

# Maritime Sector Promotes Greater Participation of Women



**E**quality of women is a concept that is not limited to books any more. Shipping has been predominantly a male-dominated industry and women occupy only a minor percentage of the total maritime workforce. In line with the IMO's approach "Training-Visibility-Recognition", the Ministry of Shipping has taken concerted steps towards increasing women workforce in key maritime roles.

According to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals related to Gender Equality, 2019-20 has been earmarked by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as the year for empowering women in the maritime community. Towards this, several member states the world over have initiated measures to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and highlight the contribution of women in the maritime sector. Economies across the world stand to benefit by empowering women as it not only spurs growth and development but also benefits the global maritime community in the drive towards safe, secure, clean and sustainable shipping.

## Indian Maritime Sector Opens its Doors to Women

Shipping has historically been a male-dominated industry not just due to the nature of work involved but also the work environment in the ship, and the long voyages undertaken, apart from the tough living conditions on board. The Secretary General of the IMO, on the World Maritime Day 2019 observed on September 26 this year, said how empowering women is now an unavoidable necessity and urged member states to address deep-seated structural, institutional and cultural barriers. A huge talent pool of women is available for the maritime community to harness as gender-diverse teams are deemed more productive than the male-dominated ones. Besides, gender diverse workplaces promoted better job satisfaction, employee engagement and retention. In support of the UN initiative, India opened the sector to women in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, joining some select Scandinavian and European countries and the US.

## Training-Visibility-Recognition

Apart from creating awareness, the IMO now aims to direct the member states to enable women to train alongside men in their maritime institutes and acquire the high-level competence that the maritime industry demands. This would be done by encouraging women to attend high-level technical training in the maritime sector in developing countries. The idea is to create an environment in which women are identified and selected for career development opportunities in maritime administrations, ports and maritime training institutes.





*Shri Mansukh Mandaviya with women seafarers*

Addressing the country on the World Maritime Day 2019, Shri Mansukh Mandaviya, Minister of State for Shipping (I/c) and Chemicals & Fertilizers spoke of the respect and empowerment the Indian culture had accorded to women. Extending greetings to all women seafarers, he said they were showing equal enthusiasm and bravery in serving the nation.

India has taken substantial steps to facilitate the entry of women in the maritime field in various capacities. India took the lead in opening this male-dominated bastion by allowing women to train for both deck and engineering roles onboard ships. With sheer perseverance and defying societal pressures, women like Captain Radhika Menon, who made a humble beginning as the first woman Radio Officer onboard a ship has made it to the top by becoming the first lady to command oil tankers and also to receive the IMO Award for "Exceptional Bravery at Sea" in 2016. Many others like Ms Sonali Banerjee, the first woman engineer in the maritime fleet and Ms Reshma Naha, the first woman Hooghly pilot, also succeeded in reliving their passion for working at the sea. Apart from the seafaring profession taken up by dozens of women following in the footsteps of the pioneers, many women support the vast and diverse field of maritime operations. Operational and administrative roles in Indian ports and maritime boards have been performed by women from time immemorial. Innumerable maritime operations including calling out ships at "VTMS" or "Harbour controls", directing pilots and tugs to berth and unberth ships, managing traffic, supporting several administrative functions while working at the backend of the maritime operations, etc. are being successfully and efficiently performed by women.

The maritime world also encompasses the Indian Navy, which has been giving opportunities to women to join the service over nearly three decades. Lieutenant Shubhangi Swaroop recently broke the barrier by emerging as the first woman pilot to fly at sea. The maritime world will recall the "Navika Sagar Parikrama", a long and arduous 25 days' voyage, undertaken by six women officers of the Indian Navy who successfully circumnavigated the world in a small sailing boat, INSV Tarini.

