

4. Dadabhai Naoroji – Personalities in News

Dadabhai Naoroji, the "Grand Old Man of India," was a pioneering nationalist leader who famously articulated the "Drain Theory," explaining how Britain economically exploited India. As a three-time president of the Indian National Congress and the first Indian MP in Britain, he was the first to demand "Swaraj" from the Congress platform.

Introduction – Remembering the Grand Old Man of India

On September 4, 2025, the nation commemorated the 200th birth anniversary of Dadabhai Naoroji, fondly remembered as the "Grand Old Man of India". A pioneering nationalist, scholar, and social reformer, his contributions laid the intellectual and economic foundation for India's freedom struggle.

Early Life and Career

Birth and Background – Dadabhai Naoroji was born on September 4, 1825, in Bombay (now Mumbai) into a distinguished priestly Parsi family.

Academic Excellence – He was an exceptional student who graduated from Elphinstone College. His academic prowess earned him the prestigious Clare Scholarship, and in 1845, he achieved the distinction of becoming the first Indian to be appointed as a professor at Elphinstone College.

Professional Journey in Britain – He later moved to London to join Cama & Co., the first Indian company to be established in Britain. Displaying his entrepreneurial spirit, he founded his own firm, Naoroji & Co., in 1859.

Academic Role in London – Alongside his business ventures, he continued his academic pursuits and served as a Professor of Gujarati at University College London, sharing Indian language and culture with a British audience.

Key Contributions of Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917)

Literary Contributions

Dadabhai Naoroji was a prolific writer whose works provided a sharp critique of colonial economic policies. His major publications include –

1. Poverty of India (1876)
2. Poverty and Un-British Rule in India (1901) – His magnum opus that detailed the Drain Theory.
3. The Wants and Means of India
4. The European and Asiatic Races
5. The Parsee Religion

Political Contributions

1. **Indian National Congress** – He was a foundational figure of the Indian National Congress and served as its President on three separate occasions –
 - a. 1886 (Calcutta Session)
 - b. 1893 (Lahore Session)
 - c. 1906 (Calcutta Session), where he famously declared Swaraj (self-rule) as the ultimate goal of the national movement.
2. **Moderate Leader** – As a key Moderate leader, he strongly advocated for achieving political goals through constitutional and peaceful methods, such as petitions, prayers, and protests.
3. **East India Association (1867)** – He founded this influential organization in London to raise awareness among the British public and politicians about Indian grievances and the detrimental effects of colonial rule.
4. **First Indian Member of Parliament (1892)** – He made history by becoming the first Indian to be elected to the British Parliament, representing the Finsbury Central constituency. In this role, he became a powerful voice for India, raising issues of unfair taxation, the need for administrative reforms, and greater Indian representation in governance.

Views on British Rule and the Drain Theory

Critic of Colonial Policies – While he initially believed in the British sense of justice, he became a staunch critic of the exploitative economic policies of British rule in India.

The Drain Theory – His most significant contribution to economic thought was the "Drain Theory." He systematically explained how Britain was draining India's wealth through a variety of mechanisms –

1. High salaries and pensions paid to British civil and military officials (non-Indians).
2. Unfair trade policies that favored British industries.
3. High administrative and military costs of maintaining the empire.
4. Repayment of debts incurred by the British Indian government.

Economic Impact of the Drain – He demonstrated how these practices systematically stifled indigenous Indian industries, deepened poverty, and fueled widespread unemployment. His critique provided the national movement with a powerful and credible economic foundation.

Role in India's Freedom Struggle and Social Reforms

Struggle for Indian Rights

Voice of India – Through his powerful speeches, meticulous writings, and various associations, he effectively exposed the economic exploitation of India on an international stage.

Dewan of Baroda (1874) – He briefly served as the Dewan (Prime Minister) of the princely state of Baroda to implement governance reforms but resigned due to differences with the Maharaja.

Advocacy for Equal Opportunities – He consistently pressed for equal opportunities for Indians in the Indian Civil Services (ICS) and other administrative roles.

Building Alliances – He collaborated closely with other prominent reformers and leaders like A.O. Hume, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Badruddin Tyabji to strengthen the nationalist movement.

Social Reforms

Women's Education – He was a passionate champion of education for women and actively promoted it during his time as a professor at Elphinstone College.

Journalism for Reform – In 1854, he launched the newspaper Rast Goftar (The Truth Teller), a Gujarati fortnightly publication, to advocate for social reforms within the Parsi community.

Equality and Justice – He envisioned and advocated for a society founded on the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and mutual respect among all communities.

Legacy and Enduring Influence

Father of Economic Nationalism – His Drain Theory became a central tenet of Indian economic nationalism and served as a powerful rallying cry for the anti-colonial struggle.

Pioneer of Swaraj – He was among the first major leaders to publicly demand self-rule (Swaraj) from the Congress platform, inspiring future generations of freedom fighters.

A Cultural and Political Bridge – He acted as a vital link between Indian aspirations and British politics, helping to build understanding and forge important alliances for the Indian cause.

Inspiration to a Generation – His unwavering dedication, intellectual rigor, and political integrity deeply influenced leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, shaping the very fabric of India's nationalist thought.