



Gujarat National Law University

GNLU PRESS NOTE No. 15/2021

International Women's Day Celebration by GNLU Centre for Women and Child Rights

Gandhinagar, March 08, 2021: On the occasion of International Women's Day on March 8, 2021, Gujarat National Law University organized a seminar on "Women and Law: Experiences from within" under the auspices of the Center for Women and Child Rights.

Bombay High Court Advocate, Social Worker and Former Civil Servant Advocate Abha Singh and the Supreme Court of India Advocate-on-Record, Advocate Shriya Maini, participated.

Advocate Abha Singh holds an M.Phil on Child Rights from the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and the Chevening Scholarship recipient to attend the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her talk "Honour Killings in India and the Legal Complications of Section 498A at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London received widespread acclaim. Abha Singh was also invited as a speaker at TEDx conducted jointly by Oxford and Cambridge's Universities in May 2017. She has successfully pursued the Salman Khan Hit-and-Run case to ensure that the rule of law prevails. Through her NGO RannSamar, she offers free legal assistance to helpless women and slum dwellers who local authorities and builders have unfairly persecuted for land rightfully theirs.

Advocate Shriya Maini is an alumna of GNLU. For her masters, she went to the University of Oxford on a fully-funded scholarship. She worked under President Judge (now Retd.) Theodor Meron at the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals at The Hague, The Netherlands, a war crimes tribunal set up by the United Nations to try the Balkan war criminals. She is now Advocate-on-Record at the Supreme Court of India. She is also practicing at the Delhi High Court and teaching at various law schools as a visiting faculty.

Advocate Shriya Maini, citing her career as an example, said that there are challenges facing women. Still, if you have substance, ambition, confidence, clarity of what you want to achieve, determination, and prepared for hard work, no one can stop you from achieving your goal.

Advocate Shriya Maini said that her father is a lawyer and her mother is a doctor. My father wanted me to be a lawyer and my mother a doctor. I took the entrance exam for both law school and medical school, and after passing both, I opted for law studies. Dad was pleased, and mother annoyed. During my five years at GNLU, being a woman did not cause any problems. After graduation, I secured a job in the top law firm in the country through campus placement. But I wanted to be a litigating lawyer. Therefore, after working in a law firm for a few months, I moved to advocacy. After that, I went to Oxford University with a full scholarship for my master's in law.



Gujarat National Law University

I also succeeded as a lawyer after the initial struggle, and today I am an advocate-on-record in the Supreme Court of India. In my journey so far, being a woman posed no obstacle in my way that I could not overcome.

A woman indeed has to struggle more than a man to establish herself as a lawyer. The first three years of advocacy were tough. Usually, the parties choose a male lawyer as their lawyer because they believe that only a male lawyer can make an aggressive and effective representation of their case. Such a belief in society makes it difficult for a woman lawyer to get briefs initially, and I also went through the same phase. But if you have the knowledge and are prepared for hard work, your work will indeed speak for itself. You will succeed in your cases, and after that, you will be seen as a successful lawyer and not as a woman lawyer.

Advocate Shriya Maini said women need not be discouraged by challenges. She said, "My career is a testament to the fact that any woman can achieve success through her qualifications, passion and hard work." She advised the students "to focus your attention and energy on your goal if you want to succeed. Just as a horse is blindfolded so that it does not get distracted and make rapid progress toward its goal, so you too should focus on your goal without being distracted by unnecessary noise around you. You will succeed for sure."

Advocate Abha Singh in her speech, stressed the need to strengthen the law on preventing sexual harassment of women in the workplace. He described the case of a woman client. The woman had been working for a blue-chip company in Mumbai for 17 years. She was made chairman of the Internal Complaints Committee, set up under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women Act. She received a complaint of sexual harassment against a senior male executive of the company. Based on the evidence, she held the executive guilty and recommended that he be fired from the company. Shortly after she submitted her report, the company fired her on flimsy grounds. The woman is currently unemployed after a successful career of seventeen years. I have filed public interest litigation in the Bombay High Court in this regard, which is currently pending. If the law requires the Internal Complaints Committee to act fearlessly and impartially, the law should also provide legal protection to the committee members and chairperson. She said such cases come mainly from private sector companies or the unorganized sector where the "hire and fire" policy is followed. Such incidents do not usually occur in government or public sector companies.

Advocate Abha Singh also stressed the need for effective implementation of the witness protection scheme in criminal cases. She said three witnesses in the Asharam rape case were shot dead, and one witness was abducted. Even though the Supreme Court approved the witness protection scheme in 2018, a rape accused in Uttar Pradesh, after being released on bail, killed the rape victim's father recently. If such incidents occur, who will come forward to testify against the big and powerful criminals? Adequate protection of witnesses in criminal cases is essential in the interest of the criminal justice system.



Gujarat National Law University

Earlier, Prof. (Dr.) Mamta Biswal, Dean of Faculty and Academic Affairs, GNLU, welcomed all attendees. She introduced how "woman empowerment is an old yet contemporary topic", considering that societal empowerment is a continuous process.

On this occasion, Dr Asha Verma, Head of the Center for Women and Child Rights, announced an essay competition on "Legal Reforms for Women Empowerment". She concluded the program by thanking both the learned speakers.

Media Contact:

Ashok Shah

Email: 9909960240, 8849110049