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Gender Equity in High Energy Physics in India: Status and Initiatives

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The scientific community in India, as their counterparts elsewhere, is still struggling to achieve gender parity in STEM fields, particularly in physics. This is not a desirable situation since an equitable contribution from all genders can only enrich any enterprise. In contrast to the inherent objectivity in science, existing practices in scientific endeavour are rooted in age old biases and discriminations. Statistics reveal that while at the undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD levels, there are large fractions of women in physics (close to 50%), the situation rapidly worsens as one goes higher up, and the fraction of female faculty nosedives to about 13% demonstrating a very “leaky pipeline syndrome”. When it comes to recognition in terms of awards and leadership positions, the number becomes minuscule, demonstrating the well known, but largely unrecognised “glass ceiling effect”. The Gender in Physics Working Group (GIPWG) was formed in India in 2017 under the Indian Physics Association. This group is spearheading activities so that a career in physics in India is more gender inclusive. In particular, initiatives have been taken to form gender groups in different branches of physics to address subject-specific issues obstructing gender parity. For example, a gender group for High Energy Physics was established in 2020. This group is now active in raising awareness in the community by identifying underlying issues and suggesting possible interventions towards affirmative action. In particular, this group organised the first-ever Gender session and a panel discussion on “Gender Imbalance in String Theory: Focus on India” at the Indian String meet 2021. Gender sessions at the National DAE-BRNS Symposium on High Energy Physics have now been regularised. During the 2022 meeting, a panel discussion on “Two Body Problem in Academia and Possible Ways to Overcome it” was organised. Due to the coordinated efforts of the GIPWG, the International Conference of Women in Physics will be held in India in July 2023 in online mode. This will be a unique opportunity that will boost similar initiatives. There are other initiatives including those by the government of India to counter gender imbalance by implementing inclusive policies. This talk will present gender statistics in High Energy Physics in India, the various proactive measures adopted to ameliorate the under-representation of women in physics in India. We hope some of these can serve as illustrative examples to tackle these issues globally.

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