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National Women's Science Congress Saw Scientists Coming Together To Share Stories

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bangalore: Balancing work and household is in itself an onerous task for women. But it's more so if she happens to be a scientist. Sakuntala Samuelson (in pic) took a seven-year break, quitting her job as a Chemistry lecturer at Mount Carmel College because ailing parents-in-law and adopted children needed her more. Returning to science was an uphill task for her as she faced an upper age ceiling of 35 set by UGC to join a government college.

Not one to give up, Sakuntala had to claw her way back into a profession that was as much her passion. She enrolled for MEd at M S Ramaiah College and completed her MBA and PhD in the next few years. Currently principal of MS Ramaiah College of Arts, Science and Commerce, the 54-year-old scientist on Tuesday won the Best Paper award for her presentation on 'Effect of substituents in benzimidazoles in curing epoxyresin systems (insulators)' at the 4th National Women's Science Congress in the city.

"Women have to overcome obstacles to pursue their dreams. There is often resistance at home, especially for women, but the challenge is in overcoming it and making a mark in the chosen profession," DRDO scientist Meera Kaushal, who also presented a paper told TOI on the sidelines of the event.

Sakuntala's struggle to remain a scientist epitomizes the challenges faced by women in Science. "The comeback was a huge challenge. I used to be out of the house by 7.30am, the time when my kids would go to school. After classes, I'd rush to the lab for practicals from 2.30pm to 5pm. After that, it was time to go back home to my family. The PhD which could have been completed in three-and-a-half years took me five years given the tight schedule," said Sakuntala.

Any regrets, she came the reply, 'No'.

The challenges were many but Sakuntala overcame them all with the help of family. Married to a fellow scientist, she drew a lot of inspiration from her mother-in-law Lalita Gnanadoss, the first woman to obtain a PhD from Delhi University (1954-55). Sakuntala, who won a patent for a nano-sized hole in crystal structure in 2005, lamented the dip in the number of students in research. "We want to promote pure sciences. Youngsters are lured to other sectors as the returns in research take time to come," she said.

The congress was organized jointly by Swadeshi Vijnana Andolana- Karnataka and MS Ramaiah Institute of Technology.

Delegatespeak

It's a nice platform for scientists to interact with each other. Such programmes should be conducted more often to help scientists exchange notes. There is so much to learn here.

Sumana K S | MAHARANI SCIENCE COLLEGE, PARTICIPANT AT THE WOMEN'S CONGRESS

The organizers need to create a database of people who come for such meets. Later, it becomes easier to facilitate programmes of such magnitude in close coordination with experts.

Meera Kaushal | SCIENTIST, DRDO, BANGALORE