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Hidden figures

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By Navjyoti Dalal

Attend a talk to learn the extraordinary stories of women in science

Although many women have been pioneers in the field of science, in society's collective consciousness science is rarely considered to be a woman's domain. How do we view women in science? Who are they? What are their stories and why are they important? Did they struggle to get their genius validated by society? Why must we remember them? To find answers to these questions and to throw a spotlight on women in science, the Exciting Science Group (ESG) with the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune (IISER) has organised a talk titled '(Great) Women in Science', which is primarily aimed at school children but is open to all. The talk is a part of the ESG's ongoing Popular Talk series for making science interesting and relatable to all.

The extraordinary journeys of women in the field will be presented by Dr Pooja Sancheti, a visiting faculty of the humanities and social sciences programme at IISER. While most talks in the ESG series are related to core science, Dr Sancheti's lecture "is an anomaly", she says, "because I will not be talking about science or demonstrating science experiments, but instead speak on the life of women in science," says Dr Sancheti. A teacher of literature and language, she is not a scientist, points out the academician. "My talk is not from an insider's perspective but an outsider's."



Dr Sancheti has curated a list of phenomenal women from the sciences like Ada Lovelace, Marie Curie and some Indian scientists like Violet Bajaj and Anna Mani as well. "The talk will share the stories of several women scientists who should be better known, who have made contributions to science throughout history but either received recognition several decades or centuries after their deaths, and those that broke new ground through their work," says Dr Sancheti, who will also briefly touch upon gender bias in the field. "My desire is to use their stories so that parents and teachers are encouraged to become more aware of prevalent gender biases, and for students to be inspired. That, in spite of institutional difficulties, they can rise to greatness," she adds.

Along with Dr Sancheti's background in literature, her observer view has helped put together a wellrounded list which features writers of science as well. "Mary Shelley, who wrote Frankenstein, was not a scientist. But her contribution is tremendous for she pioneered the genre of science fiction, which is largely associated with men," explains Dr Sancheti. While she believes gender prejudice is prevalent in every field including science, she won't dwell on it during the talk. "These stories, which span from the 17th century times to the present, are a comment on how far we have come. Women of all times had to fight institutional prejudice to rise, to be granted agency and air their views," says Dr Sancheti, who feels that women's representation is less visible because their contributions are often not counted. Gender conflict, says Dr Sancheti, arises in professions that were thought to be male bastions, like soldiers, engineers, scientists, and even painters (in the Renaissance) and, for some time, even writers.

To attend the talk, register online at excitingscience.org or write to register@excitingscience.org.

WHERE: New Lecture Hall, Indrani Balan Science Activity Centre, IISER, Pashan

WHEN: July 29, 10 am to 11.30am

CALL: 25908467

ENTRY: Free