

# Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Gleaned in the Selected Speeches of Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago

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**Abstract** - *Gender inequality and the resulting discrimination of women are deeply rooted in history, culture and tradition. It is said to be detrimental to the mental health of women and persists as a debilitating stigma which lowers their dignity and sense of self-worth. Thus, this qualitative research was conducted to underscore the issue of gender equality and women empowerment as core topics in selected speeches of Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago. Findings of the analysis showed that the issue of gender gap in the Philippines was manifested and discussed forthrightly by the senator in her speeches in terms of educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment, all being effectively touched by the senator with the signature wit, eloquence, astuteness and passion she was widely known for; that gender equality and women empowerment were likewise gleaned in the selected speeches, all of which were delivered by Miriam Defensor Santiago with the motive of persuading her audience to espouse the same advocacy, and this she achieved through her unique and distinct style of utilizing the persuasive ability of literature; and, that the implications of the author's advocacy on gender equality and gender empowerment delegated the monumental task upon the shoulders of the Filipino youth, in ways that their thinking will be directly influenced by her advocacy and thus promote within them a sense of urgency to embrace and espouse the same advocacies in order for them to be able to contribute to nation building.*

**Keyword:** *Gender Equality, Iron Lady of Asia, Margaret Thatcher's Protégé, Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Women Empowerment*

## INTRODUCTION

In the 90's, the womenfolk were considered to have triumphantly taken giant strides by being key players in society, but the endpoint of gender equality is yet to be realized, as the disadvantages being faced by today's female populace serve as main hindrances to the total development of the human race. Every so often, the womenfolk of today still face gender discrimination in the fields of labor, education, healthcare, and politics, all bearing negative implications in the realization of their potential and almost always encroaching on their freedom of choice [1].

True enough, it is a known fact that gender inequality remains a persistent global issue in spite of efforts and substantial measures taken toward its dissolution. In fact, only a meager four nations namely Costa Rica, Cuba, Norway and Sweden have achieved gender equality. Out of the 135 nations, Yemen yielded the lowest scores across dimensions which

include accessibility to basic education, availability of health programs, health and life expectancy, equality in economic opportunity, and political representation and empowerment. While significant studies in the aforementioned dimensions have been undertaken, a host of alarming issues regarding gender inequality still prevail thus calling for a need to make gender equality a global priority as the attainment of which is considered an essential first step toward human development and global economic prosperity [2].

Gender inequality remains a worldwide problem with varying degrees and extent, with immense concern raised by reports of crime and violence against women, even murder or rape, and at times, even the age old crime of honor killing in cases when a female member is thought of as having brought dishonor to her family. In countries in the Middle East, cases of violence against women are said to be on rise, as in the case of two female Saudi Arabian siblings who in 2009 were murdered by their brother

in their father's presence under the mandate of defending the honor of their family. In Guatemala, 3,000 women have been murdered for over the past seven years on cases of misogynistic violence. 130 million girls from Africa and Yemen were reported to have their genitalia mutilated, and in India, around 5,000 women fell victim to female infanticide and bride burning in accounts of insufficient dowry payment given by the bride's family. These cases are not merely cases of unlawful and barbaric travesties against the womenfolk, but are also heinous and inhumane crimes that smite the face of humanity [2].

Another alarming issue under the umbrella of gender-related violence is the disaster that is sex-selective abortion, as it brings about the proliferation of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and an utter imbalance in demography. In China and India, for example, the preference for the male offspring aggravates the being undervalued of the female in society. China's preference for the male offspring with the "One Child Policy" in effect yielded an approximate 32 million more males less than 20 years of age as opposed to the females, and this preference has yielded a ratio of 126 boys versus 100 girls in the 1-4 year age group.

As in China, when the female is viewed as the weaker and less intelligent sex, the same can be said of India, where the birth of a male offspring is welcomed while the birth of a female offspring is considered a burden. This preference in selection of sex is a blatant violation of a human's right to live and has drastically affected the sex ratio in nations where it remains a persisting issue [2].

In the Philippines, the issue of gender inequality tells an interesting story. The country is ranked number one worldwide in terms of having zero gender gaps in literacy rates and life expectancy. As a result, the Philippines' performance on the two aforementioned indices propelled the country to be ranked 9<sup>th</sup> place overall. However, the Philippines still has to perform better in terms of gender inequality in political empowerment in which it is ranked 17<sup>th</sup>, and in economic opportunities, where it is ranked number 24. The country's female workforce participation rate of 53% versus the male participation rate of 81% proves the level of inequality between genders in terms of economic opportunities. As such, the Philippines' labor force participation index yielded a dismal ranking of 102 out of 142 nations [3].

The Philippines has been identified as key supporters of international agreements aimed at gender equality, one example of which is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The country boasts of an extensive and impressive institutional framework targeted at the said issue. One case in point is the Philippine Commission on Women's *Comprehensive Program on Gender Mainstreaming and Good Governance* which is generally aimed to support women's economic empowerment. Likewise, the Philippine Constitution upholds gender equality with The Magna Carta of Women's Rights proving the level of commitment to upholding the rights of the female population.

Needless to say, while the institutional blueprint of the Philippines provides a promising future for gender equality, it can never be dismissed that the Philippines needs to face and overcome adversity in terms of implementing, enforcing, and maintaining the key programs to further eliminate gender equality in the country.

Gender inequality and the resulting discrimination are deeply rooted in history, culture and tradition. It is detrimental to the mental health of women and persists as a debilitating stigma which lowers their dignity and sense of self-worth.

Tackling an issue that is rooted in history and culture requires a remedy that would have to emanate from culture and tradition. Thus, the tradition of citizenry which leads to local communities, institutions, national and international bodies working alongside each other must be tapped in order to promote the value of women and to provoke a positive change in the state of worldwide gender inequality. The said tradition can be seen as vital in all aspects concerning communication, leadership, education, and will promote a shifting in the mindset of the global population in favor of gender equality [2].

A prime example of this movement is the United Nation's CEDAW or what is also known as the International Bill of Rights for Women which was adopted by the UN in 1979. Affirming the movement for the protection of women against all forms of violence, it consists of a preamble and 30 articles and defines the degrees of discrimination and has in it a set of agenda from which all national action against a particular discrimination should be based [4].

The convention promoted a call of affirmation in favor of the women in civil and political spheres as

well as in economic, social, cultural and even in the women's family lives. Nations who accept the convention are required to maintain a commitment to a detailed set of measures that end discrimination against women in various forms, and these include the incorporation of the principle of gender equality in their legal system, abolishment of discriminatory laws, adoption of appropriate laws that prohibit discrimination against women, and the establishment of tribunals and public institutions that ensure the elimination of all acts of discrimination against women, whether these be by a person or persons, social groups, organizations, institutions or enterprises [4].

Thus, the foundation for the ultimate realization of equality between the sexes has been provided for by the UN convention through ensuring equity in access to and equal opportunities in the political and public spheres as well as in the fields of health, education and employment. The acceptance of the said convention and the commitment to legislative measures translate to a glimmer of hope that sees women being able to avail of their rights and fundamental freedoms [4].

In the face of the detrimental effects afforded by culture and tradition, the visionary agenda that is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 is a giant stride towards the empowerment of women. Considered as the contemporary time's most comprehensive global policy framework, it is a blueprint of guidance and inspiration aimed at the realization of gender equality and the worldwide promotion of women's rights. Beijing's Platform of Action designated twelve areas of concern including women and poverty, women's education and training, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutions for women's advancement, women's rights, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child. This platform for action provides the foundation for the obliteration of hindrances to the participation of women in all aspects of life, protects their rights and allows for an integration of their concern in all dimensions of sustainable development [5].

The Philippines, on the other hand, is not without laws and key legislations aimed at the overall welfare of women: spearheading the list is the Republic Act 9710 or The Magna Carta of Women, which is a comprehensive law aimed to protect and uphold

women's rights, and eliminate discrimination against women by way of recognition, protection and promotion of the rights of the Filipina, including and especially those from the marginalized areas; Republic Act 9262, or the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 which strictly penalizes any act of violence against women and children particularly in the context of either or both domestic violence or violence in relationships [6].

The Philippine Commission on Women, the country's machinery for gender equality and women's empowerment, likewise boasts of its Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development or PPGD. Formulated from 1992 to 1998, the PPGD is a 30-year perspective program covering 1995-2025 which outlines the important strategies, projects and policies aimed at the women being able to participate and benefit from. As per Executive Order 273, the PPGD was subsequently adapted as the Philippines' main platform in line with the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action or PFA which was launched at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women [6].

The PCW in coordination with other key government agencies likewise came up with the PCW-DILG-DBM-NEDA Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2016-01, which included provisions to improve the PCW-DILG-DBM-NEDA Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2013-01 or the Guidelines on the Localization of the Magna Carta of Women. In it, amendments were issued to address key concerns on the Annual Gender and Development or GAD's Planning and Budget and its implementation in the national down to the local and barangay level, and; Republic Act 10398 which declares the 25<sup>th</sup> of November of every year as National Consciousness Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children. This was done in recognition of the continuous clamor for a structured and comprehensive national campaign versus violence against women [6].

Similarly, the adoption of gender education into the World Council for Curriculum and Instructions (WCCI) Special Interest Groups (SIG) is in congruence with the promotion of gender equality, gender-sensitive development and governance, the fulfillment of women's rights and women's economic empowerment as incorporated in regional and international commitments and mandate.

In history and society's perspective, literature serves a very important purpose by providing the

people with language by which they can share, discuss and intellectualize the human experience. Access to language affords them the ease of access to their own experiences in a fresh new way and allows them to trace and experience within a social, cultural or political dimension. The inherent ability of man to analyze, conceptualize and to some extent, sense, is greatly dependent on their extensive and appropriate utilization of language. Literature comes with it the role of utilizing definitive and effective means and methods of communication. Lye [7] stated that to engage in literature, one must engage in a continuous process of refining one's capabilities to use language and one's sensibilities to good language use. Literature allows men to educate themselves to a level of awareness that is adept at identifying and making use of the plethora of ideas, feelings, symbols and/or images which underpins their private, social and political life experiences.

Contemporary civilization is hinged on communication. Humanities: art, culture, history and language flourish by way of communication. Lye also stated that literature, as with other art forms, engages the readers in the complexities of emotional, moral, intellectual, social and symbolic considerations by utilizing the more common means of communication like stories, language, symbols, codes or images while employing and utilizing them in a varying subtleties and complexities not typical in everyday communication. Language is definitely a dynamic linguistic device used extensively by speakers to express their feelings, opinions, ideas or views, and is an effective but volatile tool which when inappropriately used may mar, cloud or distort a speaker's true intentions.

The aforementioned potential of literature, explains the incorporation contemporary political leaders' advocacies into their literature and language. While some political statements and speeches abound with literary cliché and typical catchphrases, many discourses and speeches have utilized literary and rhetorical devices in memorable ways than ever, and more often than not, effective use of literature and language brings about a positive change of atmosphere in the face of the sternest and most persistent of humanity's problems.

It is therefore proper for people to be cautious about political discourses so as for them to avoid being merely carried away and instead be able to discern from the collective experience shared by

speaker and audience the underlying advocacy beneath the language and discourse that is being delivered. While today's communication is dominated by the proliferation of mobile and online technology and by the broadcast and print media as well, speeches are still considered as fundamental media for political communication as it retains an intimate potential to shape the mindset of its audience.

An in-depth analysis of literature and rhetoric can uncover how politics works and how people's political awareness may be influenced. People have the ability to learn from political arguments, and associate one ideology to a particular position or party, and these observations are not without impact on their way of thinking [8].

Rhetoric and literature are fundamental tools in a political arsenal, as through them they can effectively share an ideology or advocacy and inspire or change the way people think. This explains why world leaders and politicians hinge on their abilities to utilize language and literature to appeal to the sensibilities of their audiences even more so in the more sensitive issues such as gender equality and women empowerment. It is with language and literature that important concepts about education, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity and women's political empowerment can be effectively discussed.

Philippine Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago is a globally renowned crusader against corruption in Philippine politics. At 43, she was bestowed the laureate of the Asian Nobel Prize, or what is called the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Government Service. She has been cited for "bold and moral leadership" in cleaning up a graft-ridden government institution. Her charisma, along with her wit, intellectual flamboyant personality made her a widely featured political personality by the international press. An Australian magazine in 1997 named her to their list of "100 most powerful women in the world". In the following years, Miriam Defensor Santiago became a keynote speaker in Sydney, Australia in its International Anti-Corruption Conference. As a senator of the Republic of the Philippines, she has sponsored and successfully secured ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption by the Philippine Senate [9].

She wrote books about law when she was an upcoming lawyer, and has written two autobiographies: *Inventing Myself* and *Cutting Edge: The Politics of Reform in the Philippines*. She has

authored around 30 law textbooks as well as in the social sciences, including political science and philosophy. She was responsible for the *Code Annotated Series* where she annotated the major codes of law in the Philippines including the Philippine Constitution, Rules of Court, Civil Code, Penal Code, and all with Supreme Court decisions. The *Code Annotated Series* are extensively used in law schools as well as in the judiciary, and her books are also listed in the US Library of Congress [9].

Into her second term as senator, Defensor Santiago was heralded as the most hardworking senator of the 13th and 14th congress, having filed the most number of bills and senate resolutions. She remains as one of the country's foremost public servants as she continues to blueprint national policies via the necessary laws and is known to be very open in denouncing corruption in government, and serves as mentor to future legislators via her summer legislative internship program [9].

Considered by the media and her fellow legislators as an expert in constitutional and international law, Defensor Santiago serves as one of the judges in the International Criminal Court or ICC, being the first Asian from a developing country to sit in an international tribunal which handles cases of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide [10].

In contemporary Filipino culture, Defensor Santiago has become a cult figure for the youth and a living legend in Philippine politics. Whenever she grazes shopping malls or trade exhibits, fans are driven to taking their cell phones for a photo-op and their pens for an autograph signing to go with it. True enough, no other politician regardless of wealth or popularity has received the admiration evoked by the Filipino senator with her brilliance, charm and interesting sense of humor. Media has been known to come up with what is called "Miriam magic", referring to her unique appeal to idealism in the ever colorful world of Philippine politics [9]. Despite her health condition, Miriam Defensor Santiago remains the Philippine Senate's most prolific legislator, filing 1,007 bills and resolutions since the commencement of the 16th congress until 2014.

Defensor Santiago is considered a stalwart of an advocate in issues of gender equality and women empowerment and this she has effectively done through legislation. As a result, the Philippines is recognized in its triumphant strides to close the gender gap most especially in the workplace. Ranked within

the top 10 countries with low gender inequality as per the Global Gender Gap Report for 2014, the Philippines upholds specific laws aimed at the elimination of discrimination against women like Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta for Women. The aforementioned law recognizes, protects, fulfills and promotes the rights of Filipino women and this includes the non-discrimination in employment opportunities in the fields of military, police and other similar services [11]. Climbing two notches in this year's World Economic Forum (WEF) report which measured gender equality in 145 nations, the Philippines remain as the Asia Pacific region's topnotcher, with New Zealand as the only other country from the Asia Pacific to be included in the top ten. The WEF report clearly stated that at number seven worldwide, the Philippines was able to close 79 of its gender gap, "by far the highest of any Asian country". The WEF likewise stated that major improvements were seen in the economic participation and opportunity indicator following the country's influx of female legislators, senior managers and officials, and technical and professional workers. Likewise, the country benefited from a reportedly higher number of females in ministerial positions [12].

This paper analyzed the speeches of Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago and highlighted how she appealed to the politically adept intelligent readers and scholars of rhetoric and literary fans who are interested to learn how the strategic use of language in dynamic contexts can shape the thinking of people. Likewise, this paper highlights how the art of rhetoric can provide for opportunities for social change, and how rhetorical performances can function as key sites for intervention and political agency, as well as how rhetorical actions both allow for and conversely, limit social change.

The importance of this literary analysis is hinged on its significance to a particular group of individuals. Hence, it is important to outline how this research is beneficial to the researcher, to future researchers, to academic managers, college instructors of literature, students of literature and to working professionals.

This research will be beneficial to the researcher by serving as her modest contribution to the growing body of literature on Santiago's literature and rhetoric, and to future researchers who may be inspired by this paper which may be used as a frame of reference in the event that they conduct studies about gender equality and women empowerment. This study will be

helpful to academic managers by inspiring them to adhere to the advocacy of gender equality and women empowerment as espoused by Miriam Defensor Santiago as a worthy epitome of culture and letters in the highest order, and to disseminate the said advocacy and values to their respective academes. This paper will likewise be helpful in college instructors' methodology in teaching literature, specifically with the use of applicable and appropriate theories, approaches and devices in literary analysis as well as the linkages between persuasion and identity in contemporary Philippine and global politics. This research will inspire students to treat literature as notable work of art distinguished from other texts through form and content, and will help them intensify an appreciation of speeches, discourses and articles, and further inspire them to engage in literary analysis as an essential academic activity. This study will benefit working professionals who may belong to the politically engaged, intellectual leaders and scholars of rhetoric who may be interested in how the strategic use of language in a dynamic context may inspire them to organize appropriate workplace initiatives inspired by the advocacy of Miriam Defensor Santiago.

Bearing these thoughts in mind, the researcher, who currently serves as a lecturer at the Batangas State University, felt deeply motivated to pursue an analysis of gender equality and women empowerment as gleaned from the selected speeches of Miriam Defensor Santiago, highlighting their implications to the thinking of the Filipino youth.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This research was centered on the issues of gender equality and women empowerment as core topics in select speeches of Miriam Defensor Santiago and specifically aimed to determine how gender gap in the Philippines was identified in areas of educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation, available opportunities and political empowerment. Likewise, this study aimed to illustrate how gender equality and women empowerment were manifested in selected speeches of Defensor Santiago and sought to identify the implications of her advocacy to the thinking of the Filipino youth.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design.** This study made use of the qualitative research method in analysis of gender

equality and women empowerment as highlighted topics in the selected literary works. Qualitative research must maintain strict adherence to the philosophy which requires full consideration of the multiplicity of realities afforded to participants from which understanding of even the most complex events can be gained, according to Suter [13]. Law, et al. [14] likewise stated that a researcher must be keen to identifying the meaning of beliefs and/or behaviors which are derived from the subject's interactions within a particular setting. Gender equality and women empowerment are seemingly ancient issues to man which, while not totally obscured from public knowledge, remain a persistent worldwide issue which made the qualitative exploration of the well-respected Filipina senator's selected literary works all the more significant and necessary. Falling under the category of verbal discourses, the selections in this study considered the special nature of the author's viewpoint, with respect to her stature in Philippine politics and the breadth of her knowledge and experience in the aforementioned issues. According to Ary, et al. [15] human experiences derive meaning from social, cultural, and political influences, and this inter-relationship afforded the researcher the substantial interpretation of the author's motives in connection to her advocacies.

Qualitative data analysis aims to pinpoint the occurrence of insights, concepts, patterns or themes, according to Patton [16], hence, the technical approach of message handling and content analysis, or textual analysis was likewise utilized [17], with the identification of the recurring patterns and extraction of meaning from Defensor-Santiago's selected image data or literary narrative as focal point in this paper's data analysis.

**Treatment of Materials.** The researcher conducted this study in full consideration of the essential features of literature in the treatment of materials.

Literature follows a set of standards by which particular selections may be subjected to analysis. Garcia et al. [18] outlined seven standards by which literary selections may be evaluated and analyzed, namely; universality, permanence, suggestiveness, intellectual value, spiritually value, style and artistry.

With regard to universality, the selected literary pieces were deemed as having a universal appeal as it deals with universally relevant issues about human conditions that are timely. The same can be said for

the quality of permanence, as the said selections bear a lasting significance aimed at the issue of gender equality and women empowerment, and interpretation may be realized depending on the discernment of every reader who may be privileged to encounter the said selections. With regard to the quality of suggestiveness, the selections have the ability to appeal to the reader's emotions, intellect and imagination, with a charm by which a reader may experience a realm of an experience from which values can be gleaned. As to the selections' intellectual value, much can be gleaned from them in ways that stimulate the reader's thoughts and enrich their mental life by way of realization of fundamental truths and concerns about human nature. With regard to the spiritual value of the selected works, it is important to emphasize the underlying moral messages in the literary pieces which bring about spiritual upliftment to the readers by way of the moral values within them.

With regard to the literary selections' quality of style, the said selections are not without their particular form or distinction in type which offer a vivid representation of the particular way by which the writer views life and offer her own expression, in her particular style.

As to the selections' artistry, the said works are considered valid expressions of the author's insights about life in her own artistic reflections of truth and beauty, all of which are available to be discovered, rediscovered and appreciated.

The representative literary works that were analyzed included the following: *Closing the Gender Gap and Stopping Political Dynasties*, *Women and Human Rights*, *Night Work Prohibition for Women is Unconstitutional* and *Women as Agents of Change*. These speeches formed the primary core sources of this study, and were chosen because of their interrelation to the aforementioned themes and subthemes. Even more so, the selections substantiated the aim of this study to illustrate the implications of the ascertained advocacies to the thinking of the Filipino youth.

Other speeches of Miriam Defensor Santiago which might have gender equality and women empowerment as undertones were not chosen to become part of this study. Similarly, other approaches in literary criticisms were not included in the study.

The materials included in this study were carefully subjected to internal and external critique, thus, the veracity and substance of the aforesaid

literature were meticulously analyzed and chartered. In this light, the researcher exercised full freedom in utilizing her view, defending her understanding, and conducting a thorough appraisal of every literary piece in accordance to the ideological concepts evoked in her sensibilities by defining the language-theme suitability, the language's relevance to the settings and the suitability of the language to the selections.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Issue of Gender Gap in the Philippines as Focal Points Manifested in the Selected Speeches of Miriam Defensor Santiago.

As per the Geneva-based World Economic Forum which was released in 2011 about the Global Gender Gap ranking, there are four categories which determine and define the gender gap, namely educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment. In adherence to the said categories, this paper analyzed the issue of gender gap in the Philippines as key points that were manifested in the selected speeches of Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago.

**1.1 Educational Attainment.** If one were to scrutinize the educational background of the female senator from the Philippines, one would surely agree that to say that she is a one of kind, brilliant and highly intellectual individual would be an understatement. Hence, it is understandable that when the female legislator discusses key points on the role of educational attainment in closing the gender gap, one need not subject oneself to an over-analysis of the content in her message. When discussing matters pertaining to the ever-important role of education in gender related issues, Miriam's statements were concise, straightforward and devoid of the fancy rhetoric and at times, even being ever so direct without feeling the necessity to explain herself. In *Closing the Gender Gap, and Stopping Political Dynasties* in March 2013, she opened her keynote address without the lengthy introduction, but not without anchoring on her credibility as a lawmaker to share her wisdom on the ever-sensitive gender related issue [19]. In it, Miriam was forthright in saying that illiteracy serves as a culpable factor for the persistence of the gender gap, in this case in the participation of women in Philippine politics [19]. She did not feel the need to discuss the merits of education in explaining the gender gap; rather, she efficiently outlined the

reasons as to why gender gap persists in the Philippine political sphere, and placed the issue of educational attainment on top of her list. It is important to note that in establishing the ethos of her persona, Miriam had an air of authority around her, but her aura seldom alienated her from her audience. While Miriam's inherent audacity to speak on matters falling under her expertise most certainly made opponents uncomfortable, it is with Miriam's propensity to being both truthful and politically correct which earned the respect of her colleagues and even her detractors, and thus made her one of the most respected Filipino public figures.

Defensor Santiago's thoughts almost always require her audience to be on the same wavelength as hers, as was gleaned in the said keynote address where she deliberately chose to be concise in listing lack of knowledge and illiteracy as major hindrances in closing the gender gap in the area of politics [19]. It can be understood that Defensor Santiago highlighted this field in connection with the theme of educational attainment as this was the very field where she had spent a major part of her life, a field where she feels most at home.

Similarly, Defensor Santiago maintained her concise approach in equating the importance of educational attainment in alleviating poverty for the Filipino women. In the same keynote address, her statement on the implications of lack of college education to job opportunities for women basically offers an overview on how important educational attainment is for the senator [19]. Needless to say, for the greater part of her statements that touched on the subject of educational attainment, it can be gleaned that to Miriam Defensor Santiago, the said subject should be deemed as an absolute imperative.

**1.2 Health and Survival.** In matters concerning the gender gap in terms of women's health and survival, Miriam Defensor Santiago's words were gleaned to be replete but not circuitous, rather, full of the pertinent, information which she deemed necessary to explain her thoughts. In her *Women and Human Rights Speech* on December 2010, Defensor Santiago utilized her eloquence in the utilization of the facts she knew were vital to be introduced to her audience in order for them to have a firm grasp on her message. She chose a straightforward approach in giving the necessary details on parts of the said speech when she briefly defined human rights, and enumerated the strides taken in promotion of such,

before zooming in on the topic of milestones in women's rights, where she outlined the factors which, to her, relegated the provision of the said rights of women to mere areas of "special interest" within consideration of human rights [20].

Defensor Santiago's detailed approach afforded her the necessary foundation to build on the premise that was gleaned as being of prime importance to her, that women's health and survival are ever-important areas which should never be overlooked in closing the gender gap. As was manifested in the same speech, Miriam Defensor Santiago highlighted her contribution to the said theme by giving a brief outline of the legislative bill she filed which was the "Reproductive Health Act" [21]. It can be gleaned from her making mention of her authored bill that Miriam Defensor Santiago wishes to make it clear that her advocacy shall never be limited to empty premises, and that she was a person who backed her words with the necessary and appropriate actions. It can likewise be noted from the said speech that Miriam Defensor Santiago was quite adept at utilizing figures to illustrate the urgency of the matter at hand. The same ease by which Miriam navigated through pertinent facts and legalities to define the urgency of her message was manifested in her privilege speech about Senate Bill 2701 which she delivered on March 2011. In it, she emphasized the need for convention 171 or the new Night Work Convention to be ratified as it takes into account the health and safety of workers, regardless of sex [22]. Defensor Santiago's preference to highlighting the said convention 171 while not mainly singling out its benefits for the women workers can be gleaned as an important aspect of her advocacy in closing the gender gap, and while in other parts of the said speech, she mentioned the objectives that were achieved by said convention 171, she made mention of the said benefits if only to highlight the increased work opportunity for women, once again a manifestation of her advocacy on closing the gender gap [22].

**1.3 Economic Participation and Opportunity.** It was observed from the selected speeches of Miriam Defensor Santiago that she did not feel the need to draw specific lines to delineate one aspect of gender gap over another, but rather, she utilized the eloquence and brilliance to comfortably navigate around the sub-themes with much ease and comfort in the interrelationship among them. In Los Banos, Laguna on March 11, 2014, Defensor Santiago



discussed the issue of gender gap with the necessary mentioning of the dismal ranking of the Philippines in terms of economic participation and opportunity and attributed the said ranking to rather pronounced gaps in work participation between men and women [23]. She utilized wit and humor in the said speech when she added that the necessary action to correct the gender imbalance in Philippine politics was to elect six more women as Presidents, and followed with the unique utilization of logic in suggesting that "a woman should be elected as president in 2016", and six female senators would assure the 50/50 balance of sexes in the senate thus closing the gender gap. With statements like these have endeared Miriam Defensor Santiago to her audience in her own unique and audacious way [23].

Apart from her typical witticism, Defensor Santiago in the same speech was not without the more serious tones in utilizing statistics when she highlighted the role of women as agents in economic change. While emphasizing the disproportionate global ratios and the marginalized plight of women in many countries, she was quick to offer her audience a glimmer of hope in the issue of gender gap in the Philippines, thus strengthening her resolve with hope that it may radiate to her audience by equating the issue to a point of interest by which her audience can directly relate, in this case in the field of agriculture [23].

The same can be said for her speech *Closing the Gender Gap* on March 4, 2013, where Defensor Santiago took advantage of the Fifth Filipina Entrepreneurship Summit to discuss the importance of the role of women in nation building as a constitutional provision, and highlighted entrepreneurship option for Filipino women by citing the necessary education and skills training while making mention of the legal provisions which may aid women in the realization of such endeavor [19]. It can likewise be noted that in the aforementioned speech, she exemplified the typical eloquence in presenting the pertinent facts to establish the situation at hand and as was Miriam-esque of her, the usual rundown of detailed answers for every question or problem she presented could have only been delivered with much zeal and promise by only Miriam Defensor Santiago herself.

**1.4 Political Empowerment.** Being the political stalwart that she is, it is important to understand the motive behind Miriam's advocacy to close the gender

gap in terms of political empowerment. Defensor Santiago's experience in the field of public service merits her the necessary credibility to discuss the said matters, and this she does in a way which promotes the atmosphere of "if I can, so could you" as opposed to being aloof and distant to her peers with respect to her achievements. As exemplified in her keynote address at the Fifth Filipina Entrepreneurship Summit in March 2013, Defensor Santiago openly cited the provision in the Philippine Constitution which recognizes the participatory role of women in nation building, and the equality provided for by both Philippines and international law to women and this can be gleaned as a way of the senator to prod her female peers to embracing the ever important role in closing the gender gap [19].

By sharing her knowledge on the particular issue and highlighting the importance of women's political empowerment [19], Defensor Santiago was able to dismantle the often presumed elitist aura as implicated by her achievements, and by becoming very vocal and intent in expressing her pro-women advocacy, Miriam Defensor Santiago, in her address was able to endear herself to her audience regardless of social class. This unique style of Defensor Santiago concretized her status as an overachieving public servant who was indeed, for the masses. In the same speech, she again manifested her wit and charm with the quips about the burdens of womanhood while discussing the role of women in politics, and gave a typical rundown of logos in outlining the issue of gender gap in Philippine politics [19].

In similar fashion, her speech on International Human Rights Day in 2010 showcased Miriam Defensor Santiago's propensity to push for her advocacy, and this she did by inserting her thoughts on the importance of upholding the granting of equal access to power for women, as stipulated in the CEDAW and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [20]. This can be gleaned as Defensor Santiago's way of persuading the audience to her advocacy on ultimately closing the gender gap, and not in any way as an underhanded and subliminal way of saying that she alone is the best person for the job. As capable as she is for the highest position in Philippine politics, in the said speech, as with most of her discourses, Defensor Santiago never felt the need to elevate her status among those around her, rather, her dedication to pushing for the best opportunities for women in the field of Philippine politics more often

than not made her all the more qualified to lead a nation.

## **2. Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Gleaned in the Selected Speeches of Miriam Defensor-Santiago.**

A staunch proponent of gender equality and women empowerment, Miriam Defensor Santiago was an accomplished public servant who, by far, pushed for her advocacy through a substance amount of laws she passed to push for the said endeavor. In the same light, she was quite vocal and intense in making mention of her advocacy in every opportunity she deemed fit. By far, numerous accounts of her discourses afforded her the venue to speak her thoughts on gender equality and women empowerment, and the selections included in this paper were truly replete of the senator's espousal of the said advocacy.

Miriam Defensor Santiago in March 2015 took advantage of the celebration of women's month in seeking the support of the public for her authored bills which aim to further establish the equality of opportunities and responsibilities between the sexes. Having authored and co-authored the Magna Carta of Women and the Reproductive Health Law, respectively, Defensor Santiago in 2015 manifested her deep desire for her advocacy to be espoused likewise by the public, as she implored the plight of similar bills she authored which, to date, remain in stagnation at the Philippine Senate Committee level [24].

In her stint as a guest speaker at IRRI, Los Banos, Laguna in 2014, she emphasized the need for the advocacy of gender equality and women empowerment by enumerating constitutional and international law provisions which promoted and protected the said advocacies, and detailed the immense role of women as agents of change when she discussed the *Women as Agents of Political Change Research* [23]. In the said speech, she successfully equated the women's role to her audience's particular field of practice, and this manifestation of adaptability exemplified by the senator all the more reflected the sense of urgency required by her advocacy.

In her keynote speech at the World Trade Center in Pasay City on March 1, 2013, Defensor Santiago celebrated International Women's month with much enthusiasm and zeal while exhibiting the passion in highlighting her advocacy on gender equality and women empowerment through her usual utilization of

factual and statistical rundowns of substantial data as a precursor to delivering her thoughts [19]. It was observed from the selections that in terms of discussing the issues of gender equality and women empowerment, Senator Santiago was keen to deliver her message forthrightly but in her most concise yet eloquent way. Miriam Defensor Santiago's vocabulary supremacy and her intellect and wisdom afforded her with the best choice of words that give justice to the most ardent thoughts in her head, and this exceptional eloquence afforded Miriam the ability to easily connect with her audience, bereft of the fanfare, flamboyant as she may have been.

In her privilege speech in March 2011, Miriam Defensor Santiago was not without words that reflected her passion and wisdom. In it she highlighted the implications of the "protectionist approach" as discriminatory to women [22]. This was in reference to the Senate Bill 2701 which prohibited night work for women, which, to Defensor Santiago was protective in nature, but in contemporary age of gender equality and balance proves outright discriminatory for women [22]. While Miriam recognizes the protective nature of the said bill toward women, it is important to understand that as part of her advocacy, she deems the said bill as encroaching on the capabilities of the women, and thus opposes the thrust of women empowerment. Defensor Santiago's stand on the said bill reflected the astute interpretation she was most noted for, and her passion in standing for what she believes in was one of her most distinguished trademarks.

Similarly, in 2010, when she delivered her speech at Centro Escolar University, Miriam Defensor Santiago exhibited the typical fiery passion combined with the wisdom of a true scholar that she is. In it, she gave important insights on *Women and Human Rights* by providing a detailed, structured and well-organized address which defined human rights, enumerated milestones and strides accomplished in the promulgation of human rights, and inculcated within her message important milestones in women's rights and gave an overview on the Reproductive Health Bill [20]. She then concluded her speech by urging her audience to fight for women's rights, and rallied for support for the Reproductive Health Bill, and ended her speech with a quote from the poem "Invictus" in a way to persuade her audience to be masters of their own fate, and this can easily be gleaned as her vibrant plea to uphold the advocacy of gender equality and

women empowerment-an appeal to the youth with whom she shares the strongest of connections.

### **3. The Implications of the Author's Advocacy on Gender Equality and Gender Empowerment to the Thinking of the Filipino Youth.**

For the greater part of her career as a public servant, Miriam Defensor Santiago has endeared herself to the countless youthful visionaries who saw a glimmer of hope in her persona. While it may be a deplorable possibility that the Philippines may never be able to see the day when the brilliant senator gets back to lead the Filipino nation due to health restraints, it can never be denied that if the Filipino youth were to name the worthiest of mentors to guide future leaders, Defensor Santiago would surely be shortlisted. She truly belonged to the top of the heap in Philippine politics, and if one were to disregard the fact that she was an accomplished public servant, or a stern law professor, or a fighter of graft and corruption-if one were to concentrate on her advocacy that is Gender Equality and Gender Empowerment, Defensor Santiago still would be entitled to bear the torch of contemporary Filipino youth, as her advocacy and the passion she espoused in fighting for it will not be without implications on the Filipino nation's future leaders.

Defensor Santiago's advocacy is hinged on the premise that the youth will be able to emulate her brilliance, dedication, strong will and desire to be an agent of change. Her life as a public servant serves as a solid example for the youth, particularly the young women of today. With her advocacy, the youth may find value in the equity of roles that both sexes must share in nation-building and in her message which is aimed at the urgency of the situation, the Filipino youth must be ready to embrace, adhere to and espouse the very same message, with the very same motives and the very same passion Defensor Santiago epitomized before them. While emulating her academic brilliance may seem a tall order for most of the Filipino youth, one need not look past her achievements to see the flame within that she keeps alight for the future of the Filipino youth. Defensor Santiago's motive in her advocacies was quite clear, what is quite vague is the capability of the Filipino youth to immediately discern from the advocacy she keeps alight. The implications, no matter how countless they may be able to enumerate, all revolve and return to the flame within Defensor Santiago's advocacy. The time when the Filipino youth

acknowledges the motive behind her advocacy and recognizes that her being the keeper of the flame would eventually lead them to searching for the fuel that feeds the advocacy is the time when the Filipino youth will finally decide to not look elsewhere. The implications of her advocacy reflect a rather heavy responsibility on the shoulders of today's Filipino youth. With it, whether or not they should keep the flames of her advocacy should be kept alight is utterly out of the question, as it is an absolute and certain responsibility the youth will inherit. The question as to when the Filipino youth will understand that they, along with the future Filipinos are the fuel to the advocacy of gender equality and gender empowerment is the point at hand. Being as it is, it is not the toughest of tasks for the Filipino youth to be able to begin the espousal of Miriam's advocacy. Failure of the Filipino youth to adhere to the advocacy of gender equality and gender empowerment would render them helpless to the changing times. The Filipino youth of today can be considered as a far cry from the rather carefree youth of the not-so-distant generation X, hence it can be expected of them to be the ever-able and willing stewards of the said advocacy, in order for them to rightfully claim their role and for them to share with the responsibility of nation building in congruence with the advocacy they must perpetually uphold.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The issue of gender gap in the Philippines was found to be manifested and discussed forthrightly by the senator in her speeches in terms of educational attainment, with herself being a solid example of the capability of women to attain intellectual and educational brilliance. Her discussion on the role of education in gender-related issues in her keynote address in March 2013 offered insightful wisdom in identifying illiteracy as one culpable factor for the persistence of gender gap, as well as the relationship of college education to job opportunities for women. Women's health and survival was likewise given importance by the senator, as can be gleaned in the Reproductive Health Act which she herself authored, as well as in her privilege speech on March 2011 wherein she emphasized the need for the ratification of the New Night Work Convention, further offering proof on her advocacy in protecting the welfare and overall survival of women in the workforce. The same can be said for women's economic participation and

opportunity, as can be gleaned in her discussion of the said issue on March 2014 in Los Banos, where the senator identified the pronounced gaps in work participation between men and women as the reason for the country's dismal ranking in terms of the said economic variable. Similarly, her speech *Closing the Gender Gap* on March 2013 discussed the importance of role women in nation-building as a constitutional provision and highlighted the legalities by which women may be able to do their part. In terms of women's political empowerment, Defensor-Santiago's experience in the field of public service merited her the credibility to highlight important provisions in the Philippine Constitution which recognizes the role of women, as manifested in her keynote address at the Fifth Filipina Entrepreneurship Summit in March 2013. Likewise, her speech on International Human Rights Day in 2010 highlighted the importance of equal access to power for women, as stipulated in the CEDAW and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. With these, it was found that the focal points pertaining to women's educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment were effectively touched by the senator with the signature wit, eloquence, astuteness and passion she was widely known for; that gender equality and women empowerment were likewise gleaned in the selected speeches, all of which were delivered by Miriam Defensor Santiago with the motive of persuading her audience to espouse the same advocacy, and this she achieved through her unique and distinct style of utilizing the persuasive ability of literature; and, that the implications of the author's advocacy on gender equality and gender empowerment delegated the monumental task upon the shoulders of the Filipino youth, in ways that their thinking will be directly influenced by her advocacy and thus promote within them a sense of urgency to embrace and espouse the same advocacies in order for them to be able to contribute to nation building.

With these, the study offers the following recommendations: that future researchers may find merit in considering this research as a worthy reference or basis for future studies aimed at exploring the rhetorical brilliance of Miriam Defensor Santiago, and that this paper may well be included in the ever-growing body of literature on the literary prowess and passionate advocacy of the prolific legislator, and that they, in the course of future research may discover fresh insights which may supplant or substantiate this

paper; that academic managers thereby accept the exemplary works of Defensor Santiago as vital representations of culture and letters in the highest order with the inherent capacity to induce change, and find the appropriate philosophies from which they can formulate concepts that may apply to their particular academes; that college instructors of literature may find concepts to augment their methodologies in teaching the application of appropriate theories, approaches in literary analysis and likewise in the pedagogical concepts that connect identity with persuasion, in this case exemplified in contemporary Philippine politics; that students will be inspired by this research and thus consider literature as a distinct art form with unique style and content, hence aid them in the resolve to intensify their appreciation of speeches, discourses and articles, and teach them the value of engaging in literary analysis as a worthy academic activity, and instill in them the importance of espousing the advocacy of gender equality and gender empowerment in their future roles as nation builders; and, that working professionals may likewise be inspired by the advocacy espoused by Defensor Santiago, most especially those who belong to the politically engaged readers and/or scholars of rhetoric, that they may incorporate the said advocacy and the exemplary strategic use of language to persuade, which may inspire them to organize the necessary and appropriate workplace initiatives, all being in congruence with the advocacy of Miriam Defensor Santiago that is gender equality and gender empowerment.

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