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Towards gender equality in High Energy Physics

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Despite great strides in gender inclusivity in the sciences in the last millennium, the equal participation of women in sciences remains a distant dream. Dominant conceptions and practices of scientific knowledge attribution, dissemination and acquisition systematically continue to disadvantage women. This is particularly true in Physics. Gender diversity is a basic requirement of a democratic society and it is also imperative to the survival and advancement of science as a multitude of styles and approaches are needed to solve important physical problems. While participation of women at the undergraduate level is steadily increasing, there is a “Glass Ceiling Effect”. In India, it has been noted that while faculty enrollment of women in medicine is about 44%, that in physical sciences is only 16%. With reference to women in High Energy Physics in India the situation is worse, and less than 10% (looking at the Universities, IITs, IISERs, NITs, National Labs etc.). Gendered under-representation and lack of leadership go hand in hand. To have the opportunity and vision to be a leader, one must have a supportive environment, high self-esteem and good interpersonal skills. A realistic goal we hope to reach is a representation of 20% of women in High Energy Physics in next 10-15 years. The Indian high energy Community has recognized this fact and has initiated several proactive measures towards achieving this goal. To mention a few, the Indian Physics Association (IPA) formalized a working group on Gender in Physics with the mandate of coordinating national efforts towards gender parity in Indian physics profession. It organized a national level conference Pressing for Progress at University of Hyderabad in September 2019, the outcome of which is known as The Hyderabad Charter for Gender Equity in Physics. In the national level High Energy Physics symposium 2020, a special session was dedicated to deliberate the issues related to Gender-gap in Physics. This has set the precedent for gender diversity discussions at future meetings. Female role models have had a profound impact on young women’s achievement and aspirations, in part because they represent the possibility of overcoming gender barriers to achieve success. In this context, a special article in Physics News has been published remembering Dr. Bibha Chowdhuri, the first Woman Particle Physicist in India. In this talk these and other efforts at achieving a gender parity in high energy physics will be discussed.

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