Darashaw Nosherwan Wadia was a pioneering Indian geologist whose work laid the foundation for geological investigations in India. His major observations and interpretations in the early days of Indian geology still hold good.

Wadia was born on October 23, 1883 at Surat. He came from the same family as Ardaseer Cursetjee - the naval architect and the first Indian to be elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS). Wadia’s father was a station master posted to a small railway station. As there were no good schools there, Wadia stayed with his grandmother and studied in Surat. Initially he went to a Gujarati school and later to the Sir J. J. English School. When he was 11 years old his family shifted to Baroda where he imbibed a rational outlook and a strong love for science from his elder brother.

In 1903 Wadia obtained a BSc degree in Zoology and Botany. He completed his MSc degree in Biology and Geology in 1906. At the Baroda College, Wadia’s interest in geology was aroused by his teacher A. M. Masani - a keen naturalist and Professor of Natural history. The geological specimens kept in the Museum of Arts and Science at Baroda greatly helped Wadia to pursue his geological studies.

In 1907 Wadia joined the Prince of Wales College in Jammu as a Professor of Geology where he served for 14 years. Later it was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi College and is now affiliated to the Jammu University. Besides geology, Wadia also taught English, a testimony of his command over the language. During his Jammu stay Wadia spent his vacations trekking the Himalayas and familiarized himself with its geology. He collected minerals, rocks and fossils which he used extensively to make the teaching of geology interesting.

He took students on adventure treks and investigative field trips in the Siwalik Hills of the Jammu region. His keen eye for observations helped him identify many significant artefacts. It was in one of these trips that he discovered a 3 metre long fossil tusk of an elephantine mammal Stegodon ganesa, a finding of crucial importance. He climbed peak after peak in the Himalayas to better understand its geology and structure. Wadia explained the abnormal sequence of rock formations of varied ages in the North-Western Himalayas and also the unique knee-bend of the mountain chains around the Nanga Parbat. Deeply devoted to the study of the Himalayas he was responsible for the establishment of the Institute of Himalayan Geology in Dehradun and became
Wadia was extremely energetic and hardworking and lived a simple life. In 1945 Wadia was appointed the Geological Advisor to the national government of Jawaharlal Nehru. He initiated and formulated a mineral policy for the country. In 1963 the Government of India made him the first National Professor in geology. The government of India honoured him with the award of Padma Bhushan (1958). In 1957 Wadia was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London. He was showered with numerous national and international awards and honorary doctorates from various universities.

Wadia wrote some amazing popular science essays – The Story of a Stone being a classic. In it he succeeds in giving us several fundamental lessons in geology, all the while keeping us absorbed in its autobiography. After reading it one feels there are true sermons in stones. The doyen of Indian geology died on June 15, 1969 at the age of 86.