Introduction

The coveted Nobel Prize (NP), one of the best known awards world-wide, was founded by Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833-1896). Although he is known for the discovery of the dynamite, he was a man of multiple interests: a scientist as well as a successful businessman. He held as many as 355 patents and through his skill as an industrialist, he became one of the wealthiest men in the world. According to his Will, five prizes were established in the fields of physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace. According to the Statutes of the Nobel Foundation, the Peace Nobel Prize is awarded by the Norwegian Storting (Parliament).

Seen in international context not much has been written about Indian Nobel Prize nominators and nominees. The present article deals with this issue in the case of the Peace Nobel Prize. Based on the Nobel Committee’s documents the following has been explored: What was the nomination practice of Indian nominators? How Mahatma Gandhi’s achievements have been viewed by the Peace Nobel Committee and the Norwegian intellectuals?

Indian Nominators and Nominees between 1901 and 1950

Nomination and selection process: In the case of Physics / Chemistry Nobel Prize the Committee Members (generally 5 in numbers) can only recommend the names of candidates to the Swedish Academy of Sciences. The Academy takes the final decision after a discussion in a Physics / Chemistry Class. The Academy is not bound by the decision of the Committee. In order to receive proposals for the Peace Nobel Prize, the Committee sends invitation letters to the following persons or organisations:

(a) Present and past members of the Nobel Committee and the advisers at the Nobel Institute.
(b) Members of national assemblies and governments, and members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
Under the above stated rules different Indians were nominated or asked to nominate a candidate (see Table 1). Raja Mahendra Pratap – a freedom fighter and reformist was India’s first candidate. NA Nilsson - a Member of the Commission of the Permanent International Peace Bureau (Sweden), sent a letter to the Nobel Committee and stated:

Pratap gave up his property for educational purposes, and he established a technical college at Brindaban. In 1913 he took part in Gandhi’s campaign in South Africa. He travelled around the world to create awareness about the situation in Afghanistan and India. In 1925 he went on a mission to Tibet and met the Dalai Lama. He was primarily on an unofficial economic mission on behalf of Afghanistan, but he also wanted to expose the British brutalities in India. He called himself the servant of the powerless and weak.\(^1\)

The history of Nobel Prizes shows that only in rare cases a candidate gets the NP for a single nomination. Before taking decision, the Committee ask its experts to write a report on the work of the nominee. In the case of Pratap such a report was never written. In fact the Committee did not find any suitable candidate for the year 1932. The Prize was reserved and allocated to the special fund.\(^2\)

India’s next candidate was HM Banerjee - President of the Aryya Mission Institution, Calcutta and the author of Peace.\(^3\) He was a religious-social reformer. In March 1937 under the auspices of the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee the International Parliament of Religions was organised in Calcutta. HM Banerjee was one of the major figures behind this event. He delivered a lecture on “Religion” and tried to show the similarities between Hinduism and Christianity. As noted in the “Preface” of the reference 9, the participants of the conference were not only from Asia but also from Europe, America and Africa.\(^4\) In 1934 at the time of nomination he was President of the United Mission Calcutta. As we see from Table 1 he was nominated in 1934, 1936 and 1938. His nominators were DR Bhadarkar and SK Gupta – Professors of History and Law respectively at the University of Calcutta. Banerjee was nominated for his book Secrets of Religion and Way to Peace. As in the case of Pratap, Banerjee’s work was never evaluated. In 1934 the prize was awarded to A Henderson (UK) - ex-Foreign Secretary and President, Disarmament Conference in 1932;
in the year 1936 to Argentina’s Foreign Minister CS Lamas - President of the Assembly of the League of Nations; Mediator in a conflict between Paraguay and Bolivia.

In 1937 there were two nominees from India, namely, NK Mukherjee - Advocate of the High Court of Judicature in Calcutta and the politician Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi from Delhi. The former was nominated by SC. Bagchi – a Professor of Law at the University of Calcutta for a pamphlet called “War and Peace”. MK Gandhi was nominated by O Colbojørnsen – a member of the Norwegian Parliament. He wrote a letter to the Nobel Committee on behalf of the organisation “Indias Venner” - Friends of India (O Colbojørnsen to NC, Jan. 29, 1937). In general the candidature should be supported by documentation. On behalf of the “Friends of India” such a document was prepared by its members VS Colbojørnsen and A Heber. In Gandhi’s favour they wrote a long report of about 6 pages. In it they emphasized that Gandhi had advocated racial, social and political peace. He is a leading figure of India’s nationalist movement in a non-violent struggle against British rule. Also he has managed to unite conflicting religious groups in peaceful cooperation guided by the ideals of Ahimsa (non-violence). However the expert of the Committee Jacob Worm-Müller saw in Gandhi a shrewd politician – a freedom fighter and a dictator, an idealist and a nationalist with sharp turns in his politics. Thus the Nobel Committee did not take Gandhi’s case seriously. 5

In 1937 the NP was awarded to R Cecil – a British politician and writer; founder and president of the International Peace Campaign.

In the following year, that is 1938, three Indian candidates: NK Mukherjee, HM Banerjee and MK Gandhi were proposed for the Peace Nobel Prize. The first two had their national supporters (see Table 1). Gandhi was nominated again by the “Friends of India” group from Oslo. Colbojørnsen repeated his previous nomination (O Colbojørnsen to NC, Jan. 30, 1938). VS Colbojørnsen on behalf of “Indias Venner” wrote a letter to the Committee and stated that the following persons: R Rolland, G Lansbury, CF Andrews, JJPL Sheffard, L Housman and A Belden supported this case (VS Colbojørnsen to NC, Sept. 14, 1937). In a separate letter JJPL Sheffard, Canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral wrote to the Nobel Committee on Aug. 12, 1937:

When you are considering the Nobel Prize for this year may I respectfully suggest that Mahatma Gandhi’s candidature should receive special attention? There is no need for me to write about him, but I do not know anyone who has striven for peace with greater energy and self-sacrifice.

Another strong recommendation came from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. In part it reads:

We have the honour to inform you that the IXth International Congress of the Women’s ..., which met at Luhacovice, Czechoslovakia from July 27th - 31st supported the proposal to award the Nobel Prize for Peace to Mahatma Gandhi (underlined in original, C Ragaz, et al. to NC, Aug. 20, 1937).

None of the Indian candidates came on the “short list”, that is, there were no special reports prepared as the Committee thought that they did not deserve the award. Probably the political situation in Europe forced the Committee to decide for another organisation namely “The Nansen International Office for Refugees” (NIOR), which existed in Geneva and was founded by Fridtjof Nansen in 1921. If we analyse the political situation in Europe in those years, it is not difficult to understand this decision. For example under the tyranny of A Hitler, many Jews and persons with other political ideas than the nationalist’s were forced to flee from Germany. Some organisations in England and other European countries were helping to find employment for them. To award the Prize for such an organisation attracted the attention of the people to the refugees’ problems.

In 1939 again there were two candidates from India, namely NK Mukherjee and MK Gandhi. In a letter of January 31, 1939 O Colbojørnsen repeated his nomination. Same was done by Mukherjee’s nominators. Due to the Second World War, no Nobel Peace Prize was awarded between 1939 and 1944. The prize for 1944 was reserved and in 1945 awarded to H Cordell - one of the initiators of the United Nations.

For the first time in 1947, Gandhi was supported by his own countrymen. All of them on January 23, 1947 sent telegrams from Delhi to Royal Norwegian Foreign Office, Oslo as recorded in the Document No. J.nr. 80/81/IV/47 of the Nobel Committee. BG Kher - the Prime Minister of Bombay wrote: “The object of awarding the Nobel prize cannot be better fulfilled than by awarding it to Mahatma Gandhi Apostle of peace truth and non-violence and symbol of India’s culture and genius.” Mavalankar - the President of the Indian Legislative Assembly observed that: “Recommended for [the] current year’s Nobel prize [is] Mahatma Gandhi, living symbol of eastern and Indian culture and philosophy [and] greatest exponent of non-
violence and international peace". A similar recommendation was given by GB Panth - the Premier of United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). Though there was no international support and the nominator did not provide evidence in Gandhi’s favour, the expert JA Seip was asked by the Nobel Committee to prepare a new report. He complimented the old report and wrote Gandhi’s contribution in Indian politics after 1937. He showed that Gandhi with his non-violence method had handled the situation in such a way that the struggle between the Indians and the British; the question of India’s participation in the Second World War and the conflict between Hindu and Muslim communities had been solved peacefully. However, he did not forget to mention the migration of millions of people from India to newly founded Pakistan and vice versa.6

The studies of Physics-Chemistry Nobel Prizes show that international politics sometimes plays an important role in the decisions. The story of Gandhi’s Nobel Prize suggests a similar pattern. Particular in this case politics became more relevant, as the decision is taken by only five persons. Apart from that the “public opinion” (nomination by Norwegians in favour of Gandhi) is visible in this particular case. In 1947 two of the members were in favour of Gandhi. But ... they were not able to convince the other three members. The labour politician Martin Tranmæl was very reluctant to award the Prize to Gandhi in the midst of the Indian-Pakistani conflict, and former Foreign Minister Birger Braadland agreed with Tranmæl. Gandhi was, they thought, too strongly committed to one of the belligerents. In addition both Tranmæl and [the Chairman of the Nobel Committee G] Jahn had learnt that, one month earlier, at a prayer-meeting, Gandhi made a statement which indicated that he had given up his consistent rejection of war.7

Here they referred to the article published in The Times of September 27, 1947. Gandhi had stated that if there was no other way to secure justice from Pakistan, the Indian Government would have to go to war. The Committee Chairman G Jahn gave too much importance to Pakistan’s issue. This was not the only issue. In general, he had doubt about Gandhi’s personality. In his diary he wrote, “we should remember that he is not only a apostle for peace; he is first and foremost a patriot.”8 Although Gandhi was one of the finalists, again he did not receive the Prize. It was given instead to two organisations i.e.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominator/s Country Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>EG Balch, NL Peace US Jan. 14, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS Oftedal – Member NC NO Jan. 20, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Friends Service Committee, NL US Telegram, ?, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>H Schneider and four Professors of Philosophy, Columbia University US Jan. 21. 1948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Duverger and five Professors of Law Faculty, Bordeaux University FR Feb. 9, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>F Castberg, Professor of Law, Former advisor to the Norwegian NC NO ?, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>WE Hocking – Harvard University USA April 26, 1948</td>
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<td>PS Buck, NL Literature USA April 1, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC Fisher – Social activist and educational reformer USA March 31, 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>B Jensen – Assistant to the President – American-Scandinavian Foundation USA March 25, 1948</td>
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“...they were not able to convince the other three members. The labour politician Martin Tranmæl was very reluctant to award the Prize to Gandhi in the midst of the Indian-Pakistani conflict, and former Foreign Minister Birger Braadland agreed with Tranmæl. Gandhi was, they thought, too strongly committed to one of the belligerents. In addition both Tranmæl and [the Chairman of the Nobel Committee G] Jahn had learnt that, one month earlier, at a prayer-meeting, Gandhi made a statement which indicated that he had given up his consistent rejection of war.”

The Nobel Laureate EG Balch on Jan. 14, 1948 wrote to the Nobel Committee:

It is not known to me whether he [MK Gandhi] has already been proposed for 1948 but as one of those nominated for the 1947 Award I assume that the Committee has before it all the documentation necessary for decision in his case. I am, however, sending you with this pamphlet of 160 pages by...
Madame Camille Drevet entitled “La Pensee de Gandhi”, Bordas, Paris, 1945, which gives essential data regarding his ideas and deeds. It appears to me that no choice could be wiser and more widely acceptable than that of Gandhi.

Balch’s proposal was supported by PS Buck, American novelist and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938, who reported that:

... Mr. Gandhi long ago became a world figure but the West did not fully realize it until he died. To receive the Nobel Peace Prize would extend the influence of his life and establish him for what he is, the greatest figure of our generation in wisdom and humanity (PS Buck to NC, April 1, 1948).

A group of six professors from the Faculty of Law - University of Bordeaux (France) proposed Gandhi in a letter of Feb. 9, 1948. Surprisingly enough, this nomination was considered for the year 1948, though the letter was sent to the Committee too late. H Schneider and four professors of philosophy, Columbia University, New York wrote in their proposal:

... It seems to us that a detailed justification of this recommendation is scarcely needed or even appropriate, in view of the dramatic events of the last few days in India and Pakistan. There can be little doubt that Gandhi’s fast was a major, if not decisive, contribution to laying the foundation for a general and peaceful settlement of the bloody mass struggles. If anything approaching peace results in that part of the world, recognition of this achievement is certainly worthy of the serious consideration of the Nobel Committee (HW Schneider, et al., to NC, Jan. 21, 1948).

Another strong recommendation came from the Director of the National Peace Council, London - a co-ordinating body, which represented forty British national organisations (G Bailey to NC, May 26, 1948).

Especially after his death people in Europe and the United States began to realize the value of Gandhi’s philosophy and accomplishments. In the USA in The Washington Post (March 21, 1948) a letter was published. In part it reads:

... no man in our times has done as much for peace as Mahatma Gandhi, and yet he was never awarded the Nobel Peace Prize while he was alive, although it is believed that his name did come up for consideration several times. Perhaps in the past the fact that he was the leader of India’s struggle for independence to some extent overshadowed his role as an apostle of peace. There can be no doubt today about Mahatma Gandhi’s influence throughout the world for peace. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee might well consider awarding the Nobel Peace Prize for 1948 posthumously to Mr. Gandhi. By doing so it would not only give belated recognition to Mr. Gandhi’s work ..., but also add to the prestige of the Nobel Award.

This letter was sent by AJ McCusker to the Secretary of the American Scandinavian Foundation (ACF) on March 22nd, 1948. B Jensen from the ACF forwarded it to the Nobel Foundation in Stockholm.

From Table 2 we also see some of the letters came after Gandhi’s assassination. As stated above some of them were considered by the Committee for the year 1948. Thus there were enough nominations in Gandhi’s favour. Once again a report was prepared on Gandhi’s achievements. This time the Nobel Committee stood before a new problem, that is, the discussion in the media for a posthumous prize for Gandhi. It was entirely a new situation, as the prize has never been awarded to a person who had just passed away. However, there was provision for it as one of the nomination letters indicates. For instance, on April 26, 1948 WE Hocking, an American philosopher from the University of Harvard wrote to the Chairman G Jahn that “I am glad to learn that it is possible, in terms of your statutes, to consider the award of a Nobel Prize to Gandhi.”

But there were also arguments against a decoration of the Indian politician. In the expert’s report for the year 1948, an article was mentioned, published in the Times of Sept. 27, 1947, which was entitled “Mr. Gandhi on “war” with Pakistan”. In part it reads:

“Mr. Gandhi told his prayer meeting to-night that, though he had always opposed all warfare, if there was no other way of securing justice from Pakistan and if Pakistan persistently refused to see its proved error and continue to minimize it, the Indian Union Government would have to go to war against it. No one wanted war, but he could never advise anyone to put up with injustice.”

However, Gandhi felt misunderstood as we find in the report of the Nobel Committee, which quoted from The
Times of Oct. 1, 1947 as follows:

My reference to the possibility of war between the two sister Dominions seems, I am told, to have produced a scare in the West. – I hold that not a single mention of war in my speeches can be interpreted to mean that there is any incitement to or approval of war between Pakistan and India unless the mere mention of it is to be taboo.

In the report it was also mentioned that due to Gandhi’s fast against the violence, a number of lives have been saved. The report also observed Gandhi’s assassination by the Hindu-brahmin NV Godse and the political group RSS whose ideology he was following.

It seems that the Committee was willing to give the award posthumously. As O Tonnesson points out the Committee sought advice from the Nobel Institution. The following part of the expert’s report shows that it took interest to find Gandhi’s successor-organisations etc. The Harijan Trust Ahmedabad was one of them. As quoted in the report it’s reply was, “Its main activity is the publication of Gandhian literature, that is writings of and about Gandhiji, or any of the activities founded by him or akin to them, and particularly in quest and pursuit of or bearing upon truth and non-violence.” So far Sarvodaya Samaj was concerned, it was by Mashruwala – the editor of Harijans to the Committee enquiries : “It is more a spiritual brotherhood of all those who believe in the cause of Sarvodaya (well-being of every one) than a physical organisation.” Then there was the “Gandhi Memorial Fund” initiated by the Congress Party and the Government of India. On behalf of India’s President R Prasad, the Nobel Committee was informed that the fund “will be utilised mostly in furtherance of constructive work in which he as engaged.”

As O Tonnesson shows the Nobel Institution came to the conclusion that Gandhi had not left any property and Will behind; who, then, should receive the money? At the same time the Chairman Jahn saw the awarding of a posthumous prize even “contrary to the intention of the testator.”

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In 1950 four Indian nominators proposed four nominees. A Professor of Law - J Majundar – University of Calcutta was of the opinion that the NP should go to the Jurist Sanjib Chaudhuri for his book A Constitution for World Government, whereas S Sen – a Philosophy Professor at the University of Andhra nominated a Bengali Arobindo Ghose - nationalist and social reformer. LR Sivasubranian of University of Delhi nominated India’s Prime Minister JL Nehru “for his neutralist foreign policy and for upholding the same principles as Gandhi.” Nehru’s other nominator was M Venkataramangalam – University of Bombay. He also nominated S Radhakrishnan – Politician and Professor of Philosophy, who in the 1920s had taught at the University of Calcutta. After Gandhi, Nehru was the only candidate taken seriously by the Committee as JA Seip wrote a report on the achievements of the candidate. It was the first nomination in Nehru’s favour. Thus he had little chance to get the Nobel Prize. In 1950 R Bunche (USA) - Director, Division of Trusteeship, U.N.; Acting Mediator in Palestine, 1948 received the Prize.

From the above discussion we have seen that only a few nominators were involved in the history of the Peace Nobel Prize. In the following, we shall see their nomination practice.

**Geographical Distribution of Nominators and Nominees within India**

According to the records of the Nobel Committee only six cities appear in the list. The cities which played a major role in the game of Peace Nobel Prize are Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. Only once (that is, in 1950) S Sen from Waltair (Andhra) nominated the Bengali reformer Sri Aurobindo [Ghose] from Pondicherry (not shown in Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>No of sent proposals</th>
<th>Name of nominators</th>
<th>Name of nominee/s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>BG Kher, Mavlakar, GB Panth</td>
<td>3 (MK Gandhi)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L Venkataramangalam</td>
<td>2 (JL Nehru and S Radhakrishnan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>D R Bhadarkar, SK Gupta</td>
<td>4 (HM Banerjee)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SK Gupta, Sc. Bagchi</td>
<td>HM Banerjee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J Majundar</td>
<td>3 (NK Mukherjee)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LR Sivasubranian, CM Shaffee, various</td>
<td>JL Nehru</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CM Shaffee</td>
<td>PM Fran (France)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>various</td>
<td>12 (MK Gandhi), 2 (JL Nehru)</td>
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According to the official record of the Nobel Committee Gandhi and Nehru were nominated 12 and 2 times, respectively.
It is evident from the above table that between 1901 and 1950:

- Calcutta had a total of nine nominations, three nominees and four nominators. All of them were residents of the city.
- Bombay sent five proposals, none of them in favour of its own citizens.
- Delhi had three nominees, and two nominators. One of them nominated a foreigner. Gandhi from Delhi was an exceptional case who got international recognition. However, only three Indian politicians did nominate him.

Conclusions

The analysis of India’s nominators and nominees in the field of Peace Nobel Prize between the time period 1901 and 1950 shows that:

- Indian nominators and nominees were involved in the history of the Peace Nobel Prizes only after 1930.
- In most of the cases Indian nominators nominated their own country men.
- Seen on the national scale, most of the nominators were from Calcutta. They nominated persons from their own city whereas the nominators from Bombay or Delhi acted differently.
- The most interesting point seems to be the nominees. The Bengali nominees were proposed for their social and religious contributions, whereas the nominators from Bombay and Delhi preferred the politicians. This might reflect the way of thinking of different communities in these cities.
- Calcutta’s nominators and nominees dominated in the Peace Nobel Prize as was the case of the Physics and Chemistry Nobel Prizes.1
- From the above analysis we also see that Gandhi’s views were not appreciated by his own countrymen. Only three Indian politicians nominated him whereas in the West, there was much more support.
- So far the Peace Nobel Committee is concerned, the analysis suggests that in the case of Gandhi the Committee rejected his case again and again, as he was seen as a person, whose politics remained limited to “only Indians”. However, the Norwegian intellectual community saw him in a different way, and nominated him various times. This shows how a personality can be interpreted on “official” and “private” level.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Anne C Kjelling, Head Librarian The Norwegian Nobel Institute, Oslo for sending the Reports of the Nobel Committee as well as the nomination letters from MK Gandhi’s nominators.

References

3. Only O. Colbyansens’s nomination is recorded in the Committee’s record, see Det Nordske Stortings Nobellkomite - Redegjørelse for Nobels Fredspris XXXVIII – 1938, (Croendahl & Soens Boktrykkeri, Oslo, 1938), p. 9.
11. O. Tonnesson, ref. 10
12. O. Tonnesson, ibid
13. O. Tonnesson, ibid