major hurdle for almost all of the women personnels. This hampers their self-confidence and dignity. What makes their situation even worse is that their complaints are not paid heed to, and hence, a lot of such cases are never reported. Even if they report, they are considered troublemakers. Low acceptance by their male colleagues also bothers them. Usually, they are the marginalized group and are not given any weightage when it comes to any major decisions making. They have to work twice as hard as men to prove themselves. According to a survey, a huge number of men in the Armed Forces think of women colleagues as Intruders of their privacy. In spite of all these hurdles, women still keep their morale high and strive to make their place in the Armed Forces.

Women in Administration and Politics:

From Queen Elizabeth to Catherine the Great, history has witnessed a number of miraculous women administrators who have set precedents for generations to come. There existed a time when women's voices could hardly reach the public sphere. But like everything else, society too changed with time. Today, women acquire some of the most prestigious posts in India and the world. Women in the administrative field have done exceptionally well to break the glass ceiling. Anna Rajam George was the first IAS officer of independent India and Kiran Bedi was the first female IPS officer. Women have been working assiduously and have achieved milestones. Women like Iska Basant Joshi, the first women ICS Officer of British India and Ira Singhal, the first physically challenged women who cracked the civil services exam in general category and also topped the UPSC exam in 2014 are an inspiration for a vast number of budding officers out there.

Women form great leaders, administrators and executives. They are better than men when it comes to balancing professional and personal leadership skills. Women are naturally empathetic and understand their people and motivate them. They are better than men when it comes to acknowledging the efforts made by the folks. Women like Jacinda Ardeen, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the mother of a girl, has proved that no barriers are ever high enough to prevent a woman from accomplishing her duty skillfully, when she brought her daughter, Neve, to the UN General Assembly. She proved how well a woman can balance her professional life with her personal one and slammed all those who considered women's participation in jobs outside the home as a threat to her home and personal life

India has also witnessed puissant women leaders, from Indira Gandhi to Sushma Swaraj, from Sarojini Naidu to Nirmala Sitharaman, from Jayalalitha to Asha Sinha and the list is still endless. In India, women make up about 27.2% of the total labor force. But women are still not adequately represented when it comes to administrative roles; out of the 88 secretary rank officers in India, women hold up only 11 such posts. In June 2019, according to the government data, women formed only 19.14% of the total officers working under the central level at the joint secretary level or above that. Across the states and the union territories, of the 32 chief secretaries, only 1 is a woman. In the past three years, out of the 2848 candidates selected by UPSC, only 675 were women. In India, women occupy 12.6% of the Lok Sabha seats and 11.5% of the Rajya Sabha seats, giving India the 148th rank out of the 192 countries. While countries like Rwanda (1st rank) have the highest representation of women in the parliament, with 61.3% women in the lower house and 38.5% in the upper house, countries like Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu have absolutely no women in their parliaments. As per the UNDP data, women make up about 45% of public administration, but the high degree of variation makes the range wide enough to constitute 3% to 77%.

It cannot be denied that women have been underrepresented in administrative and executive fields. The narrow mindset of the people is one of the major reasons behind this. Makers do not want to accept females working in the administrative sector and try to overpower and overshadow them. Women, no doubt, form a really sensible and salient part of the administrative field. People ought to understand and appreciate their role in administration and give them the share of power they deserve. Women, when they take up administrative posts, bring revolutions and make history. Suppressing their voice is suppressing the voices of nearly half of the population of the planet.

Women in Business:

The recent decades have witnessed a welcoming space for women entrepreneurs. Businesses, in recent years, have grown in unprecedented ways under the increasing leadership of women. A number of companies have entered the realm of prosperity under women CEOs and leaders. Women play a significant role in almost all of the businesses, micro or macro, all over the globe. Women make great entrepreneurs and business owners but the male half of the population is still reluctant to accept them; and in spite of proving themselves equal to men, if not better, at every stage, women are still being pushed out.

Gazillions of reasons prove why women are better business owners than men. It is psychologically proven that the intuition of women is very real. Another reason is that women are less impetuous than men. They are less likely to engage in arguments and fights. In any threatening situation, men have been generally observed to switch to the fight mode; whereas women generally deal with such situations in a calmer and more rational way. A cohesive and purposive team is an essential for any business to prosper and succeed. Women are better at communicating with their employees and they keep the level of their employees' comfort high which increases their efficiency and paves the way for a successful business. Women are more resilient as they had to and still have to work twice as hard as men and hence, are more hard-working and strong willed than men. According to the stats, women owned businesses are 1.7 times more productive than male owned businesses.

Indra Nooyi occupied the position of the president of PepsiCo in July 2016 and the flat profits of the company in 2016 jumped to 16% in 2017. Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's COO, led the company to a record-breaking increase in revenue to 57%, or 26.9 billion dollars, during her tenure. Along with being one of the most successful COOs of the world, Sandberg is also the author of *Option B*, which topped the best seller spring list in 2017. This shows how skilled a

Woman can be when it comes to multitasking. Another example is Ananya Birla, who became an established entrepreneur at 17 years of age and became a world famous musician at 25 years of age. She also founded *Svatantra Microfin* at a young age of 17 that provides microfinance to rural women, and *CuroCarte*. She is also the co-founder of *MPower*. The founder of *Biocon*, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, is one of the richest and self-made businesswomen.

Women have achieved great heights and attained prosperity. Women owned businesses and enterprises comprise 39% of America's small businesses and employ almost 9 million people and generate over 1.6 trillion dollars of revenue. In the period 2007-2016, these enterprises increased by 45%, which was five times the national average. (Source: Score Association, 2017).

Conclusion:

Women have proved themselves in every work they have done. In spite of the resentment they face from their own families and the society, they have done exceptionally well and are working assiduously. Women have set precedents and inspirations for millions of people. Women are still not accepted by their male colleagues. These are disrespected and considered inferior. The world and the society need to change and acknowledge the efforts of the women and their invaluable contribution towards the betterment and upliftment of the society.

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