

Nobel laureates of Indian origin mostly from Tamil Nadu, Bengal

Is it more than just a coincidence that the the Nobel laureates of Indian origin belong to Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Like Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, the latest winner, C.V. Raman and Subramanyan Chandrasekhar, who won the prize in 1930 and 1983 respectively, were also Tamils. They were also members of the Tamil diaspora in the US who had emigrated following the rise of the backward caste movement in Tamil Nadu that put the upper castes under social and political pressure.

Of the other winners, the first among Indians was Rabindranath Tagore, who received the prize in 1913. It was not until 1998 before another Bengali won the prize -- economist Amartya Sen.

There were two other winners, however, who were associated with Calcutta, as [Kolkata](#) was then known, although they were not Bengalis. Ronald Ross was one of them. He received the prize in 1902 for his work on malaria, which he studied at the Presidency General Hospital (now Seth Sukhlal Karnani Memorial Hospital) between 1881 and 1899. The other was Albania-born Mother Teresa, who won the prize in 1997.

The reason why Tamil Nadu and West Bengal should have produced more Nobel laureates than other provinces is probably due to the fact that these two states had a headstart in the matter of modern education.

The first college imparting Western-style education was set up in Calcutta in 1817. It was called Hindu College and became the Presidency College in 1855. Similarly, the Presidency College of Madras (now Chennai) was set up in 1840.

What cannot be easily explained, however, is that although Elphinstone College in Bombay was set up at the same time (1856), Maharashtra has not been as fortunate as Tamil Nadu and West Bengal in the matter of producing Nobel prize winners.

This strange regional imbalance where two states in the east and the south are the only ones from where scholars and scientists of distinction have emerged must arouse curiosity.

Only historians can offer some clues by probing the past periods of these two regions in terms of ascertaining their intellectual legacies along with sociologists who try to identify the factors responsible for the academic achievements.

Arguably, the distinction which the British made about martial and other races in India may include a grain of truth after all even though such assessments were later criticised as another attempt by a colonial regime to divide and rule.

It has to be noted that apart from those Tamils who won the prize, there were also others who eminently deserved it, such as the mathematical genius, Srinivasa Ramanujan, who, incidentally, was the nephew of the great astrophysicist Subramanyan Chandrasekhar.

In Bengal, too, there were at least two others who could have won the prize. One of them was Jagadish Chandra Bose, who pioneered the investigation of radio and microwave optics, as the

Internet wikipedia says, and also made 'significant contributions' to plant science.

The other was Satyendra Nath Bose, who is known for his work on quantum mechanics, which led to the Bose-Einstein theory. The subatomic particle, Boson, is named after him.

Not surprisingly, two other scientific terms recall these Indian scientists. One is the Raman effect, which is named after C.V. Raman, and the other is Chandrasekhar limit, which is named after the astrophysicist.

The other Indian scientist who won the prize is the molecular biologist, Hargobind Khorana, another resident of America. He was born in that part of Punjab which is now in Pakistan.

Then, there is Rajendra Pachauri, also from north India, who won it in 2007 for his contributions in the field of climate change. He was also the first to get the Nobel prize for peace after the Dalai Lama, who received it in 1989. Though not an Indian, the Tibetan pontiff can be regarded as an honorary citizen of the country.

V.S. Naipaul is the second person of Indian origin who won the prize for literature after Tagore. But his links with India are no more than tenuous despite his keen interest in its history and the social scene. He was born in Trinidad and is now a British citizen.

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