



NABA BALLYGUNGE MAHAVIDYALAYA

(Formerly CHARUCHANDRA EVENING COLLEGE)

27E, Bosepukur Road, Kolkata - 700042

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Title of the Seminar: "Workplace Equality: Proactive Measures to Combat Sexual Harassment"

Speaker: Dr Sunanda Goenka, Principal, Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri Law College.

Organizers: Gender Sensitization Sub-Committee, Internal Complaint Committee, Internal Quality Assurance Cell of Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya

Date: 21.12.2024

No. of participants: 23

Link to the seminar on Institutional Youtube Channel: <https://youtu.be/Zn81L-vaL9w?si=q4BTwZdTjfcXVJxU>

The seminar began the principal of the college Dr Ayantika Ghosh, addressing the audience on the relevance of the topic and expressed her hope that at the end of the seminar, the audience will be made aware and sensitised about the boundaries that employees must keep in mind with relation to their behavior with their colleagues. It was expected that the outcome of the seminar will be knowing from the resource person where exactly one must keep limit or boundary to making fun, and understanding the subtle boundary line between teasing that is innocuous and teasing that tantamounts to sexual harassment. She defined the scope of sexual harassment, saying that it can be direct as well as indirect like filthy talk, showing offensive pictures, sexual innuendo etc. She further said that it is not that only women are harassed by men at workplace, it can all also be the vice versa, and today's talk by Dr. Goenka would explore the meaning and extent of sexual harassment at workplace and when exactly steps should be taken to combat it.

The convener of the Gender Sensitization Sub-Committee, Shri Debi Prasad Lahiri addressed the audience. He briefed about the works of the subcommittee and mentioned that the committee strives two sensitise against general discrimination and promote gender equity at workplace.



Dr Ayantika Ghosh, Principal, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya addressing the audience in the seminar on "Workplace Equality: Proactive Measures to Combat Sexual Harassment" on 21.12.2024



Shri Debi Prasad Lahiri, Convenor, Gender Sensitization Sub-Committee addressing the audience

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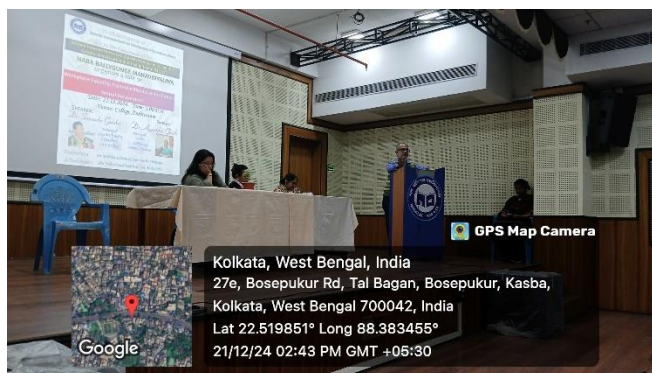
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The convenor of Internal Complaint Committee Smt Mala Saha Basu explained the extent of work of the committee. She explained that the committee, formed pertaining to the Vishakha guidelines, makes sure that there is absolutely no harassment and the primary aim of the workplace would be total eradication of gender discrimination and ensuring that any individual, regardless their sexual identity whether cisgender, transgender, LGBTQIA+, Queer must be safe. If any complaint against sexual harassment is lodged, the internal complaint committee first makes necessary investigation of the truth and accordingly, whatever decision is taken by the ICC it is final.

The next speaker was the IQAC Coordinator Dr Tamal Taru Roy who addressed the audience saying that any kind of harassment wherein one feels humiliated must be prevented.



Smt Mala Saha Basu, Convenor, Internal Complaint Committee addressing the audience



Dr Tamal Taru Roy, Coordinator, IQAC addressing the audience

Finally, the resource person, Dr. Sunanda Goenka addressed the audience. She began saying that the predicament of women has never been a rosy picture. In the context of social smugness, even in the so-called advanced countries where women are expected to be safe, the reality is not so. Her definition of workplace equality is that all employees should have equal access to opportunities, rights and resources, and its aim is fostering a positive, meaningful, healthy work-environment and healthy work ethics and strengthens trust and reliability. Dr Goenka's findings have established that nearly 8.2% women have experienced sexual violence at workplace compared to 5% men, which is an alarming percentage. Unfortunately, there are many complaints of sexual harassment lodged against male professors by female students, teaching and non-teaching staff as well as librarians. Some have been suspended, while others are struggling to not lose their jobs. In India, equality before law is enshrined in article 14 and writ to life in article 21 yet sadly harassment takes place, yet why then women are not equal? It is because reality and law are not in sync. The discrimination, in the speaker's words, starts even before the birth of the girl.

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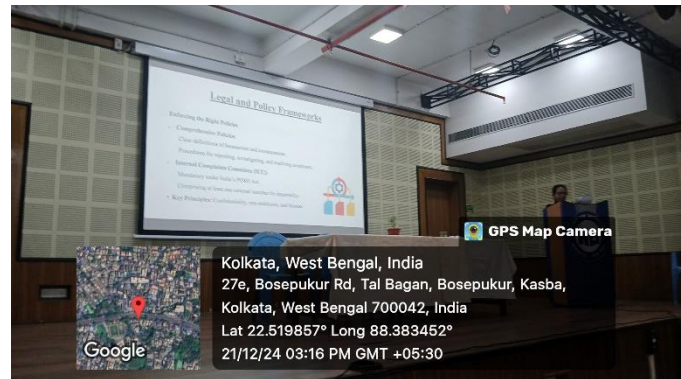
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Because, although sex determination is a crime in India, in Punjab Haryana belt, the sex of the offspring is determined, and if found to be a girl child, it is aborted. Yet, it is a paradox that in a country like India where a girl child is aborted, women are adored as Goddess. Dr Goyenka stated that to penetrate into the nuances of workplace equality, one must have a view of the state of work in the industries. She mentioned that even a few years back, there was no prevalence of the system of equal payment or wages for equal work. Even when the floodgates for women's vocation opened, women were employed as cheap labour in developing, developed as well as under the undeveloped countries. The speaker affirmed that even in the unorganised sectors today, the women are employed for lower wages compared to the men counterparts. She emphasised that the origin of the formulation of law regarding women's sexual harassment at workplace can be traced back to the Bhanwari Devi gangrape case in Rajasthan which caused a furore throughout India and finally gave way to the formulation of revolutionary Vishakha guidelines in 1997 which ultimately went to the Apex court in India, bringing in the radical changes in workplace law vis-a-vis sexual harassment. Dr Goenka said that the higher educational institutes are mostly guided by the UGC guidelines with relevance to sexual harassment, so composition of ICC is monitored by UGC itself Whereas in non higher educational institute workplaces, UGC formulated guidelines are not prevalent. Supreme court has formulated certain guidelines which are in force in these workplaces.



Dr Sunanda Goenka, Principal, Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri Law College and Resource Person explaining the Vishakha Guidelines and legal formulations regarding Sexual Harassment at Workplace in the seminar titled "Workplace Equality: Proactive Measures to Combat Sexual Harassment" on 21.12.2024

At least 11% of the composition of ICC must follow this Act and the rest of the members will constitute of women. She emphasised that The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, also known as the PoSH Act, aims to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace by providing a mechanism for prevention, prohibition, and redressal of complaints but unfortunately, at that time, it did not cover women working in agriculture and armed force.

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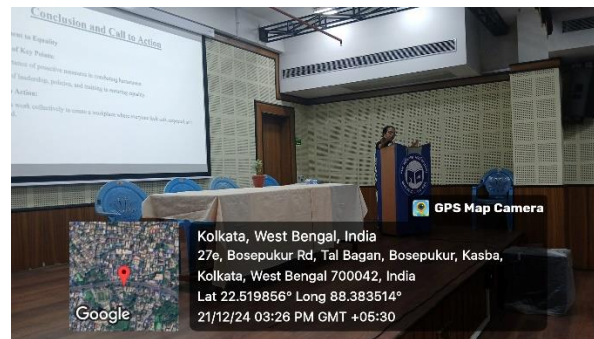
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She further said that if an allegation sexual harassment against the someone is lodged, ICC investigates and throughout the tenure of investigation, the accused will remain suspended and if he loses the case in court, he is to be dismissed from job. Even if the accusation is proved to be false and the woman proved guilty of false complaint, she would be prosecuted. The act defines the employer could employee and workplace equation. But it is ambiguous who is the authority going to confirm the punishment: Principal or President of the Governing Body or Education Minister? She also explained the extended definition of an employee that if the wife of the gatekeeper is abused at college, then also, she would be coming under the sexual harassment act. She rightly stated that in India, we fear to lodge a complaint of sexual harassment because of prevalent social taboos albeit the law is very modern and progressive to protect the women. She also defined as Dr. Ghosh already said that the scope of sexual harassment is broad and it does not necessarily include only physical touch; it might also be an offensive remark. Whatever may be the investigation report, ICC is responsible to send it to the police and the police after meeting with the governing body, the measure would be taken by the Governing Body, sent to the education directorate and the legal measures would be taken accordingly. Those institutes which do not have internal complaint committee must have a local complaint committee under District Magistrate who would employ a Nodal Officer depending on the rural areas/tribal areas/municipality sectors/urban sectors, who must forward the complaint to the concerned local committee within 7 days. She believed that the seminar must sensitise everyone from Principal to all stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of law regarding sexual harassment. It is a statutory obligation to work towards the implementation of the Act. She discussed each eight key chapters of the Act, namely Chapter I: Preliminary, Chapter II: Constitution of Internal Complaints Committee, Chapter III: Constitution of Local Complaints Committee, Chapter IV: Complaint, Chapter V: Inquiry into Complaint, Chapter VI: Duties of Employer, Chapter VII: Duties and Powers of District Officer and Chapter VIII: Miscellaneous. He entered the lecture with reference to the Vedic times when women were at par with men and moved shoulder to shoulder with them. Protection of women is enforced in the laws of India but this needs to be implemented and understood.



Some moments from Dr Sunanda Goenka's talk on "Workplace Equality: Proactive Measures to Combat Sexual Harassment" on 21.12.2024

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Group photo of Principal, the resource person and faculty members at the end of the seminar

Outcomes of the seminar:

The audience were able to:

- ✓ Be aware of the Vishakha Guidelines
- ✓ Sensitised about the impact and consequences of sexual harassment at workplace
- ✓ Know about the power and functions of Internal Complaint Committee
- ✓ Be aware of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

Principal

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