

## Book Reviews

### **Gauhar Raza, R Gopichandran, T V Venkateswaran and Kinkini Dasgupta Misra (editors), *Scientifically Yours - Selected Indian Women Scientists*, CSIR—NISCAIR, and Vigyan Prasar, DST, 2016, Pages. IX+134**

**Kankan Bhattacharyya\***

This is an extremely praiseworthy effort. The authors have tried to capture the spirit, struggle and success of several Indian women who excelled in the field of science and technology. It contains brief biography and an elaborate interview of 13 prominent women scientists of India. Such a volume was long overdue and that is why missed out some of the other women pioneers like Anandibhai Joshi, Kadambari Ganguli, Janaki Amal, Asheema Chatterjee and others as mentioned by the authors.

The age and subject of the scientist chosen are diverse. There are several above seventies- Bimala Buti (b.1933), Indira Nath (b. 1938), Manju Sharma (b. 1940) and Kasturi Datta (b. 1943). They were born before independence and hence, their life is specially inspiring. Bimal Buti actually recalled riots at Lahore where she spent her child hood. It was heartening to know that her father was a freedom fighter. The youngest one, Vibha Tandon (b. 1968) is still below 50. I am particularly moved by the interview of Charusita Chakravarty (1964-2016) whom I knew personally and who was fighting with cancer when the interview was recorded.

Out of the 13 women scientists 4 had basic degree in medicine (Indira Nath, Shashi Wadhwa, Sunita Saxena and Chitra Sarkar), 4 in different branches of biology (Manju Sharma, Kasturi Datta, Chandrima Shaha, Renu Khanna Chopra),

2 in Physics (Bimal Buti and Rupamanjari Ghosh), 2 in Chemistry (Charusita Chakravarty and Vibha Tandon), and one in Mathematics (Riddhi Shah). This distribution roughly reflects the fascination of women scientists in India.

All of them acknowledged that their family supported and encouraged their pursuit of science and never wanted them to be just a house wife. Though all of them excelled in their academic result some of them were good in sport also. For example, Chandrima Shaha represented her state in Cricket.

The contributions of these 13 scientists to the country are enormous. Indira Nath played a seminal role in leprosy research which is curse in India and is largely neglected in the west. Bimala Buti, though herself trained in theory (under S Chandrasekhar, Nobel Laureate at Chicago) established experimental plasma physics research and eventually Institute of Plasma Research. Manju Sharma served as Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Government of India for 10 years and “played an important role in the establishments of a number of new institutions.”

About the specific role of women scientist in India I liked most the observation made by Indira Nath, “Women scientists are good at team building.” I hope all the leaders of Indian Science will remember this and give opportunities to more women scientists to flourish themselves and the

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institutions, in general. I am really sorry to see that the number of women faculties in any institutions and Universities in India are still abysmally low.

The life and works of these women scientists should inspire our women to take up scientific research as a profession and this may augur well for the country, as a whole. I would not attempt to list the achievements or the message

of each the glorious women. I will finish with what Charu (Charusita Chakravarty) felt about herself, "I think being a scientist is one of the most enjoyable ways of doing what you like and earning and living at the same time."

On this note, I believe this volume will be a treasure for every Indian for his/her personal collection and for every library, in India and abroad.