

**Contesting Imperial Citizenship: The election of Dadabhai Naoroji as an MP in 1892**



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## Abstract

In 1892, Dadabhai Naoroji became the first Indian elected to British Parliament upon his victory as a Liberal candidate in the Central Finsbury campaign. In the run up and aftermath of his election, the press fiercely debated the candidate's electability, in column after column which both mirrored and influenced public opinion. In his short tenure as an MP, Naoroji was perceived as an intermediary between Indian subjects and administrators in the Metropole, but he also represented and worked hard to earn the support of the constituents of Finsbury. Naoroji's election served as a referendum on the question of imperial citizenship. In debating Naoroji's ability to represent British and Indian citizens, the press reached the heart of the question of what rights and role colonial subjects had within the Empire. The electoral success of the "Grand Old Man of India," albeit fleeting, vindicated the idea that colonial subjects could indeed claim Imperial citizenship.

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Contesting Imperial Citizenship: The election of Dadabhai Naoroji as an MP in 1892**Introduction**

In July 2019, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson unveiled his “cabinet for Modern Britain,” which comprised of a record number of Indian-origin politicians. Until this point, representation by non-white MPs had been historically lacking. Since the election of the first four self-identifying ethnic minority candidates in 1987, the uptake for greater representation has remained slow.<sup>1</sup> It was not until 2010 that the political arena witnessed a significant increase in ethnic minority electoral victories. Given this complicated history of minority representation in Britain, it is worthwhile reflecting upon the election of the first Indian MP and examining the conditions of his victory.

Dadabhai Naoroji’s election as the first Indian MP in 1892 forced Britons to engage with questions of representation and imperial citizenship. Though supporters and opponents of Naoroji reached different conclusions on his ability to effectively represent the Indian subcontinent and Finsbury constituents, the campaign launched the question of colonial subjects’ place within the Empire into the realm of public debate. Ultimately, Naoroji’s election was seen as an opportunity to consolidate bonds between the metropole and colony, rather than a step towards greater independence for India.

Born in Khadak, Bombay in 1825 to a Parsi priest, Dadabhai Naoroji attended the colonial school, Elphinstone College, where he later served as the first Indian Professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. Naoroji made history again by establishing the first Indian commercial company, Cama & Co., during his maiden visit to the metropole in 1855. Long

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Sobolewska and William Shankley. "Politics and Representation." In *Ethnicity and Race in the UK: State of the Nation*, edited by Shankley William, Byrne Bridget, Alexander Claire, Khan Omar, and Nazro James, 189-202. Bristol, UK; Chicago, IL, USA: Bristol University Press, 2020. Accessed February 26, 2021. doi:10.2307/j.ctv14t47tm.15, p190.

before his election to Parliament, Naoroji was a prominent Indian statesman. He delivered the Bombay Association's inaugural address, served as Diwan of Baroda from 1873-1874, and later as the President of the Indian National Congress in 1886. However, the MP also spent many years pursuing colonial reform in England. With his longtime collaborator, W.C Bonnerjee, who would later become influential in nationalist politics, Naoroji founded the London India Society in 1865. This organization attempted to cultivate pro-Indian sentiment in Britain. Later in 1888, the pair founded the Indian Political Agency.<sup>2</sup> Any Indian organization worth its salt in late Victorian Britain counted Naoroji's membership. In London, Naoroji became somewhat of a godfather for Indians visiting the metropole, offering his guidance to professionals and students, including the young Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>3</sup> For his sustained service to his country, Indians affectionately came to refer to Naoroji as the "Grand Old Man of India," likening him to Britain's own senior liberal statesman, Gladstone, who was also known as the "Grand Old Man."<sup>4</sup>

As a long-time agitator for reform of colonial administration in India, Naoroji wrote extensively on the subcontinent, in his publications, *Rast Goftar* and *Voice of India*, and for the metropolitan press. During the 1860s and 1870s, Naoroji addressed several prominent societies in England, educating audiences on the customs of the Indian people and the problems of British rule.<sup>5</sup> His writings and speeches culminated in the publication *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* in October 1901, which linked Indian poverty to poor colonial administration that had

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 186-188.

<sup>3</sup> Dinyar Patel, *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020), 153-154.

<sup>4</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 190.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Naoroji read his paper, "The European and Asiatic Races" to the *London Ethnological Society* in March 1866 and addressed the *Liverpool Philomathic Society* on "The Manners and Customs of the Parsees," in March 1861.

resulted in a sustained drain of wealth from the subcontinent. In his critiques of British imperial rule and his entreaties for increased self-governance of Indian subjects, Naoroji has been described as a forerunner of Indian nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Yet, his participation at the heart of imperial institutions as a representative for an English constituency complicates his legacy as an agitator for colonial reform. Naoroji's election as an MP for Finsbury should be understood as a claim to the same rights of representation as British citizens residing in the metropole under the framework of imperial citizenship.

Of course, Naoroji could not have contested his Parliamentary seat alone. The Parsee developed a dense network of supporters in England and India on whom he could rely for moral, financial, and political assistance. To stand for election, Naoroji needed the backing of the Liberal party electors. This support proved difficult to attain. Initially key figures in the Irish home-rule movement suggested that Naoroji stand for a Scottish or Irish seat. Eventually, however, the party settled on the London constituency of Central Finsbury. Naoroji stood for election as a liberal candidate on four separate occasions in Holborn in 1886, Central Finsbury in 1892 and 1895, and, when the party electors were split, as an independent liberal candidate in North Lambert in 1906. The district in which he finally found electoral success was a predominantly working-class neighborhood, distinguished by its high level of crime, large population of artisans, and radical Irish and socialist politics.<sup>7</sup> The reform acts of 1867 and 1884 had increased male suffrage in cities by 40%.<sup>8</sup> In 1892, this relatively new body of voters

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Munni Rawal, *Dadabhai Naoroji, a Prophet of Indian Nationalism, 1855-1900* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1989), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015021710499&view=1up&seq=5>; Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscences of Fifty Years of Public Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 66; V. B Singh, *From Naoroji to Nehru : Six Essays in Indian Economic Thought* (Delhi: Macmillan Co. of India, 1975), 12-14.

<sup>7</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 168.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Harvie and Colin Matthew, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107.

delivered a dangerously slim election victory to the candidate: Naoroji became the MP for Central Finsbury thanks to five critical votes.

Though Naoroji is undoubtedly a fascinating figure, he is not the subject of this thesis. Instead, the work examines British responses towards the Parsee's electoral campaign and victory. In other words, it analyses how the public reacted to a colonial subject contesting a claim for imperial citizenship. Taking for granted Antoinette Burton's assertion that "imperial power relations were challenged and remade by colonial subjects," this thesis centers around the figure of Naoroji, since his election brought debates about the position of Indian subjects into the political arena.<sup>9</sup> Using the press as an archive of public opinion, the thesis analyses how the public interpreted Naoroji's otherness in relation to his ability to represent them and claim membership within the political community of Empire.

The study examines attitudes towards representation, assessing how Naoroji was, at once, a representative for India and for Finsbury constituents. By tracking and analyzing public opinion towards Naoroji, I demonstrate how ordinary British citizens viewed themselves in relation to the statesman, questioning whether they believed an Indian could speak on their behalf. For Victorians, 'public opinion' was understood to be "a product of deliberative debate, emerging organically from the clash of often strongly held beliefs," far different from the polling of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Such a deliberative debate can be evinced through newspaper analysis, by way of tracking reports about Naoroji leading up to and after the 1892 election. Victorian newspapers were obstinately partisan, however, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the press becomes less politically minded and moved towards a populist approach that

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<sup>9</sup> Antoinette M. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>10</sup> James Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of 'Public Opinion', 1867–1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), doi:10.1017/CBO9781139208611, 15.



both moulded and mirrored public opinion.<sup>11</sup> An Indian visitor to the metropole observed, “From the cabby in the streets to the Queen in her palace, every body reads [newspapers]...the highest and the lowest, professes to sit in judgement over, and takes interest in public affairs.”<sup>12</sup> Yet despite its popular appeal, there remained a “tacit acceptance of Parliament as the supreme political and social institution of the realm.”<sup>13</sup> The British Newspaper Archive helps reveal how Naoroji’s election, remarkable at the time due to his status as a colonial subject, spilled into the public sphere. Such an archival source proves useful in demonstrating his election as both a socially and politically significant event. Naoroji’s campaign speeches and addresses to the Commons in the Parliamentary Hansard were equally rich in illuminating the rhetorical devices he employed to secure further integration into the imperial fold, which were then reported on by the press. The dialogue created between Naoroji’s public appearances and subsequent press reports demonstrates the symbiotic nature of their relationship.

### **Literature Review:**

Despite being commemorated by the British government in 2014, in the decades after his death, Naoroji quickly slipped from the British imagination, outshadowed by later figures in the Indian Independence movement.<sup>14</sup> Historians have laboured to reassert Naoroji’s critical role in India’s nascent steps towards independence. In his work *Naoroji: pioneer of Indian nationalism*,

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen E. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981). 2-3, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Lala Baijnath, *England and India: Being Impressions of Persons and Things, English and Indian, and Brief Notes of Visits to France, Switzerland, Italy, and Ceylon* (Bombay: Jehangir B. Karani & Co., Ltd, 1893), 117.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>14</sup> In 2014, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg inaugurated the Dadabhai Naoroji awards for services to UK-India relations. However, Naoroji was scantily mentioned in the press after his tenure. The Digitized British Newspaper Archives contain only seven entries concerning Naoroji in the decade following the MP’s death, and only one cursory reference in the twenty-first century.

Dinyar Patel charts the statesman's life, arguing that the "Grand Old Man of India" developed, over the course of his ninety-two years, a full articulation of the goal of Indian self-government, which was adopted by the Indian National Congress. Patel situates his analysis within the history of Indian nationalism, which encourages him to see a causal relation between Naoroji's late thought and Indian nationalists' demands for Swaraj at the dawn of the twentieth century. Whilst Patel's biographical approach is useful in presenting Naoroji's own ideas towards representation, it misses a crucial part of the story of Naoroji's election: the electors. I focus on how the British public responded to the candidate's electoral campaign to understand how the claims of colonial subjects to equal rights of representation under the Imperial aegis were received and interpreted in late Victorian Britain. By capitalizing on a recent trend in the historiography of the British Empire that appreciates the symbiotic relation between historical agents in the metropole and the colonies, it is possible to understand how colonial natives became sites upon which the press projected contemporary debates over questions on the nature and future of imperialism. Limiting the analysis of Naoroji's election to its impacts on Indian nationalist thought is to minimize the simultaneous influence he exerted on British thought concerning their empire and their subjects.

Naoroji's election also provides rich material for historians interested in the development of imperial citizenship. Sukanya Banerjee's *Becoming Imperial Citizens* focuses on the attempts of western-educated colonial subjects to contest imperial citizenship. Banerjee places colonial subjects at the center of the discourse on citizenship in the nineteenth century, using the example of Naoroji to analyse how the MP fashioned his public image in speeches and electoral addresses in ways palatable to his audience in the metropole. I add to Banerjee analysis of Naoroji's election through the framework of imperial citizenship by arguing that it was not only the MP, but also his allies, his electors, and the British public that understood his campaign as a means to

consolidate the Empire. Daniel Gorman's, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging*, focuses on the upper echelons of Victorian society, who, he argues, were most interested in the subject of imperial citizenship. By tracking newspaper reports, I show that the incessant discussion of Naoroji in the political press diffused the question of imperial citizenship into the realm of public debate. Additionally, Gorman's analysis of imperial citizenship restricts itself to 1895-1920, whereas I propose that Naoroji's election is an early example of public debate over imperial citizenship, which Gorman's timeframe excludes.

Much has been written about the "contact zone" between colonial subjects and citizens living in late nineteenth-century Britain. Antoinette Burton examines three instances of Indians living, working, and studying in Britain, arguing that their presence contested and reshaped British assumptions about colonial subjects. Jonathan Schneer's book, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis*, develops the narrative that as Britons came into contact with the symbols, products, and peoples of the Empire, their self-perception and imperial ideologies shifted. Rozina Visram's book *Asians in Britain: 400 years of History*, contributes to this narrative by tracing how the long presence of Indians in Britain, characterized by a history of discrimination, sustained contributions, and agitation for reform, allowed them to challenge assumptions of inferiority and stake their claim in British society in some cases. In other cases, they remain marginalized on the periphery. The existence of extensively researched, albeit limited, studies on the reception of colonial subjects in Britain in the late nineteenth century is a useful starting point for understanding how Naoroji's election was received.

This essay's historical intervention lies in drawing out the concept of the colonial encounter by placing Naoroji's attempt at political recognition at the center of the narrative. By reconstructing popular reactions towards the campaign, using a dispersed set of on-the-ground

sources, this history builds an account of how popular political culture was shaped by interactions with the colonial ‘other’. Piecing together public reactions to the campaign trail and electoral victory paints a vivid picture of how ordinary Britons responded to colonial subjects’ claims to equal recognition within imperial institutions. Only through reconstituting Naoroji’s election through the eyes of the general public in Britain can we understand its significance in shaping Victorian attitudes towards representation. This may be done by challenging narratives of the inferiority of colonial subjects and in jostling imperial ideologies.

In the following three chapters, I demonstrate how Naoroji was primarily interpreted as a spokesperson for inscrutable Indian subjects. I argue that his campaign allowed the press to experiment with unformulated ideas about the ability of a colonial subject to represent white constituents. Finally, I situate Naoroji within the framework of imperial citizenship to illuminate the dynamic relationship between colonial subjects claims for rights and shifting attitudes towards imperial ideology in the metropole. Ultimately, Naoroji’s election served as an opportunity for the British public to debate the trajectory of the Empire.

## Chapter I: Representative for India

The idea of Indian representation at the heart of the Imperial Parliament did not begin with Naoroji. Even before Crown rule had been established in India in 1858, Indians had petitioned Parliament with occasional success and English MPs had taken up the mantle of “MP for India,” to raise concerns on behalf of the colony.<sup>15</sup> However, the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny marked a key turning point in imperial ideology. The rebellion of 130,000 Indian soldiers with the support of thousands more shook Britain’s self-confidence in the stability of its Empire and produced anxieties about the loyalty and sentiments of its subjects.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, the uprising thoroughly planted Indians in the imagination of the reading public.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the loyalty of some subjects was seen as vindication of British rule, the mutiny ultimately led to calls for more knowledgeable administration of India. Writing as the conflict drew to a close, a Minister of the Scottish National Church, Dr. Cummings, summarized the modified perception of Indians in the wake of the rebellion: “greater liars do not exist in the world than the Hindoos; that you cannot always trust them out of sight; that they are deceptive; and we have seen by recent events that such outbursts of fanaticism, cruelty, bloodshed, and crime, that we wonder how any that knew them thirty years ago could give them such and so splendid a character.”<sup>18</sup> The brewing mistrust between the ruled and the rulers demonstrates the increasing doubt of colonial administrators’ ability to accurately assess the Indian character. An 1866 *Saturday Review* article posited a similar claim that the Hindu character was “one of the hardest on earth to comprehend, and

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<sup>15</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 89. See also, Mary Cumpston, ‘Some Early Indian Nationalists and Their Allies in the British Parliament, 1851-1906’, *The English Historical Review* 76, no. 299 (1961): 279–97.

<sup>16</sup> Karuna Mantena, ‘Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism’, electronic resource, *EBook Comprehensive Academic Collection - North America*, 2010, <http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio14022501>, 1.

<sup>17</sup> E. M. Palmegiano, *The British Empire in the Victorian Press, 1832–1867: A Bibliography* (Routledge, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351121101>, 18.

<sup>18</sup> John Cumming, *The Great Tribulation: Or, Things Coming on the Earth* (Rudd & Carleton, 1860), 66, quoted in *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203708026>, 183.

particularly for Englishmen who persisted in governing a ‘childish, impulsive, and pre-eminently vain Eastern race.’”<sup>19</sup> The characterization of Indians as infantile and lacking in reason reinforced the sense of the native as inscrutable. Colonial administrators remained suspicious that Indians were planning a second uprising through uninterpretable visual codes into the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Naoroji’s intimate familiarity with native culture, religions, and governance, therefore, made him the ideal candidate to speak on behalf of the subcontinent.

Naoroji embodied the role of a mediator who could understand native frustrations and translate them back to the metropole. Patel rejects the generalizing terms of “interpreter” and “mediator,” arguing that they wrongly confer a sense of detachedness on colonial elites, who were in fact firmly attached to their Indian identities.<sup>21</sup> However, what is of import here is not Naoroji’s own views of his representative status, but rather how the British public viewed his role as an MP. In the spirit of Macaulay’s *Minute on India*, Naoroji represented “a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern.”<sup>22</sup> Despite growing distrust towards the educated native as a potential source of sedition after 1857, Western-educated colonial elites still acted as an important contact zone of Empire, mediating between the ruled and the rulers.<sup>23</sup> For the British public, Naoroji’s value lay in his ability to translate native concerns to audiences in the metropole.

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<sup>19</sup> Bolt. *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, 180.

<sup>20</sup> Gabrielle Moser, *Projecting Citizenship: Photography and Belonging in the British Empire* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 42.

<sup>21</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 125.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Minute on India*, 1835, quoted in Charles V. Reed, “‘Positively Cosmopolitan’: Britishness, Respectability, and Imperial Citizenship”, in *Royal Tourists, Colonial Subjects and the Making of a British World, 1860–1911* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 125.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv64h705.10>.

<sup>23</sup> Reed, “‘Positively Cosmopolitan,’” 126.

**INDIRECT RULE THROUGH A REPRESENTATIVE FOR INDIA**

British newspapers developed this conception of Naoroji as a “representative for India.” The *Pall Mall Gazette* published Mr. W. Martin Wood’s letter to the editor in which he commended the paper for publishing the “text of the resolution so heartily and unanimously adopted by the National Indian Congress on behalf of Mr. Dababhai Naoroji’s candidature, and again expressing the hope too long deferred that the Indian peoples may have in him their direct representative in Parliament.”<sup>24</sup> Wood’s letter lends weight to the idea that it was not only Indians who saw Naoroji as a representative for colonial reform, but also the British public, who supported the need for mediation between colonial subjects and the metropole through representation by a respectable elite. In his first election campaign, the *London Daily News* described Naoroji’s appointment as an opportunity to “demonstrate in Parliament the pressing need of his country and his countrymen for a consideration of Indian affairs from their standpoint.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, the press corroborated the idea that Naoroji’s primary duty as an MP was to speak on behalf of the Indian subcontinent. Notably, some twenty-five years after Naoroji’s election, the presence of an Indian in the House to speak on behalf of the colony was missed. In a debate concerning India’s contribution to the costs of the first World War, Liberal MP Charles Roberts reminisced, “some years ago, there was an Indian Member of Parliament here, Mr. Naoroji, who represented the feelings of the Indians on the subject at the time.”<sup>26</sup> The desire for a mediator to bridge the gap in knowledge between the metropole and colony extended into the twentieth century.

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<sup>24</sup> “Mr Naoroji’s Candidature in Central Finsbury,” *Pall Mall Gazette*. 4 Jan 1892.

<sup>25</sup> “Mr Gladstone or Lord Salisbury?” *London Daily News*, 23 June 1886.

<sup>26</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fifth Series, Volume 91, 14 March 1917, col 1057-1242.



Figure 1: *Review of Reviews* (New York), October 1892, p. 279. Reproduced from Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina.<sup>27</sup>

Although the value of having native concerns voiced through a spokesperson was widely accepted, not all public opinion credited Naoroji as being up to the job of such mediation. In a

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<sup>27</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 191.



patronising characterisation of Naoroji's election as merely symbolic, the *York Herald* reported on the MP's visit to India in December 1893 to attend the National Congress:

“[Naoroji] is generally and enthusiastically regarded among the natives of that great dependency as something more than a mere Parsee merchant doing business in London and happening, incidentally, to have a seat in the popular House of the British Legislature.”<sup>28</sup>

Whilst this denigrating description of Naoroji as an accidental politician seeks to undermine his legislative capabilities, it also demonstrates his relation to the Indian people, who “regard the Member for Finsbury as ‘the Member for India’.”<sup>29</sup> In relaying this conception of Naoroji as a spokesperson for the subcontinent to British audiences, the *York Herald* suggests that colonial subjects see Naoroji as a means to agitate for reform, but balks at the notion that he has any political competence. In Parliament, however, Naoroji's long-time ally, Sir W. Wedderburn, jumped to his friend's defence, depicting him as a champion for the rights of Indian people:

“He has worked very hard and grown grey in the service of his country; he speaks with difficulty in a foreign tongue, and I think this House will be very anxious to understand the case that he wishes to make out on behalf of his unfortunate countrymen.”<sup>30</sup>

Wedderburn emphasises the longevity of Naoroji's service, highlighting the Parsee's lifetime of commitment to serving the cause of Indian reform. Notably, he does not downplay Naoroji's foreignness, instead using it as a symbol of his friend's dedication to the cause of Indian reform. In short, whilst public opinion was divided over whether Naoroji was qualified to represent the subcontinent, newspaper reporting shared the assumption that he was, first and foremost, a representative for India.

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<sup>28</sup> “The Week,” *York Herald*. 30 December 1893.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 17, 21 September 1893, col 1777-1894.

**INDIA FIRST AND FOREMOST**

Naoroji's position as a spokesman for India opened a debate about whether his dual allegiances prevented him from representing both colonial subjects and English constituents. Undoubtedly, India occupied the majority of the MP's time in the Commons. In the year following his election, Naoroji spoke before the chamber on twenty-five occasions on issues pertaining to India, ranging from the civil service examinations to expenditure on public works and proposing an inquiry into the condition of subcontinent. However, the MP also motioned and supported several local bills for the improvement of his constituency, including the public funding of parliamentary elections, placing the metropolitan police under the control of ratepayers, and introducing legislation to make landlords light the passages and stairways of their tenements. Naoroji was aware of the need to publicly assuage fears about his ability to manage his dual commitment. In his 1895 reelection campaign, he renewed the commitment he had made three years earlier to champion local wants and interests and devote his time to Parliamentary duties.<sup>31</sup> His assurances seemed to persuade Finsbury voters, who were encouraged by his high reputation among Indians, that he could also represent their interests. When asked why he supported the Parsee, one working man answered, "Mr. Naoroji is as much respected and beloved throughout India as Mr. Gladstone is here."<sup>32</sup> For some Metropolitan voters then, Naoroji's dual allegiance to the colony and his London constituency was an added incentive used to court their support.

On the other hand, Naoroji's opponents wrestled with fears of what a representative who championed Indian concerns first and foremost might mean for the future of the Empire and

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<sup>31</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, "Address to his Fellow Electors in Central Finsbury," in *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: the story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, Rozina Visram (Routledge, 1986), Appendix IV.

<sup>32</sup> "Round the London Constituencies," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 June 1892.

Imperial Parliament. A local London paper explicitly stated the member's priorities, asserting, "In the next House he will represent India, not Central Finsbury."<sup>33</sup> In the same month, the *York Herald* anxiously warned that the MP's election had emboldened "his countrymen in London [who] do not conceal their anxiety that he should, on the earliest possible occasion, make his influence felt in the House of Commons. This means that they rely upon him to bring forward a measure or a resolution demanding some kind of Home Rule for India."<sup>34</sup> Though Naoroji was careful to only pursue moderate reforms, the paper implies that his election formed part of a wider conspiracy for the colony to gain greater autonomy. Indeed, when referring to "his countrymen in London," the newspaper does not mean his Finsbury constituents, but rather Indians living in the Imperial capital. Diminishing Naoroji's role as a constituency MP, the *York Herald* signals that his primary objective was to agitate for Indian demands of increased self-governance. *The Bristol Times* shared these anxieties, querying, "Is he the first link forged in a chain of Home Rule for India?"<sup>35</sup> Yet, these fears were associated with more than just the issue of Home Rule. The *York Herald* reported that the "vernacular newspapers still devote a large portion of space to the expression of delight at the election of Mr. Naoroji...Occasionally they demand fuller representation. Thus, the *Bombay Shri Shivaji* urges that the great Indian cities should be allowed to return two or more members each, and that at least fifty natives should have seats in Parliament."<sup>36</sup> The discussion of Indian desires for greater representation sparked fears of encroachment on the British Parliament by colonial subjects. *The Times* expressed this worry more explicitly, asking whether Britons could "wake up one fine morning to find that English

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<sup>33</sup> "A Passion Play by Indians," *Croydon Chronicle and East Surrey Advertiser*. 9 July 1892.

<sup>34</sup> "Daily Notes," *York Herald*, July 23, 1892.

<sup>35</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 192.

<sup>36</sup> "Mr. Naoroji M.P.," *York Herald*, 9 August, 1892.

members are in a minority in the Imperial Parliament”<sup>37</sup> Naoroji’s election therefore presented a dual threat for his opponents by rousing desires for Indian home rule and by encouraging further demands for representation by colonial subjects.

### **WHICH INDIA DID NAOROJI REPRESENT?**

Though his role as a “representative for India” engendered a platform for Naoroji to speak on behalf of his countrymen, it also problematised such representation by enforcing the idea that subsects of the population each required their own spokesperson. Mantena reminds us that “the inscrutability of the native in revolt would be overcome by attentiveness to and deep knowledge of the unique (cultural) logic of native society.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the most effective way to stifle revolt was through understanding the sentiments and desires of the native population. Naoroji offered access to such knowledge. By the late Victorian period, the subcontinent had been classified as a majority Hindu population, with Muslim, Sikh, and Parsee minorities. Therefore, Naoroji’s Parsee religion became a point of contention. The MP’s supporters suggested that he was able to represent these sects regardless of his religion, whilst detractors argued his faith precluded him from effectively representing the diversity of the subcontinent.

The *Liverpool Mercury* suggested that Naoroji was able to represent both Parsees and Hindus due to his prolonged interactions with them, “when Mr. Naoroji speaks for the Hindoos it will be in consequence of the sympathy which his knowledge of their character...will enable him to display.”<sup>39</sup> It is this “insider knowledge,” developed over decades, that was appealing to the

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<sup>37</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 192.

<sup>38</sup> Mantena, ‘Alibis of Empire,’ 5.

<sup>39</sup> “Our London Letter,” *Liverpool Mercury*, July 8, 1892.

British public who sought to prevent another uprising, since it allowed Naoroji to interpret Indian desires and customs in ways inaccessible to colonial administrators. During his time in Parliament, Naoroji reinforced the idea that he was able to represent all religious sects, calling the Undersecretary of State for India to investigate Hindu-Muslim disturbances that had occurred in the past five years in Azamgarh, Balia, Bareilly, and Bombay.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, Naoroji established himself as a representative not only for Indians within the boundaries of the colony, but defended his countrymen across the bounds of the Empire. Addressing the Commons, Naoroji requested an inquiry into the unprovoked attack on and theft of property from British Indian subjects by a French holder of a concession in Madagascar.<sup>41</sup> It is notable here that Naoroji refers to the victims as “British Indian subjects,” noting their dual identities as both inhabitants of a colony, but also subjects of the metropole, deserving of protection from their government. Through this appeal, Naoroji not only demonstrates his commitment to defending Indian subjects across the Empire, but also to advocating for their rights to the protections afforded by an imperial government.

Additionally, newspaper publications of endorsements by a cross-section of Indian society served to reiterate Naoroji’s widespread support, irrespective of his religious allegiances. The *London Daily News* reported on a banquet held in Naoroji’s honour where, “an address was read expressive of the confidence of all classes of the Indian people-Hindoos, Mohammodans, Parsees, and others in the desire of the English people to do justice to India.”<sup>42</sup> Using familial language to further the sense of unity, the speaker reiterated Naoroji’s representation of Indian people foremost, expressing “deep gratitude to the electors of Finsbury for giving an opportunity

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<sup>40</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 16, 31 August 1893, col 1555-1692.

<sup>41</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 28, 9 August 1894, col 429-548.

<sup>42</sup> “Banquet to Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, M.P.,” *London Daily News*. 25 July 1892.

for India to plead her cause through one of her own sons.”<sup>43</sup> Naoroji’s allies in Parliament equally defended his ability to represent the subcontinent in spite of his minority religious status. Responding to Sir G. Chesney’s taunt that, being a Parsee, Naoroji was unable to represent the true feeling of the Indian people, the Member for North Manchester, Mr. Schwann, opined that if his opponent had paid attention to the “acclamations and effusions” with which Naoroji was received by Indians he would have no doubt in his “sympathy with the natives.”<sup>44</sup>

However, Naoroji’s Parsee religion was frequently used as an indicator of his otherness. Sir Lepel Griffin, Chairman of the East India Association, suggested that Naoroji was unable to represent Indians let alone Englishmen, since his Parsee faith rendered him, “as much aliens to the people of India as the English rulers can possibly be.”<sup>45</sup> Here, Griffin suggests that the Parsee sect are such a minority that Naoroji was *only* equipped to represent his fellow Parsees. Naoroji’s long term ally Sir W. Wedderburn sprung to his friend’s defence in the Commons, asserting, the Parsees have been nearly 1,000 years established amongst the people of India, and are to all intents and purposes true inhabitants of the country.”<sup>46</sup> By emphasising the embeddedness of Parsees in Indian society, Wedderburn challenges the claim that Naoroji’s identity is too peripheral to be representative of the subcontinent. He adds, “but the value of what a man has to say should be valued not by his race, but by the confidence which he enjoys amongst the people and amongst his fellow-countrymen.”<sup>47</sup> Like his fellow MP Schwann, Wedderburn cites Naoroji’s warm welcome in India as evidence of his support in the colony. His defence also

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 17, 21 September 1893, col 1777-1894.

<sup>45</sup> Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain [Electronic Resource] : 400 Years of History* (Sterling, Va: Pluto Press, 2002), 133.

<sup>46</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 17, 21 September 1893, col 1777-1894.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

evinces a liberal rhetoric towards colonial subjects, which judges their ability to participate in Western institutions, not on biological determinism, but through recognition of their cultivated qualities by citizens in the Metropole and the colony alike. In doing so, Wedderburn signals his belief that Naoroji's proven aptitude as a statesman justifies his right to serve as a representative, irrespective of his status as a colonial subject.

### INDIAN REACTION TO NAOROJI'S ELECTION

The idea of Naoroji as a representative for India was consolidated by the support he received from native Indians and Indians living in Britain. The *London Daily News* published reports detailing the jubilation in India at the news of Naoroji's electoral victory, where "in several parts of the country public fetes had been held. At Khetwady there was a "Jusson," or thanksgiving ceremony, followed by a dinner. The town of Nowasree observed a general holiday and bodies of men marched through the streets with tom-toms beating, and "raised shouts of triumph. All the schools, it is stated, were closed."<sup>48</sup> The widespread reporting suggests that audiences were anxious to know how the election had been received in the jewel of the Empire, and consolidated their belief that Indians understood Naoroji to be their representative. Upon his visit to India in the year after his election, The *Evening Mail* reported that the statesman received an "enthusiastic reception," from "enormous crowds of Parsees and natives of all classes."<sup>49</sup> The *Liverpool Mercury* echoed the same sentiment upon the MP's arrival in Lahore, where a four hour procession, triumphal arches, flags, and banners, led the paper to report that "nothing approaching this demonstration has ever before been witnessed in the Punjab."<sup>50</sup> Again, the

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<sup>48</sup> "This Morning's News," *London Daily News*. 4 August 1892.

<sup>49</sup> "India," *Evening Mail*. 4 December 1893. For a further discussion of native reactions to this trip, see *India & Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji; an Account of the Demonstrations Held in His Honour as M.P. for Central Finsbury, during His Visit to India for the Purpose of Presiding at the Ninth Indian National Congress, Lahore, December 1893-January 1894*. Bombay: Printed at the 'Commercial Press', 1898.

<sup>50</sup> "Mr. Naoroji, M.P., in the Punjab," *Liverpool Mercury*. 27 December 1893.

publication of detailed accounts of Naoroji's reception demonstrates that audiences engaged themselves with the question of what Naoroji's representation meant for Indians, and, by extension, its importance for Britons. Conversely, while the English press occupied columns recounting what the election meant for Indians, the Indian Press was equally concerned with what an Indian MP might mean for the future of the Empire. During the 1886 election cycle, the *Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore)* hoped that the return of Naoroji or Lalmohan Ghose, "would cement the bonds of affection between England and India more firmly hitherto"<sup>51</sup> Both the native and metropolitan press expressed the electoral consequences in terms of the unity of the Empire. Neither interpreted Naoroji's election as delivering greater independence for the colony, but rather understood it as an opportunity to strengthen imperial ties.

Closer to home, Indians living in Britain also expressed their gratitude for Naoroji's election and auspices for his tenure. The *London Daily News* reported that, "A highly interesting assembly of about one hundred and thirty Indian gentlemen resident in London or other important cities of the Kingdom, and notably from seats of learning in England and Scotland, met in a saloon of the Holborn Restaurant on Saturday evening in honour of the election of their countryman for Finsbury."<sup>52</sup> The sheer number and geographic breadth of Naoroji's Indian supporters in Britain highlight the potential lobbying power the Parsee had behind him when proposing reforms in Parliament. The same paper printed a letter to the Mayor from D. P. Cama, a fellow Zoroastrian and prominent businessman, who expressed his thanks to "our Creator" and "the electors of Finsbury" by donating a cheque "as a thanks offering for the poor-box of the Mansion House."<sup>53</sup> It is striking that Cama refers to "our House of Commons" in his letter, as it

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<sup>51</sup> "Indian Candidates for Parliament," *Civil & Military Gazette (Lahore)*, 29 June 1886.

<sup>52</sup> "Banquet to Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, M.P.," *London Daily News*. 25 July 1892.

<sup>53</sup> "This Morning's News," *London Daily News*. 12 July 1892.



demonstrates his investment and sense of belonging within British political institutions. It is equally notable that he has accumulated enough wealth in Britain to patronize the constituency's welfare provisions. These reports are therefore noteworthy in demonstrating Indian support for Naoroji as the spokesman for colonial reform and in emphasizing the status of colonial subjects as an emerging, powerful constituency themselves within the Metropole.

### **NAOROJI AS A PACIFIER TO INDIAN DISCONTENT**

Naoroji's supporters suggested that attempts to prevent Naoroji's candidature or overturn his victory would only anger colonial subjects and spark trouble for Britain. Despite Naoroji's electoral victory at Finsbury on July 8, 1892, doubt continued to be cast on the security of his victory. Having only secured a majority of 3 votes, Naoroji was faced with a challenge from his Conservative opponent, Captain Penton. The *Liverpool Mercury* insisted that it would be disappointing if the first Indian representative lost his seat in the recount, arguing that the scrutiny was unjustified and would only be deemed a "despicable trick" by colonial subjects.<sup>54</sup> On December 15, 1892 once the petition had returned Naoroji as the victor, the paper reported its relief: "We are unfeignedly glad that Mr. Naoroji has not been deprived of the seat he won last July. It is to be regretted that his right to it was ever questioned. He is the sole direct representative of the millions of India who has obtained a place in the House of Commons, and it would have been a matter of sorrow to his countrymen if by any misfortunes he had lost his seat."<sup>55</sup> The paper highlighted the injustice of the petition, implying that the desire to overturn Naoroji's victory was linked to his association with colonized subjects in India. Similarly, the *London Daily News* happily reported the end of the inquiry, asserting that, "only a very

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<sup>54</sup>"Our London Letter," *Liverpool Mercury*. Dec. 17, 1892.

<sup>55</sup> "A memorial service was held yesterday morning, at the Royal Mausoleum, Frog," *Liverpool Mercury*. Dec. 15, 1892.

embittered and an utterly unreasoning partisanship will be disappointed at the withdrawal of the petition against Mr Dadabhai Naoroji the member for Central Finsbury.”<sup>56</sup> The concern for which the newspapers present the possible backlash of Indian subjects at the removal of Naoroji’s electoral victory demonstrates the importance of the Parsee’s election in drawing colonial subjects further into the project of Empire.

In sum, public opinion largely agreed upon the value of having a native interpreter articulate the abstruse concerns of Indian subjects. Whether Naoroji was the man for the job, however, remained up for debate. Whilst his opponents denigrated his ability to represent the religious diversity of the subcontinent and expressed fears that his election would lead to concessions of Indian self-governance, his supporters highlighted his popularity among natives and political experience as evidence of his suitability. Having demonstrated Naoroji’s importance as a spokesperson for the Indian subcontinent, it is apt to turn to his role as a constituency MP for the electors of Finsbury. The press fought fiercely over the appropriateness of a colonial subject to represent white Englishmen in Parliament. The debates centered around the question of whether Naoroji was similar enough to serve as a representative, or whether his otherness precluded him from truly participating in imperial institutions as an equal to British citizens.

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<sup>56</sup> “Two Petitions,” *London Daily News*, 15 December 1892.

## Chapter II: Representing the White Man

Naoroji's campaign opened the public debate on the extent to which a colonial subject was able to represent white constituents. The role of a constituency MP was to "lead local constituency opinion to express grievances constitutionally and to accept parliamentary rule."<sup>57</sup> Deliberation in the Commons was more important than the passage of legislation, therefore an effective MP need not necessarily pass multiple bills, but would adequately voice the needs of his constituency using reason and discussion.<sup>58</sup> The press therefore assessed Naoroji's suitability as a representative by his ability to speak on behalf of the communities of Finsbury. Newspapers spilled ink in column after column, dissecting the candidate's foreignness and religion to understand whether it precluded him from representing Englishmen. Though no consensus was reached in the press, the electoral campaign fed into the wider debate about imperial citizenship by launching the question of whether colonial subjects were similar enough to British subjects that they could serve as representatives on their behalf.

Late Victorian politics was—if not in the halls of Westminster, then at least in the popular imagination—an inclusive sport. Since politicians represented their community rather than individuals, even the disenfranchised zealously followed electoral campaigns as if they were a form of entertainment.<sup>59</sup> In addition to adopting their party's platform, MPs typically championed a special issue, such as abolition of the House of Lords, Home Rule, or Women's

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<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1945*, Third edition. (Oxford ; Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 4-5.

Suffrage.<sup>60</sup> Naoroji's special issue was, of course, reform of colonial rule in India. However, as a liberal candidate, he also embraced the party's 1891 'Newcastle Programme,' which endorsed free elementary education, home rule all-around, and reform of the franchise and the House of Lords.<sup>61</sup> Voters assessed Naoroji through his commitment to liberal platform issues as well as the personal attributes required of a good liberal leader, which included popular support, self-confidence, courage, fair-mindedness, and a broad education.<sup>62</sup> In determining whether Naoroji was able to represent Finsbury constituents, the press were simultaneously engaging with much broader conceptual questions: the British public had to ask itself whether Indians were similar enough to Englishmen to speak on their behalf and, in doing so, whether they were entitled to claim equal rights under the framework of imperial citizenship.

### **TOO FOREIGN AND NOT CHRISTIAN ENOUGH**

Public opinion was divided on the question of whether Naoroji was too foreign to represent white constituents, or whether he had accrued enough English customs and manners to represent Finsbury. *The Times* dismissed his victory as a "romantic event," whilst *St. Stephen's Review* adopted a far more condemnatory tone, lambasting Central Finsbury for, "having publicly confessed that there was not in the whole of the division an Englishman, a Scotchman, a Welshman or an Irishman as worthy of their votes as this Fire-Worshipper from Bombay."<sup>63</sup> In referencing Naoroji's religion, the paper hints that the MP's otherness is defined not only by his foreign-birth, but also his cultural differences. On the other hand, other papers emphasized Naoroji's fluency and presented him as an educated English gentleman in order to convince

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<sup>60</sup> Baijnath, *England and India: Being Impressions of Persons and Things, English and Indian, and Brief Notes of Visits to France, Switzerland, Italy, and Ceylon*, 57-58.

<sup>61</sup> Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1945*, 39.

<sup>62</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 136, Patel, *Naoroji*, 191.

readers of his suitability as a representative. Highlighting his resemblance to Englishmen, the *Liverpool Mercury* also drew attention to the MP's familiarity with English customs:

“One hardly thinks of him as an Oriental at all. He has an almost English face, a very quiet English manner, and a very perfect English tongue. He dresses like an Englishman, and he has probably absorbed as much Englishry as an almost life-long residence in this country can give him.”<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, the paper emphasized the MP's English language skills, noting his “splendid command of the language,” in one article, and his “faultless English” in another, which won him warm cheers in the House of Commons.<sup>65</sup> Given the centrality afforded to speech in late Victorian politics, Naoroji's ability to speak was particularly pertinent to his suitability as a representative. imperial thinking characterized Indians, unlike Africans, as capable of speech, but only to the extent that it mimicked and approximated English.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the paper's praise of Naoroji's eloquence is all the more remarkable, for it suggests a proximity to Englishness that had been elsewhere unattainable for colonial subjects.

Naoroji also cultivated an image of respectability by moderating his religion and dress in terms recognizable to English people. He insisted upon his familiarity with English society as early as his 1886 campaign, writing in a circular, “To many of you I am a man of strange name and race but with English life and English politics I am familiar; I have voted at British Elections; I have worked for Liberal Candidates.”<sup>67</sup> Codell suggests that the MP's self-fashioning extended beyond mere familiarity with English customs to his adoption of British norms of rationality and chivalry.<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, Naoroji's Zoroastrian faith was expressed in

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<sup>64</sup> “Our London Letter,” *Liverpool Mercury*, July. 8, 1892.

<sup>65</sup> “Our London Letter,” *Liverpool Mercury*, Apr. 22, 1892.

<sup>66</sup> Antoinette Burton, ‘Tongues Untied: Lord Salisbury's “Black Man” and the Boundaries of Imperial Democracy’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (July 2000): 632–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500002966>, 648.

<sup>67</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, 1886, quoted in Patel, *Naoroji*, 105.

<sup>68</sup> Julie F Codell. “Decentring and Doubling Imperial Cosmopolitan Discourse in the British Press.” *Media History*, 15:4, 371-384, 2009, 381.

terms which made it accessible to Victorian audiences. In celebration of the MP's eighty-first birthday, *The Birmingham Mail* reported, "His great maxim is the Parsee equivalent of the Sermon on the Mount: Think no evil, speak no evil, do no evil."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the *York Herald* supported the view that Naoroji's religion did not preclude him from representing British constituents. The paper attempted to familiarize his otherness by printing an explanation of the Parsee religion offered by the MP:

"[Zoroastrianism] is a pure monotheism...We are monogamists. Our theological creed is-one God; our social code is-one wife; and our moral code is, in one word-purity."<sup>70</sup>

Naoroji's need to define his difference in recognizable terms is telling. His emphasis on the links between his own religion and Victorian conceptions of Christianity-in other words, monotheism, monogamy and morality-exposes his need to express his identity in relatable terms. The Member repeated the same move in *Time, a Monthly Miscellany of Interesting and Amusing Literature*, allowing Victorian readers to identify themselves in the Parsee's appeals to morality, charity and earnestness.<sup>71</sup>

A similar attempt at fashioning a relatable image can be seen in the evolution of Naoroji's dress. Upon his arrival to London, Naoroji continued wearing his traditional Parsee turban, however, by his 1886 parliamentary campaign, he had adopted English attire and "was often hatless, dressed in a somber double-breasted suit and tie."<sup>72</sup> Newspapers paid special attention to Naoroji's dress and appearance, especially during his confirmation to Parliament.

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<sup>69</sup> "The Grand Old Man of India," *Birmingham Mail*, 04 September 1906.

<sup>70</sup> "Multiple News Items," *York Herald*, Aug 24, 1892

<sup>71</sup> Codell, "Decentring and Doubling Imperial Cosmopolitan Discourse in the British Press." *Media History*, 379. Several influential Parsees also appealed to the similarities between their way of life and Western civilization. See Framjee, Dosabhoj. *The Parsees: Their History, Manners, Customs, and Religion*. London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1858, 70.

<sup>72</sup> Patel. *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism*. 137.

The *American Register* reported Naoroji's adherence to traditional headwear customs of the "stove pipe" in the House of Commons, despite his religion's objections.<sup>73</sup> On the campaign trail, Naoroji avoided controversy by following the advice of his longtime ally, William Digby, who, "strongly recommended [changing] the head dress to an English Hat."<sup>74</sup> Both newspapers supporting the campaign and Naoroji himself can therefore be understood to be crafting an image of the politician which explained his foreignness in relatable terms to British readers.

### LORD SALISBURY'S "BLACK MAN"

The newspapers also debated Naoroji's electability as a representative of white constituents through the lens of race. Whilst Patel asserts that race was a significant factor in the lead-up to Naoroji's 1886 electoral defeat, Burton argues that it was not until a comment by the Conservative Prime Minister Lord Salisbury opened the floodgates in the press for a discussion of the racial hierarchies and frameworks governing British society that his candidature became truly racialized.<sup>75</sup> Prime Minister Salisbury offered his explanation for Naoroji's election defeat in a speech in Edinburgh in 1888:

"Colonel Duncan was opposed by a black man; and however great the progress of mankind has been, and however far we have advanced in overcoming prejudices, I doubt if we have yet to go to that point of view where a British constituency would elect a black man."<sup>76</sup>

The terms "black" and "colored" were used interchangeably during this period, and could refer to colonized subjects in the Caribbean, Africa, or Asia.<sup>77</sup> Though Salisbury was by no means worried about offending colonial subjects in what became referred to as his "slip of the tongue," his mishap unveiled the thinly shielded prejudices of Victorian society, which made the election

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<sup>73</sup> "London Chat and Gossip," *American Register*, 10 September 1892.

<sup>74</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 137.

<sup>75</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 161, 171-172. Burton 'Tongues Untied,' 634.

<sup>76</sup> Burton, 'Tongues Untied,' 633.

<sup>77</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, pix.

of a non-white subject to parliament an unlikely possibility.<sup>78</sup> The Prime Minister's gaffe had the inadvertent effect of launching Naoroji into the status of a household name.<sup>79</sup>

Although Indian newspapers overflowed with hopeful praise during the statesman's first election campaign in 1886, press coverage in the Metropole remained limited. The sparse references to the contest in Holborn were largely devoid of a racial taint. The *London Daily News* referenced the Parsee's complexion in passing, describing him as "a middle-aged gentleman with a grey beard and a complexion much less swarthy than that of any of his fellow country-men who support him."<sup>80</sup> In other words, the paper deemed his skin color unnoteworthy, or, at the very least, it did not preclude him for electoral victory. Elsewhere however, the election commentary was undoubtedly colored by racial prejudice. Writing for the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, the Conservative MP for Sheffield, Mr. Ashmead-Bartlett praised the 1886 defeat of Gladstonian candidates, in support of Irish Home Rule, across the country. Gloating at the electoral loss of the two Indian candidates, he crowed, "There is another one of these Baboo Separatists standing for Holborn against my gallant friend Colonel Duncan. His name is Dadabhai Naoroji. After to-night there will ne'er be a Dadabhai to be seen in Holborn."<sup>81</sup> The term "baboo" was often used disparagingly to ridicule to someone of Indian origin.<sup>82</sup> Despite the racism embedded within Bartlett's remark, it is important to remember that his target here is not Naoroji's race, but rather his support of Gladstone's liberal ideology of Irish Home Rule. The press coverage of Naoroji's first electoral campaign then, generally avoided categorizing the Parsee in racialized terms.

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<sup>78</sup> For a further discussion on Salisbury's propensity to misspeak, see Burton, 'Tongues Untied,' 646.

<sup>79</sup> Patel. *Naoroji*. 121.

<sup>80</sup> "The General Election," *London Daily News*, 29 June 1886.

<sup>81</sup> "Mr Ashmead Bartlett at Sheffield," *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 July 1886.

<sup>82</sup> Burton, 'Tongues Untied,' 643.



The racialized aspect of Naoroji's electability was nuanced. His opponents used race as an indicator of his otherness rather than an inherent measure of his inability to represent white constituents. In a letter to the editor, a self-titled, "Working Man," from Naoroji's constituency in Holborn, attributed the conservative landslide of 1886 not to the issue of Irish Home Rule, but rather the inability of the liberal party to capture the working-class vote. He describes a pamphlet strewn on the floor of a public house during the course of the campaign which read:

"Naoroji, Who's he?—a black chap ain't he? What does he know about Home Rule? He won't give us cheap beer like Colonel Duncan."<sup>83</sup>

The author of the letter laments the liberal party's failure to target working class men in places they frequented, such as public houses, deeming them unsuitable spheres for political persuasion. More than just illuminating the limitations of liberal campaigning strategies though, the letter illustrates the style of attacks launched against Naoroji. Like Salisbury, the pamphleteer decides to label the fair-skinned Parsee as a "black chap," linking his complexion to the argument that he neither knows about issues in the Metropole, nor serves the interests of local constituents.

Following the backlash about his comment, Salisbury attempted to backtrack a month later in Scarborough by offering similar justifications. Scrambling to save face, he denied causing offense to the people of India, explaining "the Liberal candidate was not only of a distant race-widely separated from us-but that it was marked by his complexion that it was so, so that the whole constituency knew it."<sup>84</sup> In this subtle sleight of hand, Salisbury argues that it was not Naoroji's inherent racial difference which made him unelectable, but the fact that he *looked* visibly foreign. It is precisely this appearance of foreignness that Salisbury contends makes him unappealing to voters. Clarifying further, he opined, "The British House of Commons, with its

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<sup>83</sup> "Voters and Voting," *Weekly Dispatch (London)*, 18 July 1886.

<sup>84</sup> [Anon.], *Lord Salisbury's Blackman* (Lucknow: G. P. Varma and Brothers Press, 1889), pp32-33, quoted in Burton, 'Tongues Untied,' 645.

traditions and understandings, having grown fitted to the people, and grown out of their daily life, is a machine too peculiar and too delicate to be managed by any but those who have been born within these isles.”<sup>85</sup> By arguing the Naoroji was unelectable due to his unfamiliarity with imperial institutions, Lord Salisbury conveniently forgot the Parsee’s long residence in the British Isles. He also ignored the presence of white subjects from the dominions in Parliament at the time of Naoroji’s campaign.<sup>86</sup> Despite his disclaimers, the Prime Minister had revealed an underlying tension in the prospect of a non-white colonial subject representing white citizens.

The Press exploded with commentary on the Prime Minister’s indiscretion. Many liberal outlets jumped on the opportunity to use Conservative Prime Minister’s slip up to denigrate his leadership. The National Liberal Club held a banquet to express their disdain towards Salisbury’s intolerant language.<sup>87</sup> The *Pall Mall Gazette* recommended that Salisbury use Pears soap to wash out his eyes and mouth in repentance.<sup>88</sup> Other newspaper warned that Salisbury’s loose tongue could worsen British relations with their colonial subjects and fan the flames of another rebellion. The *Leicester Daily Mercury* expressed fears that the use of such inflammatory language with flagrant disregard of the offense it might cause could stir the Indians into another revolt, which the *Daily News* echoed, reminding audiences, “it is our interest and our duty to cultivate the best and most honourable relationship with the people of India-not to snub their eminent men from the public platform.”<sup>89</sup>

Others sprang to Salisbury’s defence. One report thought it inappropriate to allow a “Baboo from Bombay,” a man from “conquered country,” to serve in the House of Commons.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 133.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 121.

<sup>89</sup> Burton, ‘Tongues Untied,’ 639, 643.

<sup>90</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 133.

Elsewhere, Sir Lepel Griffin called crocodile tears on the Liberal Club warning Naoroji that his sympathisers, in fact, “cared as little for him as did Hamlet's player for Hecuba.”<sup>91</sup> Griffin’s unsubtle reference to performance emphasises his suggestion that the liberal outcry was insincere.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, cartoonists in the *St Stephen's Review* satirised the righteous indignation of leading liberals, depicting them bowing at the feet of a black man in a suit smoking a cigar.

(Figure 2)



Figure 2 Cartoon published in 1889 in the *St Stephens Review* depicting influential liberal politicians bowing at the feet of an oversized “black man,” dressed in a dinner jacket and smoking a cigar. The publication mocked the liberal outcry of righteous indignation over Salisbury's racialized remark against Naoroji.<sup>93</sup>

Beyond merely condemning Salisbury’s poor leadership, many liberal outlets also lamented the offense that the remark lay on Naoroji. Indeed, *The Freeman's Journal*, which— as

<sup>91</sup> Burton, ‘Tongues Untied,’ 648.

<sup>92</sup> “Daily Notes,” *York Herald*, 6 Jan 1892.

<sup>93</sup> Reproduced in “Race Relations, 1889 view,” *Daily Mirror*, 26 March 1970. The copy reprinted in the *Daily Mirror* for the weekly series *The History Makers* was found by Journalist Bruce Bernard in Camden-passage market, Islington. The article in which it was reproduced explains that the cartoon was popular when it was produced and was later issued as a large color print.

a periodical supporting home rule— was a natural ally of Naoroji, went as far as to exclaim, “the only real reparation that can be made to the Indian people,” would be to return Naoroji victorious at the next general election.<sup>94</sup> Yet, as Salisbury’s own defence suggests, the outrage expressed at the indiscretion was not really about whether a “black man” could represent white people. What was more important was the optics of racial politics—that is how Naoroji was viewed in light of his complexion. The press were primarily concerned about what describing Naoroji as black meant, not only for Britain’s Empire, but also for its carefully defined gender, class and racial categories.<sup>95</sup> Supporters of Naoroji scrambled to his defence not because of an inherent belief in the right of colonial subjects to contest the right to representation in the Imperial Parliament, but rather because they were offended by his association with a “black man.” The *Hawk* clarified the distinction between denigrating racial epithets by explaining that, “all the things [Lord Salisbury] should have called him-Baboo, Asiatic-would have been less offensive than 'black,'" which is "an adjective...to be avoided, at all costs and hazards.”<sup>96</sup> Salisbury’s comment revealed the highly hierarchical racial frameworks of Victorian society.

By the late 1800s, there was a full enunciation of biological racism and Indians were considered to be more “civilized” than African subjects. Indians were typically characterized either as mild and amenable, or, in the wake of the 1857 rebellion, as untrustworthy and in need of discipline.<sup>97</sup> Though this categorization of Indians was based on their inferiority to white Britons, it still afforded them a great deal of intellectual scope. Whereas Victorians associated Africans with “alien appearance, brutal savagery, and a generally primitive way of life,” they

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<sup>94</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 122.

<sup>95</sup> Burton, ‘Tongues Untied,’ 644.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 643.

<sup>97</sup> Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, 178.

viewed India's religious tradition favourably.<sup>98</sup> Despite newfound fears of the inscrutability of Indian subjects in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Britain's sustained relation with India, and the masses of literature and knowledge which had disseminated between the colony and metropole since the East India company had established power in 1757, prevented Indians from suffering quite the same level of caricaturizing as Africans. As early as the 1840s, the image of Indian had entered the imagination of the press. At the same as articles on the physiognomy of natives and the need for their enlightenment abounded, the press also developed an appreciation for the sophistication of ancient Indian civilizations.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, orientalist working in India had long been fascinated by Aryan Indians' proximity to whiteness, and consequently, Indians had been awarded a place above Africans in the racial hierarchy of nineteenth century Imperial Britain.<sup>100</sup> In contrast, popular representations of black people in the late Victorian period were informed by the explorer Livingstone's accounts of his missions to Africa, in which portrayed the "savage" and "heathen" inhabitants of the continent, as well as public displays of minstrelsy.<sup>101</sup>

This hierarchy fed into the wider debate over which colonial subjects were entitled to which types of rights within the bounds of the Empire. Given the lesser status afforded to black colonial subjects within the empire, the liberal outcry from Naoroji supporters is understandable. In applying the epithet, "black man," to the Parsee, Salisbury was not only drawing attention to the candidate's racial difference to challenge his electability but was also using imperial frameworks of racial hierarchy to question Naoroji's intellectual faculties and civility. Burton suggests that by using Salisbury's black man comment to catapult onto the national stage,

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 161, 163.

<sup>99</sup> Palmegiano, *The British Empire in the Victorian Press, 1832–1867*, 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 639.

<sup>101</sup> Burton, 'Tongues Untied,' 642.

Naoroji was able to “make the parliament at Westminster a truly imperial democracy by forcing it to recognize an Indian colonial subject as one of its representatives.”<sup>102</sup> Whilst it is understandable to want to place Naoroji’s agency at the centre of the narrative, it seems more accurate to understand the racial politics of Salisbury’s comment as being mutually shaped by public opinion through the press, politicians, and Naoroji himself. Though Naoroji was able to capitalize upon the publicity, the backlash unleashed upon the Prime Minister suggests that ideas of imperial citizenship, under which different subjects were afforded different levels of protection and rights, were already well established. Salisbury’s comment was so shocking precisely because it jostled the boundaries of racial belonging, placing Naoroji beyond the pale and excluding him from the ability to contest parliamentary representation.

Naoroji actively participated in the politics of racial hierarchy to assert India’s potential for development along liberal civilizing ideals. Whilst advocating for the improvement of colonial administration in the House of Commons, Naoroji emphasized the potential of the subcontinent for an expansion of trade by comparing the stages of Indian and African civilization:

“In India you have a vast country inhabited by people who have been civilised for thousands of years, and capable of enjoying all the good things of the world. They are not like the savage Africans, whom we have yet to teach how to value goods.”<sup>103</sup>

Naoroji employs the liberal framework of progress through commerce to sell India as a potential market for investment. By emphasising the intellectual capacities of Indian subjects, Naoroji is also able to demonstrate their worthiness to enter the imperial fold. In the same speech, Naoroji reasserts the cognitive capacities of Indians, arguing “if the country is to be

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 634.

<sup>103</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 17, 20 September 1893, col 1713-1776.

better governed that can only be done by the employment of the best and most intelligent of the natives in the Service.”<sup>104</sup> Elsewhere, Naoroji went to great lengths to defend the potential of his countrymen. In a paper read before the Ethnological Society, the Parsee responded to the claims made by John Crawfurd, a former colonial administrator and society President to make his case for the equal capabilities of Indians. Naoroji argued that it was the imperfect education system and early marriage and fatherhood which explained the educational gap between Indians and Englishmen, not inherent inferiority. He asserted, “I have no doubt that any impartial and candid inquirer will find that the natives of India are not below the average of the head and heart of any other nation in the world.”<sup>105</sup> Through his participation in the frameworks of racial hierarchy, Naoroji bound himself to defending the position of Indians above Africans, in order to stake their claim as recipients of special imperial privileges, but must also demonstrate the intellectual capabilities of his countrymen to prove their worthiness to enter the imperial fold as equals to their colonial masters.

### REPRESENTING FINSBURY

Naoroji was able to represent a broad coalition of voters in the Finsbury constituency and cultivated local, as well as elite, support. The existence of such a broad coalition of support suggests that he was able to find a foothold in London and Britons recognized his ability to contest imperial citizenship. From his first campaign, Naoroji used speaking tours, pamphlets, and journalism to appeal to the consciences of ordinary Britons.<sup>106</sup> The strength of local fervor for his candidacy was well documented by the *London Daily News*. Two weeks before the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji. "Observations on Mr. John Crawfurd's Paper on the European and Asiatic Races." *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 5 (1867): 127-49. Accessed January 13, 2021. doi:10.2307/3014219, 128.

<sup>106</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 163.

election, the paper reported that “a vote of confidence was passed in the candidate, who subsequently addressed an overflow meeting, hundreds not being able to gain admission to the schoolroom.”<sup>107</sup> The candidate’s popularity was reiterated the following week, with news of another local “mass meeting” during which Harriette Colenso, a missionary and mediator for the Zulu people, “who was loudly applauded, said she felt confident from what she had seen in the division, that Central Finsbury would return Mr. Naoroji at the head of the poll.”<sup>108</sup> Once the election petition had been concluded and Naoroji’s victory had been reaffirmed, his supporters held another public demonstration in celebration of his return as an MP at a popular local venue for radical demonstrations.<sup>109</sup> Of course, given the tight margin of Naoroji’s victory, we should not assume that local support for his candidature was ubiquitous. Nonetheless, the editorial decision of the *London Daily News* to include accounts of popular gatherings suggests that they were newsworthy, if not for their size, then for their vociferousness.

Patel’s excavation of over 3,800 letters of support from members of the public also advances the claim that Naoroji’s message was popularly received—especially among working class voters and Irishmen.<sup>110</sup> The Liberal party was the natural choice for those with popular grievances and Naoroji’s campaign addressed their concerns.<sup>111</sup> The candidate’s addresses to the attendees of an Irish Concert and Ball, held in Clerkenwell in support of evicted Irish tenants, corroborates the argument that Naoroji was seen as a suitable representative for the residents of Finsbury.<sup>112</sup> Naoroji also aligned himself to the cause of Irish Home Rule, professing that, “by

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<sup>107</sup> “The Election Campaign,” *London Daily News*. June 23, 1892

<sup>108</sup> “The Election Campaign,” *London Daily News*. 28 June 1892.

<sup>109</sup> “Further Tidings of the Umbria,” *London Daily News*. 31 December 1892.

For a cartographic representation of the location of these demonstrations, see Dinyar Patel, “Dadabhai Naoroji’s London and Bombay,” Accessed February 11, 2020, <https://dinyarpatel.com/naoroji/london-bombay/>.

<sup>110</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 164.

<sup>111</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, 4.

<sup>112</sup> “This Morning’s News,” *London Daily News*. 30 December 1892.



returning him to Parliament they, the electors of Holborn, would earn a double blessing, that of 5 millions in Ireland and of 250 millions in our great Indian dependency.”<sup>113</sup> Speaking expressly in terms of imperial unity, the candidate appealed to both the specific issues of his constituency and to the broader discussion of imperial citizenship by linking the Indian and Irish cause for greater self-governance. Additionally, Naoroji forged alliances with Trade Unionists. Pledging allegiance to the Parsee, the secretary of the Federation of Trade Unions remarked, “the fact that Mr. Naoroji was the first public man to suggest legislative interference with the hours of labor would not be forgotten on the polling day.”<sup>114</sup> Considered a friend of labour interests and Irish Home Rule, Naoroji proved himself to be a champion of constituent concerns, rather than solely a “Member for India.”<sup>115</sup>

Women’s Suffrage groups proved to be an equally important allegiance for Naoroji. *The Woman’s Herald* endorsed the candidate, prompting female volunteers to canvas on his behalf in Clerkenwell and several wealthy ladies to loan their carriages to transport voters to the polls.<sup>116</sup> In a meeting with the Central Finsbury Women’s Liberal Association, Naoroji reportedly, “attributed his return for Central Finsbury in a great measure to the efforts of the ladies who so strenuously and perseveringly supported the liberal programme.”<sup>117</sup> The steadfast commitment to Naoroji’s election by those who did not even possess the franchise themselves highlights the intertwined struggles of subjects advocating for rights under the imperial banner. In supporting Naoroji, suffragists, Irishmen and Trade Unionists can be seen to be staking their own claims for a more inclusive imperial citizenship, which extended rights and protections to all under its flag.

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<sup>113</sup> “The General Election: Mr Gladstone or Lord Salisbury? Holborn,” *London Daily News*, 3 July 1886.

<sup>114</sup> “Reports from Constituencies,” *London Daily News*, 14 June, 1892.

<sup>115</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 193.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

<sup>117</sup> “The Cholera,” *London Daily News*. 25 October 1892.

Naturally, Naoroji's long struggle for the cause of imperial reform led him to develop an intricate web of allies in Britain and India, but his campaign also caught the attention of elites, whose endorsements the press republished. Over the course of a single week, the *London Daily News* acknowledged expressions of support for Naoroji from prominent Liberal politicians, such as the Marquis of Ripon, former Prime Ministers Lord Rosebery and William Ewart Gladstone, the Irish Statesman Sir Charles Russell, the Editor of the paper *The English Leader*, George Holyoake, and celebrities, including Florence Nightingale, Harriette Colenso, and Josephine Butler.<sup>118</sup>

Although, in the eyes of the British public, Naoroji's race did not inherently preclude him from representing Englishmen, the press did not reach a consensus on whether his differences of faith, custom, and language could be overcome. However, the support Naoroji received from activists, trade unionists, elites, and "ordinary Britons," in addition to his 1892 electoral triumph, suggests that a critical mass of voters believed an Indian Parsee could represent them. In other words, Finsbury residents answered the referendum on whether colonial subjecthood was compatible with membership in the Imperial Parliament with a resounding, "Yes!" And, in doing so, his supporters also staked their own claims to rights under the liberal framework of imperial citizenship.

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<sup>118</sup> "The Election Campaign," *London Daily News*, June 23, 1892; "Reports from Constituencies," *London Daily News*, June 27, 1892; "The Election Campaign," *London Daily News*, June 29, 1892.

### **Chapter III: Contesting Imperial Citizenship through Parliamentary Election**

Naoroji's election as both a representative for India and British constituents further incorporated colonial subjects into the folds of Empire, fueling conversations about imperial citizenship. The debate on imperial citizenship became an intense preoccupation of late Victorian Britain. At its heart, the question hinged on the problem of defining a national identity, such that it ultimately became a referendum on what place the Empire should be accorded within society and whether imperial subjects had the same rights as citizens in the metropole.<sup>119</sup> Broadly speaking, Liberals and Conservatives understood imperial citizenship as a means to consolidate Britain's global power in the context of increasing economic and political competition from Germany, the United States, France, and Russia.<sup>120</sup> The liberal model of Empire, with its rhetoric of progress and civilization, had governed British policy in India for the most part of the nineteenth century. However, a competing Conservative doctrine emerged after the 1857 rebellion, which rejected the liberal civilizing mission in favor of a rhetoric of racial difference and the preservation of native institutions. Naoroji's election chafed against the latter interpretation, proving that colonial subjects could stake a claim at the heart of imperial government.

### **INDIANS SEEKING IMPERIAL CITIZENSHIP**

Writing on the subject of Londoners at the turn of the twentieth century, Schneer recognizes that "identity is never fixed or unitary," but rather, "fluid, subtle and the object of contestation."<sup>121</sup> Naoroji equally understood himself through these shifting lenses, identifying at once, and without discomfort, as an Indian, a British subject, and a Parsee. Codell suggests that his fluid

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<sup>119</sup> Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging*. Studies in Imperialism. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>121</sup> Schneer, *London 1900*, 13.

identity allowed him to exist “both physically and symbolically, within and against codes of imperial interpellation.”<sup>122</sup> Banerjee reminds us that before the constitutive category of the nation-state emerged, the liberal conception of imperial citizenship offered colonized subjects a mode of self-representation.<sup>123</sup> Under this broader, malleable, definition of citizenship, it was possible for colonial subjects to contest their rights under the aegis of imperial belonging. Though Western-educated colonial elites remained attentive to the violence and coercion inherent to the colonial project, they were still able to agitate for the full rights promised by imperial citizenship.<sup>124</sup> In contesting a seat at the heart of the Empire, Naoroji sought not only to represent his Indian countrymen, but also to represent his entitlement as a colonized subject to the right of parliamentary election.

Naoroji’s conviction that he could represent not only constituents in the colony but also in the Metropole, rendered him a perfect exhibit onto which the Victorian press could project the debate over imperial citizenship. Naoroji did not reject such a projection, but rather actively inserted himself into the debate. Delivering his presidential address at the opening of the 1906 Indian National Congress, Naoroji asked what position Indians held in the British Empire and whether they were British citizens. He reached the conclusion that “Indians were entitled to claim all the rights of British citizens by reason of their birth-right and by reason of pledged rights.”<sup>125</sup> Naoroji was not alone in seeking imperial citizenship. The Indian Nationalist Surendranath Banerjea used a similar language of rights and citizenship:

We are not Englishmen or men of English race or extraction, but we are British subjects, the citizens of a great and free Empire; we live under the protecting shadows of one of the

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<sup>122</sup> Codell, “Decentring and Doubling Imperial Cosmopolitan Discourse in the British Press,” 372.

<sup>123</sup> Sukanya Banerjee, ‘Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire’, 27 May 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822391982>, 5.

<sup>124</sup> Reed, “Positively Cosmopolitan,” 125.

<sup>125</sup> “President’s Speech,” *Birmingham Mail*, 26 December, 1906.

greatest constitutions the world has ever seen. The rights of Englishmen are ours, their privileges are ours, their constitution is ours. But we are excluded from them.<sup>126</sup>

Banerjea conceptually synonymizes subjecthood and citizenship to claim the benefits of the latter. Similarly, during an interview with a London Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Baij Nath replied in the affirmative to the question of whether he would like Home Rule for India, answering “in the same sense as the Colonies have.”<sup>127</sup> Naoroji, Banerjea and Nath imagine themselves as members of the cultural and political community of Empire premised on an equitability of rights and protections.

Patel challenges the thesis that Naoroji contested a Parliamentary seat out of a faith in British justice or a desire to stake his claim in citizenship—instead characterizing the MP’s objectives as nationalist.<sup>128</sup> It is clear, however, that in his public appearances, at least, Naoroji cultivated an image of loyalty to the Crown and allegiance to the continuation of Empire. It is this *performance* of loyalty, real or otherwise, which is key to understanding how Victorians imagined the election of the first Indian MP through the framework of imperial citizenship. For Britons, Naoroji need not be an enemy of Empire, but could rather act as an intermediary who could ensure its preservation through his investiture in British political institutions.

In his speeches to the House of Commons, Naoroji repeatedly references his loyalty to the project of Empire and his faith in the British values of fairness and justice. The MP rejects the notion of charity when requesting that Britain share in the costs of military expenditure, instead requesting relief on the “ground of justice” and appealing to their shared “interest in

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<sup>126</sup> Surendranath Banerjea, *Bengalee*, 14 January 1893, quoted in Banerjee, ‘Becoming Imperial Citizens,’ 1.

<sup>127</sup> Baijnath, *England and India: Being Impressions of Persons and Things, English and Indian, and Brief Notes of Visits to France, Switzerland, Italy, and Ceylon*, 120.

<sup>128</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 87.

maintaining British rule in India.”<sup>129</sup> In another speech, Naoroji skillfully, almost sycophantically, flatters his audience by appealing to their “justice,” “honour,” and “conscience,” before asking the British to “remove the yoke of the stranger and make it the rule of the benefactor,” by reducing the heavy burdens of taxation placed on India.<sup>130</sup> The erstwhile rapacious negotiator asks his Masters not to liberate him from their tyranny, but merely to loosen their grip, and act as a friend. It seems strange that whilst speaking at the beating heart of imperial power, Naoroji would voice such a mild request. Yet, it was necessary for Naoroji to strike a delicate balance. As an agitator for Indian reform, it was also imperative that he move the needle forward on the issues of poverty, taxes, and the appointment of natives to civil service exams. Attentive to this balancing act, he attempted to soften the blow of his criticisms by hedging that it is, “in every way desirable that [Indian] sentiments and opinions should be made known to the ruling classes, and such outspoken frankness should never be mistaken for disloyalty or disaffection.”<sup>131</sup> Such concessions offered the MP a blanket of protection to deliver incisive critiques of imperial administration without offending his hosts. Adeptly, the Parsee quoted other politicians and administrators to deliver his harshest blows.<sup>132</sup> Naoroji understood that Britain was in no rush to cede her territories to nationalist claims of self-governance. Recognizing the dangers of threatening Indian Home Rule himself, the MP used colonial administrator and compiler of the *Imperial Gazetteer*, Sir William Hunter, as a mouthpiece in a speech to the Commons to hasten Parliament into action. Quoting Hunter, he warned that India,

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<sup>129</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 17, 20 September 1893, col 1713-1776. Naoroji also repeats the same rhetorical move in a speech to the Commons two years later. See Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 30, 12 February 1895, col 541-636.

<sup>130</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 10, 28 March 1893, col 1297-1400.

<sup>131</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 28, 14 August 1894, col 979-1084.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, see for example the parliamentary speech from 14 August 1894, in which Naoroji quotes Macaulay to argue that in order for India to remain a dependency, its subjects must be afforded the same rights as British citizens.

“is a problem which might in 40 years become an Irish problem, but 50 times more difficult.”<sup>133</sup> By placing his omen in the mouth of a white citizen, Naoroji avoided accusations of incitement, whilst still relaying the urgency of his message. Rather suggestively, Naoroji opined, “I hope and trust that time will never come, and that such a contingency will never arise. I hope the time is coming when the natives themselves, educated and learned men, will have a voice and due share in the government of India.” The hint of inevitability is unmistakable. If Parliament do not make the reforms Naoroji recommends—if they do not admit Indian subjects to the civil service examinations—then the difficulty of administering India will only worsen. In other words, the MP used fears about the loss of Empire to encourage Britain to draw colonial subjects further into the fold of imperial institutions.

Whether we should read Naoroji as a covert nationalist or an imperial sympathizer has been discussed in great depth elsewhere.<sup>134</sup> What is important for our understanding of British reactions to Naoroji’s election is the need for the politician to filter himself in terms acceptable to Victorian audiences in the Metropole. By constantly reassuring his audiences of his commitment to the imperial project, his allegiance to the Queen and his faith in the British people and their values, the MP perpetuates the image of a permanent Empire of loyal subjects, whilst being able to advocate for reform from within.

Other forms of representation by colonial subjects and electoral firsts occurring around this time—which the press reported on—added to the growing sense of the possibility of imperial citizenship. Though Naoroji was the first Indian to be elected to the House of Commons, he was not the first to stand for a parliamentary seat. Lalmohan Ghosh, a British-trained lawyer from

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<sup>133</sup> Hansard Parliamentary Debates, *Commons*, Fourth Series, Volume 17, 20 September 1893, col 1713-1776.

<sup>134</sup> See for example, Patel, *Naoroji*.

Calcutta, was twice-defeated in his contest of Deptford in 1885 and 1886. Like Naoroji, his campaign was debated in terms of imperial citizenship. Tellingly, during a liberal demonstration commending Ghosh despite his defeat, a Dr Hunter stated, “There had not been a defeat of Mr. Ghose, but a defeat of the party. The Liberals for Deptford and other places were ready to accept an Indian candidate to represent them in Parliament.”<sup>135</sup> Self-consciously in response to Salisbury, the liberals expressed the loss as a sign of the unpopularity of their party message, rather than an inherent statement on the impossibility of the election of a colonial subject. At the same meeting, Ghosh himself addressed the importance of his election in terms of imperial citizenship. He commented that the English had given the Indians, “so striking a proof of their desire to extend to their fellow subjects in the East those political rights which were so dear to themselves...they were determined that freedom and progress, political privileges and rights of citizenship should no longer be the monopoly of the people of Great Britain only.”<sup>136</sup> The deliberate invocation of “rights” and “privileges” demonstrates the reciprocal desire of the liberals and a colonial subject, in this case Ghosh, to use Parliamentary representation as a way to claim the rights offered by imperial citizenship.

Neither was it Indians alone who sought greater integration into imperial institutions, with the rights and privileges that it offered. The *Pall Mall Gazette* commented on the diversity of the Commons following the 1892 election, noting the presence of, “Major Jones, who can tell of hairbreadth ‘scapes in the American War...Mr. Henri Josse, a Frenchman, now a naturalized British subject,” and “Hon.E. Blake, who had the reputation of being the finest orator in Canada, and only lately retired from the position of the leader of the Opposition.”<sup>137</sup> The geographic

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<sup>135</sup> “Presentation to Baboo Ghose,” *Kentish Mercury*, 10 December 1886.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> “The New House of Commons,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 August 1892.



range of the newly elected members suggests that Victorians did not have conceptual difficulty imagining a foreigner being able to represent them. What was at stake in the election of Dadabhai Naoroji was whether a colonial *subject* possessed the right to represent an English constituency. Given the complex hierarchies which plagued imperial logic, it was necessary for the press to debate the plausibility of an Indian MP.

### THE PRESS DEBATE ON IMPERIAL CITIZENSHIP

If it was possible for colonial subjects to contest imperial citizenship, it was also possible for the press to debate the validity of such membership. Naoroji's election offered newspapers the opportunity to join in the national pastime of fine-tuning ideological conceptions of the boundaries of Empire through a relational understanding of colonial subjects. The *Liverpool Mercury* posited, "It is looked upon as "eloquent testimony to the unity of Empire," of which the natives of India will now feel they "are part and parcel," and that the event stands alone in its mighty power to energise "the sense of national self-respect."<sup>138</sup> The paper considered Naoroji's election as an opportunity for consolidation of the Empire, interpreting the candidate's election not as a precursor to more encroachment by Indians, but as the start of an imperial federation. Indeed, as Patel notes, correspondence between the MP and his supporters demonstrates their belief that "increased rights would strengthen the bonds of empire, rather than disintegrate them."<sup>139</sup> The paper articulated the possibility of a colonial subject representing an Englishman, stating, "once the English citizen is educated up to regarding the Indian gentleman as a fellow-citizen, he will feel no more scruple in voting, party politics apart, for so very able a man as Mr. Naoroji, than he would in voting for a colonist."<sup>140</sup> Whilst, for some Britons, Naoroji's election

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Patel, *Naoroji*, 261.

<sup>140</sup> "Our London Letter," *Liverpool Mercury*, June 10, 1892.

sparked fears about reverse colonization and demands for more colonial representation, for others it opened debates around the reform of the Empire and opportunities for colonial subjects to integrate into the British model of citizenship.

However, other papers were not so sanguine about the incorporation of colonial subjects into the imperial fold. As the election petitions against Naoroji concluded and the year drew to a close, the *Pall Mall Gazette* looked to the future. The paper warned, “if there is one desire dear to [the Hindoo’s] heart it is to acquire the government of India. This is ultimately what he hopes to accomplish by the National Congress, and it may be that in the march of time he shall get his wish.”<sup>141</sup> Naoroji’s election had touched a nerve. By drawing a colonial subject so close to the project of imperial governance, the British public had shocked themselves and were forced to consider what his election and agitation for reform meant for the future of the Empire. But Naoroji’s election did not signal the dawn of an age of Indian independence. The paper promised, “many Naorojis will be needed to effect the transfer. In the meantime, we have to be wise, and firm, and just.”<sup>142</sup> Instead then, the Indian MP offered the Metropole an opportunity to prove their British values through the outward display of concessions whilst maintaining a firm grasp on power. By offering a colonial subject a position within imperial institutions, Britain was able to double down on her Empire, at least for the time being.

### **WHO’S IN AND WHO’S OUT: ELECTION FRAUD ANXIETIES**

Debate over fraudulent ballots cast in the Finsbury race added to the conversation about who did and did not count as a citizen in the imperial metropolis. Simultaneous to Captain Penton’s challenge of Naoroji, another election petition trial occurred, where the candidate in question was accused of bribing voters. Absent of this scandal factor, the election petition against Naoroji

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<sup>141</sup> “For Many Generations,” *Pall Mall Gazette*. 31 December 1892.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

instead assumed a xenophobic tone. On December 13th, the *York Herald* reported, “The Court proceeded to scrutinise the votes of foreigners who, though they had resided sufficiently long in England for naturalisation purposes, had not taken steps to obtain legal naturalisation.”<sup>143</sup>

Arguably, this increased scrutiny of “alien votes” was a natural reaction to the high support Naoroji received from Indians in Britain in an incredibly close election. Yet, the question of voting rights of foreign-born Britons cast a long shadow for the newspaper, raising, “a variety of points of legal importance-in regard to the evidence of naturalisation, the right of one party to a petition for a scrutiny to attack voters in his opponent’s “list,” and the position of partners one of whom is an alien, and of persons who have voted in more than one constituency.”<sup>144</sup> In other words, Naoroji’s election forced white Britons to confront the question of what it meant for non-white residents to be voting in British elections.

Elsewhere, newspapers reiterated anxieties about the attempts of foreigners to claim citizenship without adhering to bureaucratic processes, opining, “The petition against Mr. Naoroji affords some striking evidence as to the carelessness of foreigners, who, anxious to become subjects of her Britannic Majesty, do not take the slightest trouble to become naturalized. Ignorance is generally pleaded in excuse, yet the process of naturalization is extremely simple.”<sup>145</sup> The same paper offers a helpful insight into the naturalization policy of the 1890s, explaining to its readers that, “applicants must be supported by references acquainted with “the manners, habits, and mode of life” who can “vouch for his loyalty and respectability, and verily believe that a certificate of naturalization.”<sup>146</sup> The importance afforded to the

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<sup>143</sup> “Election Petitions,” *York Herald*, December 13, 1892.

<sup>144</sup> “London Press Opinions,” *York Herald*, Dec. 16, 1892.

<sup>145</sup> “How to become a British Citizen. What the naturalization papers are like,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 December 1892.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

naturalization process points to a desire to ensure that only the “right kind” of subject was granted citizenship. Citizenship did not formally emerge as a constitutive legal category until 1948.<sup>147</sup> Still, membership in the Empire’s political and cultural institutions remained conceivable when understood through the framework of loyalty to the Crown.<sup>148</sup> The paper’s unease at foreign subjects voting without being vetted for their “loyalty and respectability,” suggests that imperial citizenship was deemed appropriate only to those colonial subjects who adhered to English customs and sovereignty.

### **LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF IMPERIAL CITIZENSHIP**

Both Liberals and Conservatives were pre-eminently concerned with maintaining the Empire by providing outlets for discontent, but they differed in their attitudes towards how their aim was best achieved.<sup>149</sup> Few Victorians hoped for the dissolution of the Empire.<sup>150</sup> However, issues such as Home Rule for Ireland and increasing agitation for self-governance in the dominions raised fears about Britain’s imperial future. Imperial citizenship offered a solution to the problem of how to keep the Empire together. Citizenship was a complex and tangled term. Victorian ideas about citizenship incorporated not only political rights, such as the franchise, but also extended to a wider sense of belonging to a ‘British identity,’ characterized by participation in civic life.<sup>151</sup> During the Imperial period, the British government appealed to the harmony of Empire on the ground that all British subjects were unified under the monarch.<sup>152</sup> Western-educated colonial elites similarly spoke in terms of the unity of Empire in order to secure the rights that

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<sup>147</sup> Reed, “Positively Cosmopolitan,” 125.

<sup>148</sup> Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Bal Ram Nanda, *The Moderate Era in Indian Politics: Dadabhai Naoroji Memorial Prize Fund Lecture*. (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b4301993>, p19.

<sup>150</sup> Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*, 10.

<sup>152</sup> Rieko Karatani, ‘Defining British Citizenship: Empire, Commonwealth and Modern Britain’ (London : Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 2003), 29.

membership in the Imperial community offered.<sup>153</sup> This conception of Empire as a unified, albeit unequal, community of nations was buttressed by the creation of institutions such as the Imperial Institute, established in 1887 in celebration of the Queen's jubilee to represent the arts and manufactures of the Empire and to "accomplish its ideal of uniting the Colonies and India more closely to the Mother country and cement the Empire together into one Imperial Federation."<sup>154</sup> However, Conservatives and Liberals had fundamentally different hopes for the model of imperial citizenship, with the former pursuing a "a parochial, *nationalist*, imperial citizenship," and the latter advocating for "a nascent, *cosmopolitan*, imperial citizenship."<sup>155</sup>

Liberals were more receptive to the idea of non-white dependencies eventually joining self-governing dominions under a proposed Imperial Federation. In November 1884, the Imperial Federation League was founded to "secure by Federation, the permanent unity of the Empire." (See figure 3). Unlike the Conservative party, the Liberals had clung to the civilizing mission of the empire on the individual and national scale, believing that colonies could develop through educational, economic and political reforms.<sup>156</sup> Writing in 1888, Allen Octavian Hume, a long-term ally of Naoroji, hoped that India would achieve a dominion status similar to that of Canada and her own Indian parliament within fifty to seventy years.<sup>157</sup> Under the liberal model, colonial subjects would be granted self-government relative to their willingness to live by liberal principles.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Reed, "Positively Cosmopolitan," 125.

<sup>154</sup> Baijnath, *England and India: Being Impressions of Persons and Things, English and Indian, and Brief Notes of Visits to France, Switzerland, Italy, and Ceylon.*, 86.

<sup>155</sup> Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*, 5.

<sup>156</sup> Matthew Stubbings, 'The Partisan Nature of Race and Imperialism: Dadabhai Naoroji, M. M. Bhownaggee and the Late Nineteenth-Century British Politics of Indian Nationalism', *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 44, no. 1 (February 2016): 48–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2015.1123542>, 53.

<sup>157</sup> "Letter to Editor," *Morning Post*, Allahabad, 17 May 1888, quoted in Nanda, *The Moderate Era in Indian Politics*, 18.

<sup>158</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, 4.

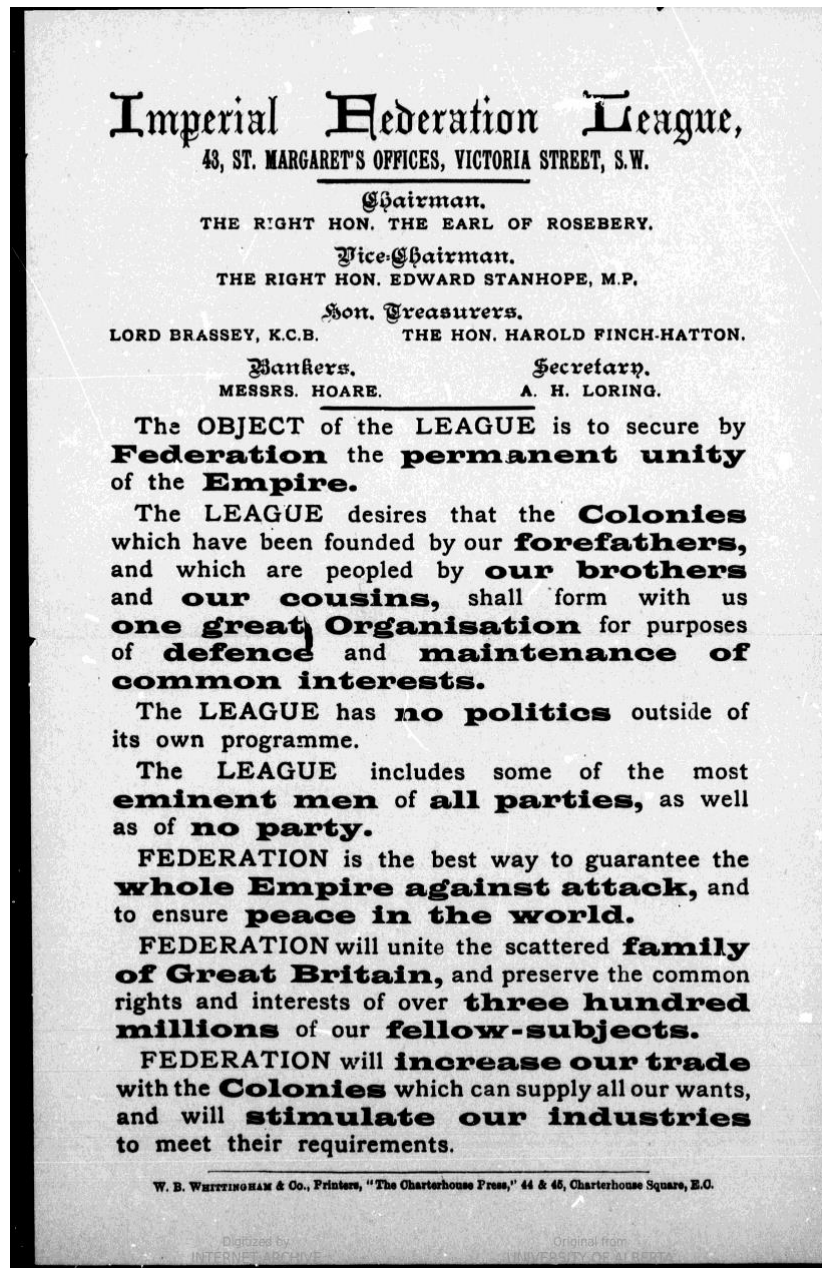


Figure 3 A pamphlet circulated by the Imperial Federation League announcing their commitment to drawing the ties of Empire closer together.

On the other hand, Conservatives distanced themselves from the liberal, cosmopolitan imperial ideologies of the early nineteenth century, instead promoting the preservation and strengthening of traditional native institutions.<sup>159</sup> By distorting Darwinian race theory,

<sup>159</sup> Mantena, 'Alibis of Empire,' 2.

Conservatives were able to propagate the perception of an irreconcilable gap between Europe and the colonies, under which natives were better governed by their own local leaders, rather than by attempts to inculcate Western values. Due to the centrality of racial difference to the Conservative ideology, granting self-governance to the dependencies would have been an impossibility. Indeed, most discussion surrounding a federated Empire concerned itself with the shared sense of racial and linguistic identity between Britain and the Dominions.<sup>160</sup> Therefore the debate over whether Naoroji could represent English constituents, was also a debate over how far Indian subjects could be constituted as part of the British Isles, or, in other words, whether they too could one day be on path to self-government under imperial citizenship.

Within these competing imperial frameworks, Conservatives wielded Naoroji's otherness as a marker of his inability to represent English constituents, characterising him as culturally alien and unrepresentative of India's diversity.<sup>161</sup> However, the conservative characterization was less a function of their inherent disbelief in Naoroji's capacity as a representative, and more a reflection of their divergent views on Empire. As a proponent of the liberal civilizing agenda, Naoroji was ideologically unacceptable to the Conservatives. However, the party had no objection to putting forth their own Indian Parsee, Mancherjee Bhowmagree, for election in 1895. As a stalwart opponent of Indian nationalism, Bhowmagree supported the conservative imperial ideology of racial difference and local rule by native elites.<sup>162</sup> Like Naoroji, Bhowmagree was also attacked by liberals in racialized terms.<sup>163</sup> The willingness of both Liberals and Conservatives to defend Indian representatives who aligned with their particular vision of Empire suggests that the electability of colonial subjects was constantly reimagined to

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<sup>160</sup> Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*, 8.

<sup>161</sup> Stubbings, 'The Partisan Nature of Race and Imperialism,' 58.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

fit changing imperial ideologies. Sinha reminds us that, “relations between the coloniser and colonised were constantly rearticulated in accordance with the continually changing political and economic imperatives of colonial rule.<sup>164</sup> The rights guaranteed by imperial citizenship then were not granted on the basis of inherent qualities in colonial subjects, but flippantly offered and revoked according to the visions of Empire supported by political parties and the press at a given time.

When colonial elites did not advocate for the maintenance of Empire, they were presented as dangerous by the press. Figures like Naoroji were only acceptable when they deferred to British power and expressed pro-imperial views. It has been established that during Naoroji’s time as an MP, he advocated for Indian reform within the bounds of Empire. His legacy was also assessed within this framework. In honour of his 85th birthday, the London Daily News reported that “the oldest of Indian political reformers...[received] congratulations from every quarter of the world.”<sup>165</sup> It is noteworthy that Naoroji is labelled as a “reformer” since his agitation is recognized within the imperial structure. Five years later, the paper acknowledged the birthday telegrams the “Grand Old Man” received from the Viceroy and other dignitaries, “who bear no malice towards an old opponent, and like to think of the aged agitator as in these days, a very fervent supporter of the imperial cause.”<sup>166</sup> In this veneration of the MP as widely respected, Naoroji’s public persona as a pro-imperial reformer is more explicitly enunciated. Similarly, before his death, the statesman was not viewed as a radical in the context

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<sup>164</sup> Mrinalini Sinha. *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century*. New Delhi, India: Kali for Women, 1997, 1.

<sup>165</sup> “An Indian Veteran,” *London Daily News*. 5 September 1910.

<sup>166</sup> “Talk of the Town,” *Pall Mall Gazette*. 4 September 1915.



of his leadership in India, where he was popular among the “Moderate section of the Indian Nationalists.”<sup>167</sup>

However, when Naoroji’s legacy became more associated with radical reform, it became less palatable. Almost four decades after Naoroji served as an MP, he is mentioned in Bhownagree’s obituary, in sharp contrast to the moderate Conservative, as a radical proto-nationalist. Irrespective of whether this was the case, it is noteworthy that Bhownagree is depicted here as a “practical Imperialist,” whilst Naoroji is presented as his “antithesis.”<sup>168</sup> As Conservative ideas of indirect rule became more firmly pronounced at the turn of century, it is possible that Bhownagree’s self-fashioning as a supporter of conservative ideologies of the preservation of native institutions and inherent racial difference made him more palatable to British audiences than Naoroji’s contestations of equal subjecthood under imperial rule. Perhaps the declining popularity of the Liberal civilizing mission, paired with increased jingoism and chauvinism during the Boer war explains why Bhownagree was re-elected multiple times, whilst Naoroji faded into relative obscurity.

Having demonstrated the importance of imperial citizenship in maintaining the Empire, it should be clear how the language of rights and belonging was used by both British citizens and colonial subjects alike. Colonial subjects skilfully balanced their claims to greater rights under the imperial aegis with deference to the Crown. Despite these attempts to stake a claim in imperial citizenship through assimilation, it was ultimately up to the British public to decide whether the otherness of colonial subjects was insurmountable or whether they, too, could bask in the benefits of the Empire. Ultimately however this perceived difference shifted to suit the

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<sup>167</sup> “Allahabad Congress,” *London Daily News*. 20 July 1910.

<sup>168</sup> “Sir Mancherjee Bhownagree,” *Truth*. 22 November 1933.

political dynamics of imperial ideologies, meaning that colonial subjects had to constantly refashion themselves in line with changing attitudes in the Metropole. This symbiotic relationship, whereby subjects shaped imperial ideology, and imperial ideology shaped the behaviour of subjects, meant that imperial citizenship was a constantly shifting goal post that proved difficult to reach.

### Conclusion

Naoroji's election became a site through which the British public could formulate their fragmentary theories about the position of colonial subjects in Imperial Britain. The "Member for India's" role as a spokesperson for the subcontinent raised questions about who could speak on behalf of colonial subjects, and how their desires could be interpreted to avoid rebellion.

Reserving a seat in the Commons to represent the Indian voice opened discussions about whether colonial dependencies should be allocated, or would agitate for, seats at Westminster.

By fixating on the question of the MP's otherness, newspapers were toying with nascent ideas about whether one day Indian subjects might hold an equal place in the Empire as subjects in the majority-white dominions. Naoroji's election did not provide the British public with clear answers for how the future of Empire would look, but it provided ordinary voters another contact zone where they could engage with imperial ideologies. Each exposure to the issues raised by Naoroji's campaign provoked Britons to challenge and reshape their ideas about colonial subjecthood, representation, and claims to the rights of imperial citizenship. The changing definitions of 'otherness' to fit political ideologies of Empire made it difficult, if not impossible, for colonial subjects to obtain the equal rights for which they vied under imperial citizenship. But, if Boris Johnson's cabinet is any indicator of the progress made towards greater representation of minorities in Parliament today, we have the "Grand Old Man of India" to thank for provoking these debates over a century ago.

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