

International Women's Day celebrations



I feel stupid admitting this, but till 2001 I didn't know that 8 March was the International Women's Day (IWD). I now discover that IWD was first celebrated as early as in 1909, actually on 28 February 1909.

NAL started celebrating IWD in 2001. NAL's Director at that point, Dr T S Prahlad, even sent a cordial letter to all his lady colleagues acknowledging their wonderful contributions. At the [2001 celebrations](#), Ms Asha Ramesh gave an occasionally fiery, but always very informative, talk on the history of women's movements in India. [The following year](#), Dr Manju Sharma, Secretary DBT, spoke with considerable élan, and often with great passion, on the role of women scientists and technologists in national development. "Why hasn't CSIR ever had

a lady Director?", she asked. This poser triggered off a warm round of applause, but we still have no answer.

In December 2001, NAL also organized a very well-attended two-day seminar on "[Women in Aerospace in India](#)". India's first lady pilot, [Usha Sundaram](#), who flew 27 hours from London to Chennai in 1948, was the star of the show, and most deservedly too. At a [panel discussion](#) on the last afternoon, Air Marshal P Rajkumar, then the President of the Aeronautical Society of India, proved to be an admirable moderator. At one point, he invited the "aerowomen" to have their own beer parties. Some ladies found the suggestion amusing, others were outraged.



After this burst of activity, NAL apparently forgot IWD all over again -- till NAL's feisty "[aero-lady](#)", [Dr Kalyani Vijayan](#), now a CSIR Emeritus Scientist, sent NAL's Director, Dr A R Upadhy, a polite note reminding him of 8 March. Dr Upadhy responded immediately, and graciously agreed that IWD would now be an official NAL function every year.

The 2006 NAL IWD Lecture (the third in the series) was delivered by Dr Malini Subramanyam, Assistant Director of Bangalore's Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL). Dr Malini Subramanyam has recently been very busy: partly because FSL's "brain fingerprinting" methods are performing very well and partly because India's criminals too have lately been rather busy.

The lecture contained a good mix of theory and practice. The large audience heard about the theory, involving image processing, wavelet analysis and statistical testing of hypotheses, with a mute, and occasionally awed, silence. But they clearly enjoyed the vivid descriptions of the case studies more. The speaker's descriptions of the investigations were occasionally colourful, but always very thoughtful. FSL has now completed 1250 investigations and Dr Malini Subramanyam has been actively involved in a very large number among them.



Dr A R Upadhy presided over the function. He complimented the speaker for her "dangerous and fascinating exposé of the world of criminals". Speaking to his NAL constituency, Dr Upadhy said that his men and women colleagues "were equal" in his eyes. Ms Rama Mahadev, NAL's Senior Controller of Administration (COA), in her vote of thanks, gently asked if



women were not "more equal" than men. In the tumultuous uproar that followed this poser, Dr Upadhyya generously conceded that the Sr. COA was probably right.

Srinivas Bhogle

Strength of the Inner Self

The International Women's Day, celebrated on 8 March every year, is an opportunity to focus on various issues concerning women in both the print and the visual media. This is the day when we feature stories on all those successful women who have made a mark in society, and also those women for whom it is just another day.

All the heated discussion on education for women, their economic empowerment, their status in decision making bodies etc. almost seems to suggest that we can pour all these ingredients inside the form of a woman and transform her into a new successful person overnight! If such transformations *are* taking place, they are very slow, sporadic and temporary and are localized to certain societies only. Sadly, very few discussions draw attention to the strength of the inner self, which when awakened could bring about a faster and a more permanent transformation in a woman as well as in the society she lives in.

It is said that Nature has created a woman in its own reflection. A woman is therefore endowed with all the qualities of Nature. Both can be loving, caring, unselfish, giving and forgiving. They can also be furious and totally unpredictable at times. While Nature has the strength to balance its qualities beautifully, a woman works very hard all her life to find that balance.

A true educational process must help her recognize all those natural inner qualities and teach her to balance them to her best advantage. It must teach her to develop her inner strength to meet the challenges of life. This important education takes place at a very subtle level. It is 'taught' informally at homes, schools and offices or wherever there is interaction between people. It can also be obtained from someone who has traversed this path of learning herself. The beauty of this informal education is that the 'teacher' continuously discovers herself even as she helps others find themselves.

There is no success or failure in life. It is a question of how well a given opportunity is used for everyone's benefit. A woman must know what is best for her; and this will invariably be something that is very close to her nature. If she chooses a life in tune with Nature, then the strength of the inner self helps her lead a meaningful life.

Sarala Upadhyya

Why doesn't CSIR have a single woman director?

Dr Manju Sharma, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), delivered the Second International Women's Day Lecture at NAL on 15 April 2002. The lecture was forceful ("the media calls me an 'aggressive' secretary, and I don't mind it. I believe women have to be aggressive and progressive"), remarkable for its wealth of statistical information (e.g. "only 3% of the fellows of the Indian Academy of Sciences are women") and posed several uncomfortable questions ("why doesn't CSIR have a single woman director?").



Why, indeed, do women so rarely make it to the top managerial positions especially when, as girls, they consistently out-perform

the boys in the Class X and Class XII examinations? We all have our theories to explain this but, in most cases, our explanations turn out to be naive and over-simplistic. The problem is much more complex than most of us think it to be.

Dr Manju Sharma, one suspects, understands this problem better than most. And, in her forthright manner, she is trying to correct this situation. She has spearheaded the new Government initiative to award 100 fellowships to women scientists ready to return to a research career; at [DBT](#) she had successfully introduced the tissue culture initiative with over 900 women engineers participating; and, if she has the option, "I always select a woman candidate if she is as good as her male counterpart".

Dr Manju Sharma also explained the many advantages if we can create conditions more favourable for women to work ("women constitute an extraordinary human resource pool in S&T which is still largely untapped"). Dr Manju Sharma also expressed her happiness at the emerging IT and BT markets "which are so attractive for women".

"Women", Dr Manju Sharma added, "have greater creativity and imagination and are better managers of people". As an example, she cited how an enlightened woman's leadership turned around Africa's AIDS awareness programme and the achievement of networked Rajasthan female dairy workers "which so impressed Bill Clinton".

Women's Movement in India

The International Women's Day, celebrated on 8 March every year, has generally gone unnoticed at NAL. This year things have been different: first, NAL's lady employees received a note on 8 March 2001, signed by Dr T S Prahlad, Director, acknowledging their very significant contributions to the Lab. Two weeks later, on 20 March 2001, NAL's ladies organised a special lecture by Ms Asha Ramesh of NIAS on the Women's Movement in India. The lecture, at the S R Valluri Auditorium, was very well attended with the vast majority of the audience being NAL's ladies. Dr Kalyani Vijayan welcomed the gathering and introduced Ms Asha Ramesh as "a very distinguished guest". She also wondered aloud why a women's day must be celebrated only once every year. Dr Prahlad in his opening remarks paid a rich tribute to NAL's ladies: "our ladies have performed extremely well both as scientists and administrators. I also believe that they have been more innovative and disciplined .. and they have posed me the fewest problems in managing the Lab!". Ms Asha Ramesh's lecture proved to be an excellent historical narrative of women's movements in India spanning a whole century. The freedom movement, she said, marked the beginning of organised struggle by Indian women. "This was the first time the women came out on the streets in large numbers", she said. Ms Asha Ramesh went on to talk of the Telangana movement of 1948-50, featuring a militant uprising against the landlord's oppressive practices; the Nav Nirman movement started by JP in 1974 ("which was in many ways a women's movement"); the Chipko movement against the felling of trees; the repercussions of the Mathura rape case of 1974, the dowry deaths starting from the 1980's etc. The speaker also made the important point that the focus of the women's movements in India changed starting from the 1980's. While the earlier movements were seeking special welfare policies for women, the emerging paradigm shift sees women as critical actors in social development. Ms Asha Ramesh talked with deep feeling about the return of the sati practice in Deorala, unfair court rulings in which rape victims were labelled as individuals with a "questionable character", about women's daily wages still being lower than men's, about women in politics and Parliament and about the shocking statistics of female foeticide even today. The lecture was rather long, but nevertheless very informative. In his reaction, Dr G M Kamath (the only participant who asked questions was a young man!) wondered why the talk focused on legislations; in reply, the speaker suggested that legislation was a pre-requisite to achieve change. Dr Kamath also asked if changing mindsets wasn't a better option than "empowering" women; Ms Asha Ramesh seemed to indicate that we needed both the options.

The lecture ended with the vote of thanks by Ms M Vimala.

Srinivas Bhogle



Five decades of flying memories K S Raman's tribute to Usha Sundaram

It was easy to recognise Mrs Usha Sundaram as she stepped out of the car at NAL guest house on 13 December 2001 in the morning. I had a portrait of the Sundarams taken by my father in 1950. Except for her hair turning silver, she looked remarkably the same. I showed her the portrait photograph - she was pleasantly surprised and said 'I look so young in the photo!'

I asked her if she remembered Mr K N Sreenivasan, and she gave her response - 'Yes - an aviation enthusiast, owned an L-5, VT-CEV'. I was stunned by her memory! I then mentioned that Mr Sreenivasan was my father, and I too learned to fly at Jakkur Flying School. I showed her other photographs - my father with his Stinson L-5 Sentinel, technicians doing work on an airplane at Jakkur in the 50's and an aerial view of HAL airport with two L-5s on the ground.



Plaque at Jakkur Flying School showing a list of 'A' Licence pilots - Usha Sundaram's name on the top of the list!

I also mentioned that I "solo-ed" in the same airplane in 1986 that my father "solo-ed" in 1949 - an Aeronca Superchief bearing the registration 'VT-CQQ'. She surprised me again by saying that she also did her first solo in 'VT-CQQ'. In the early days in Indian flying, when 'A' certificates were issued to private pilots, it was mandatory for the pupils to practice stalls, spin and demonstrate the correct recovery procedure. (Nowadays, stalls are, for the most part, demonstrated by the instructor, and spin initiation and recovery is totally absent in the PPL syllabus!). Since spin is not allowed in an Aeronca, I asked Usha Sundaram about her spin test. She said that she did it on a de Havilland Tiger Moth (the same airplane that my father flew for his spin test), considered as an all time classic biplane and loved by pilots all over the world. It felt as if I was back in the Jakkur skies when I heard Usha Sundaram reminiscing!



Portrait of Usha Sundaram and Captain V. Sundaram



Dr K S Raman



K N Sreenivasan with his Stinson L-5 airplane

The "Aerowoman" retires



This is not the Pasteboard's "official" tribute to Dr Kalyani Vijayan, who retired from NAL's Materials Science Division last week upon attaining the age of 60. I am certain that we can persuade someone much more knowledgeable to write an appreciation of her outstanding contributions to NAL in a future issue.



I would, here, like to record my personal admiration of a remarkably gracious lady who provided wonderful leadership to NAL's other "aerowomen". Till a few years ago, I always related to Kalyani Vijayan only as a very capable R&D scientist; I saw her name as an author of a research publication rather more often than I saw the lady herself! But then Dr Prahlad asked her to assume the leadership of what was evolving into an "aerowoman movement" at NAL. I wasn't sure NAL needed an aerowoman group; I even went across to argue this out with Kalyani Vijayan in her ground floor room of the Technology Block. She heard me patiently, without ever getting angry or appearing condescending, and then presented her counter-arguments very logically and convincingly. I returned feeling rather foolish.

We also interacted with Dr Kalyani Vijayan when she started her [Polysearch](#) project to create a web-based database of polymers in aerospace. "I am a total novice in this web business", she told us when she started off. Soon we discovered that her team was doing very well! What I found especially noteworthy was that Kalyani Vijayan, then aged about 59, decided to learn it all herself; most other 59 year olds at NAL or elsewhere either get students to do what is finally rather tedious work, or don't do such work at all!

Dr Kalyani Vijayan is an excellent organiser; but she works behind the scenes without fuss or drama. We first saw that when she played a lead role in organising a one-day symposium in Dr A K Singh's honour a year or two ago, and as the chief organiser of the hugely successful meeting at NAL on "Women in Aerospace" last year she did even better. We wish her an active and happy retired life

Srinivas Bhogle
