

Gandhi:

Peacemaker But Not Nobel-Prize Winner

Mohandas, or "Great Soul," Gandhi is the strongest symbol of non-violence in the 20th century. During his lifetime, many people admired Mohandas Gandhi, but his martyrdom in 1948 made him a worldwide symbol of peace. Many people believe that the Indian national leader should have been selected for the Nobel Peace Prize. He was nominated a number of times: 1937, 1938, 1939, 1947 and again just days before his murder in 1948. Curiously, though, he has never been awarded the prize.

The Nobel prize committee has publicly acknowledged its regrets for Gandhi's obvious omission. When awarding the Dalai Lama the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, the chairman of the committee remarked that the honour was "in part a tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi." However, the committee has never explained why Gandhi was never awarded the prize.

Born in 1869 in Porbandar in western India, Gandhi was named Mohandas Karamchand by his father, who was prime minister, and his profoundly religious mother. The rich Gandhi family belonged to a devout branch of Hinduism that advocated non-violence and tolerance among religious groups.

Gandhi worked in South Africa to improve living conditions for the Indian minority, developing his practice of self-sacrifice. He successfully introduced a method of non-violence and peaceful protest into the Indian struggle for basic human rights. When he returned to India in 1915, he began a series of non-violent campaigns of civil disobedience against the British colonial authorities. At the same time, he championed efforts to unite Indian Hindus, Muslims and Christians. During the last months of his life, Gandhi worked tirelessly for an end to the violence between Hindus and Muslims that had followed the partitioning of India and Pakistan. In 1948 he was assassinated during his nightly walk by a Hindu radical.

So, why was Gandhi never honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize? Until 1960 the prize was awarded almost exclusively to Europeans and Americans. Gandhi was very different from past laureates: He was not a true politician, not a humanitarian relief worker, and not an organizer of international peace congresses.

Gandhi was seriously considered for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1948 following his death. But the Nobel committee that year ultimately decided not to award the Peace Prize. What many thought should have been Mahatma Gandhi's place on the 1948 list of laureates was left unfilled.

Comprehension Questions

Read the following statements and choose the best answer.

1. Gandhi is internationally recognized as a symbol of:
 - a) non-violence.
 - b) peace.
 - c) religion.
 - d) a and b.

2. Gandhi was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize:
 - a) three times.
 - b) four times.
 - c) five times.
 - d) six times.

3. Gandhi was referred to during the awarding of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize to:
 - a) the Dalai Lama.
 - b) Mahatma Gandhi.
 - c) Al Gore.
 - d) the Red Cross.

4. Gandhi's family was:
 - a) rich.
 - b) powerful.
 - c) a and b.
 - d) none of the above.

5. The religion of the Gandhi family advocated:
 - a) respect for other religions.
 - b) practice of non-violence.
 - c) a and b.
 - d) none of the above.

6. Gandhi went to South Africa to:
 - a) develop a theory of non-violence.
 - b) practice devout Hinduism.
 - c) improve living conditions for the Indian minority.
 - d) improve living conditions for the Indian majority.

7. In his campaigns for human rights, Gandhi practised and advocated:
 - a) non-violence and self-sacrifice.
 - b) violence and self-sacrifice.
 - c) non-violence and obedience.
 - d) Hinduism and self-sacrifice.