

# Women Empowerment as Professional Goal

**A**n ICAEW source recently linked the slump in economic growth with existing gender inequality. The world economic forum finds a strong correlation between gender equality and national competitiveness. Another study reported that globally only 24 % of senior management roles are filled by women. The study has suggested that an increase in female employment can actually help raise GDP.

Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "*By merely looking at the condition of women, one can figure out the growth of the nation*". Though India today has the largest women workforce after China, they are mostly performing in the sectors of agriculture and construction and as domestic help. We urgently need to address this issue.

Today, women are no more restricted to the roles of daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. They now feel more answerable to their society and their nation. Breaking the traditional mould, they are ready to step out and act wiser in profession using their ever-cheerful, clever and careful nature, which they were using effectively for years in the affairs of their homes.

Although Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "*To call a woman a member of the weaker sex is a libel*", it will be fair on our part to support them in achieving a professional excellence. It is said that *a woman is a full circle and within her, is a power to create, nurture and transform*. Managing effectively and silently in their families since ages, women are now ready to transcend the same skills to their workplace too. Blessed with an instinct to foresee and look through, they are often suited to managerial responsibilities.

It is said that empowerment begets empowerment. They have already started giving back the empowerment to the world around us. They mean business, as they are evolved. In a lighter vein, it would be interesting for us as auditors to audit the affairs of a family, in order to realise how effectively and in what amount they contribute to their family *vis-à-vis* other earning members of their family. In all roles, whether as housewives or professionals, they need to be respected.

Our Constitution too strongly supports the cause of gender equality by empowering the State to adopt strong measures in favour of women. While Article

14 of the Constitution gives them equal rights in political, economic and social spheres, Article 15 prohibits us to discriminate on the basis of gender. Article 39 asks for equality in remuneration. Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act and Rules, 1970 recommends separate provision for utilities and fixed working hours for women. As per Section 46(b) and 50 of the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, insured women are entitled to claim maternity benefits on account of pregnancy, premature birth of child or miscarriage. While the law of the land is doing everything possible to create a gender-sensitive work environment for women professionals, as members of a noble profession, it becomes our responsibility also to empower our women in profession, and recommend the same to the industry.

Over the years, more and more women have been equally strengthening the profile of accountancy profession in India with their multitasking skills and acumen. At present, the percentage of women in active membership and student community is 21.1 and 36 respectively. Their high percentage in student community will work ultimately by minimising the gender gap in our professional fraternity.

These encouraging statistics need to be harnessed in the interests of our profession. Women are the untapped powerhouse of energy which should be channeled for the growth of our profession, our economy and our nation. With that goal in mind, the ICAI has put special focus on CA women empowerment in its Action Plan 2014-15: *Moving Towards New Frontiers*. An all-new *Women Empowerment Committee* has been formed this year to vigorously pursue this agenda. We are actively working to launch a flexi-working portal for our women professionals.

We want our women members and students to be empowered, not because they are discriminated or less capable, but because their potential needs to be harnessed and capitalised. Women will be our competitive advantage, if they are brought to the fore and core of our profession. This way, they could add their side of the story and help us create a gender-sensitive vision for our accountancy profession. ■

— **Editorial Board** ICAI – *Partner in Nation Building*