



DADYSETH, DADIBHAI NOSHIRWANJI

DADYSETH, Dadibhai Noshirwanji (1734-99), a distinguished Parsi philanthropist. His given name was Dadi, -bhai being a courtesy addition, Seth a later honorific. He came to be known popularly as the “Great Dadyseth” (Gujarati *Mōtā Dādīšēth*; Paymaster, p. 6), and his descendants adopted Dadyseth as the family surname.

His grandfather, Homji Behramji, moved to Bombay in 1689 from a village near Surat. His father became a freight broker and, as was usual then in Parsi lay families, gave his son little formal education, training him instead in his own line of business. Dadibhai soon raised himself to be a wealthy merchant, with his own fleet of five large vessels. He traded extensively with Europe, Bengal, and China, dealing principally in cotton, and was the first Indian to build a screw for pressing cotton into bales. “He was a man of great simplicity of character, remarkable good nature, and unbounded benevolence” (Karakā, II, p. 77). His philanthropy extended beyond his own community, and during the great famine in Gujarat in 1790-91, which drove many to seek relief in Bombay, he with two other Parsi merchants provided all the Parsis among them with food and clothing for ten months and at the same time cared for 2,000 Hindus and Muslims (Paymaster, pp. 51-52).

As a member of the [Bombay Parsi Panchayat](#) Dadyseth was active in the general affairs of his own community. He also made several important



religious benefactions. In 1771 he founded the [Dadyseth Agiary](#). Eight years later Mulla Kaus persuaded him to join the Kadmi movement (started in Surat in 1746) and in due course to found and endow the [Dadyseth Ātaš Bahrām](#) to serve the Kadmis in Bombay. (The Kadmis adopted a number of Irani Zoroastrian observances, believing these to be more ancient, *qadīm*, than slightly differing Parsi ones.) In 1796 Dadyseth founded a “Zend Madressa” in the Fort area of the city to give religious instruction to Kadmi children, which it continued to do until 1830 (Paymaster, p. 54). In 1798, when contention between the Shenshahis (the majority of traditionalist Parsis) and Kadmis was at its height, he had a *daḳma* (see [corpse](#)) with fifty-seven *pāvis* (recesses) built for himself and his family at the foot of Malabar Hill, where the Shenshahi Parsis had their funerary towers. The body of Mulla Feroze was also placed in this tower in 1830. Dadyseth further gave land free of cost to Hindus for building temples and rest houses. In his will he left individual legacies to his twelve faithful black servants and concluded with this characteristic advice to his son: “if anyone did you harm, you should repay evil with good” (Karaka, II, p. 77).

His son Ardashir continued in his ways and during the great famine of 1805-06 for several months fed 4,000-5,000 people daily. In 1803 he refounded the Dadyseth Agiary and in 1808 built a fire temple (see [dar-e mehr](#)) at the village of Mobāraka near Yazd (Karaka, II, p. 76), the Kadmis having especial links with Persia.

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