

FRAILITY, THY NAME IS WOMEN

1- Introduction

2 - Historical context of the phrase

3 - Triggers for the perception of women's frailty

a- Biological factors - less muscular strength compared to men

b - Social Reasons - Patriarchal societies have pushed women into subservient roles reinforcing the stereotype of frailty

c- Religious influences - Religious texts and doctrines, such as Bible's portrayal of Eve have shaped views of women as morally weak

d- Political triggers - low representation in politics, with only 2-4% in parliaments and only 8% as national leaders

4- Busting the Myth of Frailty & Challenging the stereotypes.

a- Women in Leadership -

Case in point - Queen Elizabeth, Jacinda Ardern, Benazir Bhutto, and Margaret Thatcher, who defied stereotypes of frailty

b- Women's role in Politics

i- Women worked side by side with men in Pakistan Movement

Case in point: Fatima Jinnah

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i - Women during World Wars took on traditionally male roles in factories, medical care, and even combat.

Case in point: Night Witches in WWII

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- Marie Curie in science
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f - Women as skillful Mountaineers

i - Women breaking misconceptions and reaching new heights

Case in point: Pakistani Mountaineer Samina Baig's climb on Everest

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Lieutenant General Nigar Johar, Tamgha-

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Lt. General

5 - Re-evaluating "Frailty"

a. Subject nature of "frailty" - perceptions of strength and weakness are culturally and contextually defined.

b. Recognition of men's vulnerabilities

6 - How could the myths of frailty of women be countered?

a. To provide education and awareness to masses

b. To break gender stereotypes in work places and build diversity

c. To break silence when witnessing any biased or sexist attitude

d. To encourage men's role in supporting women around them

e. to help marginalized women become financially independent

7 - Conclusion

The world is a stage, and upon it, men and women alike have played roles dictated not by their essence but by the scripts society has handed them. For centuries, the narrative of weakness has been ascribed to women, a notion whispered in corridors of power, echoed in halls of literature and cemented in societal norms. The phrase, "Frailty, thy name is woman," immortalized by Shakespeare in Hamlet, has long been emblematic of this prejudice, suggesting that women are inherently fragile and vulnerable than men. Nonetheless, this appears to be a relic of a bygone attitude. Peeling back the layers of this expression reveals its roots in a patriarchal worldview that overlooked the strength, resilience and complexity in women's lives. Today, in politics, sports, science, and technology, and literature exemplify profound strength. Figures such as Margaret Thatcher, Jacinda Ardern, Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto, Marie Curie, Helen Keller, and Nigar Johar have challenged notion of female frailty. Moreover, the myth can be dismantled through education, by transforming patriarchal mindsets, and by empowering marginalized women. This is how Shakespeare's idea can be countered, proving that, as Mao Zedong said, "women hold up half the sky."

Upon retrospective inspection, the phrase holds its traces in Elizabethan era of 16th century - Shakespeare, a renowned dramatist, immortalized this very phrase in his play named, "Hamlet". While doing circumstantial analysis the quote was personal disillusionment of character Hamlet with his mother's swift marriage with his uncle Claudius. Nevertheless, his anguish was given generalization on feminine sex. Indubitably, literature is the reflection of life or society. So, the phrase conjure the vivid depiction of Elizabethan era's prevailing attitudes towards gender, wherein women were often regarded as morally and emotionally fragile. Their roles were circumscribed by society as docile and dependent. Shakespeare's portrayal of Gertrude and his generalized assertion about women, reflect cultural assumptions, which viewed women as inherently weak and less capable of moral fortitude than their male counterpart.

Women are deemed as weaker sex.

Nonetheless, beneath the veneer of this age-old stereotype various factors play their role. These factors serve as pretext for establishing norm of women frailty. Henceforth, the upcoming paragraphs shall vignette the triggers for perception of women's frailty.

Perception of women's frailty has deep roots, often entwined with tendrils of biology. Women have less muscular strength as compared to men. The difference is driven by hormonal variations that favor muscle mass in men. Biological fact of less physical strength than men has been inflated into universal truth, extending beyond physical realm into character, intellect and capability. These differences have been used to justify exclusion of women from roles deemed physically demanding or requiring fortitude. The biological factors serving as symbol of weakness just highlight the myopic mindset of measuring strength of any individual. Such reductionist thinking neglects complexities of human strength and undermines myriad ways in which resilience can manifest. Therefore, women are regarded as fragile because of biological makeup, but it is not a sole criteria to judge one's ability.

Moreover, frailty is rooted in social fabric of patriarchal societies, which have historically relegated women to subservient roles. From confines of domesticity to gentle manner expected of them, women are fashioned into ideal of delicate, the docile, and dependent. These ascribed attitudes are the puissant tool for maintaining hegemony and control on women.

Societal expectations that women be caretakers, homemakers, and supporters rather than leaders or thinkers further cemented the belief of their frailty. Moreover, the strength of women are often eclipsed by overpowering light of male dominance. Therefore, the perception lie not in any true measure of capacities, but in enduring weight of patriarchal world determined to shape women into its narrow mold.

In a similar vein, the concept of women's frailty is also inculcated by religious doctrines and texts. The religious influences always have been remained a potent force in morphing individual attitudes. So, the narrative of original sin as exemplified by story of eve, portraying women as bearer of weakness, temptation, and fallibility. This sort of doctrines leaves no recourse for women in male dominated society. They become aloofed and isolated from the masculine sex in every sphere of life. Religion shapes the individual's behavior, attitudes and actions. But, when religious teachings lopsidedly favors the one faction of society, there comes a equality deadlock. Henceforth, by intertwining notion of spiritual frailty with broad societal roles of women, these religious influences have perpetuated a narrative that views women not as

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individuals of strength and autonomy, but as fragile beings, needing protection and control.

Along with religious influences, throughout history, political structures have often reinforced the perception of women as frail by limiting their representation and influences in governance. Political arenas have been overwhelmingly dominated by men, a reality that has pushed women to margins, often as silent observers rather than active participants. This exclusion has perpetuated the notion that women lack the strength, resolve, or capability to lead. Even in contemporary times, the numbers remain tellingly low, with women constituting a mere 2.4% of parliamentary positions and only about 8% serving as national leaders. Such statistics are not merely reflective of women's abilities but rather of systemic barriers and biases that have kept them out of corridors of power. Therefore, the scarcity of female representation in politics serves to reinforce the erroneous belief that women are inherently less suited for leadership and decision-making, thus perpetuating myth of their frailty.

Despite the deeply ingrained perceptions of frailty, history and contemporary examples provide a counter-narrative. Time and again, women have shattered the illusion of weakness, emerging as formidable leaders, warriors, thinkers, and pioneers. So, the forthcoming paragraphs shall highlight how women have challenged the stereotype of frailty.

In the annals of history, women in leadership roles have defied the longstanding stereotypes of weakness and vulnerability. Figures such as Queen Elizabeth I of England navigated a male-dominated court with strategic brilliance, cementing her legacy as one of the most influential and formidable rulers. In contemporary times, Jacinda Ardern's compassionate yet decisive leadership during crises, such as the Christchurch shooting and the COVID-19 pandemic, has showcased a modern model of strong, empathetic governance. Similarly, Benazir Bhutto, the first woman to lead a Muslim majority country, broke barriers and countered the traditional gender roles. Margaret Thatcher, known as the "Iron Lady", ruled with an iron fist, her unwavering policies and political acumen placing her among the most influential leaders of the 20th century. These women, along with many others, have substantiated that leadership is not about traditional gender-specific

approach but about the courage, vision, and fortitude that is necessary to guide the nation.

Additionally, in the realm of politics, where power and influence often seem to wear a masculine guise, women have boldly stepped forward, challenging the very fabric of patriarchal dominance. The Pakistan movement serves as a testament to indomitable spirit of women, who stood shoulder to shoulder with women fighting for freedom and justice. Fatima Jinnah, with her unwavering resolve and eloquent oratory, emerged as a symbol of courage, defying societal expectations and carving out her place in annals of history - Beyond borders of Pakistan, women leaders like Indra Gandhi and Angela Merkel have reshaped political landscapes. These women, far from shadows of subservience, illuminated the corridors of power, proving politics is not exclusive domain of men - therefore, they vindicated that politics is a platform where women's voices resonate with equal vigor, vision, and authority.

Moreover, in the times of war and conflict, women have often risen to occasion, demonstrating remarkable courage and resilience. Far from being mere bystanders, women have taken critical roles - During World Wars, for instance,

countless women left their homes to work in factories, producing munitions and supplies essential for war efforts, thereby stepping into roles traditionally occupied by men. In addition to industrial contributions, women served as nurses on frontlines and helped the wounded - The Night Witches, a formidable all-female Soviet air force regiment in World War II, flew perilous missions. "Night Witches" were officially known as "588th Night Bombers Regiment". These women pilots flew outdated biplanes under the cover of darkness, conducting bombing raids against the German forces. Despite facing numerous challenges they executed their missions with remarkable precision and bravery. These examples underscore that women can excel in even most dangerous and demanding roles and so-called frailty attributed to women is a myth.

Besides women's courage in war and conflict, women have quietly but profoundly shaped the landscape of science and technology, dismantling outdated perceptions of frailty and showcasing the enduring power of female ingenuity. The story of Marie Curie, a two-time Nobel Prize laureate, her pioneering work in radioactivity not only advanced scientific knowledge but also became an ideal for many. Similarly, in tech industry, figures

like Sheryl Sandberg have shattered the glass ceiling, proving that strategic thinking is not the exclusive domain of men. As Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, Sandberg's influence has reshaped the landscape of social media and demonstrated that women can thrive at highest level of technological leadership. Ursula Burns, the former CEO of Xerox, further put aside the myth of frailty by becoming first black woman to lead a Fortune 500 company. Her rise epitomizes determination and resilience. These women, therefore, have transformed once male-dominated arenas into spaces where female brilliance can shine.

Furthermore, literature has been enriched by indomitable spirit of women whose works transcend the notion of fragility. Hellen Keller, overcoming the double challenges of blindness and deafness, penned a memoir, "The Story of My Life", that not only chronicles her personal triumphs but also serve as a beacon of hope and determination. Similarly, Arundati Roy's "The God of Small Things" weaves a tapestry of political and social critique, capturing complexities of post-colonial India with fierce narrative voice. These literary giants exemplify how women, through their words and stories, assert their contributions are not merely an

exception to the rule of frailty, but a testament to the resilience and depth of female strength.

Moreover, mountaineering, a pursuit long dominated by male adventurers, has seen remarkable female pioneers who have shattered stereotypes and demonstrated exceptional skill, endurance and courage.

Among these trailblazers, Samina Baig stands out as a paragon of resilience and determination. In 2013, Baig made history by becoming the first Pakistani woman to summit Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. Her achievement was not merely a personal triumph but a significant milestone for women in mountaineering. It shows that gender does not dictate one's capacity to conquer the most formidable natural challenges. Another example of Japanese woman Junko Tabei, the first woman to summit Mount Everest is worthwhile to mention. Henceforth, Samina Baig and her peers exemplify the strength of women, proving that the spirit of adventure and capacity for great achievement are not confined by gender.

Besides adventurous achievements of women, the arena of sports has also witnessed the prowess of woman. They have defied the traditional

gender roles and come to limelight with their exemplary achievements. Sania Mirza, a name synonymous with Indian tennis, has not only dominated courts with her powerful serves and strategic prowess but also has become a symbol of female empowerment in sports. Her journey is marked by multiple Grand slam titles and a relentless pursuit of excellence, challenges any lingering notions of female weakness. Similarly, Imaan Khalife, an Egyptian boxing star, has risen into prominence in her boxing and won gold medal in Paris Olympics 2024. Despite facing criticism of identity she remained firm and adamant for her coveted title and eventually ~~got~~ her gold. These examples, therefore, transcend the stereotypes and prove that strength in sports is not matter of gender but a testament to individual prowess and tenacity.

Additionally, women's presence in armed services underscores the fallacy of frailty stereotype - the entrenched misogyny in society restricts the female participation in various fields and armed forces is no different. Lieutenant Nigar Johar, a pioneering officer in Pakistan Army exemplifies this defiance of gendered expectations. She was honored with accolade, Tamgha-e-Imtiaz

In this way she prove her mettle in the most demanding arena. So, her role in the military, marked by both tactical acumen and steadfast commitment to duty, challenges the belief that woman are inherently unsuitable for combat and leadership positions. Henceforth, these examples offer a powerful rebuttal to the antiquated stereotypes that once sought to define their limits.

By critically analyzing the mentioned examples, it becomes quite lucid that the phrase, "Frailty, thy name is women" is not more than a myth. So, the notion of frailty is inherently subjective and must be re-evaluated through more nuanced lens. Traditionally, frailty has been associated with physical weakness and susceptibility, but such a narrow definition overlooks multifaceted nature of human resilience.

Indeed, the very idea of frailty as an exclusively feminine trait collapses under scrutiny, as it fails to account for complexities of both the human body and spirit. So, concept of frailty associated with female are culturally and socially defined. Henceforth, reevaluating frailty requires acknowledging that concept itself is a subjective construct, often shaped by societal norms and cultural expectations rather than any inherent truth about gender.

Moreover, the concept of frailty must be understood as a shared human condition, not confined to one gender. Men, too, face vulnerabilities, be it through emotional battles, mental health struggles, or societal pressures to conform to rigid masculine ideals. A true understanding of frailty recognizes that strength and weakness coexist within every individual, regardless of gender. It is this recognition that dismantles the dichotomous dichotomy of male strength versus female frailty, replacing it with a more compassionate and inclusive understanding of human nature. By embracing this broader perspective, society can move beyond outdated stereotypes and towards a more holistic appreciation of the diverse ways in which all people, regardless of gender, manifest resilience and strength in their life.

Now, it is need of the hour to shatter the glass ceiling of gendered frailty. There are myriad ways to counter the myth of frailty, which the following paragraphs will explain.

Education and awareness are powerful tools for countering the myth of frailty. By integrating gender studies into school curricula, students can learn from young age about gender equality. Educational programs that highlight the achievement of women in various field must be

By elucidating the scientific breakthroughs of Marie Curie, or the leadership of figures like Angela Merkel - can help challenge preconceived notions of female frailty. Public awareness campaigns, like those promoting women's health and empowerment can also play crucial role. Henceforth, by providing education and awareness a robust stance about gender can be made.

Alongside with education and awareness, breaking the silence when witnessing biased or sexist attitudes is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and respectful environment. For example, in a workplace meeting where a female colleague's ideas are repeatedly overlooked or interrupted, a conscious effort to speak up can make significant difference. This act of vocal opposition not only empowers others to do the same but also educates those who might not realize the impact of their words or actions. Through these small yet significant acts of courage, one can begin to dismantle the pervasive myths of gendered frailty and promote a culture of respect and equality.

Another important measure can be to help marginalized women become financially independent. For this purpose, their access to education, vocational training and microfinance is quite imperative.

Education equips women with skills and knowledge necessary to participate in workforce effectively, while vocational training tailors these skills to specific trades or professions, making them more marketable.

Microfinance initiatives, such as small loans and grants, enable women to start their own businesses, fostering entrepreneurship and economic self-sufficiency - Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is a worthwhile example for empowering women financially. So, by making women financially independent they can contribute in society equal to men.

Recapitulating whole, the long-held notion that "frailty, thy name is women" has been thoroughly challenged and dismantled by myriad of examples demonstrating women's strength, resilience, and capability throughout history into modern era. From battlefields into boardrooms, from summit of Everest to halls of power, women have continually defied the narrow confines of this stereotype. They have shown that true strength is not measured by physical might alone but by the courage to lead, the resilience to endure, and wisdom to inspire.

By reevaluating the concept of frailty it becomes evident that strength manifest in various forms. By recognizing

that frailty is not exclusive domain of one gender, society can open door to more just and equitable system. Hence, by education and awareness and addressing the female sex inferiority the idea of gender frailty can be challenged. As Virginia Woolf aptly stated, "For most of history, anonymous was woman", a poignant reminder that silent strength of countless women has quietly shaped the world, whether acknowledged or not.