

# Nowrosji Jehangir Gamadia

1845 - 1916

Mumbai Legacy Project  
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Few precincts possess distinct identities, and Gamadia House at Mahalaxmi is one such establishment. This mansion, once home to a leading member of the Parsi Community, Nowrosji Jehangir Gamadia, is a testament to a man who was a consummate businessman, a successful industrialist, a trader, and a prominent property owner in Bombay. He was simple, down-to-earth, religious, and frugal.

Born on 7th February 1845, Nowrosji Gamadia, along with his family, resided in the ancestral family seat Behramji Mansion, located on P.M. Road in Fort. In 1906, the family moved to Gamadia House, which would become the enduring seat of the Gamadia family. Situated on a 6-acre plot, Gamadia House occupied the space where Heera Panna stands today. This venerable bungalow, covering 30,000 sq. ft, was not only a residence but also a noteworthy landmark, depicted in the paintings of James Wales from 1791 and featured in survey maps dating back to 1825.

The original Gamadia Estate spanned some 60 acres, extending roughly over the eastern half of Cumballa Hill. In the 1860s it was a jungle interspersed by vadis and seven bungalows, namely, Gamadia House itself, The Mount, The Crow's Nest, Arthur's Seat, Condor House, Styleman Lodge, and Johnson Lodge. Walking paths and rough carriage tracks connected the bungalows. Pedder Road, Carmichael Road, Navroji Gamadia Road and Behramji Gamadia Road did not exist. In 1864, the Government acquired some land near the Haji Ali junction to build a road connecting Haji Ali to Mahalaxmi station. About 1879, the Government acquired more land and built Pedder Road, which divided the estate into two parts. Still later in 1918, the Government acquired another eight acres of land on which were built Carmichael Road, Behramji Gamadia Road, and various buildings including the Municipal Commissioner's bungalow, the Port Trust bungalow, the Reserve Bank bungalow, and a whole host of private residences. In the 1930s, the Government built Navroji Gamadia Road linking Warden Road and Pedder Road. The part around Doctor House extending upto Navroji Gamadia Road was called the Gamadia Forest, and was called by that name by old time residents, because it was actually a forest (Interview with Koverji Gamadia, the great grandson of Nowrosji Gamadia, 21st November 2023).

Nowrosji Gamadia, hailed from a lineage that traces back to Jamshedji Bhimji of Surat who arrived in Bombay in 1720, and who established himself as a leading merchant. Jamshedji and his descendants amassed great wealth primarily through trading. Nowrosji established ventures in cotton ginning, owning 17 factories in Central India. His influence extended to directorial roles in renowned companies such as the Moffusil Company, a well-known company dealing in cotton, and the Bombay Burmah Trading Company, a joint stock company where he was Director for over 25 years (Parsee Prakash. 1916 & 1917 vol. v part iv, 327).



In northern Burma, Nowrosji co-founded a large rubber company, of which he was also Director. In resonance with the Swadeshi theme, along with friends, he founded the Indian Mercantile Insurance Company in 1907 and the Bombay Merchant Bank. Nowrosji's role in civic life was pivotal. The government nominated him to be a member of the Board of Management of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, established in 1909. At the same time, he was a Trustee of the Pandey Sanatorium and Dharamkhata, a benevolent trust, a long-time member of the management of the Native Dispensary and the Mulla Firoz Madrassa, and Chairman, as well as Hon. Treasurer and Chairman of the Mulla Firoz Library. He was elected as a Trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayet in 1911 and took an active part in its proceedings (Parsee Prakash. 1916 & 1917 vol. v part iv, 327)

At the time of his death, Nowrosji had been Chairman of the Zarthosti Amelioration (Labhna) Fund for 15 years. He was the Hon. Treasurer and Chairman of the Zoroastrian Girls Education Society. He contributed 50,000 rupees towards a new building for the school, Bai M.N. Gamadia Girls High School on Princess Street. He also supported and invested in other institutions, including the BN Gamadia Technical School and Hunnarshala, and the Nowrosji Gamadia Agiary in Valsad. Nowrosji was a member (agevan) of the Kadmi Panth and a trustee of the Kadmi Gahambar Fund and many Zarthosti dharamkhatas. Naoroji contributed to the Parsi Panchayet in the name of his ancestors and relatives (Parsee Prakash. 1916 & 1917 vol. v part iv, 327).

From 1884, Nowrosji was a delegate of the Parsi Matrimonial Court. For 24 years from 1892, he was a Councillor in the Municipal Corporation's Fort area, and for nine years, the Corporation's nominee on the Bombay Improvement Trust (The Times of India, 22 July 1916). He was also a Trustee of the Bombay Port Trust from 1898 till his death in 1916 and served as its senior Trustee during his last years (Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the Bombay Port Trust 26th September, 1898 and 29 December, 1898). The Gamadia Complex, present day's car park area inside the Port Trust, was named after Nowrosji to honour his story, a tale of excellent municipal governance, contributions to city development and visions of civic life, with layers of entrepreneurship and a commitment to the betterment of society.

Nowrosji Gamadia passed away at his bungalow on 16 July 2016. He was held in high esteem in his community and the commercial circles due to his great contribution to his community and the development of the Bombay city.

#### *References:*

*"List of Municipal Councillors who held office on 31st March from 1892 – 1916" in Annual Administration Reports of the Bombay Municipal Corporation.*

*Interview with Kooverji Gamadia, great grandson of Nowrosji Jehangir Gamadia.*

*Minutes of the Trustees Meeting of the Bombay Port Trust dated 26th September, 1898 and 29 December, 1898.*

*Paymaster, Rustam Burjorji, (Compiler), (Gujarati) Parsee Prakash. 1916 & 1917 vol. v part iv.*

*The Times of India, 22nd July 1916.*

