



JEJEEBHOY, JAMSETJEE

JEJEEBHOY, Sir **JAMSETJEE** (b. Bombay, 15 July 1783; d. Bombay, 14 April 1859; [FIGURE 1](#)), Parsi businessman and philanthropist. Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy received a knighthood in 1842 and a hereditary baronetcy in 1857; both honors were the first of their kind bestowed upon a British subject in India by Queen Victoria.

There was some uncertainty among Jejeebhoy's biographers regarding the exact place of his birth, with proponents of both Navsari and Bombay. Contemporary documents and general consensus today is that he was born in Bombay on 15 July 1783 (*Bombay Government Gazette Supplement*, 11 and 21 April 1836, cf. Mody, 1959, pp. 159-63). Named Jamshed by his father and mother, Merwanjee Maneckjee Jejeebhoy and Jeevibai Cowassjee, Jejeebhoy grew up in Navsari from the age of five to sixteen. Following the death of both his parents in 1799, Jejeebhoy settled permanently in Bombay and was looked after and apprenticed for three years under his maternal uncle Framjee Nusserwanjee Battliwala, later to be also his father-in-law, when on 1 March 1803 Jejeebhoy married Framjee Nusserwanjee's daughter, Avabai (d. 1870). They had three sons (Cursetjee, Rustomjee and Sorabjee) and a daughter (Pirojbai) together.

Jejeebhoy's first business venture was to collect and sell empty bottles, which earned him the appellation of *Battliwala* or 'dealer in bottles.' Having entered the more religiously and linguistically diverse business world of Bombay, he changed his name from Jamshed to the more common Jamsetjee.



Jejeebhoy was a product of the age of partnership and commercial collaboration begun with the introduction of European imperialism in Asia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Jejeebhoy's business dealings was in large-volume trade, and by 1814 he had accumulated enough wealth as a merchant to purchase his first ship, the *Good Success*; he would soon add six more as well as charter other ships (Bulley, 2000, pp. 162-65). Jejeebhoy also formed diverse social contacts with Indians of various communities and Europeans. In 1818 the firm of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy & Co. was formed with the Jain Motichund Amichund and the Konkani Mahomed Ali Rogay as Jejeebhoy's business associates, later to also be joined by the Catholic Goan Rogeria de Faria. By 1836 Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy & Co. had expanded enough to also require the assistance of Jejeebhoy's sons (Mody, pp. 32-34; Natesan, 1930, pp. 7-8; Ramsay, 1855, p. 8; Siddiqi, 1982, pp. 301-24). Jejeebhoy and associates established a network of trade that supplied resources, particularly cotton and, at its height, opium, for export outside India. Part of Jejeebhoy's initial wealth was made in the cotton trade between India and Great Britain during the Napoleonic Wars. The consignment of Indian opium to East Asia constituted Jejeebhoy's major business enterprise and was responsible for a substantial portion of his wealth (Greenberg, 1951, pp. 150-51; Siddiqi, pp. 301-24). Jejeebhoy emerged as the most prominent Indian merchant dealing with China in the first half of the 19th century, making five trips to China between 1799 (when he was only sixteen) and 1807, and he had contacts with the major Chinese, British, and American traders and commercial houses. Jejeebhoy's most famous business association was with Jardine Matheson & Co. of Canton; Jejeebhoy and William Jardine also established an abiding friendship over the years (Karaka, 1884, I, pp. 79-88).

Jejeebhoy utilized his wealth and contacts to become one of the most influential and well-known Indians in Bombay. In 1823 he became a member of the Parsi Panchayat or internal government of the Parsi community of Bombay. He was also recognized as the chief representative of the Indian community of Bombay by the British imperial authorities. His standing in Bombay was further exemplified when in 1843 he became the only Indian director of the Bombay Bank (E. J. Rapson, 2004).

Philanthropic work. While Jejeebhoy's business acumen is evident as a largely self-made man, it was for his philanthropy that he garnered his reputation. He never forgot the relative poverty from which he had emerged, and when he became one of Bombay and western India's principal philanthropists, he used



his wealth not only to help his own community, but in generous donations to help other parts of India through the establishment of schools, hospitals, and relief charities, as well as public works such as the building of causeways and bridges (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911, XV, p. 300). Upon his death, the *Bombay Times* of 16 April 1859 noted that: “To write a history of Sir Jamsetjee’s benefactions would be to write a book, and not the obituary notice of a journal.”

The first record of Jejeebhoy’s public charity dates back to 1822 with his payment of the sum of Rs. 3,040 to clear the debts of the poor in civil jail (Nazir, 1866, p. 31). Among the Parsis, charity was a vital provision for community life. Charity to the larger community also functioned to accommodate the Parsis to their social milieu. Jejeebhoy was notable for his conspicuous charity and desire to promote public charity in cooperation with the British. Jejeebhoy applied the lessons of his successful business activities to the establishment of his charities. The profitable business atmosphere had translated into socio-political collaboration between Indians and the British in Bombay, which Jejeebhoy effectively utilized for the benefit of his charitable projects and his personal elevation in colonial society. Jejeebhoy aimed to involve the British in large charitable schemes or to act as trustee by co-financing large-scale charity alongside the British. Jejeebhoy’s largest charitable projects: the Parsi Benevolent Institution (1849) at a cost of Rs. 440,000, the J. J. Hospital (1850) at a cost of Rs. 200,000, and the J. J. School of Art (1857) at a cost of Rs. 100,000 promoted British-Indian cooperation in major charitable enterprises. The Benevolent Institution was the first indigenous educational institution in Western India, educating thousands of students and the foundations of a revised Panchayat. The J. J. Hospital brought public and private interests together for the first time in the cause of public health care in Bombay, while the School of Art made Asia a center of design (Palsetia, 2005, pp. 197-217; Wadia, 1950, pp. 80-85, 165-208).

Jejeebhoy’s charitable projects and his loyalty to the British garnered him honors and public acclaim. In 1842 Jejeebhoy was to become the first Indian to receive a knighthood from Queen Victoria. In 1857 the Jejeebhoy family’s secret efforts over many years to obtain a hereditary title were also realized when Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy was granted a hereditary baronetcy, becoming first baronet. A sum of 250,000 Pounds Sterling was reserved for the maintenance of the baronetcy (Palsetia, 2003, pp. 55-75), and upon Jejeebhoy’s death in 1859, his title passed on to his eldest son, Cursetjee, who took the name of Sir



Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy as second baronet. When Cursetjee died in 1877, his eldest son, Maneckjee, became Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, third baronet. They both continued the first Sir Jamsetjee's philanthropic ways and close relations with the British. Jejeebhoy's wife and three sons were all also dedicated philanthropists, while his daughter, Pirojbai, was noteworthy as one of the first Parsi females to receive a formal education (Wadia, pp. 105-35).

Jejeebhoy's charity, honors, and public accolades made him the most famous Parsi of his time and perhaps the first famous non-European colonial subject. In 1859 the citizens of Bombay honored Jejeebhoy with the erection of a marble statue designed by Baron Marochetti and housed in the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society. Funds were collected from around the empire to the sum of Rs. 46,340, and the statue was the first major public tribute of its kind to an Indian in Bombay. Reporting on the fundraising efforts to erect the statue, the British editor of the *Bombay Times* of 6 September 1856 appreciated the historical significance of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy: "There is something more remarkable in such liberality than its munificence. It is of the most enlightened character, and places this Parsee knight not merely among the foremost men in India, but among the best of the British Empire. His abounding charity proves how truly he appreciates every element of civilization, and how keenly alive he is to the usefulness of schemes which have scarcely as yet been developed among ourselves." Other statues of Jejeebhoy were later created from the marble template, including a bronze statue at Kemp's Corner in Bombay, and another at the Parsi Panchayat Headquarters (J. J. Fort School).

At the time of his death the total value of his charities was noted to be Rs. 2,459,736 (more than 245,000 Pounds Sterling). The will and codicil of Jejeebhoy had in addition valued the property, personal and real, bequeathed to his family and friends at just under Rs. 8,500,000 or in excess of 750,000 Pounds Sterling (Mody, pp. 172-75; Palsetia, 2003, pp. 55-75).

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