

## GENDER-GAP IN STEMM FIELDS.

The Chandrabhabha Saikiani Centre for Women Studies organised the orientation programme of the project, Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI), sponsored by Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, 2021.

The programme was conducted in the Academic Council Hall, Tezpur University. The purpose of the orientation meeting was to introduce the GSAT (Gender Self-Assessment Team) members to the initiative and vision of Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI). The overarching programme is being undertaken in partnership with Aston University, Birmingham, UK. A GSAT team has been constituted with 62 members comprising of faculties, research scholars, students, technical and office staff of Tezpur University. A total of 30 institutions have been selected all over India to conduct a pilot study on the GATI project. In the Northeast, Tezpur University has earned the distinction of achieving this project.

The project aims to gauge and act upon the severity of the relative absence of women in the field of Science and Technology. The GATI programme commits to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine and Mathematics) disciplines. According to UIS data, less than 30% of the world's researchers are women. Women in scientific laboratories and institutions of higher education face several challenges in moving up the academic and administrative ladder which explains the existence of a structured hierarchy at the structural, cultural and institutional level. Considering the fact, there is a need to restructure and bring transformations at the institutional level. It bears utmost importance to understand how the 'structure' functions as a barrier in incorporating women in STEMM fields. Unfortunately, the disparity in gender statistics is not only in numbers but several micro and macro factors play their role at the institution level. GATI as an initiative aims to study these barriers which work at various levels; physical, structural, psychological, political. To understand these barriers at its grassroots, one has to look beyond the numbers and examine the qualitative factors that deter women from pursuing careers in STEMM fields.

The Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, Professor Vinod Kumar Jain, (Principal Investigator of the GATI project) honoured the meeting with his presence. Other dignitaries in the meeting were Prof. Chandana Goswami, Department of Business Administration, Prof. Ramesh Chandra Deka of the Department of Chemical Sciences.

The meeting started with a welcome address by Dr. Mousumi Mahanta, Assistant Professor, Centre for Women Studies. Followed by it was the streaming of a short film on GATI by DST, Government of India. The Nodal Officer of the GATI project, Dr. Madhurima Goswami then took the stage to introduce to the GSAT team the vision and aim of GATI. She starts by making mention of a former DST mission on women scientists, the WISE-KIRAN scheme which came up in the year 2003. It was a scheme on around 5000 women scientists and the scheme came out to be quite successful. Speaking about the cultural and structural disabilities, she says that India is at a depressing state and needs sincere attention. Acknowledging the existing state, she says in order to reduce the gender-disparity, institutional support is important. Additionally, the GSAT members, need to be actively involved because the insider's perspective is fundamental in chalking out the various structural disabilities within the STEMM fields. She emphasizes on how the participation of women is important in the STEMM fields to reduce

the gender gap and at the same time focused how women despite making their contributions in the field of science, most of the times remain invisible and unrecognised. She adds on how the GSAT team should embark on their journey towards realising the objectives of the GATI project by engaging in various participatory action like workshops, capacity-building and training programmes. She further goes on to explain to the GSAT team the GATI charter (the charter includes the rights and duties of an institution with respect to the GATI project). She adds how the entire team of GSAT needs to develop a gender-sensitive lens and integrate gender into research development, improving gender values in institutional culture. Professor Vinod Kumar Jain, Vice Chancellor, Tezpur University, appealed to the GSAT team to conduct the research in a sincere and unbiased manner. He called the issue of gender-equity and gender-sensitivity a question of justice and moral responsibility. He added that gender-sensitization programmes are fundamental in adopting a gender-specific work culture at the institutional level. He further stressed on the importance of educating the students of the university on gender and gender sensitivity. He further recommended a compulsory gender education course in STEMM departments along with the HSS stream through the Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women studies. Chandana Goswami, Department of Business Administration shared her inspiring experiences as a women employee in management stream. In 1999, she was selected for the Faculty Development Programme by IIM Ahmedabad which came with its own challenges in the social and professional fronts. She shared how she moved through the challenges during the programme. In the year 2004, she was among the privileged twelve ladies across India who were selected for the Women in Leadership and Management programme. She also shared with the GSAT team how she managed to balance her role as a mother as well as a faculty to the best of her potential. She advised the young members, especially the students to strengthen their minds and be determined enough to navigate their potentialities and possibilities and fill in the loopholes in the structure of the institutions if and when necessary. Prof. Ramesh Ch. Deka, Department of Chemical Sciences graced the GSAT team with his humble words. He assured his support to the project in all possible ways. The orientation meeting was wound up by a vote of thanks given by Dr. Ivy Daimary, Research Associate, Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women studies.