

**A Brief Summary of the Gender Issues Session
Held on 19th Feb 2015 in NCRA-TIFR
Preeti Kharb**

Sushan Konar got the third (but only the second formal) session on “*Gender Issues in Astronomy*” started with a brief summary of the previous events. She pointed out to all the talks from the previous meeting at IISER-Mohali that are hosted on her webpage (<http://www.ncra.tifr.res.in:8081/~sushan/>). She mentioned the action items that will be undertaken in the next few days, including a proposal for setting up a *Working Group for Gender Equity* under the aegis of the Astronomical Society of India (ASI). She also mentioned the “You versus We” phenomenon. Several well-meaning colleagues had been enquiring about why **we** had not submitted a proposal so far, or what actions had been undertaken by **us** since our last meeting. To that Sushan responded by pointing out that gender sensitization is our collective responsibility as a community rather than the duty of a few. If we want to bring about any changes on gender issues, **everybody** will need to participate and contribute. Sushan also mentioned that there was a need to create more soft money options for women without any age restrictions.

Resmi Lekshmi spoke about “*Women in Science: World-wide Initiatives*”. She presented results on the John-Jennifer Resume test, which was an eye-opener with all the visual histograms and numbers. Several participants mentioned later that they were surprised and impressed by the histograms and tables. She presented slides on “*Stereotype Threat*” and “*Imposter Syndrome*”. She talked about the AAS Committee on the Status of Women in Astronomy (CSWA, <http://www.aas.org/cswa/>) and the Women in Astronomy Chapter of the [Astronomical Society of Australia](http://www.aas.org/cswa/). And about how *Project Juno* (<http://www.iop.org/policy/diversity/initiatives/juno/index.html>) was beginning to see positive results in the UK after six years of its implementation.

Preeti Kharb got the Panel discussion on “*Improving the Workplace for Gender Equity*” started after briefly mentioning the discrepancies in the fraction of women at various academic levels, starting from B.Sc./M.Sc. and decreasing steadily through the Ph.D./postdoc/Assistant Professor stages. It was being recognized around the world that “*Unconscious Bias*” could play an important role in the low representation of women. She mentioned that everybody must check their own biases with tests on *Project Implicit* (<http://projectimplicit.net/index.html>).

The Panel: Nissim Kanekar spoke about the need for gender sensitization and the holding of discussion meetings on Gender Equity. He discussed an article in the *Science* magazine about how groups with a greater participation of women were better at getting tasks completed and had greater “collective intelligence” (<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/330/6004/686.full>). Prajval Shastri spoke about the need for *gender sensitization* in the community, especially among the senior people who are in responsible positions, about *transparency* in hiring practices and about *consistency* in the selection criteria. Dibyendu Nandi spoke about the issue of Sexual Harassment and the laws in place, which every Institute must be aware of and adhere to. Firoza Sutaria spoke about the DST Fellowship for Women who have taken a career break and the need for removing age restrictions

on the same. Prasad Subramanian spoke about the need for recognizing that the responsibilities for women and men were heavy but different, a fact that must be appreciated by both genders.

There was a question about the suitability of using data from the US to assess the Indian situation. However there was a realization that similar statistics and tests were not being carried out in India at all.

Overall the response of the participants was positive. Everybody felt this was an important discussion and that more time (e.g., half a day) needed to be devoted to it.

A rough head count revealed about 70-75 participants, 40 of which were men and 30 women. Several members of the ASI SOC were present for at least a part of the session. There were at least 4 senior professors present as well.