

BOOK REVIEW

WOMEN AT THE SCIENTIFIC FRONTIERS

Hasan Jawaid Khan

Title: *Women Shaping Scientific Frontiers – From Lab Coats to Leadership*

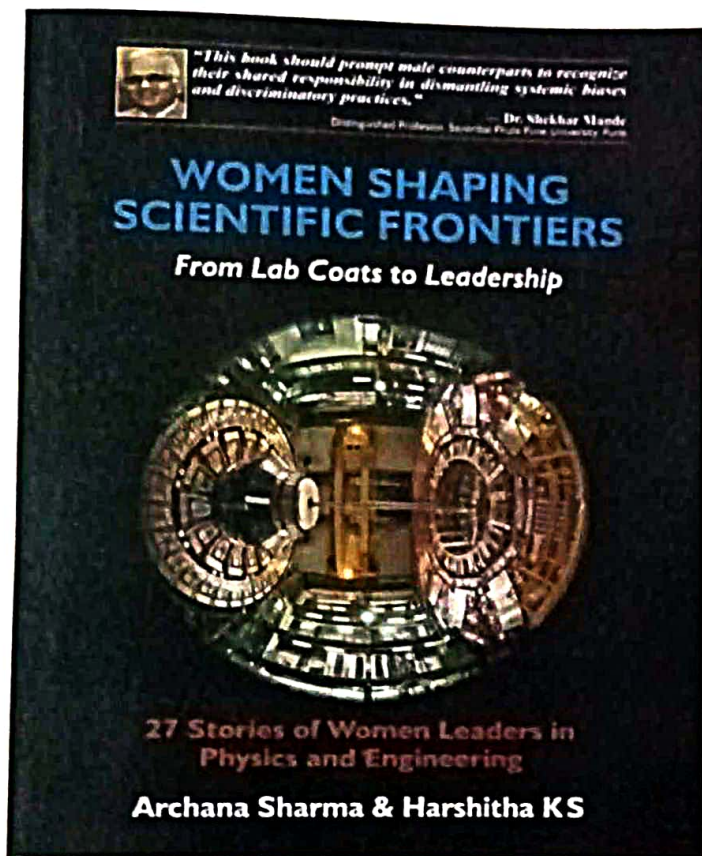
Authors: Archana Sharma & Hashitha KS

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HOW rapidly any society anywhere in the world develops and progresses depends largely on equal opportunities for all – without favour, discrimination or injustice. The world over, however, many societies have been inching very slowly towards achieving this 'utopian' ideal in the face of traditional, cultural and sometimes religious hurdles. Over the years, women have often had to surmount such challenges posed by traditional lines of thinking. This has been especially true in the field of science, where women have often not been offered opportunities due to biases, and many have had to face discrimination and even injustices in their pursuit of science.

The book *Women Shaping Scientific Frontiers – From Lab Coats to Leadership* is an effort to showcase how women, comprising a substantially huge proportion of society, can contribute to science and the progress of humankind if cultural and traditional biases are done away with and the level playing field is made available. The book written by authors Dr Archana Sharma, herself an accomplished scientist at CERN in Geneva, and Dr Hashitha KS, brings forth the significant achievements of 27 women scientists in the field of Physics and Engineering. Their remarkable research and breakthroughs in frontier areas of Physics and Engineering have been brought out in substantial detail. Today these women have reached leadership positions where they can influence, motivate and support young girls aspiring for a career in science.

Apart from the scientific contributions, the authors have also documented their struggles, often the pain in the face of discrimination and even injustice, and how they would like women to be truly empowered in the field of science.

For instance, Dr Rohini Godbole, whose research has largely been focused on advancing the understanding of particle physics, recounts the prevailing limitations during her childhood when girls were expected to focus on domestic sciences rather than pursue the study of science. Her supportive parents, motivating teachers and a self-taught interest in reading beyond the standard textbooks helped her gain a broad outlook and propelled her into the world of science. Dr Godbole says, a generic childhood that encourages you to increase curiosity, encourages the attitude of questioning, studying, and understanding is enough later to foster the pursuit of a career in science.

However, facing and tackling systemic challenges that often lead to injustices is heartbreaking, as Dr Anita Mehta, a theoretical physicist, discovered this in the Indian scientific institution where she worked. She calls for making science blind to identity or social status. Rich or poor, men or women from any region and social strata should have the same chances to pursue and succeed in scientific studies, she says.

Dr Urbasi Sinha, who is leading the Quantum Information and Computing laboratory at the Raman Research Institute,