
The Issue Of Gender Diversity Related To Nobel Prize

I agree to a certain extent with the statement “There has been a rising voice for Nobel committees to consider gender diversity in addition to work quality when nominating scientists”.

However, though there is a rising voice, there has been no concrete results and solid actions done by the community in terms of alleviating the gender diversity.

Only one woman has won a Nobel prize in the past 50 years. In the history in Nobel prizes, only 3% of the winners were women. This is especially so in the Science prizes. This creates a ‘Nobel Imbalance’, inciting the Nobel committee to look into the matter. In addition, there were no female laureates from 2016 to 2017.

The prizes were said to be recognized in the era where men in specific geographical locations were more favoured. This passed on through generations, resulting in the strong gender diversity faced currently.

The Nobel prize was founded by Alfred Nobel. Alfred came up with a nominating process for the prizes. The prizes are split into different committees- the science and literature committee bodied by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm respectively.

More senior professionals of the respective fields are requested to be nominators to nominate potential candidates through a shortlist. This makes the selection prone to human factors, and causing the gap in gender diversity. Some changes have been made to the nomination process, but no substantial results have been seen currently to even up the gender diversity.

Göran Hansson, secretary-general of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences admits that very little women have been selected as nominees for the Nobel Prizes. However, he declined to reveal the statistics as it can only be revealed after 50 years, due to the academy by-laws.

Hansson also mentioned that for the next Nobel prize, nominators will be highly encourage them to consider gender diversity, among other things, through the invitational letter. Hansson says that “We don’t work in a vacuum. We need the scientific community to see the women scientists and to nominate those who have made outstanding contributions”.

Nominators were able to put forth multiple names in an discovery previously. However, the committee realized that it has not been properly utilised, and encourages nominators to do so.

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This helps to increase both gender and geographic diversity as people tend to make more varied choices when there are multiple candidates available. Iris Bohnet, a behavioural economist at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts says “I’m delighted to hear about the change”.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences also deliberately increased the number of women who are eligible to make nominations. This was for the fact that more female nominators would nominate females over males. However, cultural biases is strong and thus, even female nominators still favoured men over women. Despite that, Hansson estimates that, of the 500 or so scientists each committee picks, the representation of women has roughly doubled to an average of around 25%. Though exact number could not be revealed, it has been said that the numbers were substantial.

Brian Uzzi, a social scientist from the Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, states that women have been winning prizes equally on par with men. However, the prizes were of lower value compared to the science prizes.

In conclusion, even with a higher voice to attend to gender diversity, no proper results have been seen. Actions taken so far have been mediocre and could be improved to reduce the gender diversity. That said, the fact that the committee has realized, and highlighted the issue is a good start.

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