

Guwahati annual meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences

Salient points of the deliberations of the Committee on Women in Science

Nath – Enormous increase in women who do not proceed further in their scientific careers largely due to societal reasons. This is not unique to India and more people are conscious of this with education being publicly funded in India and this has energized the Science Academies.

Godbole – Spoke of 50% of the population being women and the question of gender equity, the GWIP programme, the EU programme and the International Conference on Women in Physics in Paris which included participation of men.

Main issues:

Attracting girls to science, launching their careers, science leadership structure, security at work and balancing family and career.

Indicated some EU statistics but questioned the paucity of statistics and the reluctance by organizations to part with the same. Asked 'Is it a combination of unfair gender bias and hiring policies?'

Official version: No gender bias, no discrimination but she felt the discrimination is subtle involving well meaning advice and indirect references.

Highlighted the need to look at women in science statistics pertaining to India in an organized way – presently NO NUMBERS AVAILABLE.

The drop off factor is the smallest in France. In India the biggest leak factor is Ph.D. to PG – Faculty positions e.g. University of Kolkata hired the first woman only a few years back (?)

Fellowship of the Academies of women miniscule, however not asking for proportional representation.

The need for Academies to chalk out action plans, write more articles on the subject projecting the problem and to help change societal attitudes thereby.

Mohan Ram – Empathy created by one's upbringing, gave his own personal example of being sensitized to the equity role. Spoke of the urgent need for creche for organizations with more than 10 employees.

Nath commended the AIIMS creche whereas Godbole stated that IISc had none.

Mohan Ram – Although women outnumber men, for e.g. in DU courses the drop-out rate is high due to marriage. There is the added problem of procuring degrees but remaining unemployed. At the entry point to courses there was no dearth of women applying. He spoke of H.P. where every girl child goes to school and availability of cooking gas, thereby minimizing the drudgery associated with daily chores.

Nath – spoke of the NE outstripping in literacy, although the Planning Commission estimates showed that poverty, women's empowerment and the number of women in science in the N.E. was low. Here in the N.E. there was a problem of literacy

levels not matching up to the opportunities.

There was a need to set up Centres of Women Studies such as Delhi University has done and provide facilities to married couples like Israel. Were we complacent due to more people? The idea of working from home IT enabled was a suggestion.

Subir Sen – advocated the work from home approach and dwelt on great detail on the wives of J.C. Bose and J.B.S. Haldane. He called for changing the deep rooted social aspect of the problem. He said para-academic fields should have more women. Mofussil girls of west Bengal could not afford the expense of a science education. Most research scholars came from affluent backgrounds who later left on being married and Ph.D. was a stepping stone for an NRI husband. Most successful women however were married and there was a lack of a broad objective survey.

Jemmis – Entry level is higher only in urban situations. Drop-out rates are not of as much concern as the 70% still left behind. Even urban centres where communication is good do not fare well. Entry point statistics are also misleading as the right people are not admitted.

Nath – Women at top act as deterrents whereas men are more sympathetic with selection criteria. Any programme to help women must have then included. She spoke of the success of the WOS programme recently launched by DST and gave the salient details to the audience present. Although the R&D part did well the other parts had not done as well. She gave a break-up of the patterns, subjectwise and Statewise that had emerged from the applicant backgrounds to the programme.

Trends in medical sciences were shown.

The comparison between Indian situation and that prevailing in other countries was taken up, including type of jobs, disciplines favoured, retirement ages, salary differentials, maternity leave, proactive approaches, flexibility in work and hours spent, part-time work, and the evolution of a new Indian male. It was stressed that under no circumstance merit of the scientist should be compromised.

Hans Gill – spoke of the discrimination faced when Mathematics and women were put together in social situations and the need of women to always prove their equality.

K. Gopalan — spoke of the low job opportunities for both men and women.

Some existing rules and attitudes were highlighted such as that of IIT's debarring couples working in the same department, male chauvinistic attitude at IISc and the role model of women portrayed in the mass media of TV and films.

Rajagopal – spoke of the need for creches, flexible hours, part-time jobs and promotion of women.

Several women in the audience poured their heart out on personal problems that they had to face in their careers.