

Women are slowly making their mark in a male dominated field. Numbers still may not favour women, but their achievements are no small means.

Sreekala G

## WOMEN IN MARITIME

# RISE UP TO CHALLENGE

**W**omen have come a long way since those days when they were forced to disguise as men and assume fictitious names, to be on board a ship. Before 1900, the only way perhaps for a woman to take part in running a merchant vessel was through marriage or being the daughter of the captain. It was the world wars (I&II) that brought in a significant difference in the lives of women seeking a career in shipping and allied industries.

Historical data suggest that in mid-1943, at the height of the shipbuilding boom, nearly 65 per cent of the shipyard workers on the West Coast were women. Shipyard work became a boon not only for white women; but for Asians, Latinas, and African Americans. As never before, women as a whole had experienced financial and social independence by the end of the war. Thus the World War II changed their lives dramatically and there is no looking back since then.

"Our industry has so much to offer for all of us! We have such a broad working field. There are not many industries I know in which you could start, as a seafarer (in the lowest ranks) and then switch your job and become a pilot or start working for a ship broker, ships agent or shipowner as a technical inspector, nautical or quality inspector or manager or work





#### **WISTA India**

Women Maritime professionals in India may soon have another reason to celebrate. WISTA is likely to open a chapter in the country this year thanks to the efforts made by Sanjam Sahi, her sister and a few like-minded women in this field. "I have been trying to start a chapter for WISTA even since I joined the industry 10 years back. At that time we had even met the then chairperson of INPT Nerra Saggi. However, due to some reasons we could not establish the chapter. Now it is the right time to commence the Indian Chapter. Since there are a few women at middle and upper level it would be good to interact and have a forum," says Sanjam Sahi.



"If you start working ashore without sailing experience, there are so many job opportunities; including finance, human resource management, insurance and legal, to name a few."

**Karin Orsel, President**

Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), International & CEO, Management Facilities Group.

at any other company related to our industry. Also if you start working ashore without sailing experience, there are so many job opportunities; including finance, human resource management, insurance and legal, to name a few," says Karin Orsel, President, Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), International & CEO, Management Facilities Group.

Though she admits that women do not dominate any particular segment in maritime, they are present in all segments related to shipping and allied services. "There are several challenges before women in this industry. The first one is that in some countries half of the graduates are females, but in the end less than 10 per cent in Europe, 14 per cent in the US and less than 6 per cent in Asia will be found in a management or board position. There is lack of awareness among women that this is a viable career path. Also, the perception that there are barriers to women in entering this field," she points out.

She regrets that it is still challenging for female seafarers to get a job in some areas although women, who managed to get a job on board, fit in very well in their role.

Looking back, Orsel says, when she started in this industry in 1988 there were only a handful of women. "Today this number is increasing, which is good as we have a different perspective thus have an added value. Multicultural and diverse management teams perform better, having a broader view and are more profitable," she says.

Now the industry can boast of many women leaders and their achievements. The most prominent among them will be Ane Uggle, chairman of the foundation that controls Danish shipping and oil group A.P. Moller-Maersk

A.P. Moller-Maersk owns Maersk Line, the world's biggest container shipping company, and is an oil producer mainly in the Danish North Sea and Qatar. It is also engaged in tanker shipping,

supermarkets and has a one-fifth stake in Danske Bank. So in effect, a woman is in-charge of decision making at the world's biggest container shipping company.

Uggle, the youngest of three daughters of Moller, who headed the foundation until his death on April 16, owns 41.22 per cent of the stock and holds 50.60 per cent of the voting rights in A.P. Moller-Maersk.

Uggle had been deputy chairman since 1998 and a member of its board since 1986. She is also deputy chairman of the board of A.P. Moller-Maersk.

"In recent times with the advent of technology and mechanization more opportunities have opened up for women in the maritime and allied industries. Of the few women in the industry, some are there due to family lineage, but it has become a viable career for all women due to the advances in technology," says Sharmila Amin, one of the pioneers in Indian maritime industry.

Sharmila has been associated with the industry for about 28 years and has executed multiple projects in various capacities. She was the Head of Panprojects, South Asia- India, from 2007-2012, the specialist project division of the Panalpina Group. Prior to this, she was involved in turnkey project management and implementation for core sector industry projects, which also included customs clearance and inland transportation, for some of the major companies in the field.

If Uggle is the heiress of a family who took helm at Maersk, there are many professional women who made a mark in the industry without the help of any lineage. Royal Caribbean International for instance promoted Karin Stahre-Jansen to Captain in 2007. The Swedish mariner is the first female captain of its fleet as well as the first woman in the industry to command a major cruise ship.

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ALL WOMEN FROM SALES & POLAR RESEARCH VESSEL BILTA PUT DAL VOYAGE



In another major feat, SA *Aguilhas*, South Africa's ice-strengthened polar research vessel completed a five-day voyage from Cape Town to Durban with 34-member all woman crew in October 2010.

Women also made a major achievement in July this year, when Noliswa Bekiswa guided the largest ship to into Port of Ngqura. The Port handled cargo from the biggest container ship - MSC *Sofa* on July 8.

En route from the Far East, MSC *Sofa* was guided into the Port of Ngqura by Bekiswa, the fourth black female marine pilot to obtain an open licence in South Africa. This allows her to help navigate vessels of any size and type into South African waters. The 29 year-old said this would be one of her greatest achievements both personally and professionally.

In Durban the ship was guided in by fellow female marine pilot, Bongwiwe Mhambho, one of the three women who last year made history as Africa's first black, female marine pilots to obtain the open licence. Two tugs navigated by a team of all female tug masters escorted the vessel into port.

But there are no official statistics available on the number of women working in the maritime segment. "What I do know is that WISTA with more than 1,600 members on management level, globally represented in 34 countries is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more women active in our industry," says Orsel.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is also making efforts to increase the number of women in the industry and ensure parity between men and women. IMO produced its strategy for the integration of women into the maritime sector in 1988 and began implementation of the IMO Women In Development Programme in 1989, concentrating on equal access to

maritime training through both mainstream programmes and gender specific projects.

The increased percentage of women students at the World Maritime University and the International Maritime Law Institute (IMLI), Malta is one example of the "multiplier effect" of this Programme. IMLI already allocates 50 per cent of its places on its postgraduate maritime law courses to women.

IMO feels the need to attract well-trained and qualified young people to go to sea could lead the way open for more young women to become seafarers. "Shorter voyages and/or longer home leave, improved on board accommodation and facilities and proper training will work in attracting more women to the profession - but the benefits would be for all, regardless of gender," says a report based on IMO programmes.

Despite these efforts the participation of women in shipping and allied industries are skewed towards developed countries especially Europe and the Americas.

"There have been cultural drawbacks in terms of women taking to the corporate world in India, and this is true across all industries. However this trend has been changing over the past decade. The maritime industry is still in the nascent stages of getting itself organized as a sector, and the time is not far when women will choose to develop their career in the maritime industry as well," says Shantha Martin, CEO (NVOCC), Allcargo Global Logistics.

Another reason that prevents Indian women from joining maritime industry is the lack of women friendly policies. According to Sharmila, the industry is still dominated by men due to working conditions that are physically taxing and require women to be away from home for long periods. "Companies including MNCs do



Ave Ugula - Deputy Chairman of AP Moller - Maersk

not have women friendly policies in place and most people are skeptical whether women have the physical ability to carry out the manual labour required in this field," she says.

Initially, she also faced problems and overcame these hurdles through self-education. "Undeterred view and ambition are the only way forward for women to achieve their goal in this industry. Sheer hardwork and perseverance will help women reach the top. But, it'll be a while before we see women venturing out without any hesitation and fear. Though times are changing and many companies are hiring women we need to see the whole industry change, this can take a lot of time and effort," she points out.

Sanjam Sahi, director, Sitara Shipping, also feels most companies do not have women friendly rules and regulations. "There are very few facilities for working mothers. Most companies do not offer daycare or flexi-time options. Women often face harassment as well and there is no cell to guide them," she points out.

But she personally makes it a point to ensure that her company provides flexible time for young mothers and also give work from home options.

Sitara Shipping was set up by Sanjam's father Capt SS Sahi in 1981. Sanjam and her sister Sumeet Sahi are directors in the company and they take care of various divisions under the parent firm .

"The maritime industry is still in the nascent stages of getting itself organized as a sector, and the time is not far when women will choose to develop their career in this industry as well," says

**Shantha Martin**  
CEO (NVOCC),  
Allcargo Global  
Logistics





**Karin Orsel** has been working in the Maritime Industry since the age of 18. At 23, she became one of the shareholders of the Management Facilities Group (MFG). Her present position, which she holds since 2001 after a management buy-out, is CEO and majority shareholder of the international shipping company MFG, which partly owns and manages a fleet of 50 vessels. MFG employs approx 1,000 seafarers and 50 office staff employees. Besides running her own company, Karin is an active board member in a number of national and international associations and organisations including WISTA. She won the female entrepreneurship prize in The Netherlands in 2009 and is Ambassador of We Keep on Growing, this together with Princess Maxima of the Netherlands.

**Q** What was your inspiration for choosing a career in the maritime industry?

**A** I started working in this industry by coincidence at the age of 18 years, just like about 50 per cent of all people working in this industry. The other half is due to family ties. I had no role model that made me choose the maritime industry specific.

**Q** Did you personally face any challenges during your career and if yes, how did you overcome them?

**A** I have never faced any real challenges during

my career, I always did things my way, stayed loyal to my principles, was convinced of my knowledge and capabilities.

**Q** Are there policies in place to protect or ensure equal opportunities for women in this industry?

**A** The maritime industry is a global industry and we all have to fulfill the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) 2006 rules. These rules are not specific for men or women but are there to protect all our seafarers. Regarding the women working ashore, rules

vary across countries. Some countries have maternity leave rules for both men and women or have a financial compensation for daycare of the children. Some countries even have quota to make sure governments or companies hire more women at board levels. Overall, though, there is no one global rule thus it differs per country and region of the world you live in.

**Q** What is your advice for women who want to build a career in this industry?

**A** First of all, it starts with the right education. If you have finished the maritime academy and know exactly what you want, it might be an idea to look for a mentor who can guide you. The positive thing of being a member of WISTA is that we are a global organisation, with quite a number of members in the Asian region. This means that we could guide, mentor and reach out to women who are familiar with all that is important to build a career in this industry.

**Q** How many members does WISTA have from Asia?

**A** In 2010 13 per cent of our total membership was from the Asian region. We expect our Asian membership to increase and are discussing to start up in Indonesia and Vietnam. Presently we have National WITA Associations in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Philippines and Japan. [en](#)



Karin Orsel



Shantha Martin has over 17 years of work experience in various industry sectors. Though she says it was not a planned choice to enter the field of logistics, this MBA graduate in marketing has already made a mark in the industry. According to her, logistics is a very dynamic industry with full of opportunities to develop creative solutions and provides a global platform to operate in. Currently, she is the CEO – NVOCC at Allcargo Global Logistics.

Shantha Martin



**Q** What are the opportunities that exist for women in maritime and allied industries?

**A** I believe there is opportunity for women in every field and more so when we have come a long way in terms of gender equality. The maritime industry with its allied areas is no different. Women by nature are more profit conscious, meticulous and good at multi-tasking. They are also more flexible and are organised. This augurs well with the ever increasing demands that occur in the maritime industry more as one has to deal with lot of external factors like customs, shippers, regulators, unpredictability in weather etc on a day-to-day basis.

**Q** How easy/difficult is it for a woman to become a leader in this industry?

**A** Leadership is not about being a woman or a man, it is about demonstrating leadership. You need to have clarity of where you want to go, be able to take the team along with you and always stay focused as a leader. To become a leader you need to prove your worth as a leader, so in my view being a woman does not bring in any advantage or disadvantage in becoming a leader in any industry.

**Q** What was your inspiration in choosing this career?

**A** I am an MBA graduate in marketing, and have worked in different sectors, logistics came my way and I took it up the way I would

have taken up any other sector. One may say that I did not have to inspire myself to choose this career. Having come here I must say that it is a very dynamic industry with full of opportunities to develop creative solutions and provides a global platform to operate in. Also since this industry is fast emerging, it brings with it several opportunities to develop and launch new services for your customers.

**Q** What do you consider as your major achievements in this field?

**A** My major achievements have been in terms of growing the business, nurturing innovation, and developing entrepreneurial leaders

within my team. I have been able to grow the business to ₹400 crore topline for the region of ISC and Middle East, a team of 650 people, spanning 34 offices.

**Q** Do you think most companies in this field have women friendly rules and regulations or do you like them to improve?

**A** Like I said the corporate culture is fast evolving, and the work environment is good for the career-oriented women. It is upon the women to carve out a niche for themselves, rather than seek reservations, special rules and regulations. Such endeavours would only alienate the leadership seeking woman, from an environment that offers a fair chance of leadership.



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## Myanmar: Crucial Trade link

With India looking at increasing its trade with East Asian nations, Myanmar can provide the crucial connecting link.



# BETTER OR WORSE?

*As 2012 draws to a close, a bunch of experts from the industry look at issues that will impact the business, growth areas, strategies to adopt and biggest concerns ahead*



## WISTA launches India chapter

WISTA India will help provide a strong platform for women to voice their opinions about the changing face of shipping industry.

Women in maritime industry in India have one more reason to celebrate. Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA), an international organization for women in management positions involved in the maritime transportation business and related trades worldwide, opened its Indian chapter on December 7.

The 34th chapter of the association – WISTA India – was formed under the leadership of Sanjam Sahi Gupta of Sitara Shipping Ltd. She is the president of the India chapter.

WISTA is a major player in attracting more women to the industry and in supporting women in management positions. WISTA currently counts over 1,600 individual members in 34 National WISTA Associations (NWAs). Its India chapter has over 25 members.

"My goal for WISTA India is to provide a platform and a voice for women and to ensure we are well represented in industry forums. We want to mentor the talented younger lot by providing them with scholarships and training programmes. We have already spoken to a few companies in this regard, and they are interested in working with us," said Sanjam Sahi Gupta, president, WISTA India.

With the advent of technology, shipping as an industry has now become one of the best career options for women interested in the maritime business.

"I am delighted by the energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by Sanjam and her team in developing WISTA India. They have captured the spirit of WISTAs everywhere—to foster women in shipping and make a contribution as maritime professionals," said Karin Orsel, President of WISTA International.

In her presentation, Nafeesa Moloobhoy of A S Moloobhoy, highlighted the fact that in the 21st century where women have managed to surpass men in every arena of career, still there are places where women are restricted.

WISTA India has been launched with an aim to provide a strong platform for women to voice their opinions about the changing face of shipping industry. The association will also act as a training school for young talents all set to put their foot down in the shipping industry.

Women are today playing important roles in all segments of the maritime industry and their presence and scope will only grow in future. That was the general refrain at the launch of the Indian chapter of WISTA.

