

Embracing Womanhood

There were times when the prime role of woman was confined to her household duties. But as times changed, the world realised that her potential was meant to be explored in various fields. Today's woman is a hard taskmaster, managing between a homely wife, a shrewd boss, a caring mother, a genuine companion, with such ease and grace that is remarkably appreciable. This article highlights not only the challenges and opportunities faced by women today but also honours some women of substance, puts forward some social issues and hopes to offer realistic means towards creation of a gender unbiased society.



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Women today have scaled great heights. They are impervious to the traditional beliefs of our society in a non-defiant but affirming way. They know what they want. They are not apprehensive in discovering their capability and carving their own niche in these contemporary yet conventional times. They know striking a right balance between personal life and career is a challenge and they have learnt to conquer it with grace. Today we talk of empowering women, but they have done their best bit to devise for themselves a society where they are no more weaker sex. They have been continuously hitting on the correlation of weakness with gender.



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Swearing by the principles of equal opportunities as propagated by the Constitution itself, the role and contribution of women in society at large can never be completely underlined, however it is articulated.

When we speak of *woman on top*, many images flicker in our mind. Mother Teresa spent her entire life for the cause of humanity and ultimately became synonymous with kindness. She being a profound missionary instilled in us a sense of pride towards not only womanhood but towards our potential to embrace mankind selflessly. Though human beings of this order are rare, there are many who in some way have been able to ignite the grey matters of our society. Women leaders have a remarkable capacity of pulling the strings of our entire nation and creating a melodious, harmonious reverberation that a country of such demeanour as ours must command. Women like the politically strong and elegant Mrs. Indira Gandhi have become a subject of admiration not only for their sophistication but for their competence, passion and an unwavering faith in what they do. If we were to write a write up on remarkable women, we would surely find it hard to miss Shahnaz Hussain's name, the acclaimed and renowned entrepreneur who took life hands on and attained a remarkable and deserved credit for her contribution to the world of beauty business. She not only carved a coveted place for herself but proved that women can do wonders once they set their heart and soul to pursue their goal. Reflections from the past and present reveal a lot about women and their competence in various fields of our existence. When the beauty of women

is compared with that of the moon, Kalpana Chawla actually had the nerve to go up to moon. She will always be remembered for her splendid courage and never-say-die and follow-your-dreams attitude. We cannot ignore the contribution in business of the corporate women leaders like Ms. Chanda Kochhar, Ms. Indra Krishnamurthy Nooyi and Dr. Kiran Majumdar-Shaw. Ms. Kochhar, the CEO of the ICICI Bank, proved that if women like them had it in them, the world will have to ignore their gender and give back the dues that they deserve. Ms. Nooyi, PepsiCo's Chairperson and CEO, with her glaring

confidence, charming zest and don't-mess-with-me attitude leaves us all aspiring to be like her. Dr. Majumdar-Shaw became India's first woman Brew Master and founded Biocon India in 1978 which has grown to be the biggest biopharmaceutical firm in India today. How can we forget Melanee Verveer, the US ambassador for global woman's issues, who embark and enlighten the society and support the cause of woman empowerment? These are just a few examples of the women who have dared and achieved, dreamt and accomplished, and earned respect of all and proved that the whole world has to step aside for the person who is willing to make a path and determined to leave a legacy for humankind.

It is imperative today that each woman should understand the role she plays in society. Demand for professionals is growing and so is the number of women professionals. Women professionals have to perform well with an additional responsibility of managing their home. They are no more hesitant in setting up their priority and are rapidly reaching for the sky. Workplace often pressures women too to do overtime and today they know how to deal with this. They are not unwilling to add responsibilities to their profile. They understand a job's demands and that nothing is enough to satisfy a professional.

However, there is a need to address certain challenges faced generally by women today. Their attitude today means business. We live in a society where we have an opportunity on the basis of our potential. Gender has a minimal or at times no role to play. Women have realised their true potential by experiencing all fields of existence. We today

find to our surprise woman cab drivers gracefully executing their job. There are women in chartered accountancy, law, medicine, education, politics, social activism, management, and in every other field.

In The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), the setting up of a Women Steering Group is analogous to woman empowerment in society. Being a woman chartered accountant, I have discovered not only a sense of independence and security but a responsibility to cultivate the best of talents our society can utilise. Fortune comes with a social responsibility. Torch bearers of the CA profession must inspire a vision for our society to be free from the bias of gender. Woman CAs have established themselves enjoying immense opportunity. The CA profession, amongst others, demands and enjoys a tremendous respect because of its unbiased approach towards gender. Here individuals are recognised for the traits they possess and not for the gender they belong to. Gradually number of women in all professions including the chartered accountancy is increasing. Women are getting empowered gradually through their acceptance in all professions.

However, we still hear cases of deaths by dowry. We are not shocked by the increase in number of rape cases. Female infanticide is still prevalent and very visible in television soaps. We need to confront strongly rather than being mere spectators to such anti-social practices in our society. We must stop these anti-social elements from bringing disgrace to the society we live in. There are committed voluntary organisations in all parts of this world which work for the uplift of women and girl children for creating an unblemished, fearless and independent space for everybody. People in these organisations are trying hard to bring comfort to their crisis and create goodness enough to overpower the evil in our society. We don't need much money to

convince our society to tread on the path of righteousness and equality. The foundation we lay today would look down on us if it's not strong enough. It's time that we seriously start learning from the crises that we have created. No society can progress and prosper if women there don't enjoy freedom and respect. Gender must never bring disadvantage to any person. Somebody may say that on one hand we proclaim men and women to be equal and then there is advantage for women in our society. Actually by giving advantage, we acknowledge that they are at a disadvantage and yet they are not contributing less than what others contribute.

Being a woman professional, I am scared at times to live in a place where there is news of crime against women. Naina Sahni, Priyadarshini Mattoo, Shivani Bhatnagar, Natasha Singh, Madhumita Shukla and Jessica Lal murder cases being high-profile cases are just a few examples. Actually numerous such crimes against women could be discovered from the files of the police stations across our country. These heinous crimes are an impediment to our being as humans – they are a question mark on our existence as ingredient of a civil society. We should ask ourselves how seriously we consider fighting against such evils that exist in our society. Despite the fact that women have made their mark in all fields, our mindset has not changed. Still they are treated as a burden in their families. They are not men's counterpart but distinct individuals like anybody else on this earth. Let us hope there will be a time when we could call ourselves members of a civil society where equality and individuality is respected, where there is an opportunity for all.

To conclude my treatise on womanhood, I want to voice the fears of a girl child who is yet to be born: *Let me see the light of the day; Let me be born; Let me see the happiness when I am born; Let me not die; Let me survive-I am a life force.*

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