



Swaraj: Dadabhai Naoroji and the Birth of Indian Nationalism *Panelist Transcript*

Moderator

- **Sven Beckert**, Laird Bell Professor of History, Harvard University

Panelists

- **Dinyar Patel**, Assistant Professor, S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research

In 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji declared swaraj, or Indian self-government, as the goal of the Indian National Congress. This talk examines how Naoroji developed the idea of swaraj during his five decades-long political and nationalist career, which evolved from contact with European liberalism and socialism and had a significant influence on the growth of global anti-colonialism and antiracism.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

Sanjay Kumar: Hello and welcome to today's seminar on Swaraj, Dadabhai Naoroji, and the Birth of Indian Nationalism. I'm Sanjay Kumar, the India Country Director of the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute at Harvard University.

The mission of the institute is to engage through interdisciplinary research to advance and deepen the understanding of critical issues relevant to South Asia and its relationship with the world. As part of this engagement, the Mittal Institute hosts a multitude of events covering topics in the Arts, Humanities, Science, Education, Business and more. We're so glad you joined us today and please consider joining us for our upcoming seminars.

A couple of housekeeping items for today, today's session will be recorded. During the Question and Answer session, you can submit questions directly to moderators via the Q&A function on Zoom. Due to the large number of attendees at today's seminar, we unfortunately will not be able to cover all questions. There will be a short survey automatically sent to you at the end of this session. We would request that you kindly fill this out.

Without further ado, I would like to introduce the moderator of today's session Professor Sven Beckert. Professor Beckert researches and teaches the history of the United States in the 19th Century, with a particular interest in the history of capitalism. He's co-chair in the Program of the Study of Capitalism at Harvard University, and co-chair of the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History.

Our speaker for today is Dinyar Patel, Assistant Professor at the Department of History at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research. He teaches courses on Modern South Asia, Indian Nationalist Movement, and the British Impact. In 2015, he received his PhD in History from Harvard University. His biography on Dadabhai Naoroji, *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism* was published by Harvard University Press in May 2020. He has received two Fulbright Fellowships, and a Fellowship from the national government for the humanities for his research. Thank you for being with us today Sven, and Dinyar. Over to you, sir.

Sven Beckert: Thank you so much Sanjay for this generous introduction. I am delighted to be here and I'm looking very much forward to our conversation Professor Patel about your recent book which I had read in an earlier version and I just reread it yesterday and I must say it is a beautifully written, and powerfully argued biography that touches upon many, many issues that are of relevance to understanding of the history of South Asia and India in the 19th and 20th Century. But I think it also touches upon issues that are quite important to the contemporary movement. I am very much looking forward to our conversation and before we start that, I would invite you to give us a short presentation on your work and on your recent book.

Dinyar Patel: Thank you. So, first of all, I would like to thank the South Asia Institute and of course Professor Beckert for letting me to have this talk. It's wonderful to give a talk to the Harvard community again and again thanks to everyone who has joined in today. I'll begin with a very short presentation as I mentioned, just on the book and Dadabhai Naoroji and his particular life.

This is the book, it's now available in the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom, and in India, it's out at least in Mumbai and it'll be out pretty much in the rest of the country by the 15th of July.

Naoroji was someone whose life span was 91 years, and out of those 91 years he was politically active for about five or six decades. And the central focus of his life was Indian poverty, discussing why India was so poor and what could be done in order to modify that poverty and make India self-sufficient. By the end of his life was as many of us know, his solution for Indian poverty was swaraj, idea of self-government. Naoroji himself came from quite a poor background. He grew up in relative poverty in colonial Bombay but he benefitted from public education. There was an experimented public education at the time in Bombay and he rose through the ranks and he really used education as kind of the focus for the rest of his life. He believed that he deserved to give something back to the general public for getting a free education and so he began his career as a professor. So, one of the interesting things that I found in the archives were actual test papers that Naoroji gave his students. He was a Mathematics professor, so for those of you who are more mathematically inclined, you can take a look at some of the test questions he gave his students well over 150 years ago and see if you can also crack the exams.

But there were two formative experiences that explained why particularly, aside from his own personal upbringing, he became interested in poverty in India, and one was his association with the Indian economy. He was involved in the Indian cotton trade, both in Bombay and in London and when he was involved in the cotton trade, the American civil war took place, and this of course affected the Indian economy tremendously. First, Indian experienced a cotton boom when supplies from the American South were cut off and after the end of the civil war, people like Naoroji himself got involved in a very deleterious way, even bankrupt. So, this is a moment when you really mostly understood how India was connected to the global political economy and on the heels of that movement you have terrible famines setting in to parts of India. By 1867 famine had stalked the part on eastern India, Orissa and as many as one in three residents of Orissa, one million people at this time died of famine, very quickly.

And these twin moments really started to convince Naoroji that something was wrong, fundamentally wrong with the economy in India and this began about 15 to 20 years of real, detailed economic work. When Naoroji took apart the economic data that existed in India, added his own inputs, critiqued and revised data and came up with evidence that India was perpetually on the verge of starvation. The reason why famines set in so quickly in the 19th Century India was because India was so poor that the average peasant was always living at the very verge of starvation. When something bad happened like lack of rainfall, other climatic conditions, you could explain famine very quickly. So, this was a very unpopular view that Naoroji was articulating at this point in time but as one that had great significance in terms of the development of the anti-colonial thought, not just in India but around the world. I mean, we see reverberations of this thought in the walks of people like Kwame Nkrumah who fought against colonial rule in places like Trinidad even people like Sukarno in Indonesia with concepts like the chain theory. And this also provided an important bridge for Naoroji's political work.

Beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, Naoroji begins to think of standing for the British parliament in order to influence politics in Great Britain, specifically in favor of reform in India that will help India to become a less of a poor place. So, from the 1880s onwards you see Naoroji give dozens if not hundreds of lectures around the country on the topic of poverty in India. And his focus was to try to convince the average Britain to be more sympathetic towards Indian political reform and eventually to elect him as a representative in parliament.

As you can imagine, he faced a great degree of opposition, I mean those, a great degree of racist opposition towards an Indian standing for parliament so much so that the Prime Minister of that time Lord Salisbury actually called him a black man undeserving of election to the British parliament and this in turn made Naoroji a kind of cultural product of his time. I mean you see on the slider a cartoon from the magazine Punch where Naoroji is parodied as Othello and Lord Salisbury as the Doge of Westminster. So, he really becomes a kind of a cultural figure in many ways because of the identity of his race and nevertheless wins. This so called black man incident where he is called out by the Prime Minister actually stows a lot of public sympathy towards him and Naoroji is elected to the House of Commons in 1892 as the first real Indian to be a member of parliament and here you have a cartoon down where Naoroji is standing as a colossus with one foot in India and one foot in England. He was only in parliament for about three years and these were not very fruitful years in parliament. I mean he spoke out quite forcefully at times against British rule but not everyone was listening.

Ultimately, he lost election in 1895 and he became terribly disillusioned at the prospects of gaining political reform in England through constitutional methods and particularly through lobbying the British public but instead of kind of shrink or adopt more revolutionary politics, you know, forsake constitutional methods, he kind of accelerated them and he reached out beyond the British public to many other components of society that were interested in Indian affairs and anti-colonialism in general. He reached out to socialists and here is

an image of Naoroji attending a socialist congress along with figures such as Henry Hyndman, Rosa Luxemburg, who's the only woman in that audience, Karl Kautsky, Jean Jaurès from France.

And he reached out as well to anti-colonialists in the United States through intermediaries, his ideas were transmitted to people like William Jennings Bryan, other anti-colonial figures. And at the very end of his life, he came up with this idea that only swaraj or Indian self-government should you know would be the way to alleviate Indian poverty, would be the only way to get rid of the drain of wealth. And so, you see, this is a cartoon that was published in 1906 of Naoroji dressed as a Hindu sadhu under the flag of self-government. So, Naoroji was really identified with the idea of swaraj at this time, nowadays we think of figures such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak or of course people like Gandhi when we think of the idea of swaraj but the first person really popularly associated with this idea and the goal of swaraj as being associated with the Indian National Congress was in fact Naoroji. With that I'll end my presentation and we can move on to questions and answers.

Sven Beckert: Thank you so much professor Patel. You know, the short presentation, even that short presentation shows us is that Naoroji was a key figure in Indian politics in the 19th and 20th century. He was also a key figure in the more global thinking about colonialism from the global south. He was also a key figure in thinking about the effects of capitalism on the development of global capitalist economy on the global south. So why is it that his students haven't written more about him earlier?

Dinyar Patel: For me at least that was a fortunate circumstance because, it was easy to write about him because very few people have written about him before. But I think there were a few reasons, at least in India he, as well as his entire generation, has been overshadowed by individuals from Gandhi and Nehru's generation, for obvious reasons. People like Gandhi and Nehru took the ideals that people like Naoroji developed and advanced them much further. It was only with people of Gandhi's generation that you start to talk about this idea of poorna swaraj or full swaraj.

Naoroji still was conceiving of the possibility of a self-governing India being within the bounds of the British empire and it took a long time for even people like Gandhi to break the notion. There's a certain factor of generational eclipse over there and then the idea of I think probably parallel paths in terms of economic pot. I mean a lot of the ideas Naoroji was thinking about in the 1860s and 1870s in London were being talked about by other figures as well. I mean most probably Marx, we have no evidence that Naoroji and Marx ever met one other but Marx most likely got whiff of Naoroji's ideas of drain of wealth through a common friend Henry Hyndman, who was the founder of the first socialist party in Great Britain and really the first person to really popularize Marx's ideas in Britain and the English language.

So, you know, if that actual physical meeting were to have taken place, we might know more about Naoroji just through the vehicle of Marx and Marx certainly talked a little about drain of wealth as later on as time went by. But the last factor which I'll explain as a possibility for why Naoroji is less known is, his published works and what he was saying in his letters were often times quite different. I mean, in his published works he oftentimes took quite a moderate line and if you read his actual letters, they show a figure that is much more radical.

I don't want to talk about Naoroji being radical in the same depth as Indian revolutionaries at the time, he certainly was not. But it definitely shows a man who is much more advanced than he's being given credit for and I think that's one reason why a lot of people tend to discount him because they always think of Naoroji as being quite a moderate, a loyalist political figure when in actuality, he was much more than that.

Sven Beckert: How come you rediscovered him, how come you decided to write a biography of him?

Dinyar Patel: I think a common factor in South Asian historiography has been kind of a reluctance to delve into both biography and to a lot of these kind of elite political figures from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. People who came from backgrounds that were oftentimes quite anglicized, people who spoke more often not in English. There has been a gap and people like Ramchandra Guha have talked about this gap and identified the fact that in comparison to other societies, India has really lacked a strong biographical tradition, still lack a good amount of biographies that are very important of historical figures people like Sardar Patel and other economical figures and political figures. You know, it presented itself as an opportunity for all of the focus in Indian history on economic work and understanding poverty, a lot of key thinkers behind —

Sven Beckert: Sorry, we lost you again.

Dinyar Patel: Can you hear me now? I'm terribly sorry about this. So, towards the end of his life he really was kind of caught in the middle between both a radical stream of thought and a moderate stream of thought. So, a lot of moderate politicians in India viewed him as being radical, whereas a lot of radical politicians viewed him

as being a moderate. And really, the figure who was quite in the middle of over here was Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the acknowledged leader of the radical camp of the at this point in time.

Tilak was the favorite of the radicals and he was someone who was promoted as being you know someone who'd be the president of the Congress in the 1906 session but

Sven Beckert: Dinyar?

Dinyar Patel: Can you hear me?

Sven Beckert: Yes!

Dinyar Patel: Okay, let's hope this stays for a bit longer this time. So, as I was saying with regard to Tilak, I mean he was regarded as the leader, at this point in time, of the radical camp but he himself bows out of the running of the 1906 Calcutta congress in favor of Naoroji and he really regards Naoroji's speech of

Dinyar Patel: Okay, I really apologize for this. It seems that all my internet connections have decided to cut out. So, anyway as I was saying over here in 1906 after Dadabhai Naoroji gives the speech where he declares that swaraj was the goal of the Congress, Tilak actually takes this as quite an inspiration message that he can give to the radical camp and eventually even people like Bipin Chandra Pal, who was a critic of Naoroji and someone who very forcefully spoke on behalf of the radical cause is won over by Naoroji's call for swaraj and says, this is what we need to actually walk towards.

Sven Beckert: Right, can I ask you, when you think about, I mean for a long time Naoroji seemed to think that the future of India is to remain part of the British empire, to take a different position within that empire but to remain part of that empire. Was that a tactical move of his or did he genuinely believe that there is a future for India within the British empire?

Dinyar Patel: I think it was a little approach. I mean for the vast majority of his life; Naoroji maintained his faith in something that he called British justice. He thought that there was this sense of justice that the British people had and eventually they would come to the conclusion that providing India with political rights was the sensible and right thing to do. Towards the end of his life he starts to lose some of this sentiment. It's very hard for him to get over this, I mean this is something he was reared in from the very beginning of his education in Bombay in British-run schools. But the significant thing of his last speech that he gives at the Calcutta Congress is that he says India should achieve something like swaraj as exists either in British colonies like Canada or Australia, where there was self-government within the British empire, or swaraj as a form of self-government as exists in Great Britain. So, in that case, you're talking about India as an autonomous nation potentially outside of any sort of imperial framework. So, at the very end of his political career, he has started to think outside of the boundaries of the empire itself.

Sven Beckert: Right. And his critique of British colonialism is obviously to large extent political but it's also as you pointed out in your introduction it's also very much economic, right. He develops this idea that Britain is draining resources from the Indian sub-continent and I just wonder if you can say a few words and this is obviously an idea that has been quite impactful not just to the Indian freedom struggle but it has also been impactful in a whole school of thinking about the modern world and about global capitalism. And, I wanted to ask you how did Naoroji develop these ideas, where did they come from, what other streams of thoughts did he connect to?

Dinyar Patel: I think the two important streams of thoughts to think about here is economic thought that was going on within India itself amongst Indian intellectuals and economic thoughts going on amongst anti-colonial figures in Great Britain or people who were critical of empire in Great Britain.

So, within India there definitely was a much longer tradition of understanding something like a drain of wealth. Naoroji himself notes that when he was in school in Bombay in the 1840s there were a group of Maharashtrian students who were just a little older than him who were talking about drain of wealth and poverty but not talking in terms of sophisticated economic theory, but just talking about the facts that were around.

There was common memory of more prosperous times and the general understanding that under British rule things have become much worse for the average India. So, there was that indigenous tradition in India of understanding that poverty has set in specifically with the collapse of the cotton textile industry and this was coupled again with the thought that Naoroji encountered both amongst British people who worked in India as well as British people in Great Britain who were campaigning against thoughts of imperial policy. So, when Naoroji goes to Great Britain and moves there in the 1850s and 1860s, he meets a lot of people who are very

critical of imperial polices and he works for them although a lot of people who were involved in British movements like abolition or the anti-colonial law leagues, these people were also dealing with ideas of what British rule should be like in India, specifically what was the relationship of British rulers vis a vis Indian rulers such as the princes and there was a general understanding again that British rule was distorted and it was based entirely upon trying to maximize wealth to be taken out of the country. So, Naoroji's significance in this regard was melting together to these two traditions.

Sven Beckert: Right, and how impactful was that set of ideas beyond India?

Dinyar Patel: So, it was first and foremost very significant in the dissemination of anti-colonial thought in Great Britain. You know, really within the sphere of Naoroji's orbit in London where he spent a good chunk of five decades of his life, he was talking with people in later generations of Indian nationalism, people like Ramesh Chandra Dutt, who wrote the multi volume economic history of India. He was familiar with socialist figures who were very critical of empire people like Henry Hyndman, and through people like Hyndman he branched out to other socialist figures in Europe and America. So, one of the most interesting figures that I encountered in this paper about whom we know very little was a man called George Freeman, and George Freeman was an Irishman who left Ireland and Great Britain in the 1880s and 1890s and settled in North America.

He eventually settled in New York, and he was very pro-Irish independence but also at the same time interested in what the British empire was doing to other parts of the colonized world and for that reason he facets upon India, and Naoroji and him engaged in about 5 or 6 years of correspondence. They never met another in person but they corresponded for a good long period of time where they exchanged ideas about what colonialism meant in India, Canada or other parts of the world that were going under colonial rule such as the Philippines or Puerto Rico or Cuba in the American imperial sphere and they came up with a lot of ideas that were very similar to kind of Marxist thought, the idea of capitalism being built upon racial and colonial differences. So, they anticipated a lot of these ideas that Marx had already come up with, but they weren't familiar with chapter and verse in terms of Marx's political writings.

Sven Beckert: Right, so you would say that Naoroji becomes part of a much larger conversation that comes out of the colonial world about the distributional effects of colonialism but also of the development of capitalism and the importance of this kind of connected diversity that increasingly made up global capitalism.

Dinyar Patel: Correct, yeah and in the Indian context this is especially significant because as you know, there's been a long kind of weariness of capitalism in India right. I mean leading up all the way through liberalization in 1991 and 1992 and a lot of that weariness of capitalism is rooted in this economic work from Naoroji's generation which pointed out that well ultimately capitalism was the operating principle upon which Indian impoverishment was based upon.

Sven Beckert: Right, that is very interesting and a lot more people said about that but I wanted to quickly move on to a related but different issue and that is obviously there are increasingly economic inequalities and there is in Naoroji's thought this idea of the drain of wealth from India into Europe but this is also a moment in which Europeans increasingly developed ideas of scientific racism in which they argued that they are not just richer but that they are also in some fundamental way different from people in other parts of the world. So, I wanted to ask you to tell us a little bit how Naoroji navigated this increasingly harsh and pseudo-scientific racism that comes about exactly the moment that he is most politically active.

Dinyar Patel: That's a particularly relevant question because as you may know in India there's been a lot of debate after Black Lives Matter about Gandhi in particular, was Gandhi a racist?

And you know, someone like Naoroji was similar to an early Gandhi in the sense that he had a general feeling of a certain brotherhood amongst humanity, a general feeling that color was not necessarily an important factor but nevertheless there was some relation. So, I mean unfortunately he did, at a point in time, subscribe to a common view amongst Indian nationalists of the time that Indians were more civilizationally developed than say Africans and therefore they deserved more rights from the British than say Africans living in the colonies of South Africa or East Africa. So that element of thought was there, but again as time moves on like Gandhi, he becomes much more progressive by the end of his life he is reaching out to Black activists from the West Indies as well as communicating with African Americans who are coming over to Great Britain in order to talk about lynching in the American South. There was a journalist called Ida Wells, who was one of the founders of NAACP, she was born into slavery and when she came to Great Britain in 1894 - 1895, Naoroji was one of the people who she met with and talked to and Naoroji helped establish an anti-lynching organization in Great Britain to protest against lynching in the American South. So, he was moving along with the spectrum where he was leaving behind his own possible moorings of scientific racism and embracing more of an egalitarian

humanitarianism but even at the earliest stages of his political career, he hit out very very strongly against racism towards India.

Sven Beckert: Can you say a few more words about his engaging British racism against Indians?

Dinyar Patel: Sorry could you repeat that again?

Sven Beckert: Can you say few more words about Naoroji engaging British racism against Indians?

Dinyar Patel: Sure, so you know perhaps the best example took place when the Prime Minister of Great Britain called him a Black man undeserving of the vote. And what Naoroji tried to do was say, look color is not the important power over here it's not the important factor upon which to work and in fact an Indian could be as qualified for holding a political office so subscribing to a particular credentials as a Brit. And, to their credit a lot of British people denounced Salisbury, so kind of like now, where you have political leaders who go a step than what is publicly acceptable, I won't mention those political leaders by name but I think we all know who they are and promoted backlash. In many ways Salisbury did the same thing in the 1890s, he got enough British people ashamed about racism and got them to introspect helped and that I think helped not just Indian nationalism but also in general anti-colonialism.

Sven Beckert: Right, I mean one of the most moving parts in your book I think is his ability to reach out to Irish nationalists and also his connection to the British working class. And, in some ways I think there Naoroji is superbly relevant to the contemporary movement, not just in India but globally. Because, on the one hand, he fits the contemporary movement in that he is a budding nationalist, he eventually wants to build an Indian nation but he's also cosmopolitan. He sees there are a lot of commonalities between the Irish struggle, and the Indian struggle, between the South African struggle and Indian struggle. So, I wanted to, in conclusion, before we move open up to the many, many questions we already have, I just wanted you to speak for a minute or two on, can we see him as a cosmopolitan nationalist and is that a model that is somehow relevant for the contemporary movement.

Dinyar Patel: Absolutely, one of the ideas that really came to me as I was writing this book and I am going to explore it a bit more in my second book is Indian nationalism had very cosmopolitan moorings. I mean just on the fact that it grew up both in India and Great Britain, it already was exposed to an international environment and through the British connection India automatically grew very interested in what the experiences were like of other colonized people living under the British flag. So, people like Naoroji very naturally gravitated towards the Irish because they saw the Irish as being similarly round down by poverty under the British rule, they saw the Irish fighting for their political rights. Many Indians thought that the Irish were too radical, people like Naoroji tended to disagree but for this reason there was a kind of a feeling of brotherhood amongst other people who were fighting emancipatory political struggles and this is really the reason why people like Naoroji but also later figures people like.

Sven Beckert: That included the British working class, right? That included labor in Britain.

Dinyar Patel: Exactly. That's why people like Naoroji and others like DK Krishna Menon aligned themselves with the British working class, they fought on behalf of labor and union rights and also female suffrage. Naoroji was one of the most vocal proponents of female suffrage in 1880s and 1890s in Great Britain so you have an Indian being identified by female suffragists as being one of their one of the most vocal supporters, which is quite an incredible circumstance at this moment.

Sven Beckert: Can this cosmopolitan nationalism be a model for today, is that relevant to today?

Dinyar Patel: Absolutely, I think it's particularly relevant in a place like India. There's a huge liberal political tradition here in India, which unfortunately has come under assault in the past few years and as we try to discuss how we go forward we need to unearth more of this liberal political tradition and discover how it really benefited in the formation of India being an independent democratic nation state. A lot of the aspects of India that we value and treasure the most really had the roots in this liberal nationalist generation from the 1880s onward.

Sven Beckert: Right, so your book is not just an intervention in reinterpreting Indian history of the 19th century, reinterpreting the Indian freedom struggle, but also in a way an intervention into current debates?

Dinyar Patel: Right, to a degree. And the next book that I am going to be writing is much more in this phase of liberal nationalism and that will be a direct intervention, talking about how Indians came up with their own ideas of freedom of the press, representative government, the ideas of judicial reform, police reform. And these

are all really relevant questions in the modern day as many of these freedoms and these ideas come under attack.

Sven Beckert: Okay, that is wonderful I think we need to now open it up to the audience and we have received already a lot of interesting questions and what we are going to do is, I am going to read each of these questions and I'll give you a chance to respond and I think we'll might be able to get through five of these questions. Unfortunately, I don't have the names of these people who asked these questions but let me just read the first one, okay?

So, the question is how we interpret terms like nationalism and swaraj in today's India where some of these terms are being misappropriated to imply a certain extremism. What did nationalism mean to Naoroji versus what it has come to imply now in political culture. So, this is actually directly related to the discussion we just had.

Dinyar Patel: That's a great question. I mean, there's always been this kind of duality of meaning of the world nationalism, but the way nationalism was understood by people like Naoroji, or even later on by people like Gandhi and Nehru, is it wasn't exclusive. It was the goal of building an independent or self-governing nation but with a sense of solidarity with other people who are also struggling for their own rights, which is the reason why. Again, Indian nationalism always contains a very international focus. I mean in 1946, just right before Indian independence, Indian nationalists talking about colonialism in Indonesia, one of the first thing the Indian government does once independence takes place is protest against continuing colonialism in places like Indonesia or Vietnam. So, that's radically different from what you have today, where you have a very exclusivist form of nationalism that's talking about only one particular definition of who an Indian can be.

For Indian nationalists of the earlier period, anyone could really be a nationalist as long as you believed in the ideals of self-governance, which is why Indian nationalism embraced so many non-Indians. I mean the founder of Congress itself was a Scotsman, Alan Octavian Hume. Some of the most important nationalist leaders were people like, an Irishman Annie Besant, or Americans or Britons, who came over to India and tried to help out, people like Charlie Andrews, who was one of Gandhi's great friends. So, Indian nationalism always had kind of international and worldly mooring, that's very different from the kind of nationalism that is being talked about today, not just in India but as we know in America, in Brazil, or other places around the world.

Sven Beckert: This is a really global moment; I mean as you say India is not that different from other parts of the world. And maybe that's one of the reasons that makes your book so incredibly relevant to the contemporary movement as well. The next question is a more technical one for the historians amongst us, namely the question is could you expand upon the archival materials that you consulted for the book, such as the National Archives of India.

Dinyar Patel: Right, so Naoroji is unique in the sense that a good chunk of his papers survived. In India a lot of our most important political figures unfortunately don't have much which a historian can work with, a lot of the papers have been lost over the years. Naoroji's collection is around 30,000 documents in size. So, it's quite large, it's not in terribly good condition and that's not entirely the fault of the National Archives of India because those papers suffered a lot of wear and tear before they were deposited there, but it's difficult to work with. And this is a problem that every historian in India has to face, dealing with materials that is oftentimes very damaged or not very well catalogued or incomplete. One of the challenges for archival research for Naoroji was that a lot of the letters that he himself wrote either are damaged or no longer exist. So, I had to kind of reconstruct Naoroji's life with the letters that he mostly received. I had to use other people's letters to kind of reconstruct what Naoroji was saying to them. Those letters by and large don't exist anymore, but that situation is fantastic in comparison to what the situation is like for other people.

To give you an example, a very important nationalist from Naoroji's generation was a Bengali called Surendranath Bannerjee, none of his papers seemed to survive. So, we really have nothing with which to work on him aside from his publications and random letters that are in collections of other people that did survive.

Sven Beckert: Right, how long did it take you to do this research?

Dinyar Patel: Quite a long time. I mean it took me about two years to go through about half of the collection. And then I spent a few more months in places like Great Britain, or Ireland or other libraries across India looking for other supplementary material. So, all in all, it took about two and a half years to do the research.

Sven Beckert: So, another question is very different. Can you address the influence of Naoroji on Gandhi?

Dinyar Patel: Sure, Gandhi's primary mentor from this period of time was Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who was another early nationalist leader who was in turn influenced by MG Ranade, who was Naoroji's contemporary. But Naoroji also was a mentor-like figure, not to the same degree as Gokhale but he definitely played a role. The most important role that Naoroji played in Gandhi's career was taking Gandhi's early political work in South Africa and broadcasting it to an audience in Great Britain. Because when Gandhi starts out his political work in South Africa around 1892, 1893, 1894, very few people are listening. He's a young, relatively inexperienced lawyer, so he reaches out to Naoroji and there's a chance that the two might have met one another when Gandhi was studying in Great Britain in the late 1880s, early 1890s, we don't know for sure. But Gandhi knew that Naoroji was identified as the leader of nationalist politics at this time, so he wrote to Naoroji and said can you give me advise? And what Naoroji did for the next several years is that whatever letters Gandhi sent to Naoroji, Naoroji in turn forwarded them to the imperial officials working at the colonial office or members of parliament, or even members of the government when the liberal party was there and was in power at the time, and said you guys need to do something about this because Indians are being discriminated against in a British colonial colony.

So, he was one of the first people to put pressure on the imperial government to do something to remedy racist policies in South Africa.

Sven Beckert: Right, so you would say Naoroji was an important influence on Gandhi?

Dinyar Patel: Yes. In terms of ideas also, for the first two decades of Gandhi's life, Gandhi embraces the similar ideals of kind of constitutional nationalism, gradual political development through specifically legal and constitutional means. He only starts breaking with these ideas around 1908-1909 when he goes to prison. So, these ideas really influenced Gandhi's early political thought and not just then, even later on, once Gandhi had moved into a territory where he's willing to confront British rules with non-constitutional means.

Sven Beckert: Right. Okay, the next question is rather critical, so be prepared. The question is if you could explain your approach towards writing of history or placing Naoroji within a broader historical context, does this book signal a return to great man of history narrative style and historical message? Is that an impact to what we have accomplished in writing history from the bottom up?

Dinyar Patel: Right. That's a great question and that's an extremely valid criticism. What I've tried to do in this book is not just write about Naoroji himself but the people around him. The thing is people weren't just other nationalists, oftentimes they were say, Indian students in Great Britain, the particular individuals who are helping him collect economic data. So, in that case people who are working on farms or people he encountered in tours on countryside in India or people he was communicating to around the world whether they were members of the Indian diaspora or other people involved in the anti-colonial struggle. So, I agree entirely that the great man theory is very problematic but there were certain people I think who nevertheless deserve study because their ideas were significant and they influenced certain historical grates, but I think the west way to go about that is again not just focussed on the man or the woman himself or herself but to talk about the wider circle and network of people which they worked with because you know, again Naoroji did not work in a vacuum, his ideas were influenced by a large segment of society and he in turn influenced a forthcoming generation of nationalists leaders in their own part in political perspectives.

Sven Beckert: Right, and to be fair, in your book you don't just talked about Naoroji, but I remember you writing about these moments where he returns from England to Bombay and he is greeted by tens of thousands of people in the streets. So, you do situate him in the Indian society more broadly, right?

Dinyar Patel: Right, right, right.

Sven Beckert: Okay, the next question is about capitalism again, in that the question here is how would you place Naoroji's thoughts vis a vis capitalism? Was he an anti-capitalist or was he proponent of independent capitalist development? Okay, so that's really interesting, was he against capitalism as such or was he just looking for a different kind of capitalism under Indian auspices.

Dinyar Patel: Right. Again, his views evolved quite a bit overtime. In the 1860s, when he begins his first economic work, he's in favor of more British capitalist investment in India. He thinks that's the best way to get India to be richer, to bring capital that doesn't really exist in India from Great Britain and invest in India and that would be how India would get to be a richer country through investments and infrastructure and such. Within 10 or 20 years, he completely abandons these ideas because he realizes that any capital invested from Great Britain would oftentimes be siphoned out of the country through exorbitant interest rates and any profits will cycle back to those very same British investors. By the end of his life, he himself was saying there was something fundamentally wrong with capitalism itself. He took the idea of free trade, like other individuals like

Ranade said this is not exactly free trade, I mean free trade itself is not free, it's based on certain preferences that were given to British importers and exporters and certain penalties that were given to Indians who were either supplying raw materials or who were the buyers.

So, by the end of his political career, he really is evolving as a socialist leader. He's talking about state support for development but that required things like tariffs, it required protection. It required a great deal of state and investment in order for it to be viable.

Sven Beckert: Right, and I actually now have the name of the person who asked the question, Prabhu Ayan, thank you so much for this really important and insightful question. And let's move on now to Hasan, who's asking the extremists overshadowed the moderates and nationalists, is it what shapes our current political discourse too? The period 1920-1930 Tokyo and world history is often taken into consideration with respect to certain narratives of nationalism.

Dinyar Patel: Right. Early nationalism is definitely often overshadowed, you're right, at least among scholarship, academic scholarship there's a lot of scholarship on the radicals, right? People who came after the moderates and who are also challenging Gandhi. So you're right there is a great degree of overshadowing but what I think is very important to keep in mind is that all of these groups whether you are a moderate or radical or a Gandhian, they were not ready to cooperate in isolation, they were all talking to one another and often people moved between camps. So, to give you an example someone like Lala Lajpat Rai or Madan Malviya, these were the individuals who moved between moderate and extremist camps and eventually Gandhian camps. They played a role in each of these camps and they brought ideas to each of these particular streams. Radicals and moderates were working together and talking to each other for a good chunk of time in the very early 1900, I mean otherwise the Congress would have completely imploded. I mean it came very close to imploding in 1907 but there is resolution by you know 19 Jan in 1915. So, you know, one of the problems with this whole process of overshadowing is the very issues of categorization themselves, these categories overlapped with each other to a much larger degree than we believe nowadays.

Sven Beckert: And this actually relates directly to the next question which unfortunately also will have to be the last question we can discuss here by Amaya, and the question is, could you expand on the relation of Naoroji with latest stalwarts like Gokhale and Gangadhar Tilak?

Dinyar Patel: Right. So, Gandhi was very much kind of a mentor like figure to people like Ghokhale. Ghokhale was a young member of the Congress in the early 1890 and Naoroji along with Ranade take him under his wing and whenever Gokhale came to the United Kingdom in order to give evidence or campaign along with Naoroji for Indian political rights, Naoroji would work very closely with Gokhale. And, the one thing Naoroji tried to do was make Ghokhle more radical specially on the issue of self-government. Gokhle was the president of Congress in 1905, one year before Naoroji was president at the Calcutta Congress.

Ghokhle kind of tip toes around the issue of self-government for India, he does not really say specifically that India should get self-government, and this should be the goal of the Congress. Naoroji really tries to make Ghokhle a vocal proponent of this idea, so much so that in 1906 when Naoroji is too old to give his final presidential speech to the Congress, he makes Ghokhle read it. So, he literally puts his words in Ghokhle's mouth about self-government. Tilak again was someone who regarded Naoroji as a political senior, he obviously disagreed to a great degree on Naoroji's ideas but there was a definite sense of respect between the two men. I mean if you look at the few letters which exist between the two men its cultured with a great degree of respect, there is no antagonism there, and Tilak even you know referred to Naoroji as being his guru, his nationalist guru.

Sven Beckert: Thank you so much Professor Patel. Unfortunately, we will have come to an end now. Thank you so much to the audience for being here with us. This was a terrific discussion, obviously much more could be said about these topics.

I think the book, which I have here which I very much recommend you all to purchase, is important because it does throw a different light on the history of Indian nationalism, it does throw light on to early debate on the global history of capitalism but I think the book is also particularly relevant to contemporary moment. I think there are some lessons in that book about how to navigate the global economy and also global politics and the question of nationalism in today's world. So, I very much recommend you read this book but I also recommend you to read this book because it's beautifully written and it's a joy to read. So, thank you so much Professor Patel and thank you so much to all of you for being present and I hope you are going to be able to join the next meeting of the Mittal Institute. Goodbye.