

Women in Physics in India

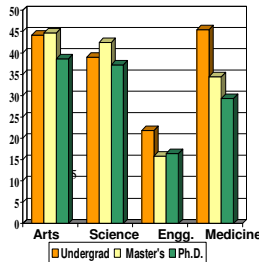
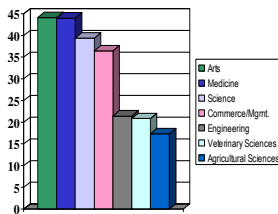
Shobhana Narasimhan

shobhana@jncasr.ac.in

Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bangalore 560064, India

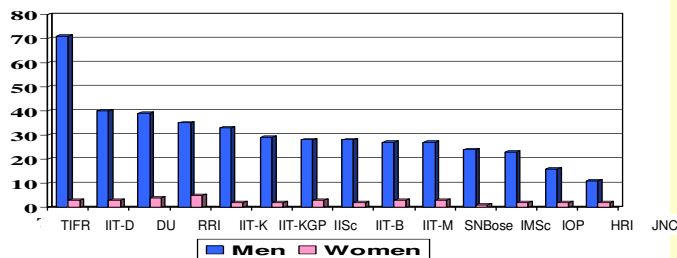
- Everywhere in the world, women in physics are a minority. India is no exception. But the nature of the problem varies from country to country...

- In India, roughly 1/3 of science students are women, right up to the PhD level:



Though not much rigorous data is available, anecdotal evidence suggests that the stereotype that women cannot do physics is NOT as widely prevalent in India as it is in some "developed" countries.

- But after doing their PhD's, most of these women "disappear"! e.g., consider the data on the physics faculty at some elite institutions in India:



- So unlike the "leaky pipeline" observed elsewhere, in India the main problem is after the PhD
- This represents a huge loss of highly trained (wo)manpower!
- The problem: societal expectations that women should function primarily as wives & mothers.

- Most prestigious science prize (Bhatnagar) has never been awarded to a woman in physics!
- Few (or no) women in high-profile positions, selection committees, etc.

What are Governmental Institutions & Academies doing to help?

➤ Department of Science & Technology, Government of India:

- Has a division: **Science for Equity, Empowerment & Development**
- Created "**women scientists' scheme**": 3 year research grant, specifically for women who have had a break in career and want to return to science (hundreds of fellowships awarded).
- Established "**Task Force on Women in Science**" which held meetings all over India, evaluated situation and made long list of recommendations recently.
- Minister of S&T (P. Chavan) invited women scientists to meet him and talk to him.
- Ministers for S&T have made various **announcements** to help ameliorate the situation (flexitime, funds for creche & daycare, planned establishment of Standing Committee, etc.)
- Institutions encouraged to have programmes dealing with gender equity.

➤ Indian National Science Academy & Indian Academy of Sciences:

- Committees to discuss issues related to women's participation in science
- "**Lilavati's Daughters**": book of autobiographical essays by 97 women scientists.
- Surveys commissioned to gather more data, including information about why women have left science.

One continuing problem in search of a solution (any ideas?!):

How can we convince men that this is not a "women's issue" and get them involved in the movement to increase the participation of women in physics in India ???!