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Subject : A National Inter-disciplinary Conference to Tackle Gender Inequity in Physics

Issued by : Dean, School of Physics University of Hyderabad

Over 200 physicists, social scientists and educationists will gather at the University of Hyderabad on the 19th of September, to cross disciplinary boundaries and debate on the vexed question of why there is a persistent gender gap in the physics profession in India.

The conference, titled 'Pressing for Progress 2019: An IPA National Conference towards Gender Equity in Physics', is organised by the Indian Physics Association and hosted by the School of Physics of the University in partnership with the TIFR (Center for Interdisciplinary Sciences). Over a third of the participants are men and about half from the younger generation. The conference has been driven by the Gender in Physics Working Group of the Indian Physics Association of which Prajval Shastri is the chair. Vandana Nanal, secretary of the Indian Physics Association and ex-officio member of the working group, describes this conference as "an important step towards rectifying parity violation in gender". The local organising committee of the conference is led by physicist Bindu Bambah, who has had a long-standing presence in the efforts towards gender equity in physics. She says that one of the most fallacious myths is that, for women, marriage is perceived as the end of investment made towards their scientific training.

Prajval Shastri points out that the fraction of women among PhDs in physics employed in higher education in India is about 20% which is already skewed. But the fraction in elite institutions, leadership positions and in honour lists plummets much further. Furthermore, the gender gap in the physics discipline is among the largest in any scientific discipline, which points to physics being highly gendered in its practice, despite professing to be an objective science.

Pressing for Progress 2019 will have eminent women physicists presenting keynote physics talks including Aditi De, the first woman awardee in physics of the Shantiswarup Bhatnagar award, the highest Indian award for science. Women physicists from all over the country will present their research in a range of sub-disciplines, demonstrating a large and wide variety of talent. For the first time, physicists, educationists, social scientists and diversity experts will share a common space to deliberate on Different Angles on Promoting Gender Equity. But most innovatively, all of them will participate in both immersive, process-based workshops that are designed to build capabilities in understanding gender inequity. A panel, that will have both mid-career and senior physicists, including those in leadership roles, will discuss the question 'The Gender Gap in Physics: Whose Problem is It?' K Vijayraghavan, the Principal Scientific Adviser will give a keynote address in the inaugural session over internet video link. The participation by a very significant fraction of men brings hope that the gender gap is no longer been seen as a women's problem but a malaise afflicting the profession itself.

The inter-disciplinary conference is primarily supported by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, with additional funding support from the Harish Chandra Research Institute, Allahabad, the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, Microsoft, Fujitsu Pvt. Ltd and Horizon, Pvt. Ltd, Hyderabad.