

Will we ever get another Dadabhai Naoroji?

Dadabhai Naoroji died on June 30, 1917. Over 100 years have passed since his demise, but his legacy is still remembered and will always be remembered.

He led a remarkable life and was widely admired for his many talents



By Minoo Jokhi

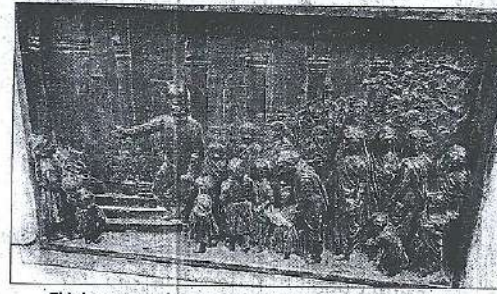
A famous quote says: "There is a great man who makes every man feel small. But the real great man is the man who makes every man feel great." One such 'real' great man who lived an exemplary life was Dadabhai Naoroji, popularly known as the "Grand Old Man of India" and also called the "Unofficial Ambassador of India".

Early Years

Dadabhai Naoroji was born on September 4, 1825 in Mumbai into a priestly Parsi family. He had to see poverty in his childhood days. His father, Naoroji Palanji Dordi, died when Dadabhai was merely four years of age and it was his mother Maneckbai who brought him up very well amidst great difficulties.

Dadabhai Naoroji was a brilliant student who excelled in his studies. He studied at the Elphinstone Institute School. After completing his education, he became a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. He later travelled to London and became a professor of Gujarati in the University College London.

Dadabhai Naoroji went to England in 1855 to join the first Indian business firm established in Britain, which was Cama & Co, but he later resigned from the company on ethical grounds. For Dadabhai Naoroji ethics meant a lot. As the late Porter Stewart had rightly said: "Ethics is knowing the difference between what you



This bronze panel shows Dadabhai Naoroji leading little girls to school; girl's education was high on Naoroji's agenda

have a right to do and what is right to do."

Dadabhai Naoroji, in 1865, along with W.C. Bonnerjee, founded the London India Society to highlight the grievances of Indians. He also has the honour of being the first Indian to become a member of the British House of Commons in England. He took lots of efforts due to which in 1893 the House of Commons passed a resolution in favour of holding the I.C.S. exams in England and India simultaneously.

Political Leanings

Dadabhai Naoroji was married at a very early age to Gulbai. They were blessed with three children: Ardeshir, Shirin and Maki.

Being born at a time when India was under British rule, Dadabhai Naoroji was attracted towards India's Freedom Movement. He was actively involved in the establishment of the Indian National Congress. He was elected as the Indian National Congress President three times in 1886, 1893 and 1906. In the Kolkata Session of 1906 he diplomatically helped to postpone the impending split between the moderates and extremists in the Congress Party.

Important resolutions on self-government, boycott, swadeshi and national education were passed by the Congress under his Presidency. Dadabhai Naoroji was so highly respected and loved, and was a mentor to important national leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. In 1894, Gandhiji wrote to Dadabhai stating that Indians looked up to Dadabhai as children would look up to their father. Such were the sentiments he inspired.

Dadabhai Naoroji in 1866, founded the East India Association in London. The Association became popular and its branches were set up in Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata.

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Mumbai Stalwart

Dadabhai Naoroji returned to Mumbai in 1869. He was elected to the Mumbai Municipal Corporation and later to the Town Council. He founded the Bombay Association; edited the Gujarati newspaper 'Rast Goftar', which means 'Speaker of Truth'. 'Rast Goftar' was an Anglo-Gujarati paper and it championed social reform. 'Rast Goftar' was also one of the four daily newspapers in circulation then. He also launched a magazine, 'Dharm Marg Darshak'. In 1883, he also started publishing the newspaper 'The Voice of India'.

Being an upright and honest individual, Dadabhai Naoroji started movements against the Vernacular Press Act and opposition to the atrocious treatment



Dadabhai Naoroji's statue, Mumbai's first bronze statue, is located at Flora Fountain at the end of D.N. (Dadabhai Naoroji) Road

and suffering inflicted on of poor peasants by rich zamindars.

Multifaceted Titan

Dadabhai Naoroji was a great man, a go-getter, an achiever who remains unforgettable to date. He was a man of action, not mere words. He had the courage to pursue what he wanted. As it is rightly said: "The difference between success and failure isn't ability as much as action."

In 1874 he filled in as a Diwan under the support of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda. He also filled in as an individual from the Legislative Council of Mumbai in the 1880s. He deserves credit for establishing the framework of the Independence Movement.

Dadabhai Naoroji was a good student of economics and he believed that the main cause of India's economic woes was due to the exploitation of India by the British. His views on the Indian economy are well explained in his work: 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India'. Dadabhai Naoroji's famed 'Drain Theory' explains how India's wealth was being drained to England through various ways.

When Bengal was partitioned in 1905, there was a countrywide movement against this. Dadabhai Naoroji gave a clarion call for continuous agitation. Dadabhai Naoroji died

on June 30, 1917. In 2017 a commemorative stamp on him was released in his honour. Over 100 years have passed since his demise but his legacy is still remembered and will always be remembered.

Dadabhai Naoroji commands respect, love and admiration. He led a remarkable life. As Miguel Angel Ruiz has rightly said: "Respect is one of the greatest expressions of love". Late renowned journalist Sir Chirravoori Yajneswara Chintamani rightly gave a tribute to Dadabhai saying "The public life of India has been adorned by a galaxy of brilliant intellects and selfless patriots, but there has been in our time none comparable with Dadabhai Naoroji."

He had a wonderful vision for the future. Indeed, the Zoroastrian community will always be proud of the amazing legacy of Dadabhai Naoroji and he will always be remembered.

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