



We Urge The Government To Vaccinate Our Seafarers On Priority Basis.



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A pioneering interview with SCI's first woman CMD, Mrs. H. K. Joshi

As the first woman CEO of Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), leading the Maritime Industry,

► What are your expectations from the women seafarers of India?

Women are strong, though ironically they are considered as the 'weaker' sex but I believe Indian women are even stronger. Having said this, there is no reason to have anything but the highest of expectations from the Indian women seafarers. They have chosen the path less traveled in a male-dominated field, which is slowly changing in perception and becoming a more inclusive and diverse arena. This has also been the agenda of the IMO lately and they are taking concerted efforts in empowering the women seafarers through various measures including training programs to give them the added fillip and boost. The responsibility now lies with them to take on the challenges and forge ahead with conviction and belief that they will make a difference to the 'seafaring' and will be considered as serious contenders for the profession in future.

I expect to see the women seafarers honoring the coveted profession that they have chosen and discharging their duties with all diligence and perfection, expected of them as seafarers. I expect them to perform at the highest professional standards and raise the esteem of the industry and bring glory to it. I see them meticulously striving and achieving the safety standards aligned with the maritime standards and increasing the confidence within as well as outside the Industry for attracting more women to take on seafaring as a profession.

► How did your experience inspire you to form an all-women crew to head and operate a ship?

As everybody knows by now I started my career in a very secure profession, considered a haven by most, as a Lecturer in Delhi University in 1983. I created ripples in '80s at home and around when I decided to quit this haven within a year and move to uncharted domains which were dark and unknown to join the corporate world (ONGC). So I didn't land myself in the corporate world - I chose to do so and that was because I was seeking challenges or, as I now say, maybe, the challenges were seeking me. Having made my place in the mega Maharatna PSU which itself was an achievement, I once again had the urge to seek something more challenging and I joined SCI in February, 2015 as Director (Finance) and was the first woman Functional Director on the Board of SCI quite literally an alien for everyone within SCI and in the Maritime Industry. I knew that I wouldn't be welcomed but that in itself was a challenge and the fact that I have held multiple additional charges since 2017 till present when my formal appointment as CMD from December 2019, along with the present additional charge of Managing Director in the Indian Ports Global Ltd. should bear testimony that women are not only strong but capable too and, so long as you have the drive and the urge, learning is never a problem.

I felt that women, irrespective of the field that they work in, should be given an equal opportunity and platform based on their capability. And with these values and conviction, I set out to realize the dream that had seemed distant. I felt that the time had come to demonstrate and showcase the capability of women who in any case had been doing it, just that, as a Women Team, they needed the visibility. Most of the time, women are capable and can succeed; all they need, are opportunities. I knew I would be able to lead a company even before I was actually given the opportunity. With women this is a common problem that they are pre-judged and may not be the first choice and are often denied an opportunity and it takes time for acceptance and realization to dawn. Considering this background where I believed, "Don't limit your challenges but challenge your limits", Shri Amitabh Kumar, DG Shipping mooted this idea of an 'all-women officers' crew'. He said that it was a distant dream for the industry but SCI could do it and the 'seed' was

sown. It got me working on making the dream a reality. I was inspired to take it 'head on' looking at my past and drawing a parallel to it and I knew that the stereotypes have to be shattered and mindsets changed!

If the women's capabilities are doubted, then, inclusivity and diversity can never be promoted in a work space.

► How do you feel to have achieved such a great feat?

I am truly elated. I feel happy that we could take this challenge amidst the pandemic and in the Year of SCI's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations which caught the sails, as one would put it, on the eve of the International Women's Day 2021. The event not only marks the celebrations of empowered womanhood but also of the courage and committed endeavour of SCI and the involved stakeholders, after conceptualisation of the idea, to execute it to perfection. I owe it to my Team who believed in me, put in concerted efforts and meticulously planned the project to execution. There are a lot of people who worked behind the scene to make this dream a reality and this recognition is for them too.

I do feel that having reached this pinnacle myself, it's my duty to ensure that I provide more opportunities to capable women. I feel I have walked the talk and demonstrated trust and confidence in women professionals - if I don't believe in them, then who will? It was my moral as well as professional duty and I feel contented that we did it despite all odds in the midst of the pandemic. A question emerges though - why this event took so long for fructification; perhaps, due to the apprehension of an adverse outcome if things didn't go well on a vessel with only women onboard and the lack of the 'risk-taking' ability. It isn't the women seafarers' capability which was lacking there was something else that was amiss. SCI has the highest number of women seafarers, almost double that of the global average of 2 percent and the talent and the potential I believe was always there I simply provided them a platform and an opportunity symbolising our confidence and support and ensured that the feat got due acknowledgement and recognition for the history that was created.

► What are your future expectations for the Maritime Industry?

The IMO has in a recent initiative announced during the 1st Maritime SheEO Conference in Nov. 2020, that they would be sponsoring a number of women from developing countries to follow a new maritime leadership programme, as part of the Organization's ongoing work to support gender diversity in the maritime sector, which would include training, mentoring and networking opportunities. I would expect the maritime industry and the shipping companies to view integration of the women workforce into the maritime sector more seriously and promote the diversity and inclusion in the sector. We should also use the opportunity which the adverse conditions of the COVID crisis has brought on to rebuild inclusively, equitably and sustainably and put women's leadership and contributions at the heart of resilience and recovery and the sector managed such that all talent is used across the gender diversity.

► We at Seajob truly believe that SCI have given a gift to the women, what is your message to all the women of India on International Woman's Day?

My message shall be "Believe in yourself even if no one else does and success is bound to follow". Women have repeatedly demonstrated their skills, knowledge and networks to effectively lead everywhere and also in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. We have it in us to achieve the goals that we set our eyes on; it is just the belief that you need to keep working on and persevere to achieve it. There is a 'leader' in all of us and we need to set it free. This year's theme for the IWD 2021 is Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world which celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been synonymous with my dream and endeavour and it should not be a statement for a year but an agenda for a lifetime.

"Believe in yourself even if no one else does and success is bound to follow"



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