

# Essay on Dr. Amartya Sen – The Nobel Laureate

*"The Heights by the great men reached and kept,  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But while their companions slept,  
They were toiling upwards in the night."*

It was a great moment of pride for India and the Indians, when the great Indian Economists, Prof. Amartya Sen was chosen for the Nobel Prize for Economics 1998. Prof. Sen has conferred the most coveted international award for his elegant contribution to "Welfare Economics" which throws light on the understanding of the economic mechanism under the circumstances of famine and poverty. With the recognition for his contribution to welfare economics, Dr. Sen, 64, master of Trinity College at Cambridge University, became the sixth Indian to get the Nobel Prize and the first Asian to merit it for Economics. He is also the first solo winner of the prize for Economics since 1995.

Prof. Sen was born on Nov.3, 1933, in Shantinekantan (Bengal). When he was just 9 years of age, he witnessed the destructions caused by the 1943 famine which left indelible marks on his mind. He said "It touched me to find emaciated people arriving from nowhere and dying in the thousands. It made me think about what causes famine and when I took on the famine work in a formal way 30 years later, I was still quite haunted by the memories of that period." After completing his graduation from Presidency College Calcutta, Prof. Sen went to Trinity College Cambridge for higher studies, where he received his doctorate. At the age of twenty-three, the young Sen already enjoyed the status of a celebrity. He was appointed, Head of Department of Economics by the learned academician Dr. B.C. Roy, that generated a

hot debate in the Bengal Assembly, but taken care of by Dr. Roy with his characteristic élan. Dr. Roy hailed Prof. Sen, as excellently brilliant and competent to occupy the chair of HOD of Economics.

Professor Sen has published a number of books as well as articles in various journals of economics, philosophy, politics, and decision theory. His books have been translated into many languages and include *Collective Choice* (1970), *On Economic Inequality* (1973, 1977), *On Ethics and Economics* (1987), *Choice, Welfare and the Measurement* (1982), *Resources, Values and Development* (1984), *The Standard of Living* (1987), *Inequality Reexamined* (1992) and *Development as Freedom* (1999), among others.

His research has ranged over a number of fields in economics and philosophy, including social choice theory, welfare economics, theory of measurement, development economics, and moral and political philosophy. He has a forthcoming book, *Freedom, Rationality, and Social Choice*. He is currently working on the rationality of choice and behavior, and also on the objectivity of knowledge.

He is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Econometric Society as well as a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has received honorary doctorates (more than forty) from major universities in North America, Europe, and Asia. Sen has received various honors including the “Bharat Ratna” (the highest honor awarded by the President of India). Among the awards he has received are the Frank E. Seidman Distinguished Award in Political Economy, the Senator Giovanni Agnelli International-Prize in Ethics, the Alan Shawn Feinstein World Hunger Award, the Jean Mayer Global Citizenship Award, and the Nobel Prize in Economics.

Mr. Sen also served as a professor in the prestigious Delhi School of Economics and in London School of Economics. He served as Professor

at Oxford University and also at Harvard University.

Nobel Laureate Mr. Robert Solow, Professor of Economics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, paid the most telling tribute to prof. Amartya Sen. He said, "Mr. Sen is the conscience of economists. He taps something many economists feel, namely, that you're put your misspent youth into learning all this stuff but you can't say as an economist whether something is the right thing to do."

Prof. Sen made empirical studies on the cause of famine and its impact in terms of Welfare Economics, mechanism. In empirical studies, Sen's applications of his theoretical approach have enhanced our understanding of the actual effect of economic policies to tackle the problems like poverty, famine, hunger. He opined that famine has less to do with food supply than with simple economics.

India is proud of Prof. Amartya Sen who followed the footsteps of other Indian Nobel Laureates like Rabindranath Tagore–Literature (1913), C.V. Raman–Physics (1930), Hargobind Khurana–Medicine (1968), Mother Teresa–Peace (1979), and Subramaniam Chandrashekhhar–Physics (1983).

Prof. Sen is a man who rose to such grandeur heights by sheer force of his zeal, dedication, determination, and sincerity. He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He achieved everything with his untiring work, devotional approach, and dedicated efforts with a positive and iron will. The International media too reclaimed Prof. Sen for getting the Noble Prize. In the New York, Times in its editorial, wrote, "It is gratifying to see the prize given to a man who has dedicated himself to the issues of poverty and distribution of wealth—a question of supreme importance to far more people than was the work of last years' witness."