

STATE BANK OF INDIA OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION

(BENGAL CIRCLE)

(Registered under Trade Unions Act 1926-Regd. No. 6908)

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To All Members (Please Circulate)

THE 1st WOMEN'S CONVENTION ORGANIZED BY SBIOA (BENGAL CIRCLE) " YES WE CAN"

The 1st Women's Convention of SBIOA (Bengal Circle) was held on 22nd June, 2019, at Calcutta University Institute Auditorium at 10 a.m. It is a part of the Golden Jubilee celebration of the first Indefinite Strike Call given by AISBOF from 10th June to 26th June, 1969.

The convention was started with hoisting of flag and release of balloon by Comrade Soumya Datta, General Secretary of AIBOC and AISBOF, Comrade Asitava Kundu, President, SBIOA (Bengal Circle), Comrade Shubhajyoti Chattopadhyay, General Secretary, SBIOA (Bengal Circle) and SBIOA Seniors amidst chanting of slogans by the members.

Comrade Arunima Ghosh, Coordinator of the convention heartily welcomed the Guests and the members present in the convention. The inaugural song was sung by team, "SRIJAN" comprising Com Baishali Mitra (Mullick) and Com Priyanka Bhattacharya.

Comrade Arunima Ghosh then invited on stage President Com Asitava Kundu and General Secretary Com Shubhajyoti Chattopadhyay of SBIOA (Bengal Circle). Thereafter, she invited General Secretary of AIBOC & AISBOF, Com Soumya Datta, Comrade Jyoti K P Menon representing IOBOA and Com Nirmala Khuswaha representing AIUBOA.

The convention was inaugurated with planting of seeds by the dignitaries on a big earthen tub filled with soil on the stage to celebrate the World Environment Day on 5th June, which was a unique concept.

Circle General Secretary. Com Shubhajyoti Chattopadhyay in his welcome speech extended warm welcome to the dignitaries and the members present in the convention and reiterated the importance of Golden Jubilee celebration of indefinite strike which was the first strike called by our Federation. Till today, the cause of the historic strike is relevant in the space of trade union movement in true sense.

Participants of all Affiliates from other Circles and Affiliates of other banks in the country were felicitated by giving sapling as a mark of celebration of World Environment day.

The Coordinator then invited General Secretary of AIBOC & AISBOF, Comrade Soumya Datta to deliver his speech. At the outset, he said that the 1st Women's Convention was being held as a part of celebration of Golden Jubilee of the 1st indefinite strike in the year 1969 from 10th June to 26th June. The main demands were the demand for casual leave and work-life balance. In the era of primitive communication system, the news of the strike that originated in Mumbai spread like wildfire across the nation and all the branches of SBI were closed from 16th June, 1969. All officers joined the strike in unison and made the indefinite strike possible and created history. According to him, the most significant point is that today's situation is quite similar as officers fraternity is still fighting for work life balance and is under tremendous duress. He said that actual woman empowerment comes from within. The women who were working in remote villages in Banks, Post Offices and Police stations were the real ambassadors of women empowerment as they reached out to the section of the society, where women were subjugated and exploited. Today issues like gender sensitivity and intolerance assume profound significance and any responsible Trade Union would have to focus on these issues. The issues like softer transfer policy for women employees, provision for 'Work From Home', Flexi working hours have been demanded in Charter of Demands prepared by the four officers' organizations.

Com Jyoti K P Menon, of IOBOA during her key note address congratulated the organizers for holding the 1st women's convention and told that she was honoured to get such an opportunity to be present in Kolkata. She stressed upon women not to compromise on their self esteem. She also told that all women present here were privileged being educated and working ladies. Equality in working area and regulated working hours for all remained our dream.

Shubhajyoti Chattopadhyay

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Com Nirmala Khuswaha, representative of UBOA emphasised in her speech the importance of women in the society. She called women as the prime architect of the society as they perform sincerely multiple roles at home and outside also as mother, daughter and in offices as well. She further stated that women were endowed with inherent strength and thus they should not allow to be dominated.

Next program was named as **"This is my story."**

Comrade Nisha Jaiswal of Bidhananagar Module told about her saga of struggle in a typical patriarchal society and shared the success story of her journey.

Comrade Mrityunjaya Chakraborty of Kolkata Module narrated how she handled the overtures of a male colleague during her stay in Andhra Pradesh. From that incident, she learned that being silent was no longer an option. She emphasised that women must speak up and they must not give right to anyone to be judgmental about them.

The next part of the program was a panel discussion : **"Equality For Women – What It Means To Me."** The panelists were Com Jyothi K P Menon, ABOC EC member, Ms Kasturi Basu, an eminent women's right activist and a documentary film maker, Prof. Nilanjana Gupta, former General Secretary of Jadavpur University Teachers' Association and a women's right activist, Prof. Albeena Shakeel, an eminent social worker, and Com Elizabeth Sonali Desai representing SBIOA(Bengal Circle). The program was moderated by Ms Anchita Ghatak, a renowned social worker and a writer.

A brief synopsis of the thoughts shared by the panelists:-

Jyothi K P Menon -- She raised a question that 14% of legislatives were women, but how many of them were independent leader, why crime was always against women? There are huge gaps in all areas viz. education, economic rights, immunisation, property rights, wages, access to credit, politics etc. Why such differentiation and discrimination existed in the society? She expressed that women used to handle entire things viz. family, career without any complaints. However, in banks the transfer policy was a great hurdle for the career progression. She told about child care leave, national policy for women, Vishakha guidelines etc. She also said that though there were differences, struggles, hurdles but the present working ladies were privileged and they would have to help each other, especially those who were deprived and subjugated.

Ms Kasturi Basu --- She told that equality needed to begin with from the lower echelon of the society. Right to lesser working hours, holiday, leave, and work life balance is the essence of increasing productivity and making employees happy. According to her, women's equality has two views: first liberal feminism and second one lies in the fact that comes in one's mind when one questions herself. The main point is that all the rights which come to our mind have to be addressed. None other than women would fight shoulder to shoulder to get their right and freedom. In the year 2017, women in Mexico, Poland, etc stopped all the household and official jobs and they also stopped smiling for one day to make people realise their importance in the society. Success of a woman CEO or a woman leader cannot change the reality, only the real issues facing today when addressed properly will pave the way for equality.

Professor Nilanjana Gupta-- There is a feeling of slight guilt that we are privileged so we should not demand anything else. This thought has to be eradicated and Day Care Centres should be encouraged. We need to get out of the taboos. Women need to fight for their rights not only in workplace but also the entire environment. It is time to realise that it is not a woman's problem; rather it is a social problem. When we talk of gender equality, it is to be kept in mind that it is a social business, not a woman's business.

- Dr. Albeena Shakeel --- Women are 50% of the world population, but what about equality when the natural order is that household work is to be managed by women but when these work is being done for public then men start to dominate. If it is paid work, men dominate the sector and if it is unpaid one then it is to be done by women. India is sleeping in terms of gender equality; society remains silent in terms of domestic violence, sexual harassment, gender sensitivity in work place. In private sector, people have to go far for different negotiations and are paid less and have to work more. Negotiation for regulated working hours and work life balance is most important.

Elizabeth Sonali Desai –Stereotypes are the prime hindrance in women empowerment. There is a glass ceiling which is unseen hindrance in path of women's progress. We have to overcome otherwise women cannot progress further.

The discussion session was followed by interactive session. It was adroitly moderated by Ms Anchita Ghatak.

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Post lunch session started with presentations by the representatives from all the 7 AZCs of the Circle Association. The topics were as follows:

Bidhannagar Module	:	Tradition To Transformation.
Burdwan Module	:	Problems faced by working women and how to overcome.
Howrah Module	:	Courage calls to courage everywhere.
Kolkata Module	:	Work Life Balance.
Siliguri Module	:	Be smart innovate for change.
South 24 parganas	:	If you educate a woman you will educate the society as a whole.
Corporate Module	:	Me and my Liberty.

All the presentations were innovative and were highly appreciated. At the end of the program, special invitees Com Tripti Joshi and Com Jyoti of SBIOA(Bhopal Circle) delivered speech jointly on the topic : **"Why It Is Important to have Women Representative in Trade Union and How To Involve More and More Women in Trade Union."**

Com Manju Sharma and Com Monica Chattu, delegates from Chandigarh Circle in their deliberation stressed on women's empowerment and their rights and congratulated all for holding the successful 1st Women's Convention.

The Modular performance session was followed by a mesmeric dance recital by Com Ritwika Halder and others.

After the program formally ended with a vote of thanks proposed by Com Pritikana Saha, Convenor of the program, the famous Bangla Band "Chandrabindoo" took over the stage and enthralled the entire audience with their performance.

The convention ended on a highly positive note and everyone present pledged to take up the women's movement across the Circle to prove **"Yes, We Can"**.

With revolutionary greetings,

Shubhajyoti Chattopadhyay
(General Secretary)

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