



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Evaluate how the emergence of economic nationalism laid the intellectual foundation for political nationalism in India. (150 words)

28 Jul, 2025    GS Paper 1 History

### Approach:

- Briefly define economic nationalism and political nationalism.
- Discuss the key features of economic nationalism.
- Explain that economic nationalism intellectually prepared the ground for political nationalism.
- Conclude with a scholarly remark.

### Introduction:

Economic nationalism refers to the **ideological and intellectual resistance against the colonial economic policies** of the British Raj that led to exploitation, poverty, and underdevelopment in India. The rise of economic nationalism during the late 19th century laid a **critical foundation for political nationalism**, as it exposed the exploitative nature of colonial rule and mobilized public opinion towards the demand for self-governance.

### Body:

#### Key Features of Economic Nationalism

- **Early Nationalist Leadership:**
  - Pioneered by moderate leaders such as **Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and R.C. Dutt**, economic nationalism emerged through well-reasoned critiques of British economic policies.
- **Focus on Drain Theory:**
  - **Dadabhai Naoroji's 'Drain Theory'** (highlighted in his book *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*) argued that Britain was draining India's wealth without any fair return.
- **Protection of Indigenous Industry:**
  - Leaders criticized the **unfair tariff structure**, which promoted British goods at the cost of Indian handicrafts.
  - They called for **protective tariffs, promotion of Swadeshi goods**, and state support for Indian entrepreneurs.
- **Demand for Fiscal Autonomy:**
  - Gokhale and others emphasized Indian control over revenue, expenditure, and economic policymaking.
  - They opposed excessive military expenditure and the use of Indian revenue for British imperial interests.

#### Transition from Economic to Political Nationalism

- **Exposure of Colonial Economic Intent:**

- Economic critiques highlighted the **inherent conflict between Indian welfare and British interests**.
- The realization grew that economic relief was **impossible without political freedom**.
- **Growth of Political Movements:**
  - The **Swadeshi Movement (1905)**, initially an economic boycott of British goods after the Bengal partition, evolved into a mass political movement demanding Swaraj (self-rule).
  - Economic slogans like "**Boycott British goods**" became tools of mass mobilization and political assertion.
- **Demands for Administrative and Constitutional Reforms:**
  - Nationalists demanded the **Indianisation of the civil services**, asserting that only Indians would **prioritize national interest**.
  - This was coupled with demands for constitutional reforms, including **greater Indian participation in legislatures**, control over budgets, and **responsible government**.
  - Movements like the Home Rule League (1916) and the **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms** debate further reflected the growing demand for **institutional political change** driven by **underlying economic dissatisfaction**.

## Conclusion:

Thus, historian **Bipan Chandra** rightly underscores that "the entire critique of colonialism found its focal point in the ***Drain of Wealth theory***," and that this "understanding of the **complex economic mechanisms** of modern imperialism" laid the **intellectual foundation** for both anti-colonial and subsequently **anti-imperialist politics** in India.

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/mains-practice-question/question-8902/pnt>