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Mock Exam for CSS 2026 Date: 29-07-2025

① The Evolving Role of Women in Leadership and Decision Making.

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OB Batch 77

Outline:-

1 Introduction

1.1 HOOK

1.2 Background

1.3 Thesis

2 How role of women evolved?

2.1 Historical context and Barriers

2.1.1 Patriarchal Societies and early leadership exceptions

2.1.2 Suffrage movements and legal motives

2.1.3 Persistence of male dominance well into the 20th century

2.2 Drivers of Transformation

2.2.1 Education and rising literacy

2.2.2 Legal and Institutional reforms

2.2.3 Economic changes

2.2.4 Role of Social movements and feminist activism

2.2.5 Visibility of global female role models

3

Present day Achievements

3.1 Rise in political participation

3.2 Corporate leadership

3.3 Influence in Civil Societies

3.4 Growth in academia, Judiciary and public discourse

4 Persistence challenges

4.1 Gender stereotype and bias in hiring

4.2 Burden of work life balance

4.3 Wage gap and lack of financial inequality

4.4 Safety, harassment, and online abuse

4.5 Lack of mentorship

5 Regional and cultural variations

5.1 Difference between developed and developing countries

5.2 Cultural, religious and societal constraints

6 Recommendation for future progress

7 Conclusion

The Essay

Centuries ago, in the bustling trade routes of 7th century Arabia, a wealthy and respected business woman named Khadija bint Khuwaylid managed a vast commercial empire. She not only broke the social norms of her time but also proposed marriage to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and became a crucial advisor in the early days of Islam. Thousands of miles away and centuries later, Queen Elizabeth I ruled England with unmatched political acumen, defending her nation against Spanish invasion and overseeing an age of exploration and cultural renaissance. These early examples of female leadership, though exceptional for their time, laid silent ground work for the gradual yet profound transformation that the world witnesses today. The evolving role of women in leadership

and decision making reflects a profound shift in global social dynamics. Leadership, traditionally perceived as a male domain, has undergone significant transformation over the past century. While in the past women were largely excluded from influential roles, confined to the domestic sphere or considered supporters rather than decision makers. The modern world now increasingly recognizes the value of inclusive and diverse leadership. This change, though uneven across regions, is visible on a global scale. Women today actively shaping policy, heading institutions, managing corporations, and leading social movements, contributing meaningfully to governance and innovation across various domains. Historically, the exclusion of women from leadership roles stemmed from deeply rooted societal norms and patriarchal

traditions. Ancient civilization such as those in Greece, Rome, China and the Indian subcontinent limited women's political and legal participation. Though exceptions like Cleopatra, Empress Wu Zetian and Razia Sultana challenged this norms, such figure were rare and often faced significant resistance. The industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment period sowed early seeds of gender equality. With the rise of of suffrage movements in late 19th and early 20th centuries, women in countries like New Zealand, Finland and the United States began to secure the voting rights. New Zealand became the first self governing country in the world to grant all the women right to vote in parliamentary elections when Governor Lord Glasgow signed the Electoral Act on September 19, 1893. A landmark achievement of the suffrage movement led by Kate

Sheppard. These legal milestones laid the foundation for future inclusion, but leadership roles remained predominately male well into the 20th century. Overtime, several factors converged to propel the transformation of women's roles in leadership. Education played a vital role. As access to primary, secondary, and higher education expanded, women entered the workforce with better qualifications and confidence. UNESCO data suggests that the global female literacy rate has surpassed 87% and women in many countries now exceed men in university enrollment. This literacy enabled them to qualify for leadership and decision making roles across sectors. Simultaneously, legal and policy reforms facilitated this evolution. International agreements like convention on Elimination

of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted by 189 countries, pressured government to enact gender-inclusive laws. National policies, supporting maternity leaves, equal pays, political representation and gender quotas in legislature further enhanced the women's participation. Legal frameworks thus helped institutionalize equality, creating an enabling environment for leadership to thrive. Economic and technical shifts also contributed to this progression. Globalization and digital revolution created flexible employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Women especially in developing economies used online platform to participate in social enterprises. These changes allowed many women to balance domestic responsibilities with professional goals and

encouraged the new form of leadership. In same way, social movements challenged traditional gender roles and elevated women's voices. From early suffragette campaign to contemporary movements like "MeToo" and HeForShe, Feminist advocacy has reshaped the societal attitude. Social media further amplified women's leadership and activism providing platform for global visibility. Equally important has been the visibility of female role model. The success of prominent women in politics, business, academia and civil society has inspired others and helped normalize women leadership. Figures like Queen Elizabeth I, Kate Sheppard, Razia Sultana, Angela Merkel, Jacinda Ardern, Benazir Bhutto and Malala Yousafzai have not ^{only} led effectively but have also challenged the

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1. stereotypes that equate leadership solely with masculine traits. As a result of these developments, women today are visibly present in leadership across many fields. In politics, the global average of women in parliament has risen to about 26% as of 2023. Some countries such as Rwanda, Finland and Iceland have achieved near gender parity. According to IPU, the percentage of women of developing countries in parliament increased from 11.3% (1995) to 27.2% in 2025. In the corporate context, although only 10% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. This figure represents a significant increase over past decades. Besides formal politics and business, women are influential in the civil society. They lead the non-government organizations. Women like Greta Thunberg and Nobel

Peace prize laureates have steered the global attention toward critical social issues. Similarly female representation in academia and Judiciary like Marie Curie, Bano Qudsia. Women are now professors, Judges, researchers and public ~~center~~ intellectual contributing to creation and interpretation of knowledge and law. Despite these gains substantial challenges remain. Gender stereotype continue to associate leadership with assertiveness and dominance traits of socially coded as Masculine. Similarly the burden of professional responsibilities with family care, economic disparity, safety and harassment, and online abuse are the threats women often face in leadership and ~~dec~~ decision making. Additionally the lack of mentorship and

professional networks for women impedes their progress in leadership and decision making. The experience women in leadership is not uniform varies widely across regions and cultural contexts. In developed countries, progress has been more intensely institutionalized and supported by legal system and public discourse. In contrast, women in developing countries often face intense cultural and economic barriers. Looking ahead several steps are essential to ensure that the evolution of women's role in leadership by legal reform, gender equality in workplaces, Education equality and media narratives. In conclusion the evolving roles of women in leadership & decision making signifies one of the most important transfor-

mation of the modern era. Women have moved from the margins to the center of decision making in politics, business, academia and civil society. This journey, while marked by progress it is far from complete. Inclusive leadership produces more representative and compassionate and effective governance. As the world seeks solutions to crises ~~fr~~ ranging from climate ^{change} to inequality the active participation of women in leadership is not just beneficial, it is essential. The future of leadership and decision making must be shared equally by all.