



33

## A tale of two lives

Srubabati Goswami

I am lucky to be born in a family where one is allowed to pursue one's own interests irrespective of one's gender. I developed an interest in mathematics and science in school and chose the science stream for further studies. I worked in Neutrino Physics for my Ph.D. with Prof. Amitava Raychaudhuri in the University of Calcutta. It was an upcoming field and I enjoyed my work a lot. I got married during my Ph.D. period to another physicist. It was my own decision.

Two years after my marriage I submitted my thesis and applied for a postdoctoral position in the institute where my husband was working. However, it was not clear when the selection interview would take place. I was allowed to use the facilities there and I even had an office space. However, I soon started facing difficulties since I did not have any affiliation. So I started applying to other institutes in India for a postdoctoral position and I got an offer from TIFR. However, I was expecting at that time and because of my health conditions we decided that it was best for me to go back to my parent's house for the delivery of the child. The interview for which I waited for seven months was held soon after my departure.

My daughter was born on 27th July, 1997 and within a few days I came to know that there would be a second interview in

my husband's Institute in early September. I managed to attend this interview and got selected.

Finally, I joined as a postdoctoral fellow in January 1998 after about more than a years break. To come back to physics was not easy, specially with a small child to take care of.

After completion of one year I had to give a talk for the renewal of my fellowship and I got a positive feedback from the committee. However, the head of the group wrote in my report that I was irregular and not punctual and so my postdoctoral fellowship should not be renewed. Thus, once again I faced the possibility of termination of my career just within one year of restarting it. I was working very hard during that period. I used to go to the institute even on holidays. A question mark on my sincerity at that stage was the last thing I expected from someone totally unaware of my work. or what could be its possible impact. But at that time I was feeling very confident about the work and I thought that I should not deviate from my goal. Despite the objections finally I was given an extension. I completed my tenure there and in January 2000 I joined Saha Institute as a visiting fellow.

My work started progressing very well at this stage. I had the support of my family and I could work for long hours. But in 2001 my husband told me that we should admit our daughter to a school where he was staying as later getting admission to the school would be very difficult. So I came back to stay with him, taking leave from Saha Institute. This was a very crucial point in the field in which I was working, with a lot of new results. So I decided that the work should not stop. At that time I worked from home, from cyber-cafes and we wrote a paper analyzing these results. This paper went on to become a top cite.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my collaborators Sandhya Choubey and Abhijit Bandyopadhyay without whom I could not have done in this period. In between, I had applied for postdoctoral positions abroad and had got offers from Portugal, Spain and Japan. At the same time, I got a job offer from Harish Chandra Research Institute (HRI), Allahabad in March 2002. I decided to take up the offer.

I joined HRI in April 2002 and after that I never had to

look back again. We stayed on campus. The atmosphere was friendly and progressive. The academic environment was excellent. I enjoyed myself, my work and everything very much.

These years were termed as the golden period of research in Neutrino Physics. There were remarkable results from several experiments establishing beyond doubt that the invisible particles called Neutrinos are massive. This was a very important result that compelled us to think beyond our standard ideas. Our work in this field was highly appreciated worldwide.

After the struggling period from 1996–2002, it was like a golden period for me also. Of course I was not staying with my husband. It was difficult for me and I think more so for him as he was alone. But we managed. In our separate lives we were happy which, I found, was much better than staying together with one person sacrificing the career and remaining unhappy. We accepted life as it came to us and tried to make the best out of it.

My decision to come to Allahabad was a very tough decision. My husband, I feel, wanted very much to be with our daughter. However, he did also realise that I had to take the job. My husband had once told me, 'if you want to build your career do it on your own strength. Do not depend on me or anyone else for that.' Today I am very happy that what I have achieved, I have achieved it on my own. Of course, being in HRI has made it easier and having my daughter around has added a totally new meaning to my life and has made it worthwhile. In 2007, I was offered a faculty position in the institute where my husband was working and where I am now based.

This has given my daughter the chance to stay together with both parents – a chance that perhaps she deserved much earlier.