

Dinshaw Edulji Wacha

(1844-1936)

President - Calcutta, 1901



Dinshaw Edulji Wacha was born in Bombay on August 2, 1844 in a middle class Parsi family. He worked in close association with Dadabhai Naoroji and Pheroza Shah Mehta in the Congress and was active in both social reform and educational fields and in political activities. He took a keen and active interest in the Bombay Municipality, being its member for forty years. He was a founder - member of the Indian National Congress, functioned as its Secretary for several years and was elected its President in 1901. He was the Secretary of the Bombay Presidency Association for thirty years (1885-1915) before he became its President (1915-18).

Early in life he displayed his grasp of public finance and economic issues. Just as he ranks with Pheroza Shah Mehta as the maker of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, so also does he rank with Gopal Krishna Gokhale as the custodian and watchdog of the country's finance. Moderate though he was, he greatly embarrassed the Government by his trenchant criticism of its economic and financial policies. In 1897 he gave "correct and adequate expression" to the national view before the Welby Commission in London, pointing out that the financial embarrassment of the Government of India was caused not by the falling rupee exchange but by the reckless increase in military and civil expenditure.

The positions he held were many and various. He was Knighted in 1917. He was a prolific writer and was foremost educating the people and creating an enlightened public opinion on the political and economic issues that faced the country. His pen was powerful, often trenchant. No economic irregularity, no misuse of finance escaped his hawk - like eye even at an advanced age. He condemned the "homoeopathic dose of Indian participation in legislation provided by the Morley - Minto and Montford Reforms.

A great nationalist economic critic and financial wizard, he was modest, unassuming and unostentatious throughout his long life.

- A.J. Dastur

Leaving aside all other countries, let us take the case of England alone. How is it that there at least for half-a-century past there is no such calamity as famine, though the country depends for two-thirds of its food - supply on foreign nations? Is it not the case that it is the vast and most satisfactory improvement in the economic condition of the English labourer and artisan which has banished the sufferings? There might have been any quantity of food - supply from foreign parts; but so long as there was the lack of the necessary means to buy that supply, the

food for all intents and purposes might as well be at the bottom of the sea. Now the one phenomenon, above all others, which was discerned on the surface in India in reference to the last famine, was the almost total disability of the masses.

From the Presidential Address - Sir D. E. Wacha
I.N.C. Session, 1901, Calcutta

Courtesy : Mehernosh Fitter