Science societies: Are they democratically undemocratic?

There has been an interesting factual analysis made by Peter J. Heaney. He has tackled two important issues: (i) Are scientists engaged in the society affairs? and (ii) How much democracy do we need in our scientific societies?

The immediate thought while reading the article was to introspect on the conditions of some of our own scientific societies in India and their methods of governance. Probably, these very questions if posed before the governing personalities of some of the Indian science societies, can lead to interesting answers. The mechanism and the bye-laws framed in some societies are such that while the Fellows of the society can nominate the names for various offices of the council, it is the prevailing council members who stand as the authority to select and or shortlist the names for election! The list they finalize for election shall have no extra names, leaving no options for the fellows who are the non-council members other than to merely be the rubber stamps to cast their vote of acceptance. Thus the elections for the governing council shall be a farce and democratically undemocratic.

The conclusive statement of Peter J. Heaney ‘what is beautiful about democratic (science) societies is also what is terrible of them: they are as successful or as ineffective as the people who participate’ can in reality be true for many of our societies that are democratically undemocratic.