



DADABHAI NAOROJI



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Dadabhai Naoroji was an outstanding intellectual and selfless patriot who devoted his entire life to the service of the nation. He was universally loved and adored by the people as the "Grand Old Man of India", and the "Father of Indian Nationalism".

Dadabhai Naoroji was born on 4 September 1825 to Naoroji Palanji Dordi and Maneckbai in Bombay\*. He had his early schooling in a primary institution in the city. On the advice of one of his teachers, Dadabhai was sent to the Elphinstone Institution (now the Elphinstone College), Bombay, for his secondary education where he had a brilliant career, winning many scholarships and prizes, including the prestigious Clare Scholarship in 1840. He was keenly interested in mathematics, natural philosophy and political economy and graduated in the year 1845. Seven decades later, in 1916, Dadabhai was awarded the Honorary Degree of LL.D. by the University of Bombay.

Dadabhai began his illustrious career after graduation as the Native Head Assistant at the Elphinstone Institute, Bombay. In 1850, he was appointed Assistant Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy and acquired the distinction of being the first Indian to be appointed in that capacity at the Institute. In 1855, he went to England to work as a partner in the commercial firm of Cama & Co. In England, besides his business, he worked as Professor of Gujarati language in the University College of London, a post he continued to hold for about a decade.

In 1861, Dadabhai Naoroji established the London Zoroastrian Association and in 1865, he founded the London India Society and became its President and continued as such till 1907. On 1 December 1866, he

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\*Now known as Mumbai.

founded the East India Association, London, and became its Secretary. He returned to Bombay in 1869. In 1874, he was appointed the Dewan of Baroda<sup>#</sup> but resigned a year later on account of his differences with the Maharaja and the Resident.

In July 1875, Dadabhai Naoroji was elected to the Bombay Municipal Corporation as its member from the same ward in which he was born fifty years ago. In September of the same year, he was elected to the Town Council (Finance Committee) of the Corporation. He was appointed as Justice of the Peace (JP) in 1883. He was later elected to the Bombay Municipal Corporation for the second time.

Dadabhai had a crusading zeal for civic work and public welfare. In January 1885, when the Bombay Presidency Association came into being, he was elected as one of its Vice-Presidents. In August 1885, Dadabhai joined the Bombay Legislative Council at the invitation of the Governor, Lord Reay. At the end of the year, he played a leading part in the founding of the Indian National Congress and later became its President thrice—in 1886, 1893 and 1906.

Dadabhai visited England once again in 1886 to ventilate the grievances of the Indian people and to secure a fair hearing and justice for his countrymen. The determined and tenacious man that he was, Dadabhai was elected to the British Parliament from the Central Finsbury constituency in 1892, thus becoming the first Indian to be elected to the British Parliament.

Dadabhai's notable role in the British Parliament during his brief stint (1892-1895) made a great impact on the British Government. George Hamilton, the Secretary of State for India, informed the Viceroy of India, Lord Elgin, in 1897 about the activities of Dadabhai Naoroji in the British Parliament, and his fearless and forceful advocacy of the Indian cause.

With the aid of his colleagues, Sir William Wedderburn and Mr. W.S. Caine, Dadabhai organized the Indian Parliamentary Committee, which rendered

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<sup>#</sup>Now known as Vadodara.

substantial service to his country. The most important result of Dadabhai's parliamentary labour was that he presented to the British people the theory of '*Drain*' of wealth with facts and figures illustrating systematic drain of resources of India by the British Government. This was a charge made by him against the British Empire, and he asked for immediate appointment of a Royal Commission to look into the charges. As a result, the British authority appointed the Royal Commission on Indian Expenditure in 1895. Dadabhai Naoroji was the first Indian to be appointed as a Member to the Royal Commission. Later, his propagation of '*Drain Theory*' was put into a volume and published under the famous title of a book called "*Poverty and un-British Rule in India*".

All through, Dadabhai advocated the use of constitutional methods and exhorted the Indian people to make the British agree to the soundness and justice of India's demands. The most important of the demands, which he put forth before the British people and the Government, related to the reform of the Legislative Councils, Indianisation of services, establishment of just financial relations between India and England, and the separation of the Executive and the Judiciary. He urged the Indian nationalist leaders, particularly the younger generation, to carry forward the difficult task and continue the struggle with great force, vigour and zeal despite the unfavourable conditions and response from the British. A leading social reformer, Dadabhai Naoroji was opposed to casteism and caste restrictions and was a pioneer of women's education and an upholder of equal laws for men and women.

Dadabhai had a well-deserved reputation in the history of Indian economic thought for his pioneering work in assessing India's national income. As one of the eminent economists of his times, he systematically diagnosed the malady and analyzed the factors responsible for the economic misery of the Indian people, who were suffering from want, scarcity and unemployment and were groaning under the weight of heavy taxation.



At the Calcutta\* Session of the Indian National Congress held in 1906, the key theme of Dadabhai's address was *Swaraj*. Explaining as to what he meant by *Swaraj*, Dadabhai observed:

Just as the administration of the United Kingdom in all services, departments and details was in the hands of the people of that country, so should it be in India.

As in the United Kingdom and the Colonies all taxation and legislation and all power of spending the taxes were in the hands of the representatives of the people, so should it be in India, and the financial relations between England and India must be adjusted on a footing of equality.

We do not ask any favours. We want only justice. Instead of going into any further divisions or details of our rights as British citizens, the whole matter can be comprised in one word—"Self-government", or "*Swaraj*".

Dadabhai advocated self-sufficiency and attached utmost importance to cottage industries. He declared: "*Swadeshi* is a forced necessity for India in its unnatural economic muddle. As long as the economic condition remains unnatural and impoverishing...the talk of applying economic laws to the condition of India is adding insult to injury."

Dadabhai articulated his nationalistic thoughts and ideas through his frequent contributions to various journals and magazines. In the early years, he wrote regularly for the *Students' Literary Miscellany*, a journal started by the Students' Literary and Scientific Society at the Elphinstone College, Bombay. He edited the *Dnyan Prasarak* magazine and contributed numerous articles on social subjects. In 1878, he published a pamphlet, *Poverty of India*, which he later revised and enlarged in the form of a book and published it in 1901 from London, under the title *Poverty and un-British Rule in India*. In 1883, he started the *Voice of India* in Bombay and later incorporated it into the *Indian Spectator*. In 1889, along with a few others, he started the *Rast Goftar* (*Truth Teller*), a Gujarati weekly which was known for its advanced and progressive views, and edited it for

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\*Now known as Kolkata.

two years. He also contributed articles to various newspapers and magazines in England like the *Commerce*, the *India*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Daily News*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Weekly News and Chronicle* and the *Pearson's Magazine*. The Gujarati newspaper, *Samachar Darpan*, published a series of articles by him entitled *Dialogues of Socrates and Diogenes*. Dadabhai was also a distinguished orator, both in English and Gujarati, and his speeches were characterized by simplicity and a great deal of force.

Dadabhai was not keeping well in his later years. On the morning of 1 June 1917, he fell seriously ill and passed away in Bombay on the evening of 30 June 1917 at the age of ninety-two. Dadabhai's body was consigned to the *Tower of Silence* according to Parsi rites.

The Indian National Congress, at its 32nd Session held in Calcutta, condoled Dadabhai's death by passing a resolution which placed on record its sense of profound sorrow and recalled "the valuable services he had rendered to India and her people with his public virtues".

While paying rich tributes to Dadabhai, Gopal Krishna Gokhale observed:

"What a life it has been, its sweet purity, its gentle forbearance, its noble self-denial, its lofty patriotism, its abounding love, its strenuous pursuit of high aims—as one contemplates that one feels as though one stood in a higher pressure!"

Mahadeo Govinda Ranade referred to Dadabhai as a leader to follow in matters of India's economics and finances.

Mahatma Gandhi observed that "Dadabhai's flawless and uninterrupted services to the country will always furnish India with an ideal to follow".

The selfless life, service to the nation and the intense patriotism of Dadabhai Naoroji will continue to inspire the generations to come.