



HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA

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with gender equality 2019



Human Rights at Sea Case Study

In Their Own Words Gender Equality at Sea - Amreen Bano



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Human Rights at Sea

CASE STUDY - IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Human Rights at Sea Comment

"In this year with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) focus on gender equality, the case of Amreen Bano, a high-achieving Indian Electro Technical Officer now working often as the only ETO onboard VLCC vessels, highlights the ongoing challenges and struggles for women seafarers despite often achieving higher educational grades and placing than their male counterparts. The gender imbalance, historically ingrained male bias, and often deliberate choices not to employ women in sea-going roles is an issue increasingly now being addressed in the shipping industry, and notably the charity started reviewing Gender at Sea in 2015. Human Rights at Sea met with Amreen in Mumbai after the 28 February industry led 'Human Rights at Sea' seminar to hear her story first-hand. The meeting was facilitated by Mrs. Saleha Zubair of the Maritime Union of India Women's Wing."

"Girl, you chose wrong side. Stop dreaming about your career here."

Girl at Sea*



Amreen and her Mother

Being from a Muslim family, when I decided to do my BE.EEE (Marine) from AMET University, Chennai, all the relatives opposed my decision and kept on preaching my family that at this age you are sending your daughter so far, from north to south completely different state different culture, no same language, no same food. But my parents did not care about any of them, especially my father, he always supported my decisions. And then I left for Chennai to complete my Engineering.

At AMET, I completed my engineering EEE marine first class with distinction. The initial phase in classroom was very difficult for me, as I completed my schooling in Hindi and all the engineering classes were in English. All my room mates, warden, teachers, classmates spoke either English or Tamil, so I had no other option rather than speaking in English or Tamil (I did not know the basic of Tamil), With my strong willpower I became fluent in English very soon, hence clearing the language barrier.

Being in AMET I used to participate in all kinds of sports events, extracurricular activities, and my everyday schedule used to be so busy from morning 4am till night 10pm. I made myself so busy that I never wasted even a minute of my life. I used to wake up at 4am and run for at least 5 - 6 km every day then do some exercise, shower and get ready for breakfast. In between, if I get 10 -15 min also I would utilise that time in preparing myself for the subjects which will be taught in class, or reading news updates etc. Everyone at AMET knew me as the most active girl in campus.

For becoming an ETO I had to complete my four years engineering, as AMET offered both the course so I decided to join their ETO course, during my engineering I got selected in many shore based companies, but as I was determined to join at sea that time, this decision was very tough for me because (one side I already had job's in my hand, on other side as an ETO there was no girl at sea and I had no relative, no one known in this industry and family situations was also not good, my

“ After clearing my Electro Technical Officer (ETO) Certificate of Competence (COC) in 2016, I became the first and youngest lady ETO with COC from India.

My name is Amreen Bano, and I was born and brought up in Meerut, which is in state of Uttar Pradesh, India.

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Amreen with her Family

“ father was sick and had brain haemorrhage time really tough... should I start earning but should I join for ETO course), but with the strong determination and faith in me and I choose to join ETO course, I talked about my decision with my family and they supported my decision.

Hence, started my ETO course in AMET. I used to love the training early, morning wake up, then morning muster, morning parade. If you are late by a single minute then there was one extra complete parade ground running round; this taught me punctuality and discipline. This habit of punctuality and discipline I have carried onboard, and the same routine I follow on board every day. Starting my day early in morning, then going for exercises, doing meditation and reading something related to ship machinery.

I completed my ETO in 4 months, and was awarded top of my batch and got the 'Award of Academic Excellence'.

I gave interview in AMET for many shipping companies, but didn't get selected in any company even though I was top, and I used to reply for everything the interview, they used to say (they were) impressed and we will see, but no response.

But I was not demotivated, because so far I did not know why companies are doing like this and where I'm (going) wrong. As soon as I got my CDC I didn't go home and I came to Mumbai from AMET, Chennai all alone, in a new and unknown city for me. During this time, I got scholarship from DG shipping of 50k, it was a great help for me that time.

Times at Mumbai were tough, I used to go to the each and every company door in Mumbai, and most of the companies used to laugh at me, saying why did you join as ETO, who advised you, are you mad, you are good and smart knowledge wise no doubt, but no company will take risk putting a lady ETO onboard.

If you would have been deck or engine side we would have taken you, but as an independent ETO, sorry, there is only one ETO onboard, and he should know his job very well. He will have to work mentally as well as physically, like entering dark spaces sometimes, climbing on masts, working at night also, lifting heavy items.

If you are deck side 2nd Officer, Chief Officer and Captain are there to guide you. If you are an engineer then also 2nd, 3rd and Chief Engineer are there, but for ETO people can only assist, but there will be no one to guide you.

“Girl, you chose wrong side. Stop dreaming about your career here”, and many more things I used to hear every day. I heard so many negative thoughts every day, but I was not broken, as I knew that I have to do this only.

During these tough times my parents and my branch HOD in AMET, Mr. Gopinathan Sir used to always motivate me a lot. They always trusted my capabilities and made me realize that I can prove everyone wrong and I can make my successful career at sea. ”

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“I used to walk many miles around Mumbai every day, knocking all the companies and at night my legs used to pain like anything. I prayed, “Koi toh mujhe leg massage de do aake” (somebody comes and give me leg massages to relive this pain).”

“ I didn't used to tell all my hardships to my parents, but nothing can be kept as a secret from Mom, she used to cry, and say “better come back home, leave it”, but I was very determined and sure.

My father used to motivate and say beta “HIMMAT AE MARD A MADDAD AE KHUDA” (when there is a willpower GOD is always there for help), these words kept me moving ahead towards my dream. So, at last I got fed up and used to say if companies don't take girls, then why do colleges take girls in course if they stop us there itself why we would have so much hope and dream. (DISCRIMINATION)

Example

I would like to share one such incident, A well reputed big shipping company (I don't want to say the name) called top 10 guys of ETO, and I got the mail from college, my name was on top. We were called to company for the interview. I saw mail, read it mentioning everyone by Mr. even me as Mr. Amreen Bano, but still I went there as my name is there. I was determined to go and will give my best and grab the opportunity.

When, I went there every one was looking at my face there, what she is doing here, who called her, I could hear all these gossips and mums, as usual they didn't select me at this interview also, clearly saying that we won't take girl in our company.

This was peak for me; I decided to write a mail to Director General Shipping and all higher authorities even to Parliament regarding the mentality and gender inequality in this field. But, during that time Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) posted on website vacancies for the fresher ETO recruitment, I decided to give it a try and then if same thing happens in SCI as well then, I will send the mail.

“Being alone in Mumbai, I used to be heartbroken at times, but I always remembered the faith my family had in me and I used to stand up again with more strong will.”

I gave the SCI interview and performed very well, but still hopes were very low, as I always gave my interview well in other companies as well, but being a girl, I was always rejected.

Hence, lastly, I was so numb because this was my last hope and asked my interviewer, “Will SCI take girl ETO?”.

He asked me, “can you work at heights, and at nights?”

I replied “YES”.

(Between that period, I even got selected for teaching ETO's but did not join as I was determinant to join sea only.)

Then I was waiting for result it took around a month during that time I joined electrical workshop in Mumbai, MEREW (MARINE ELECTRICAL REFRIGERATING AND ENGINEERING WORKS) They also did not have girls so far, but I requested them and assure them they won't have any problem because of me. And I need some practical experience as all the shipping companies are not taking me so I didn't have any other option. I didn't need money, just needed experience. During that time, I was staying in chawl, before that I didn't even know the meaning of chawl as north India don't have this concept.

I used to go with MEREW guys for work on different ships in dry-dock. One fine day I was in dry dock with MEREW and **suddenly got a call from one of my friends, he said the words I struggled to hear for so long, “Amreen, result, come you got selected”,** really I cannot express my happiness. I called up my father and told him the good news, tears of happiness came out and every one was so proud of me.

After a pre-joining training, my first ship was assigned within a week. I did not feel like to go home I just said yes. **I was so happy for joining, my dream coming true; my mom, brother came to Mumbai to see me off.**

After that ship journey starts with lots more challenges, and I love the challenges so it has been lot more interesting for me so far.

My first ship was Suez max tanker “Desh Shanti”. I learnt a lot, and got a very good senior ETO, Agdish Prasad Singh. I finished my first contract and learnt a lot about machineries, and the sea.

After completing my sea time, I appeared for the ETO COC exam, which was also challenging as passing rate in mmd was just 10%. I didnot have much of practical experience but still with the motivational words of my Dad “HIMMAT AE MARD A MADDAD AE KHUDA” (when there is a willpower GOD is always there for help)”. I cleared my COC in the first attempt.

After getting my COC, I got my next vessel, a VLCC as an independent ETO. No senior, no one. Fresh in the marine field and still at a very young learning stage, I was bit nervous, but excited as well. ”

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“ The ship I was assigned, I had to join it within 3 days. I have not been home for long, as after first ship I did my STCW advanced courses at Mumbai, then I stayed at Mumbai and prepared for my COC for 5 months, and now I will have to go again for minimum 6 months. It had been nearly 16-17 months since I had been home and now again I had to go. I informed my father that I have to join very soon and won't be able to come home. He understood me and gave me blessings to be successful in life.

I completed my first ETO contract happily and successfully, got good reports and was appreciated by everyone.

While joining the giant VLCC, in office during briefing superintendent explained me, “Amreen you are going there but CE (Chief Engineer) is very tough none cannot stay on his ship, still time is there decide now”, I said, “Sir, already decided.”

Yes, really it was very tough in starting as it took time for the CE to have trust on me. But after all few months of observation he was impressed with my work and still I remember his appraisal wording

“Although she is first time as ETO, but she had proved herself she is better than many senior ETO's”

After that I changed over to Wallem Ship Management for better exposure to international shipping, and have been happily sailing with them on tankers for past one and half years. ”

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“ Every ship is challenging for us. We have to change the old mentality now. The time has changed but still people are not used to it as it is new for them to see girls in shipping, but they had to change their thinking.

So far as I had observed on every ship, most of the staff have presumptions for a lady working on ship (which should not be there if company is sending us they should consider it as (a) rank) there is no discrimination for a lady or men, we all are seafarers. But, still many times we have to face the difference. We have to build maximum trust to our seniors and have to prove them 100% that we are capable in our ranks. ”



“Shipping had been a male dominant industry for decades, but now times are changing. Women are coming to sea and they are proving themselves. Seafarers should be more open minded, and they should welcome the change coming in this industry. ”



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“ At shore there are equal opportunities for both the gender, but still there exists a lot of gender in-equality at sea. But I have a faith, that things are changing, and soon we will see growing proportion of women at sea.

Once on ship, it's not about a man or woman, everyone is same, everyone is a seafarer (seaman), and everyone has the potential to perform.

I faced many challenges to start my career at sea, but now I am happy to sea that many companies have started welcoming women seafarers onboard.

But, still a few things need to be addressed for us, one of them is paid maternity leave for women seafarers, like it is on shore, and assured rejoining for them after maternity leave.

Finally, after lots of hard struggle the result is: “A girl flying over seas” ”

Since 2017, Amreen has been the Vice President of the Association of Marine Electro Technical Officers (AMETO) which is the world's first registered trade union for Marine Electro Technical Officers (ETO).

World Map: Amreen Bano - Shipping Career to date by Countries visited as an ETO



* First published on 'Women in Maritime' Facebook page

Disclaimer

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Human Rights at Sea is a Registered Charity in England and Wales No. 1161673. The organisation has been independently developed for the benefit of the international community for matters and issues concerning human rights in the maritime environment. Its aim is to explicitly raise awareness, implementation and accountability of human rights provisions throughout the maritime environment, especially where they are currently absent, ignored or being abused.

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