

# A Lasting LEGACY

Philanthropist. Educationist. Businessman. Sujay Jairaj is more than just the sum of his parts. In conversation with G2's CEO and Editor **Abhinav Aggarwal**

**I**N the 1950s the Government undertook a major reclamation project, christened the Juhu Vile Parle Development Scheme, laying the foundation for what has gone on to become one of Mumbai's most tony areas. Several leading lights of industry and of Bollywood have their homes here, including the likes of Amitabh Bachchan and Adi Godrej, to name but a couple. The area is also renowned for having some of Mumbai's finest schools, a tribute to the vision and dedication of its founding families and early settlers. One such family is that of Seth Narsee Monjee.

We are seated with Sujay Jairaj, great-grandson of the illustrious Narsee Monjee. His grandfather, Chatrabhuj Narsee, was one of the early settlers of Juhu Vile Parle and one of the visionaries responsible for helping create its educational infrastructure amongst other things.

The family legacy was continued by his father, Jairaj Thacker, who runs their family business, Golden Chemicals, and is the Managing Trustee for Jamnabai Narsee School.

The flame continues to burn bright in the able hands of Sujay who is Chairperson of Chatrabhuj Narsee School, which he is building in Kandivali, as well as a Trustee of the Jamnabai Narsee School.

## In the beginning

The great state of Gujarat is renowned for its enterprise. It is here that our story begins.

It is the year 1887. In a small village called Lakhania in Kutch, a boy is born in the family of Monjeebhai. Improbable though it might have



With wife Minal

PIC: SWAPNIL SAKHARE

donated freely and generously.

By 1930, Narsee found his interests moving towards industry. Mahatma Gandhi had called for the Swadeshi Movement. The call touched Narsee's heart and Golden Tobacco was born. It was the first completely indigenous cigarette manufacturer in India and broke the tobacco monopoly of the British Raj. He founded Golden Chemicals in 1941.

Those were halcyon days. His career graph was rising rapidly, but his health was failing. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a disease for which no cure had yet been discovered.

### Gen next

Narsee had three sons—Chatrabhuj, Pratap and Dharamshi. Chatrabhuj was the eldest. He was all of 17 when his father died and the family's responsibility fell on his shoulders. He and his brothers had to give up their schooling and take over the family businesses. As the eldest, Chatrabhuj was appointed the Managing Director of GoldenTobacco and Golden Chemicals.

Despite their lack of formal education the brothers were blest with good business acumen and earthly wisdom. The companies thrived under their leadership and expanded all over India. By 1960 Golden Tobacco and Golden Chemicals had become names to reckon with.

Chatrabhuj Narsee was now ready for the next phase of his life. Somewhere inside him his lack of a formal education continued to bother him and he decided to dedicate himself to further the cause of education. He founded the Narsee Monjee Educational Trust named after his father who though a self-taught man advocated economic freedom through education. The Trust's credo is simple: 'illuminating all with the lamp of knowledge'.

In the year 1971 Chatrabhuj founded the Jamnabai Narsee School named after his mother. Located in the Juhu Vile Parle Development Scheme, it is an unaided, co-educational school that continues to celebrate its motto, *Vidya Param Balam*.

Chatrabhuj had firm beliefs on education. For him, "a child must learn to excel for his own sake and self-study must be an integral feature of the child's education. A teacher must be an eternal learner. In all aspects of school management and administration, extravagance must be curtailed and values of thrift encouraged." These beliefs are a part of the family's educational institutions even today.

### First denizens

Says Sujay, "In the 1950s the Government undertook a major reclamation project at Vile Parle leading to the establishment of the Juhu Vile Parle Development Scheme. It was hard to imagine at that time that this is where the future of Mumbai lay.

There were a handful of families, whom I like to call the early inhabitants, who settled here. Our family was one of them. My grandfather, Chatrabhuj Narsee, served as the President of the Kelavani Mandal for 25 years. We were also the main donors of the Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (N.M.I.M.S.) and N.M. College of Commerce and Economics.

Education was very close to my grandfather's heart. One of his daughters, my aunt, got married into the D.J. Sanghvi family who

seemed then, this boy Narsee, was destined for greatness. His enterprising father, Monjeebhai, first came to Mumbai and then moved to Pune. Narsee Monjee, as the boy came to be known, spent seven years in Pune before the family shifted back to Mumbai.

Narsee was all of nine years old when his mother died. Father and son spent a year and a half in Kutch before moving onto Burma (Myanmar).

This is where the young Narsee found his calling. The Burma trade was booming. By the time he was fourteen, Narsee was dealing in jute, tarpaulin and scrap. He went on to become 'the shining star' of the business world with interests spread across Burma, India, China, Japan and several other countries.

### Serial entrepreneur

In 1917, Narsee's partner, Sheth Jushub Haji Suleman died. And Narsee shifted base to Mumbai. He dabbled in the grocery business there. He also started dealing in paints, earning him the title 'The King of Paints'. He also ventured into the old newspaper business giving this traditional trade a new spin.

Narsee was a dyed-in-the-wool entrepreneur. Each new business he tried led to several others. Everything he touched seemed to turn into gold. By 1918, he had entered the Bombay Stock Exchange and went onto become one of the leading share-brokers of the time.

Narsee was a philanthropist at heart. He

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### A passion

Education is not my business. It is my passion. Jamnabai Narsee School has a special place in my heart as I schooled there. After completing my Master's in International Management in Scotland, I dedicated myself to upgrading the infrastructure and technology of the school



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are the founders of D.J. Sanghvi School. And the other into the Parle Products family who founded Jitendra Chauhan College of Law.

Business-wise our companies, Golden Tobacco and Golden Chemicals, were both doing well but something kept bothering my grandfather. He simply could not bring himself to terms with the tobacco business. The British had long gone and the company had served its purpose. He sold Golden Tobacco in 1979.

Grandfather also served as the President of Nanavati Hospital for 25 years till his death in 1998. My Dad, Jairaj Thacker, became President of Nanavati Hospital in 2012. I am a member of the Governing Council of the Hospital.

Dad has been the Managing Trustee of Jamnabai Narsee School since 1998. The school has grown manifold under his leadership.

Dad has also served as Managing Director of

My in-laws are real estate developers. They are developing a 10 acre parcel of land in Kandivali. Three acres have been earmarked for education. We have built a school there named after my grandfather

Golden Chemicals since 1974.

Jamnabai Narsee School has a special place in my heart as it is where I did my schooling. I did my graduation from N.M. College of Commerce and Economics and my Master's in International Management from the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. I was one of the youngest Presidents of the University's Management Consultants' Club.

Education is not my business. It is my passion. My business is Golden Chemicals. After returning to India I dedicated myself to upgrading the infrastructure and technology of the school. I strongly believe that education involves four critical factors—academics, sports, extra-curricular activities and values.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat, he awarded us with an MoU to build an international school in

GIFT (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City), Gandhinagar. There were 50 other leading schools from all over the country vying for this honour. It was a very proud moment for me when I received the MoU from him.

Jamnabai Narsee School GIFT City, Gandhinagar is now operational. It has 550 students presently. We are targeting a capacity of 2500 students.

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### Sports buff

I am also very passionate about sports. I am an ardent skier and used to be a national-level badminton player. I am keen to promote the sport. I have tied up with Saina Nehwal and have the rights to make a film on her life. Scripting is presently underway.

I love bicycling although it is not easy to pursue this sport given the condition of Mumbai roads. I have always wanted to share my passion with others. In order to do so more efficiently I started the 'Mumbai



**Clockwise:**  
**With Saina Nehwal**  
**Raveena Tandon lights the flame**  
**With Smriti Irani**  
**Amitabh Bachchan is the Chief Guest at the**  
**Jamnabai Narsee International School**  
**Founder of the Mumbai Cycling Enthusiasts**  
**Going back in time**



say that the Chatrabhuj Narsee School is nearing completion and has begun accepting students. It is an international school and presently has a strength of 400 children. It is well on its way to reach a capacity of 2700.

There are some reasonably good schools in India. The advent of IB schools has also helped. But the situation post the 12<sup>th</sup> grade continues to be rather bleak.

We have started Global Pathways Institute to address this need. Under Global Pathways we have tied up with leading universities from abroad. Students can do two years in India and transfer to a degree programme overseas.

Our partner universities will give them full academic credit for the work done in India. This way they can get the benefit of a good overseas degree and international exposure without paying astronomical fees.



Cycling Enthusiasts'. It has taken on a life of its own. We now have 10,000 members and a dedicated admin. It is the biggest and most active cycling community in India.

Equal Streets is an initiative of Renuka Tahiliani and P.K. Das. I was fortunate to be a founding committee member. It was adopted by the Times of India and has grown to an unimaginable extent.

There is so much need for good quality education in India. My favourite quote is one by Franklin D. Roosevelt in which he says, 'We might not be able to build the future for our youth but what we can do is

build our youth for the future'. It is my dream to build on the Jamnabai legacy and start parallel campuses of K-12 schools in Mumbai and across other cities in India."

We wish Sujay all the best in his endeavours. ☺

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