

2.4 Women in Fellowship

The Indian Academy of Sciences is distinguished by the fact that among the founding fellows of the Academy was a woman scientist: the distinguished plant geneticist E K Janaki Ammal. However, in the years that followed this number remained rather small: in 1940 there was only one woman out of a total of 240 Fellows. In 1976 the total number of Fellows nearly doubled to 430 and six of them were women. The three plots in the Graph show that the number has increased steadily *albeit very slowly* from 1986 onwards when it stood at 8 in a total of 518. In the latter half of the last 72 years since the Academy was founded, the overall situation thus improved somewhat, the percentage of women increasing by about a factor two standing currently at 5.25% : 46 women out of a total Fellowship of 877 (as on 1st January 2006).

As can be seen from the Table in the following page showing the subject-wise gender breakup of the Fellowship, this *small* increase is almost entirely due to the larger presence of women in the Fellowship in Medicine (about 25%), Animal Sciences (about 20%) and in General Biology (about 12%). While indeed it reflects the larger participation by women in these disciplines at all levels as is normally perceived, one wonders whether the participation in areas such as Physics, Chemistry is indeed as low as 1–2% as is seen in the Fellowship. Further, it is also not clear whether quantitatively the fraction in Life Sciences in the Fellowship, is commensurate with the larger participation by women in these disciplines at all levels. While no one would ever advocate any proportional representation, this is a question worth asking. Surprisingly Mathematics does better than Physics and Chemistry, where the percentage stands at about 5%. In Engineering and Technology, all the 131 Fellows at present belong to the same gender. Of course, the rather small number of women in the Fellowship meant that only a small number of them have been office bearers of the Academy.

The small number of women in the Fellowship seen here is consistent with the general picture seen in all such bodies the world over. However, a small analysis on the success rates of nominations indicates that in the last thirty years or so (the period covered by the analysis) there is *no gender dependence of the success rate of a nomination*. It is gratifying to see this. This then clearly points towards the way to correct the imbalance that is seen: being more proactive about nominating more deserving women scientists to the Fellowship. One believes that this will help the gender distribution in the Fellowship

Subject-wise gender decomposition of the Fellowship through the years

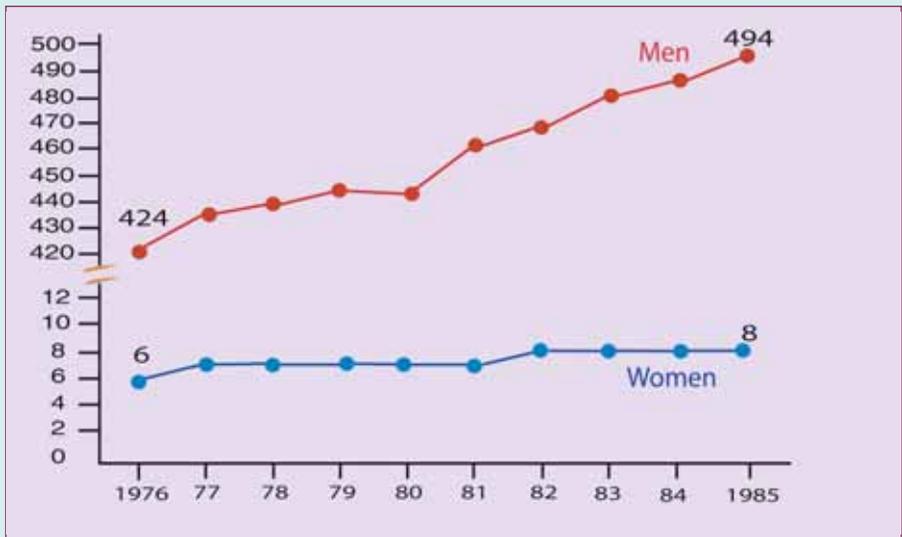
Subject	1940		1976		2006	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Math. Sci.	17	-	34	-	70	4
Physics	34	-	83	-	178	3
Chemistry	41	-	65	1	134	3
Engineering	27	-	60	-	131	-
Medicine	23	-	35	3	56	14
Earth Planet. Sci.	23	-	33	1	74	1
Animal Sciences	26	-	33	-	39	7
Plant Sciences	43	1	62	1	55	2
General Biology	6	-	19	-	94	12
Total	240	1	424	6	831	46

to be more representative of the number of women participating in the country in scientific activities in various disciplines at high level of achievement.

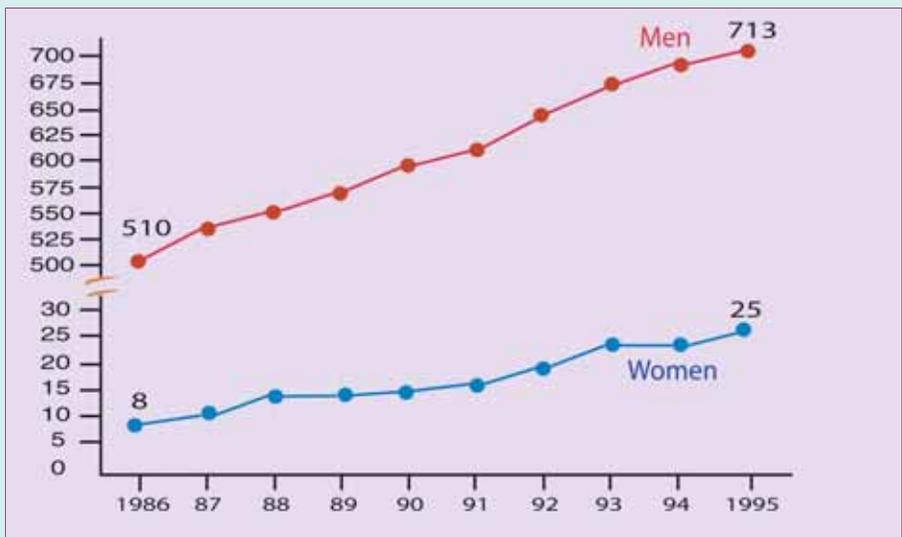
Panel for Women in Science: A Committee was formed by the President of the Indian Academy of Sciences in 2003 to look into the issues of Women Scientists. The convener Rohini M Godbole along with members R J Hans-Gill and D Balasubramanian, were asked to formulate the terms of reference and define appropriate action points. The Committee took note of the report (at that time under preparation) brought out by the Indian National Science Academy on 'Science career for women: an examination of the Indian women's access to and retention in scientific careers'. It was felt that while such a report which collects some facts and figures was very essential, it was definitely going to support the obvious fact that the participation by women in 'practice of science' is rather small and hence discussions of remedial measures do not need to wait for the completion of the report. The recommendations of the Committee included setting up, as a first step, a page for 'Women in Science' on the Academy's website. The remaining recommendations (among other things) can be seen in this web page at the Academy's website. Another recommendation of the Committee was to have a Panel of the Academy for Women in Science, which will work towards putting into practice various interesting programmes that the Committee had suggested. A panel discussion on 'Women in Science' was held during the annual meeting of the Academy at Guwahati in November 2003 and Rohini Godbole reported to the Fellows of the Academy about the Committee's report. One of the point of discussions, relevant to the Fellowship, was about an unwritten policy in various institutes in India which prevent the husband and wife being employed at the same institution. The Committee members agreed that such policies are in fact counterproductive and come in the way of development of the career of (mainly the) woman spouse. Since a large number of individuals involved in decision making at the institutions happen to be Fellows of the Academy, it was suggested that the Committee bring this fact to the notice of Fellows of the Academy. In 2005 a panel of the Academy for Women in Science was formed and it has already set in motion various programmes, information about which will be made available on the web page as they progress.

Gender distribution in Fellowship through the years

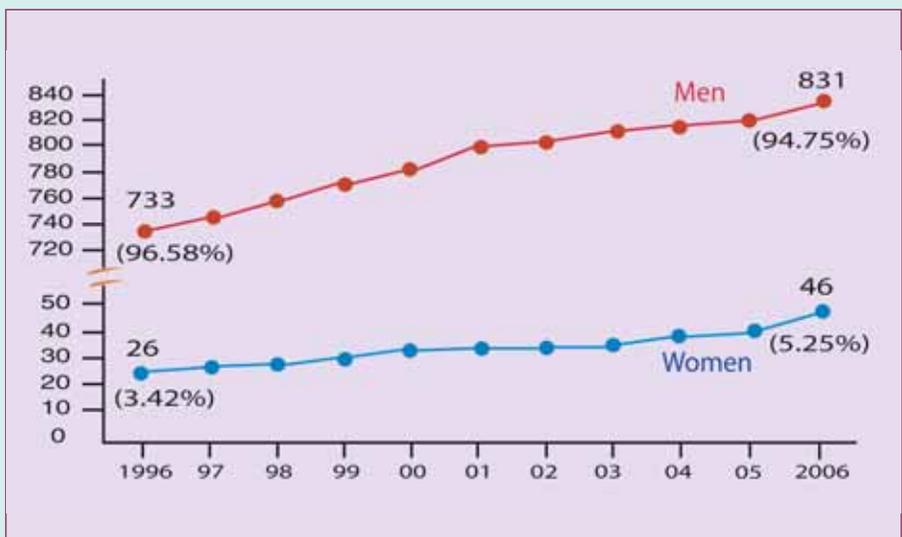
1976 - 1985



1986 - 1995



1996 - 2006*



**Note: Over the period 1996 to 2006 the percentage of women changed from 3.42 to 5.25 and that of men changed from 96.58 to 94.75.*