



Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata
1904 – 1993

The legend lives on . . .



प्रथम दिवस आवरण FIRST DAY COVER



हस्तानुलिखित HOOI NEW DELHI

जे० आर० डी० टाटा
J.R.D. TATA







“ No success or achievement in material terms is worthwhile unless it serves the need or interest of the Country and its people and is achieved by fair and honest means ”

J.R.D. Tata





TATA STEEL



JRD-Bharat Ratna Felicitations from a proud Steel City

March 5, 1992, was a day of great pride and jubilation in Jamshedpur. Aviator, statesman and principal architect of Jamshedpur's pre-eminence in the industrial map of India, was in the city. A mammoth civic reception was held at the gaily decorated J.R.D. Tata Sports Complex to honour him for the Bharat Ratna—the nation's highest award. The warmth and adulation of the overflowing galleries provided a fitting tribute to the man whose concern for his fellow-men and their well-being, during his nearly half a century long association with Jamshedpur, has greatly enriched life in the Steel City.



Above : JRD receives the Bharat Ratna from the President of India on March 28, 1992 at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi

Below : Glimpses of a mammoth civic reception accorded to him at Jamshedpur



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JRD... moments, milestones and laurels

J.R.D. Tata today towers over Indian industry like a colossus. Chairman of Tata Steel for nearly half a century, his concern for employee welfare and passion for technological progress made the Company a role model for the industry to emulate. In recognition of his eminence in many spheres of activity, JRD has received honours and distinctions from all over the world, including the U.N.O. and the Vatican.

1 After re-enacting his Karachi to Bombay flight on the Golden Jubilee of Indian civil aviation.

2 Receiving a commemorative plaque from Mr Mody at the inauguration of the JRD Tata Sports Complex, Jamsbedpur.

3 Talking to the staff of the Tata Main Hospital, Jamsbedpur.

4 Being greeted by eager workers at the Steel Plant.

5 At the Steel Plant during the 1st Phase of its Modernisation.

6 Showing Mrs Indira Gandhi and Shri Rajiv Gandhi around at an exhibition inside the Steel Works.

7 Receiving the International Man of Management award of the National Association of Foremen, USA.

8 Greeting children at a community development centre, Jamsbedpur.

9 Pitching in at the ground-breaking ceremony of the Bar & Rod Mill.

10 Inspecting a float of the Raw Materials Division on Founder's Day in Jamsbedpur.



Voices in remembrance.



नई दिल्ली 110001 NEW DELHI

3-day state mourning

BOMBAY — The Maharashtra Government has announced a three-day state mourning from Tuesday in view of the demise of JRD Tata.

An official spokesman said here on Monday night that during this period the national tricolour will fly at half mast throughout the State and there will be no official entertainment. •PTI



Industrialist JRD

BOMBAY — Pioneering Indian industrialist J.R.D. Tata, long a symbol of the country's entrepreneurial spirit, died yesterday after nearly half a century at the helm of India's biggest business house.

A Tata spokesman said JRD, as he was popularly known, died at 0200GMT in a Geneva hospital where he had been admitted for a routine check-up.

A pall of gloom descended on India's business community as news of his death spread.

The less active relative, Ratan Tata, but he continued to be on a sabbatical when he was in the hospital.

J.R.D. Tata Dies at 89

Industrialist in India

The Associated Press

BOMBAY — J.R.D. Tata, 89, a pioneer of Indian industry and founder of the airline that eventually became Air-India, died Monday in Geneva. He had been suffering from kidney infection and fever for several weeks.

one of the biggest Indian industrialists

2 govt JRD's

By A State

BOMBAY, Dec 1 — Chief minister, Mr. Yashwantrao Chavan today announced government would award two awards in the memory of J.R.D. Tata — for political and decentralisation.

Tata was one of the prominent figures of India, who retired away from active life in 1926, he became a director of Tata Sons Ltd. holding 10% share. In 1938, he became its chairman, effectively heading the empire that made even a map to trucks and railways, a luxury hotel chain.

The Tata group has 80 companies employing 250,000 workers. In 1991, they had an 140 billion rupee turnover. Jehangir Ratan Tata, who was known as JRD, was in Paris.

He travelled to France, where he was in the hospital for several years. He was always benefited from it.

He revealed that there was objection to a state mourning being announced on JRD's death from certain quarters but he prevailed upon them to accept that JRD had done much more for the country than many elected representatives.

He had, however, ruled out a public holiday as JRD would never have approved of people sitting at home to mourn anyone.

Mr. Tata stepped down from the Tata group in 1991 and handed over his company to his nephew, Ratan Tata.

THE WORLD RESPONDS

"His business endeavours were embellished with a wider vision... a concern for the nation and a social purpose."

— Narasimha Rao
Prime Minister of India

"This house... recognises him as one of India's greatest industrialists as well as the founder of Indian aviation."

— Keith Vaz
MP, House of Commons

"JRD Tata, the man who had the right ideas too soon."

— Le Monde, Paris

"He was such a towering figure... that he seemed immune to human frailness."

— Nestor Carbonell
Pepsi-Cola International

"... a unique and visionary man to whom India owes so much."

— Varel D Freeman
International Finance Corporation

"Because of his broad understanding of human nature, his knowledge of history and his astute understanding of business problems, Mr. Tata's views were listened to... with great interest and respect. He was universally liked and admired."

— David Rockefeller
The Chase Manhattan Bank

Both Houses adjourned in memory of JRD

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

BOTH Houses adjourned today after paying tribute to the late J.R.D. Tata, who died here.

Dear Sir,

I have been deeply saddened by the sad demise of Shri J.R.D. Tata, who is passing away the country's industrialist. His contribution to the industry, and his indelible impact on every area of activity, would indeed be impossible to describe by his departure.

Kindly accept my sincere condolences and may God bless his soul.

Yours faithfully,

Atal Bihari Vajpayee

LS, RS pay homage to J.R.D.

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI, December 2:

BOTH houses of Parliament, which began the winter session today, adjourned after paying homage to Mr J.R.D. Tata, the doyen of Indian industry, and expressing grief over the death and devastation caused by the recent earthquake.

civil aviation, promotion of scientific research and social service.

The prime minister, while underscoring the contribution made by Mr Tata to the country's industrial development, commended his "futuristic outlook".

Mr Tata, who used to describe himself as apolitical, was deeply concerned about the nation's future, which was reflected in his

ly, and the former members, including Mr Janardhan Reddy.

While expressing profound sorrow at the death and devastation caused by the Maharashtra earthquake, Mr Rao said the state government did "excellent" work in providing relief and taking follow-up measures.

He made specific reference to "unlimited sympathy" that was received from all parts of the country.

HINDUSTAN

J.R.D. Tata

To mourn Jehangir Ratanji Tata, it is not merely to remember an individual's achievements. 'JRD' as he has been known to admirers, or Jeh, as to close associates, is considerably more: an image of a certain spirit and, consequently, of modern India. The man, near to the count himself a maker. The man, near to the still untimely passing, was nobody's idler. Approaching inertness till the very end, far, he has ever been a picture of youth. He has done nothing to make him the like of an endearing. As a pioneer aviator at the time, he caught the country's imagination and sense of adventure has imbued his subsequent as an entrepreneur and a promoter in fields ranging from



Jeh's views worth listening to

CHIEF MINISTER
BIHAR

SUNDAY OBSERVER BOMBAY

11 DEC 1993

DAVID ROCKEFELLER

FOR MORE than 20 years, J R D Tata, familiarly known as Jeh, served as a member of the international advisory committee of The Chase Manhattan Bank, a committee representing leading

industrialists from the major nations of the world in which The Chase does banking business.

There have only been two or three members of the committee who served as long as he did. Because of his personal charm, modesty and wisdom, The Chase asked Mr Tata to remain on the committee far beyond a normal retirement age and until he, himself, indicated two years ago that the lengthy trip from India to New York had become too tiring for him to make. But his broad understanding

of human nature, his knowledge of history and his astute understanding of business problems, Mr Tata's views on any subject he addressed were always listened to by all members of the committee with great interest and respect.

We never had a member of the committee who was more universally liked and admired. He will be sorely missed by his many friends all over the world, but his kindness, his spirit and his understanding will live on in our memories.

David Rockefeller is chairman, international advisory committee, The Chase Manhattan Bank, New York. This tribute is exclusive to THE SUNDAY OBSERVER

TIMES OF INDIA 30 NOV 1993

Tallest Of Them All

If there is one factor which sums up all that J.R.D. Tata accomplished in 53 years as chairman of his group of companies it is that the family surname has become synonymous with the very best that Indian industry has to offer. With his death in Geneva, the Tata empire will be robbed of the debonair figure, who presided over it with his nephew, Mr Ratan Tata, two years ago. J.R.D., as he was popularly known, was as much at home in Paris, where he was born, or in New York or in Bombay, the base of his multifarious activities. His heart was always in India and he addressed himself to problems which were not for the faint-hearted, whether it was the population bulge or the development of civil aviation or Bombay's transport. He was one of the mentors of the "Bombay Plan", along with his fellow doyen, G.D. Birla, among others, which was meant to be a 15-year blueprint for the country's economic growth. His pioneering flight from Karachi to Madras, when Tata Airlines was rechristened Air-India Ltd, is the stuff of which legends are made. In a sense, the Tata empire was run with such genteel benevolence that J.R.D. was able to devote himself to many public causes. It is a tribute to his commitment to such concerns that he accompanied a citizens' delegation which met Mr Narasimha Rao in Bombay during the communal riots this January.

Unfortunately, J.R.D. has passed. The country is on the verge of a new era. he had

THE ECONOMIC TIMES 30 NOV. 1993

JRD

WITH the passing of Mr J R D Tata, the country has lost one of its most illustrious citizens. Not only had he become a symbol of maturity and wisdom, his was also seen as a steady influence, a voice of reason in an increasingly turbulent domestic polity. When JRD spoke, everyone listened. More than anything else, it is that patriarchal voice will be missed - not only in Tata Sons but by the country too.

In his twilight years Mr Tata had turned his attention to social problems. He was most concerned at the rapid increase in India's population, an issue that had troubled him since 1951. The exigencies of corporate pressures kept him from full involvement but latterly, for over a decade, he had made that his major concern. He kept reminding that if there was one problem which threatened development and growth, it was its huge and uncontrolled population. Unfortunately, the issue never came up during the Emergency, the wake of the political agenda. That must have been a political blunder. He battled on manfully against the UN population growth. He was bound to be fact that

J R D TATA, who has died in Geneva aged 89, was head of his family's industrial empire for five decades largely through an accident of birth; what he achieved, however, was entirely due to his own talent and quality. His dynamism vastly outlasted the business; his surprise created Air India; his convictions made him a champion of free enterprise; his humanity inspired widespread employment and his generosity diverted nearly all his wealth into philanthropy. Handsome, with a thick moustache, courteous — he was often goaded to anger by Tata's aggressive attitude. A prerequisite for success, his ship of state was a masterpiece of management.



'Jeh' Tata: the 'He'

emergency. It did not help that he had opposed the diktat that Air India should banish alcohol. He was used to being in the limelight. Though Nehru was his friend, JRD had a different view of the Indian leadership. He was a socialist, but as an economic liberal, he was bound to be fact that



30.11.93.

PATNA

atan Ji,

I am deeply grieved to learn about the sudden passing away of Bharat Ratna, Shri J.R.D. Tata, the doyen of Indian Industry. Shri Tata was truly patriot and humane. His pioneering contribution to the country shall ever be remembered. In his demise we have lost a great son.

With deepest sympathy and lasting peace to



SIR WILLIAM RYRIE
Executive Vice President

Mr. Ratan Tata
The Tata Iron and Steel Company, Ltd.
Bombay House
24 Homi Mody Street
Bombay 400 001
India

I was very sad to hear of the passing of an outstanding entrepreneurial leader. I join me in extending our sincere condolences.

NEWS

QUARIES

J.R.D. Tata



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TATA-PRESIDENT

PRESIDENT CONDOLES DEATH OF TATA
NEW DELHI, NOV 29 (PTI) THE PRESIDENT, DR. SHANKER DAYAL SHARMA, TODAY EXPRESSED SHOCK AND GRIEF AT THE PASSING AWAY OF J R D TATA.

TATA, THE PRESIDENT SAID, WOULD ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED FOR HIS PATRIOTIC SERVICES IN DIVERSE FIELDS OF NATIONAL PRODUCTION, PARTICULARLY IN THE SPHERES OF INDUSTRIAL AVIATION, TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH. HE WAS ONE OF THE WEALTHIEST FAMILIES IN THE COUNTRY, BUT HE WAS NOT OF THE COMMON TYPE OF MODESTY.

J.R.D. Tata: symbol of the Indian spirit of enterprise

By Stefan Wagstyl in New Delhi

Mr J.R.D. Tata, the urbane industrialist who headed India's largest commercial group, died yesterday aged 89.

Tributes flowed into Tata's Bombay headquarters, including a message from President Shankar Dayal Sharma, who said Mr Tata would "always be remembered for his patriotic services" in many fields. Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhai Tata, the son of an Indian father and a French mother, was born in Paris in 1904 into one of India's wealthiest families. He made full use of the opportunities offered by his privileged life: businessman, pioneer aviator, and champion of many causes ranging from India's nuclear development to population control. He piloted aircraft until well past 80, his seat on the board of Tata Sons, the group's core company, until his death.

He spoke French better than English and both better than any Indian language, yet he devoted his life to India. He stayed out of politics, but he often criticised India's socialist programme, an approach

which cost Tata companies dear when it came to securing government investment approvals.

Flying was Mr Tata's passion. As a boy in France he watched Louis Blériot's earliest flights. In 1925, he became one of the first Indians to secure a commercial pilot's licence. In 1932, he founded Tata Air Services, a forerunner of Air India, the national flag carrier, and piloted its maiden flight. After the nationalisation of aviation in 1963, Mr Tata was made Air India's honorary chairman - a post he retained until 1978, when he was sacked by a government jealous of his influence. Mr Tata later said it was his life's biggest setback.

Mr Tata's business career began at 21 after he completed military service in France. Mr Tata wanted to go to Cambridge, but his father told him to move to India to join Tata as an unpaid apprentice in the group's steel business. A year later, Mr Tata's father died and Mr Tata inherited his seat on the Tata Sons board. In 1938, the chairman died and, at the age of 34, Mr Tata was chosen to succeed him.

Mr Tata ruled with a light hand and gave managers freedom to work independently. Just as Mr Tata pursued aviation, other executives expanded the group's interests in

engineering, motors, chemicals, hotels and many other industries. As the group's sales rose to their current annual total of over \$4.5bn (£3.04bn), so investments became increasingly diverse.

Until the late 1970s, Mr Tata's charisma held the group together. But in the 1980s, the group began to look increasingly incoherent, with its ageing managers often too busy guarding their own fiefdoms to respond to commercial challenges. Mr Tata was criticised for retaining power for too long. In 1991 he finally handed over the chairmanship of Tata Sons to his cousin, Mr Ratan Tata.

Mr Tata gave much time to causes of national interest. In 1945, he set up the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, a pioneer of India's nuclear programme. In the early 1960s, he was one of the first advocates of population control - an issue over which he quarrelled with Jawaharlal Nehru, who believed a large population made for a powerful country. In 1992, Mr Tata received the United Nations Population Award.

Mr Tata, who had no children but is survived by his wife, died in a hospital in Geneva, where he had gone for a holiday and for medical treatment.

THE INDEPENDENT 30 NOV. 1993

'J.R.D. was like a God to our sportsmen'

A Sports Reporter
Bombay

J.R.D. Tata was a multi-faceted personality who made a tremendous contribution not only to industry but to sport as well. His encouragement to sport and sportsmen resulted in the House of Tatas becoming the premier institute among commercial firms in various fields of sport. Administrators as well as sportsmen from the Tata Sports club, of which J.R.D. was a founder member, paid glowing tributes to the man.

Following are the reactions of some eminent members of the Tata Sports Club.

Avjo, JRD

Amul

He touched the sky and it smiled.
He stretched out his arms
and they encircled the globe.
His vision made giants out of
men and organisations.

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime.
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time."
R.W. Longfellow

Raymond's

J.R.D.
We like to believe that he was ours.
The man who gave us life and shaped our wings.
But we know he belongs to thousands of others.
To India.
And to the world.
With love and reverence from
the people of

भारत AIR INDIA

Son of India
J. R. D. TATA
Farewell



Boeing joins the world
aviation community in saluting
the memory of a great
aviator, industry leader
and friend.

J.R.D. Tata
1904-1993

BOEING





TRANSITION

An era ended with the death of Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, builder of a Rs 15,000-crore empire.

"HIS LEGACY WILL BE INTELLECTUAL HONESTY AND STRAIGHTFORWARDNESS."

—ADITYA BIRLA

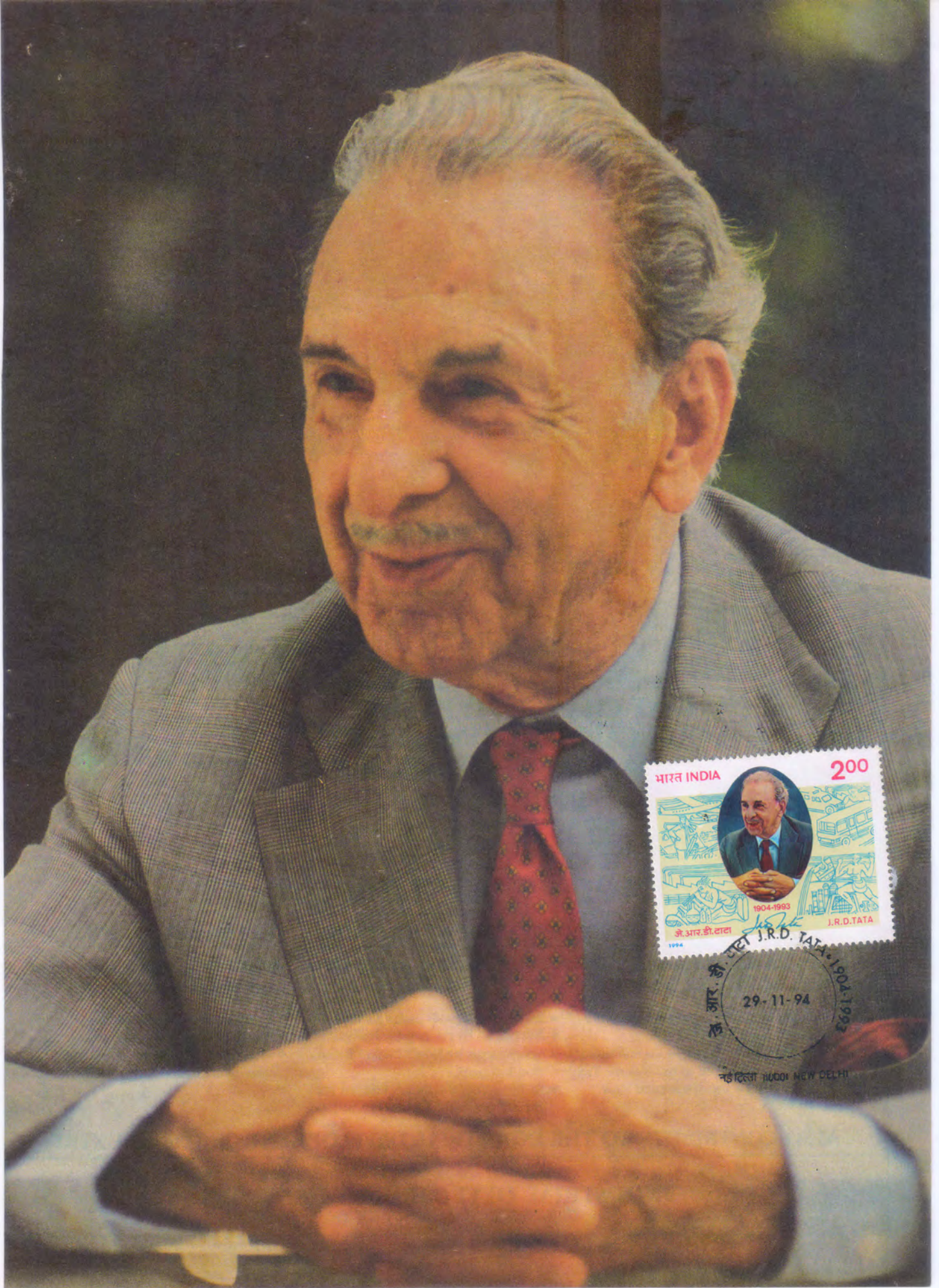
What would you like your epitaph to say? I haven't got such a high opinion of what I have done. I've only got a high opinion of what I've hoped to or tried to do. In most cases, I did what I thought was the best I could. But that is not enough and it doesn't deserve national recognition. And, therefore, that brings up the epitaph ...

**He did
his best**

That does not mean I succeeded every

time in doing something that could not have been done better — J R D TATA

M A N E C K D A V A R



Industrialists hardly make for heroes. They are, for the most, dull, colourless men with the zeroes on their balance sheets as their only marks of distinction. Some gain notoriety by their ruthless manipulation of the system or the emasculation of all those who dare to challenge their hegemony. Some are servile factotums of politicians, their success predicated on the political longevity of their masters. Most contribute little except to their own coffers and numbered Swiss bank accounts. Hardly the stuff of legend.

Yet the only time I have asked anyone for an autograph, it was an industrialist. Though it would be facetious to classify Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoi Tata as purely a man devoted to business and industry. He is a unique phenomenon in the corporate firmament.

His is a life multi-faceted and well lived. At 88 now, his years have just begun to sit heavily on him. Just when he has hung up is faced with ungainly his flagship company. heirs realise the need strengthen the always uous Tata hold over t diverse companies. effort has also provided own tremors. His immediate task, in the twilight his life, is to leave behind the entity he so assiduously nurtured and part-created – of course he would not have it any other way – with the aid of his colleagues.

This interview, to disappoint the prurient, is not about the controversies in the House of Tatas. It is on a much higher plane, not because there was any reluctance to talk about it, but because the life of JRD Tata is far larger in its scope than the companies with which he shares his name. There was not enough time in the two hours spent with him to compress the canvas which is JRD – industrialist, aviator, corporate statesman and above all, a humanist and patriot,

deeply concerned over the state of the nation and willing, not to sermonise, but to do his bit.

And underlying his deep emotional attachment to the poor and his commitment to improving their lot, is his charm. Charm not the slightest tarnished by age. Charm accentuated by modesty over his contribution. Charm which has inspired fierce loyalty amongst those who work for him (sorry, with him).

This is by no means a complete JRD interview. To capture the total essence of the man would take days. These are just the views of a man on the most exciting economic period of our country. With a few personal glimpses thrown in.

This interview, reproduced largely verbatim, was conducted on April 27, 1992 in JRD's office in Bombay House with TISCO vice-chairman Sharokh Sabavala present.

While addressing the convocation of the Bombay which conferred an



Pioneer pilot: JRD on the 30th anniversary of his historic launch of civil aviation in India

said that India would still be one of the poorest nations by the year 2030 AD. Do you still subscribe to this view?

■ Yes. But poorest compared to what nation? First of all, our population keeps increasing and our standards of education are not very high. So when you say poorest, I presume you mean poorest in the

sense that I understand it – a country, the bulk of whose population is somewhat deprived of education, health and money. We may hope that the success of the reforms which have been recently introduced with the approval of the prime minister and mainly on the advice of the finance minister, will succeed. But how long will it take to have an effect on the population?

In your speech you mentioned 2030 AD, that gives us another 30 years.

■ If the present trend of economic reforms continues, 2030 is not very far away. If today we have a backward nation – backward for the bulk of its population – it is because in all the rich nations there is no such thing as illiteracy. There is a very high standard of school-going and then university, which we don't have here. We have very good universities, we have good IITs, we have schools, of course, but not in the villages. I have been occasionally to villages where I see a beginning being made – like an

open school near Navsari. So by the year 2030, there will be a change if the same reforms are tried and are successful. But we will still be a poorer country. So the answer is yes and no.

I don't think there will be a higher standard of education, though there might be hope for a higher standard of literacy. But today, this

question of literacy is of importance in India, not in Europe or America or even in most of the new countries of Asia, leave alone Japan. For example, I happen to know that approximately four northern states of India – Rajasthan, UP, MP, Bihar – contain about 40 per cent of our population. This means about 300 million. In those states, today, out of every 100 girls born, 90 will never go to school. Illiteracy is something that almost exists for women. For men, literacy would be 43 per cent. On the other hand, in Kerala, there is virtually already 100 per cent literacy. I am a great devotee of the idea that India, or any state, must have education for progress. At the start of all education, what you need to be is literate. You can't start with illiteracy.

Then we have our own problems of language as they do in Europe, where they have a variety and almost the same number of languages we have. So 40 years, or 38 years from now, I have no doubt, that if we don't have a catastrophe of any kind, political or otherwise, which I don't visualise, there will be considerable improvement in education. Without this, there will be no change in our economic or social conditions.

Do you feel vindicated by the economic policies of this government?

■ Oh yes! Since the times of Mr Nehru when socialism or so-called socialism, for it never was socialism, was introduced – and therefore the socialism that was inflicted on us, not deliberately – I have been speaking out against it. Our prime minister then, Mr Nehru, was a true believer in socialist methods, which were mainly inspired by Russia. He was a great admirer of Russia and their idea of quick economic

progress through socialism. He thought he might do the same thing here and so he followed their industrial policy. Mr Nehru even got annoyed with me because on one occasion while I spoke to him, I advocated that the public sector must make profit, because the whole idea of the public sector was that the money invested would bring

returns and this would be channelised for further progress, further industrialisation. When I mentioned that it would be a failure of socialism if the public sector in India didn't make a profit, Mr Nehru was annoyed with me for using the word profit. He told me at that time, that in his opinion profit was a dirty word. Now things have changed a lot and even people who may tag themselves as Nehruvian are no longer of the extreme socialist view of Mr Nehru. So though there will be

When I mentioned that it would be a failure of socialism if the public sector in India didn't make a profit, Mr Nehru was annoyed with me for using the word profit. He told me, at that time, that in his opinion profit was a dirty word.

control?

■ There is a clear relationship between literacy and fertility. A state with a high degree of literacy like Kerala also has the lowest birth rate in India, and those like Rajasthan or Bihar or Uttar Pradesh which has the largest degree of illiteracy, also has the largest birth rate.

You had mentioned to

your biographer, "Never once has any prime minister asked me what I thought of the economic policy of the country". Has this prime minister ascertained your views?

■ No. Not in the sense of ... I don't attend any conferences. Yes I did, for example, attend a conference organised by the governor on the disposal of waste in Bombay. At my age of 87, 88, I am very unlikely to be invited for consultation of the condition of the country. So the answer is no. Even earlier, my colleagues in Tatas, outstanding men like John Matthai were invited. At one time he was managing director of Tata Steel, he was an outstanding man and of course he was 'borrowed' by Mr Nehru, first as minister for railways, funnily enough. From there, he became the finance minister. Then, when he disagreed with Mr Nehru over the creation of the Planning Commission which he treated as a set of fifth wheels to the coach, he resigned to come back to us. In those days and since, we have had people who were very able, educated people, more educated than I am, whose voices were heard. For instance, the voice of Mr Palkhivala on the budget is heard every year. I have not been asked particularly by this prime minister or even by Mr Rajiv Gandhi or anybody before. Not even Mrs Gandhi. I would see her at intervals and I

progress, 35 years is not going to make a big difference to social progress.

Especially with what has happened in the last 35 years.

■ During the last 35 years, there has been some progress obviously, but very slow, much too

slow. And, of course, the problem is population; the biggest obstacle to progress.

Do you see a connection between literacy and population



Of two minds? JRD with Pandit Nehru

would be struggling against this wrong kind of socialism, but the fact that while I was struggling against it, (in hindsight) I was at least pleased with myself that without the knowledge or with the little knowledge I had, I was advocating for or against the right thing.



Forward thinker: An industrialist with foresight

In your biography, there is a substantial amount devoted to your relationship with both Jawaharlal Nehru and Mrs Gandhi, but there is not much as far as Rajiv Gandhi is concerned.

■ No. For the simple reason that while I was delighted at his becoming prime minister – he was a young element, he was a modern man who believed in technology and science – Mr Rajiv Gandhi had one characteristic for which maybe I even admired him. He wanted the views of young people, he wanted the cooperation of young people and I was an old man. Though, I did (advise him) at some meetings. When he attended the meeting of Assocham (Associated Chambers of Commerce) on one occasion, I even attacked him. Attacked him in a very polite way, on the lack of adequate action on population (control). He just smiled at me and seemed to agree and said that everything possible would be done. I pointed out, this thing I told you about the women in northern India, that there were young girls who would be illiterate for the rest of their lives. I told him that surely every one of those four states – which at that time were Congress states and therefore one would imagine that the Congress policies would have some influence there, I said, Mr Prime Minister, influence and not compulsion – surely there are ways in which the party can influence its

divisions, and surely on education and literacy they would listen to the leaders of the Congress. I said there are other ways in which political influence can be exercised, through budgets, through policies of the government.

So only on such rare occasions did I put forward my point of view. Not that I was

being asked, for even on that occasion Mr Gandhi didn't ask anything, I took it upon myself to express my views. I think that answers your question. It was the same with Mrs Gandhi. Mr Sabavala attended meetings with Mrs Gandhi and myself and I think somewhere I mentioned in my biography that when she lost interest, she started fiddling and opening envelopes and removing letters and beginning to read them. So, therefore, right down to Mrs Gandhi, although Mrs Gandhi and her father, Mr Nehru, I think respected my views as that of a modern man, but he must have thought that from an economic point of view, I was a backward fellow who still believed in *laissez faire* and Mrs Gandhi wasn't interested in the views of individuals.

In that same chapter where you said that no prime minister has asked for your advice, you've expressed some scepticism about reforms and said that let's wait and see whether the bureaucrats will allow its implementation. Now it's been almost a year since the biography,

what is your feeling, what do you see around you now?

■ The major bureaucrats, the really educated ones, like Mr Manmohan Singh, who has the background of being an economist and bureaucrat – these people understand. The younger group, I think they understand too. I have great respect for the Indian bureaucrats' intellectual capacities. I find them, always found them, very intelligent, very knowledgeable. But of course they have their own views and I can well understand that socialism is a god-given benefaction to bureaucrats because, who runs the country, except the bureaucracy, if it is not a country like America or India in the future, or even England, where the private sector or individuals can play very important roles.

In fact, on the economic front, it is the private operators, industry or industrialists that set the progress of the economy or the lack of progress. We saw what happened in Russia where in technology or science they were very advanced. That was a typical result of not socialism, but of the kind of economic management that the Russians accepted. That was giving the bureaucrats power. Because they were all bureaucrats. You might say that Gorbachev, until he became the president, was himself a bureaucrat. Until you have a man like Gorbachev, and today perhaps Yeltsin, who learnt by themselves or

realised that what they had learnt to do and accept was wrong (you cannot change). The same thing, I think, is happening or has happened in India. I can sense when I talk to bureaucrats, as to how enlightened they are. Look, a typical, top-class bureaucrat is a director of Tatas now. Mr B. G. Deshmukh, who was, you might

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say, the chief bureaucrat in the days of Mrs Gandhi. He ended his term and we invited him to join us and today he is the director of Tatas. I can see the way he talks and the way his mind works. If all our bureaucrats were like Mr Deshmukh with his kind of thinking, there would have been much further progress. But there is so much of the older bureaucracy which has been so conditioned. I used to say and still say that progress in this country requires the dismantling of the bulk of the bureaucracy. That is what is being done. By the Congress, by the finance minister, by the prime minister, it is being done. The role of the bureaucrats is to administer or to express in action the policies of the masters – the electorate. This is already happening now. I have no doubt about it.

What role do you think your group will play in this new environment?

■ It will play the same role that it has played all along. What is the difference? During the socialist regime, when we had naturally slowed down, it didn't interfere with our progress. With the investments that we made, it didn't interfere with the growth of Tata Steel, didn't interfere with the fact that we got into the fertiliser industry as soon as the politicians allowed us. I don't know whether you know, but today Tatas are the biggest tea-growers in the world. The same thing will happen in the truck industry. We are the leaders in India, though not in the world. In India, the socialism from Mr Nehru onwards, did not prevent us from being leaders the moment we had the opportunity, like in the case of trucks. And incidentally, we must recognise that it was a government minister who encouraged us to go into trucks. T T Krishnamachari, who was quite an

enlightened politician. He was also an SOB, but a very able man. Even Mr Nehru encouraged us to double the size of Jamshedpur. He even came to Jamshedpur. So there is going to be no change because that's all we've been trying to do all along.

There is going to be definite help in what you've been trying to do all along.

■ Yes, of course. As I said, we were not into tea. There are literally hundreds of other companies that are in the tea business. Why have we become the leaders? Take, for instance, Tata Chemicals. In its own way, it is a leader. If for instance, you take the fact that Tatas were entrusted with the single biggest project in India today, that is the development of the petrochemical company in Haldia. I think the answer to your question is that we continue to do what we can, expand where we can, encourage new technology, new progress. If you talk to Mr Ratan Tata, you will find that he

What are the specific ways and means which you have introduced to perpetuate this value system?

■ This goes back to the days of Jamshetji Tata. He inaugurated and created the value system that the Tata companies follow. Right from the start, from the time I had any say in the firm and ultimately became the chairman in 1938 – now it's 50, 60 years – I have been an unyielding believer in not only the adoption of, but the adherence to, a high value system. And therefore, so far as I was concerned, as the chairman of the group, and until 1972 don't forget I was the head of the managing agency, and all the policies of the companies were settled by the managing agents. All that has changed now, but I've found no difficulty or resistance from the group of companies, large and small, to the value system created by Jamshetji Tata and his successors, Sir Dorab Tata and myself. Therefore, the system has continued.

You know, only the other day I



Fighting socialism: With Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi

is a great believer in using technology, much more than I, because I'm too old to understand all the ramifications of technology.

You've claimed that it is the shared value system that has bound your various companies together?

■ Well, yes.

was in Lonavla. We have one of the lakes as part of the hydro-electric system that Jamshetji Tata had conceived. It was a part of the programme of Jamshetji Tata who believed that electricity was one of the main forces of economic progress. Electricity, science and steel, to all of which he devoted the last 10 or 15 years of his life. In

Lonavla, I spent some time in an enterprise at the Tata Hydro Electric lake, which fascinated me although I knew about it. The Tata Electric company is doing this work to help villagers get into fish farming and to revive the *mahseer*. I'm not a fisherman, I wouldn't know how to use a fishing rod but the *mahseer* was a great fish which existed in the north of India and was gradually becoming extinct. But the point is that the *mahseer* is part of the fish industry in our country and fish is an important economic activity. You might ask, why are the Tata Hydro Electric companies spending money, why do they employ people, why do they subsidise village endeavours? Because this is a part of our value system. If it is something that enhances the profitable activities of the people, we don't need to have shareholders or a board of directors to tell us. I took no part in this. I knew about these activities at Lonavla because I remember seeing it the first time, about 25 years ago. And it continued.

them. That's all part of our value system.

Another form of the value system is to keep high ethical and business standards. I've advocated it, I've even created a chair of ethics. So it's something that has always interested me. I'm prepared to believe that in some cases some of our companies, large and small, have not adhered to our values.

Sometimes I get complaints, I get people writing to me that this company or that company is not following your value system. Usually these are some simple things to do with an apartment. For instance, sometimes people rent an apartment and do not return it.

Have there been any instances when your value systems have clashed with the government or the bureaucracy. Has it come in the way of the growth of your group?

■ Not one bit.

Let me put it this way, with

promise). I mentioned it in one or two instances that it's never been so even in the days of the licence or permit Raj as they called it. It didn't come in the way of our getting licences for projects which were economically sound and required by the country.

Where does your personal motivation come from, as far as a value system is concerned?

■ I really don't know how to answer that. First of all, from a young age, when I was in college in France, before I joined business here, at the age of 20 or so in 1925, I had a leftist instinct in me. In fact, I was totally against communism because it was a form of social government management, economic management, all kinds of management by the state which they based on force and compulsion. For some reason maybe, because I was half-French, and France had been in two wars, I was instinctively democratic. I didn't have to, but I went into the French army, not because of a law.

Yes, if I had been a purely French citizen I would have been compelled to go into the army. I was only half-French.

But still I went. I decided, and I was encouraged by my father, to go into the French army. And strangely enough, I was put in a regiment where the bulk of the soldiers were Algerians. They, incidentally, knew more French than I did. So even there, though I was an Indian I didn't know too much about Indian conditions as I lived abroad, I realised the

importance of democracy. Therefore, maybe from then on or even earlier, the answer is that I was a democrat. Somehow, I felt the need to be interested, to take part in helping people.

Does your motivation stem from the fact that you have very little interest in money?



A consensus man: With Darbari Seth of Tata Chemicals

I was very much impressed by the man who was in charge over there. Not a very high officer. But what impressed me more was not that we had employed a capable man but that he was enthusiastic about what he was doing. He was enthusiastic about the help he was giving the villagers and the response that he was getting from

the business environment in the past...

■ Oh, in the past, you mean in the days of socialism. Not a bit even then.

For example, licences, where certain business houses may have resorted to some means to obtain licences...

■ I still believe, we didn't (com-

■ Yes, I don't know why. But it is a fact that I appreciated the value of money and I would have liked to have had money. I thought at first that as a successor, in some ways of the Tatas, and the Tata way of life, there would be more money for me to spend. I was interested in motor-cars. I was interested in owning an aeroplane. But I never thought of owning an aeroplane till much later. I was never interested in money, except as a useful instrument of fulfilling my needs.

I'll give you a small instance of something that upset me. Not only did I disapprove, but I reacted adversely to it. I used to play golf where you have these little boys as caddies and *agewallas*. They work for you and you pay them and give a tip. I remember a few instances, won't mention any names, where a group of players were very rich men. The caddies used to tell us that the men used to bet Rs 1000 for every hole. (And I hope they gave good tips.) But they themselves (the caddies) were shocked that money meant to little to these young men, that they didn't mind putting Rs 5000 on a stroke. This kind of thing horrified me. Money is a wonderful thing and I'd have loved to be a multi-millionaire, provided it helped others, it supported others. I don't mean that it should

be charity. Yes, I believe in charity. In fact, what else could one do? But at least it should not be something that is totally unrelated to the kind of life other people lead. I used to get upset. That may be a negative aspect of my character which made me feel that the wish to

accumulate money was something wrong in the kind of economic and social society we live in.

Are you a gambling person yourself?

■ I have felt, therefore, quite irrationally about gambling, that making money through gambling is something not quite honest. It was wrong, it may not have been so, but that was my reaction. So I have never been a gambler. Secondly, as a businessman I could have become quite rich. If I wanted to play the market, I could have presumably, no less than others, become quite rich in my own way.

Aren't you quite rich in your own way?

■ No ... No. I'll tell you. An interesting thing has happened. I never had any wealth. My father could have been a rich man but he had five children and he was a bit of a spendthrift towards his wife and children. He himself retired without wealth. In fact, my father died in debt. In debt mostly to his own relatives, Sir Dorab Tata and Sir Ratan Tata. Which it was my duty to repay. The point is that I myself had no wealth all these years. Yes, I accumulated something from the fees that I got (as director) and something from small amounts that I did have when I was young. But that was inconsequential.

I became rich only in the last few years. About 21 or 22 years ago, my wife and I had bought an apartment. We bought it between the two of us for about Rs 5 lakh. Maybe it was her Rs 5 lakh and my Rs 5 lakh – say Rs 5 to Rs 10 lakh. That apartment we never used. It

Money is a wonderful thing and I'd have loved to be a multi-millionaire, provided it helped others, that may be a negative aspect of my character which made me feel that the wish to accumulate money was something wrong in the kind of economic and social society we live in.

was a nice duplex apartment at Cumballa Hill in Sterling apartments. She and I thought that in our old age we would retire there. So we rented it to the German government who turned it into a habitat for their consulate. And that's been going on for 21 years. When we found that we were never going to shift as we were now in an

old house, well built, belonging to an old Parsi lady, whose heirs seemed to admire me and told me not worry about losing the house until two months after I died, I thought, why do I want to keep the apartment? I knew that real estate values were high, and I thought we'd sell it, my wife and I. And it sold for Rs 4 crore. That was the first time I had anything like crores.

Or even a large number of lakhs. So what do we do with it? Out of the Rs 4 crore, the government took some of it straight away. So the first thing that my wife and I did was to pay something like Rs 50 lakh on capital gains. But still we had something like net Rs 3.5 crore left. Fortunately, my wife agreed with my views, that we don't have long to live and what are we going to do with the money? We don't need money. We have a home to stay in, I've been lent a car by the firm, actually not by the firm, by the hotel (Taj Mahal). I was chairman of the hotel for so long.

Now this is where the value system comes in. I told you of my views about illiterate girls in northern India. The women of India, compared to the men, unlike other countries, are disadvantaged and deprived. They have to accept an inferior way of life, and so what I have decided to do with my wife's and my good fortune, unexpected fortune and a fortune that I resent-



Progressive visionary: JRD sees a new economic order for India

ed, because I said it's wrong that something we paid Rs 5 to Rs 10 lakh for, how the hell can people pay us Rs 4 crore for it. But anyway, it offended my social sense. So I said, let us at least return it to the people. By the way, that is one of the value concepts in Tatas. I've myself referred to it in speeches. Tatas have made money, their companies have made money, out of the labour of the workers, in a sense, out of the poor. Therefore, what comes from the people should,

wherever possible, go back to the people. And the fact is that the majority of the ownership of Tata Sons, the parent company, belongs to charity. To which we have now added in a small way. The money that my wife and I have realised, I have decided to put into a trust. I want to work for the good of women and children.

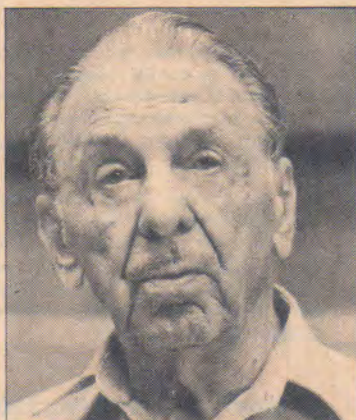
The answer is that I've never been interested in money for spending, although I'd love to have a good car. I've never bought an expensive car. Once, when I was young, I bought a small sports car but it would be considered very cheap today.

Talking of charity, what is the vision which today guides the Tatas in their social activities?

■ Education. And health. Most of the charities of Tatas have gone either into colleges or hospitals. The Tata Memorial Hospital: it was not my money, I was too poor for that, but Sir Dorab Tata put so much into it. Jamshetji Tata made money as a mill owner. He had two sons. He decided that two-thirds of the money would go to his sons, and that one-third would be left for education. He created, out of his own money, the Indian Institute of

Science at Bangalore. And that concept is still there.

I've received many awards – but the one award I've been proud of is the Dadabhai Naoroji. Why? Dadabhai Naoroji died many years



A charitable life: Returning money to the needy

ago. He was a member of Parliament in England, if you please. Dadabhai Naoroji did one thing that I was proud of (being associated with) when I got the award. When that grand man was about 20 years old, he got a college education in Bombay. He was very proud of *that* education. He

asked – to my intense admiration – who paid for my education? He found out that his education was paid for by the budget that was financed by excise duties. And excise duties were generated from products and services that served the people. He decided then, (in the middle of the last century), that this meant that education was paid for by the poor. And he wanted to repay the uneducated poor. And that extraordinary young man discovered that most of the people in India did not know how to read or write, therefore one service that he could render, because of his education, was to teach the young, disadvantaged, poor people to read and write. He did an extraordinary thing. He went house to house and asked the owners if they objected to him visiting them, using their porches or the stairs or the garden to teach children how to read and write. To me, it is

something incredible. That is why, of all the awards, including the Bharat Ratna, I am most proud of the 1988 Dadabhai Naoroji Award.

In your biography, you have, in a sense, bemoaned the fact that you have not had a formal education.

■ I mentioned that and I felt sorry. But mind you, what could it do for me now and what it could have done. I wanted to be an engineer, I wanted to create. Well, I became a pilot, creating at least an airline.

Talking about the airline, if today you were in charge of Air-India, what would your priorities be?

■ Service, quality of service, quality of equipment. The priority would be to be on time, to be punctual. In that we were very good at first. When AI International started its operations abroad, I was almost violent in my insistence on being on time. I used to insist on being informed in my office if there was any long-distance flight that was more than 15 minutes late. What is the use of an airline where you pay a fabulous sum and don't get to the destination on time? This is what is happening in India, whether it is Air-India or Indian Airlines. There is no longer that guilt that it is a crime to take money from people to go fast from here to London, if you

then delay the flight. Sometimes the delay is longer than the flight. The same with Indian Airlines.

What do you think has been your personal weakness which you'd like to conquer? You're prone to be angry sometimes.

■ We all get angry sometimes. I'm not angry with

Tatas have made money, out of the labour of the workers, in a sense, out of the poor. Therefore, what comes from the people should, wherever possible, go back to the people.

others, I'm more angry with myself. I've made mistakes like others. Yes, I'm impatient. I'm impatient with the government, with the electric power if it breaks down. I'm impatient with anything that is through neglect. Or through stupidity. I've been more impatient at times than I should be, or more angry that things are not as they should be.

Is that because you are a perfectionist?

■ Yes, I've heard (people say) that and I think it's right. I've been angry that it is our Indian trait but our young people seem to be satisfied with achieving less or being less ourselves than what we can be or can achieve. We accept second-class or second-rate things. To me, I have been almost obsessed and that's what causes disaffection. If we make a car or a truck, it must be the best possible. If you run anything, as a business or even not a business, do it to the best. I always advise people to strive for excellence, but I feel in order to achieve excellence, you must first pursue perfection. They go together. If I was flying an aeroplane, I would want to be perfect. In fact, I nearly killed myself within a few weeks of my getting a licence. I decided I wanted to be a first-class pilot and I read that first you have to be an aerobatic pilot. But I had nobody to teach me. So I learnt from books. Fortunately, I had the good sense and intelligence to practice aerobatics from sufficient height. And so when I got into trouble, it was at 8000 feet when I spun down to 2000 feet. If I had not stopped spinning and remembered what the book said, I'd have hit the ground. So perfectionism saved me but nearly got me into trouble.

Sometimes you are also indecisive?

■ Yes and no. Not indecisive knowingly. If you are indecisive it means that you don't know. But then have you taken the trouble to find out why and what needs to be done? What does it mean to be indecisive? Not to know whether to take a decision or taking the wrong decision – I've made some mistakes that way.

For instance, in the airline, my associates down the line wanted me to buy a bigger aeroplane and I felt that it was too early and so I bought the smaller aeroplane. Because I wasn't sure. We might lose money heavily on the bigger plane. I think they accused me of being indecisive because I did not accept their advice. I might have made some mistakes during my career but was this due to indecision? (Turning to Sabavala): What do you think? You have worked with me.

Sabavala: As far as I am concerned, his greatest weakness is his gut instinct, almost invariably impeccable, which he allows to be diluted by his colleagues.

How do you answer that? Is it because you are too much of a democrat?

■ Yes, but I did it deliberately. If you're the head of a big firm like Tatas, which is not very big by international standards, but certainly the biggest in India, you've got to make important decisions. Decisions that

then all right, I am a consensus man and I go by the view of others as far as possible. I feel I haven't suffered from it and on the whole I may have missed doing a few things, I might have done more. But, at least, I haven't made the firm go wrong. So yes, it may be that.

What would you like your epitaph to say?

■ I think one should take into account... for instance I have received a number of awards, decorations or what you will call them and I've said on every occasion that I really didn't deserve them. In none did I feel like that more than the Bharat Ratna. Yes, I would say that a man like Satyajit Ray, Mother Teresa or Dr Homi Bhabha. A big award or recognition must be compatible to the quality of service. Maybe that is the answer to your question that I haven't got such a high opinion of what I have done. I've only got a high opinion of what I have done or tried. What I



Steady flight: JRD recreates his Karachi – Bombay flight 50 years later

affect the share-holders, the employees, that affect the success or the failure of the enterprise. Who am I to be so sure of myself? And I've always managed to surround myself with able and knowledgeable men. Therefore, yes, if I think a thing can be done in a particular way, and my colleagues advise me not to it now,

But that is not enough and it doesn't deserve national recognition. And, therefore, that brings up the epitaph... 'He did his best'. Maybe that's all that I did, I did my best, what I thought was my best. It is not a bad epitaph. That does not mean I succeeded every time in doing something that could not have been done better. G



JRD TATA

"Let us go anywhere... I do not care where..."



In the end he did not fail himself in death either. In a rare introspective moment a few years ago, he had told his biographer, Russi Lala, that he would like to die outside India. When asked why, his reply surprised even Lala: "All the four chairmen of Tata Sons before me died abroad so it will be in keeping with that tradition," he said matter-of-factly. "Besides, it would be less of a bother for people here." And when the end came on a cold Sunday night last week in a Geneva public hospital, JRD Tata would have had the satisfaction of having realised both his wishes.

Though the finance minister, Manmohan Singh, flew down for the prayer service in Bombay, and though it was attended by close to a 1,000 people, it was a subdued affair. No lengthy speeches, no noisy public funeral that would have befitted a man of his stature.

The funeral on Friday afternoon at Paris' Pere-Lachaise cemetery in the eastern part of the city was a largely family-and-close-friends affair. Simone Tata, Ratan Tata, Darbari Seth and Ajit Kerkar were the only ones who flew down specially, apart from close friend and Bombay Dyeing chairman Nusli Wadia, and the minister of external affairs, Salman Khurshid who came down to represent the government of India. Jeh, as every one present there called him, would have loved the lack of fanfare.

"I don't know why," JRD said in a 1987 interview, "although I am full of fun, there is no doubt that in poetry, for instance, it is the more tragic things and death which appeal to me." And there was one poem in particular, by the brooding French 19th-century genius Charles Baudelaire that he liked quoting from memory called 'O Death': "Let us go anywhere! I do not care where! So long as it will be different from this lawful place we are in now." Pere-Lachaise is probably closest to his liking. For, apart from the fact that his entire family lies buried there, this cemetery on the eastern side of Paris is among the most beautiful in

the world—some 115 acres of serene tree-lined rolling hills. Besides, for a man who counted every big-time Indian business and political family among his friends, he is not doing too badly in his death. Interred alongside are hundreds of celebrities, both

French and foreign: Chopin, Moliere, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Apollinaire, Balzac, Delacroix, Isadora Duncan and, of course, the biggest tourist attraction of them all, rock legend Jim Morrison.

But to some there was a tinge of irony in



Mukesh Parplani

the fact that he chose Paris as his last resting place. For, despite being born in Paris to a French mother, and despite having spent much of his childhood there, and despite the immense possibilities that France offered to him as a young man, compared to India's grinding poverty, he renounced his French citizenship in 1929. Describing his early years in Bombay in the 1920s, he told his biographer Lala, "I had two personalities. I was an anti-British Indian and I was little more of a Frenchman. Little more of a Frenchman than an Indian because French was my language." In fact, he was well into his 20s before he mastered English.

But for a man of such staggering achievements, the lack of formal education was an abiding regret all his life. He wanted to study engineering at Cambridge, but being the eldest son in a family of three brothers and two sisters, his father would not hear of it. And JRD explained the reasons to biographer Lala in a statement that would make any high-flying Tata executive of the present day cringe, "Father decided that a college degree was not essential for a career in Tatas and summoned me to India. This decision is one I've regretted throughout my life which caused me to have a long-lasting inferiority complex."

It was a thought that bothered him very

much and he was quite candid in admitting it. When the Bombay University awarded him a doctorate in 1981, he chose education as the main theme of his address. But he prefaced his speech in a typically modest way saying, "Having had no university education, I would certainly not have the courage to make education the main theme of my remarks. However, I hope that I may be excused."

JRD was 24 when he was appointed to Tata Sons, the holding company of the then small textile-electricity and steel group. He was 34 when he took over as chairman in 1938, and in a career spanning nearly seven decades JRD's life traversed almost the entire lifetime of modern Indian industrial establishment and, in a larger context, the modern Indian nation itself.

At age 21, fresh after military service in the French army, he joined Tatas as an apprentice. His father provided him a small desk in the office of John Peterson, the then Scottish director of Tata Steel, in the newly built Bombay House in 1925. No sooner had he joined than JRD found himself in the middle of a massive exercise launched by his father to lobby the then British government in India to stop the dumping of cheap steel from countries like Belgium and

England. A bill to protect the domestic steel industry (there was only one company) when introduced received a mixed response. Motilal Nehru and Jinnah supported it, the British-dominated trade associations opposed it, while the labour leaders like N.M. Joshi and Chaman Lal, even in those days, wanted Tata Steel nationalised. It eventually went through and a 15 per cent tariff on import was indeed imposed. For R.D. Tata it was a battle won, and for JRD it was the baptism for larger battles of ideas and ideologies that lay ahead, involving the government and his sense of free enterprise and social justice.

It took him nearly three years of intense government lobbying, including some string-pulling with the then viceroy, Lord Willingdon, to get Tata Aviation Service (the predecessor of both Air India and Indian Airlines) off the ground, in September 1932. ACC came in 1936, Tata Chemicals in 1929, Telco in 1945, Voltas in 1954, Tata Tea in 1962, TCS in 1968, and so on. When he took over as chairman of Tata Sons in 1938, there were 13 companies in the group, and the flagship Tata Steel that year produced over a million tonnes of steel, though the turnover was less than Rs. 16 crore. Last year, there were more than a 100 companies in the group, in areas ranging from software



The Pere-Lachaise cemetery in Paris where the Tata family lie alongside the mighty and the powerful from history



to shipping, from pharmaceuticals to perfumes, from cement to chemicals, from electricity to electronics, and from tea to trucks. The Tatas are now easily the single-largest industrial house in the country with a turnover last year of over Rs.15,000 crore and assets that were worth close to Rs.7,500 crore.

Despite such outstanding achievements, he remained rather modest and self-effacing when talking about them. Fifteen years ago, talking to *Business India*, in the magazine's first cover story, when he was still very much at the helm of affairs at Bombay House, he dismissed a question of being one of the most successful Indian managers ever, saying, "I think you are inclined to give me credit for more than I deserve. Perhaps, I deserve some credit. Also, I had the luck to come into the firm that already had, right at its inception, good ideals and principles and good professional management. So, throughout my career, except in the airline business, my role was a supporting one — encouraging and egging on people, ensuring management recruitment and succession — rather than direct, personal management."

But his peers are less than charitable in tolerating his modesty. Says Keshub Mahindra who's known him for over four decades, "I always got the feeling that he was in many ways unaware of the importance of what he had achieved in his long



The founder of Air India was a pioneering aviator, having piloted the Leopard Moth from Karachi to Bombay in 1932, 1962 and 1982

career." His greatest quality, he says, was to build a team of professional managers and give them the kind of freedom and autonomy under which they prospered and did well.

Darbari Seth, for example, was in his early 20s when JRD hand-picked him to run Tata Chemicals at Mithapur, which he eventually transformed into the empire that it is today. Sumant Moolgaoker did the same, first at ACC and then at Telco. Russi Mody performed the feat at Tisco. Ajit Kerkar was just 35 when he was put in charge of the one hotel company called Indian Hotels in the late '60s. In less than 25 years he transformed it into India's largest hotel chain with over 50 properties all over

the country.

Says he, "He was the kind of chairman any professional manager should have. He laid down the broad policies but never interfered with the day-to-day working. Even those areas where he and the board did not agree with me, like the proposal to set up hotels in Goa in the early '70s, he allowed us to do it through other companies. He never imposed his own will on anything. That was his greatness."

But of all the businesses that he created and nurtured, his favourite one was ironically, the company that was also the source of his biggest hurt and anguish. To a question in *Business India*'s founding issue 15 years ago, about what he considered to be his proudest achievement, his answer was typically modest, "I don't know whether the word 'proud' is correct. But I think, because it so happened that I founded it, in my view, Air India. Not that I can take full credit for it, but I led it all these years and I think it is quite a national asset."

The interview was done a few months after the then prime minister, Morarji Desai, in his moment of pique over JRD's support of Mrs Gandhi, failed to reappoint him as chairman of Air India. JRD, at that time, graciously refused to give vent to his obviously hurt feelings in the *Business India* interview. But talking to a newspaper early

this year he poured out his anguish, "It was," he said, "the biggest moral and mental setback I had ever to suffer. I remember saying somewhere that I felt like a parent who had lost his favourite child. I was not feeling upset so much for no longer being the chief executive, as I was sad to see the quality of Air India's service, which I had assiduously built up over the years to a high standard, slide rapidly downhill."

Air India was also the reason why his growing friendship with the other industrial titan of this century, G.D. Birla, suddenly cooled off in the late '40s. JRD, who was by then running Tata Airlines, tried to dissuade Birla from starting his own airline called Bharat Airways on the ground that increasing competition would kill the nascent industry. "You will remember," Tata wrote to Birla in August 1946, "that on more than one occasion in the past you expressed in clear terms the view that it should be the policy of leading business firms in India not to add to the many difficulties already facing all of us by entering into competition with each other."

Birla replied back: "If my firm has decided to enter this new field, it is purely on patriotic grounds. I don't take the view, as you do, that for many years to come there will be room only for a few persons. India is such a big country and the demand is so large that there is ample room for all the newcomers." But they need not have bothered: the government nationalised both the airlines in less than six years. But the two giants never really got to being good friends after that.

Air India was also the cause of the first crack in JRD's close friendship with Jawaharlal Nehru. Both referred to each other by their first names and for JRD, Nehru of the pre-Independence period was 'the knight in shining armour who would bring us freedom and lead us to a bright new world'. But the Nehru of the post-Independence period was a vastly different man in JRD's eyes. One of his first acts as prime minister, in the early '50s, was to nationalise Air India, the company that was closer to Tata's heart than any of his other creations. Talking to his shareholders at their last annual general meeting in 1953 he said he was "grieved

that this venture to which I devoted so much thought, energy and time and for the success of which I have held such high hopes, has come to this end." Though he was bitter about the whole episode he rather graciously took up Nehru's offer to continue as Air India's chairman. Though he did not earn any salary, he devoted a considerable number of hours every day at the Air India headquarters in Bombay, shaping the airline according to his expansive vision for nearly 25 years, before Morarji Desai forced him out.

Nehru followed up Air India's national-

man and had become the prime minister, India would have followed a different path, and we could have been in a better economy than we have today."

Mrs Indira Gandhi, JRD found, was no better, with policies like bank nationalisation and the MRTP Act. "I believe that there has been a real confusion of thought in regard to the true nature and the extent of the economic power about which so much fear and suspicion, genuine or politically convenient, have been expressed," an anguished JRD told Tata Steel shareholders in August



At ACC's first board meeting in 1936: a creator of both companies and managers

isation with the Industry Policy Resolution of 1956, which sought to further curtail free progress in the country. The same year, another prosperous Tata company, the New India Assurance Company, was nationalised by the government. And in the next few years, things got so bad that for a while (in the late '50s) JRD briefly flirted with the idea of joining the Swatantra Party formed by C. Rajagopalachari, as an alternative to the Congress and the Communist Party of India. Nehru was furious and blew up at Jehangir, as he called him, saying, "You have no business to do that." Years later JRD would say, "Nehru was an ignoramus in economic matters and he insisted on the business of socialism. I knew I was totally out of tune with him and he knew that I was totally out of tune with him." And later, he even said, "If Sardar Patel was a younger

1972. "Deprived of the right to decide what and how much to produce, what prices to charge, how much to borrow, what shares to issue and at what price, what wages and bonus to pay, what executives to employ and what salaries to pay them, and in some cases, what dividends to distribute, directors and top management, from the chairman down, have no economic power in our country. Taking my own case, I doubt that there is anywhere in the world outside India any industrial executive, in charge of a major enterprise, with less real power than I have."

And all this, he said later, was responsible for sluggish Tata growth in the three decades following Independence. In 1978, he told *Business India*, "If Telco had been allowed to develop as it should have been, I have no doubt we'd be making a car in

India. And a Tata car would have been as dominant as the Tata truck is today. If Tisco had been allowed, it would be making 4 million tonnes of steel worth thousands of crores. And if we had been allowed, we would have put up the largest integrated fertiliser plant in the world in Tata Chemicals. But the conditions were different."

But having outlived all the control-minded prime ministers into the era of liberalisation brought about by Narasimha Rao, he told an interviewer early this year, "Well I'm happy it has happened in my lifetime, at least. Perhaps, I should feel vindicated. I always knew that the socialism which we had adopted, which was based on the British Fabian philosophy, would eventually fail. But its suddenness surprised me."

Another happening which he quite anticipated in the autumn of his life was the one that led to the ouster of his friend of 53 years, Russi Mody, from the group. And now that he is no more, the fear that is expressed in many circles is that, like Mody, the other Tata chieftains — like Darbari Seth and Ajit Kerkar — would also try to exert their authority and refuse to accept orders from JRD's chosen successor, Ratan Tata. Kerkar, for one, is confident that none of this will ever happen. "In fact the group will now get closer," he says. Adds Nusli Wadia, "Ratan Tata has his own vision for the group and there is never any doubt that he will hold it together."

But there are others who believe that in the current liberalised economic atmosphere the directors in the group will have to work much harder than they ever had to, to keep the group together. They give a simple example of how there are at least three companies in the group — Tisco, Tata Chemicals, and ACC — all of whom are setting up huge cement capacities. Each of the men who control these companies, of course, wants to maximise both turnover and profit, but at each other's expense, something which JRD probably would have frowned upon in his active days.

"It does not make economic sense for a group to have companies competing with each other after making such huge investments," warns a source, who's been close to the Tatas for a long time. "If these



With Ratan Tata: can he hold the group together?

aberrations are not sorted out, things could get difficult in the future." Then, there are many who believe that things would have been far smoother if JRD had decided on his succession plan a few years earlier, rather than in the late '80s. "That way, tough decisions would have been taken while JRD was still firmly in control, making the transition to the much younger Ratan easier," says a senior Tata official.

It is a debatable point. And even if it was right, there is no doubt that it would have been a minor aberration in the huge legacy that JRD has left behind. For men like Nusli Wadia and Keshub Mahindra, however, his hugely successful management style was but a small part of JRD's greatness. "Apart from his grand vision, it is the humility, the principles and the values that he lived by which made him a giant," says Mahindra.

For nearly fifty years of his life he lived in a rented bungalow on Bombay's Altamount Road. His ailing wife, Thelma, still lives there, while his only surviving younger sister, Rodabeh, who is also very ill, lives in a suite at the Taj Mahal Hotel. JRD did not have children of his own, but it was not an uncommon sight to see him playing with

the large number of servants children that lived in his compound. Except for flying planes and driving fast cars in his youth, he was not given to much of material wealth. He sold the only house he owned, a flat in Sterling Apartments on Bombay's Peddar Road for nearly Rs.4 crore two years ago, and that money was invested in a trust called the JRD Tata and the Thelma Tata Trust, the money from which goes towards educating tribal women in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

What also made him stand out among other corporate giants was his good sense of humour. Way back in 1958, in reply to a letter from G.D. Birla (saying that he should give up smoking, alcohol and coffee as suggested by two European doctors), JRD wrote back saying, "I have given up nicotine, and hardly ever drink coffee or alcohol. According to others, I should give up meat. What I would like best to give up is work! I note with some relief that neither Professor Hochreinnor nor Dr Schleicher have condemned sex too!"

And soon after he was told that he was awarded the Bharat Ratna early last year, he made it a point to invite friends for dinner to the tony Bombay restaurant called Jewel of India, saying "The Jewel of India would like to invite you for dinner to the Jewel of India." That sense of humour did not escape him, even in his last days in bed in the Geneva hospital. He would tell the nurses, who used to apologise for having to shift him up and down in bed, "I am used to the ups and downs in life."

The humour was in direct contrast to the many brooding poems that he jotted down in a red leather scrap book, that he meticulously maintained since the 1920s. One of them called 'Identity' was copied as many as 60 years ago, and reads:

*Somewhere in desolate wind-swept space
in twilight-land, in no-man's land
Two hurrying shapes met face to face
and bade each other stand.
"And who are you?" cried one shape
Shuddering in the gleaming light.
"I know not," said the second shape
"I only died last night."*

■ N. RADHAKRISHNAN with A.B. RAVI



“*To live in the hearts we leave
behind is not to die.*”



Regd. No.: R.N. 6365/57

Edited and published by H. Viswanathan on behalf of Voltas Limited, 19, J.N. Heredia Marg, Bombay 400 038, and printed by him at Elpee Printers, Bombay 400 013.
Editorial and design consultants: Corporate Communication Services.

"Get the best people, and then set them free."

Excerpts from an interview by Sallish Kottary of The Economic Times a few months back:

Isn't there a sense of irony, as far as you are concerned Mr Tata, that liberalisation of the country's economy has come about after you, perhaps the most vocal critic of our socialist policies, have effectively retired from leading the destiny of the largest business house?

Well, I'm happy it has happened in my lifetime at least, and therefore I don't feel the irony of it. Perhaps I could feel vindicated...

Did you ever foresee such an era of liberalisation? Yes. Ultimately I always knew that the Socialism which we had adopted, which was based on the British Fabian philosophy, would eventually fail. It is similar to what the Russians tried to achieve, but they did it the extreme way by adopting Communism. And if it failed in so great a society as Russia and its satellites in Eastern Europe, I knew that the Indian experiment too was nearing its end. But its suddenness surprised me.

Do you feel that this era of li-

beralisation had occurred much earlier, perhaps in 1951 itself as a sort of Industrial Development Act, would it not have meant a more exciting time for you in industry?

I must say I can't complain as I was not personally restrained in any way. But yes, there were many projects which kept getting delayed indefinitely. For myself, certainly it could have been a more exciting and fulfilling time had liberalisation come earlier.

What have been the major influences in your life?

The prime influence in my career in Tata was certainly that which was inspired by Jamsetji Tata. Jamsetji was a towering personality in every sense and above all, he was a man of vision. At a time the British were sceptical about Indians setting up a steel plant, Jamsetji never had any doubts whatsoever. I don't think anyone was on par with Jamsetji as an industrial visionary. But that is not the sole reason why I have been an admirer of Jamsetji. The major reason was his sense of values, sterling values, which he imparted to this group.

How were you drawn to the cause of population?

Though I didn't have the education nor the economic training to understand the full implications of our relentless population growth, as far back as 1951, I came across statistics which showed that the population of India had already grown to over three hundred and fifty million. Against the backdrop of the rapid pace at which we were adding millions to our population annually, I realised that the growing numbers would be a serious drag on the economic progress of the country. In those days I used to include in my speeches at annual general meetings of all our companies of which I was chairman, some expression of my views on the situation in the country.

Your style of management, which shaped the House of Tata for over a half century, has been the subject of much discussion and debate. How would you define that style?

There was no style, because for a style you need to expose it to others and I wanted none of that. But if you insist on calling it a style, I es-

entially believed that every Tata company shared the same tradition, same philosophy and same values as those of the group. And so we had to make sure that the chief executive and key managers of the enterprises should be people who believed in and followed the Tata tradition and philosophy. If we didn't find such people from within the organisation, we got them from without.

I appreciate that the recruitment policy is the crux of any management policy but what about the

THUS SPAKE JRD

style and leadership you imparted to the group holding company, Tata Sons?

I am coming to that. Once you got the best people, the people who shared our values and ideals, we left them free to act on their own. We do not fetter them. We encourage them and give them opportunities for leadership. That is how Russi Mody at TISCO, Sumant Moolgavkar at TELCO and Darbari Seth at Tata Chemicals developed

leadership of their own. Just provide the opportunities for leadership and allow your people to exercise their own intelligence and skills in management and entrepreneurship. I think you may say that this is the style of Tata. It is not an original style I created, but one that was naturally there and in which I believed strongly and strove to maintain.

What were the reasons that made you choose Ratan Tata as your successor as Chairman of Tata Sons when you stepped down last year?

I wanted to be an engineer and to apply for job in Tata Steel.

Do you have any regrets in life, at this stage?

Apart from the lack of a college education, the other thing I regret very much about is not being able to speak any Indian language fluently because I spent all my formative years abroad. But it is a belief I hold dear, that it is important for a person to converse with people in his group in his native language. With advancing age, you have had to curtail some of your activities.

Mind you, I realised that the decision should not be mine alone. It was one with which my colleagues on the board shared totally and agreed with, while I myself was a factor too, maybe I was a younger man, the decision could have been a close one for me considering the outstanding ability and experience in our team. Apart from sharing my values absolutely, he is totally honest, hardworking, able and of course, much better educated than I am.

What did you want to become when you were young?

I wanted to be an engineer and to apply for job in Tata Steel.

Do you have any regrets in life, at this stage?

What do you miss most? Skiing, flying and fast driving! I used to ski every year in Europe from 1945 until I quit when I was 60 years old. I was also very fond of driving fast cars when the law allowed it. I drove Bugattis for some years in Europe and here until my friends in Mercedes-Benz with whom we were associated used to lend me a fine and fast Mercedes sports car for driving on holidays in Europe. I stopped driving altogether when reaching the age of 80 and I realised that if I was involved in a crash, in the eventuality of a stroke or a heart arrest or some such thing, I might be endangering the life of others.

Is there anything you would like to do between now and the time you cross the great divide?

No, nothing. I don't think I would have enough left in me, in knowledge or skill, to achieve anything worthwhile any more. I am 88 years old now, and in another two years I will be 90. So what could I look forward to achieving, except greater understanding of religion or things of the spirit? Not for yourself, perhaps for others?

Before I die, I would like to see great changes in the economic and social life of our people, particularly of our women. Do you know that in certain parts of the country today, out of every 100 girls born each year, only 10 might be able to go to school.

Do you believe in rebirth?

I would say yes and no. Yes, I believe in the survival of the soul perhaps through rebirth. I sometimes wonder whether rebirth after death isn't the most likely explanation for the supernatural powers and talents of young geniuses—great artists, great composers, great scientists and great authors.

If you are born again in this world, what would you like to be?

I would like to come back with intelligence, and intellectual abilities in a powerful capacity with which I would help India and the people.

Would you like to come back to your same job?

No, but I would want to be creative in my new life. Now will you let me carry on with my present job in this life at least...



Touching great heights: (Clockwise from top left) JRD receiving Bharat Ratna from then President Mr R Venkataraman; being conferred degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) from former Maharashtra Governor, Mr O P Mehra; ready to take off in a fixed wing single-engine aircraft; with the then Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh; with Prince of Wales at the launch of Bharat Yava Shakti Trust.



A Chronicle

1904, July 29—Birth in Paris
1909—The Tatas purchase a house on the beach of Hardelot in France where a young JRD is enthralled by the aviator Louis Bleriot who becomes his neighbour
1909-17—The family alternates between Bombay and Paris and Tata attends Cathedral School when in Bombay
1917-18—The family resides at Yokohama to be with Ratanji Tata. At the end of the First World War, the family moves to France
1923—Loses his mother Sooli and spends a year in a crammer in England prior to seeking admission in Cambridge
1924—Drafted into the French Army for a year as a new conscription law comes into force in France
1924—Joins Tata as an unpaid apprentice
1926—Inherits his father's directorship in Tata Sons.
1929—Renounces French Citizenship
1929, February 10—Secures a pilot's license, the first in India
1930 December—Marries Theima Vicaji
1932 October 15—Tata Aviation Service inaugurated with JRD flying between Karachi and Bombay
1938, July 26—Appointed chairman of Tata Sons
1942 August—Attends the Congress session in Bombay where Quit India resolution was passed
1944—JRD turns down proposal of knighthood, draws up the Bombay Plan and sets up the JRD Tata Trust
1945—Initiates the setting up of the TIFR
1953, August 1—Air India nationalised, Tata appointed chairman
1962, October 15—Re-enacted solo flight Karachi-Bombay to commemorate 30th anniversary of Air India
1982, October 15—Re-enacted Karachi-Bombay flight to mark golden jubilee of Indian civil aviation
1983 January—Bestowed with the rank of commander of the French Legion of Honour
1986—Awarded the Bessmer Medal of the Institute of Metals, London
1991, March 25—Steps down from chairmanship of Tata Sons
1992, January 26—Awarded Bharat Ratna

A many-splendoured life

"YOU KNOW something? I do not like work. I like to be interrupted," Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhai Tata once remarked. For a man who put in about 75 hours of work a week, the comment was remarkably tongue-in-cheek.

However, ever since a flier-neighbour in a beach house in France fired the imagination of young JRD, his first love has been flying. Of the experience, he said "the fact that you find yourself totally alone in the immensity of space made you very humble and made you see of what little consequence you are. And then you identify God with the immensity of nature."

Mr Tata's father, Mr R D Tata, married his French tutor, Madame Briere, in 1902, and he was born on July 29, 1904, in France.

After the birth of their fifth child, the Tatas came to live in India in 1924. But his studies alternated between the famed Janson Besally school in France and Cathedral High in Bombay. However, as a young boy, he associated himself more with France because he was angry that India

was not free. After schooling, he was drafted into the French Legion for a year and was assigned to an Algerian regiment.

In 1930, he met and married Theima, an Austrian. JRD Tata and his wife soon became a familiar part of the elite Bombay social circuit. His charm, erudition and above all, dash and "man of action" image endeared him to many who met him.

He was groomed to take over from his father, then heading the House of Tatas, by Mr Peterson, a retired Scot ICS officer who was director in charge of Tata Steel. Every paper for Mr Peterson was routed through JRD.

On the death of his father, JRD was made a director in 1926. In 1938, the Tata Sons directors, all senior to JRD, selected him as chairman. For the next 53 years, he was the exceptionally popular boss of the Tata industrial empire. He voluntarily relinquished the top post in 1991.

On assuming chairmanship, the parent firm had in its care, the steel company, four units of the textiles group, the three electric companies, TOMCO and the Taj Mahal hotel in Bombay belonging to the Indian Hotels Company. Tata Ltd was the only firm abroad in London.

The growth and development of Tata into a far larger number of companies and consultancy services, its collaboration projects abroad and its main thrust since 1958, Telco, Volts, Lakme, Tata Exports, Tata Burroughs, Tata McGraw-Hill publishing company, are some enterprises set up during JRD's long innings.

Mr Tata restructured constituent companies to devote power to them, laid stress to human dignity in labour relations and made the House of Tatas irresistible to the top talent in the country. After the managing agency system was abolished in April 1970, he allowed the chief executives of various Tata companies to take over from him as chairmen. Consequently, it was not surprising to find no other business house with a comparable galaxy of high-profile chief executives.

Vital national issues mattered deeply to JRD. Family planning, for instance, was close to his heart. In fact, he was the first to advocate family planning right from independence.

Characteristically, he also made a start in his own concerns. Family planning programmes were launched in TISCO and TELCO at Jamshedpur. Tata Electric companies, Tata Chemicals and several other Tata concerns. In all the scientific bodies he headed too, JRD brought in the spirit of humanism and the never-ending quest for knowledge that had motivated his father, Ratan Tata, and the founder of the Tata organisation, Jamsetji Tata.

In his semi-retired life after nominating Mr Ratan Tata as his successor in Tata Industries, he was available to offer advice on crucial issues. He had mediated last year between the warring clans of Mr Russi Mody and Dr Jamshed Irani of TISCO when the former had issued controversial promotions to some executives.

■ Agencies

Flying high

United News of India
BOMBAY 29 NOVEMBER

"Let the young man do it, it doesn't cost much" were the encouraging words, with which, John Peterson persuaded Dorabji Tata to allow his son Jehangir to invest in a feeder air mail service, linking the hinterland of peninsular India in 1929.

Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhai Tata's interest in the possibility of civil aviation was kindled by a boxing champion of the Royal Air Force, who was going round the country in the late 1920's doing survey work. His name was Nevil Vincent.

With imperial airways planning an air service between London and Calcutta via Karachi, which would also carry mail, Mr Vincent's idea was to connect Karachi with Ahmedabad and Bombay.

The initial investment needed was Rs two lakh.

Finally, Sir Dorab agreed, writes R M Lala in *Beyond the last Blue Mountain*, chronicling Jehangir's love for flying.

That decision led to the formation of the Tata Aviation Service, later Tata Airlines, which eventually became Air India.

The Tatas had taken a decision, yet the government approval took a long time coming largely due to the innovative nature of the business proposal.

When the clearance finally came in April, 1932, Tata left for England to purchase two Pussmots.

The first flight of Indian civil aviation took off at Drigh road airfield in Karachi on October 15, 1932, with Tata at the controls flying solo to Ahmedabad and on to Bombay in the Pussmoot. At Bombay, the postmaster of the city was there to receive the mail, 55 pounds of it.

The complete journey would take four days with overnight halts in Bellary and Madras.

However, in the very first year of its service, Tata aviation achieved what Indian aviation is now struggling to attain, cent per cent punctuality.

In that first year, the service chugged up a profit of Rs 10,000, a slender profit though noteworthy that it was done without any government subsidy.

THE LEGEND

On the man who made the Tata name something to reckon with in Indian industry

WHEN Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoi Tata—Jeh to friends—announced his resignation from the chairmanship of Tata Sons Limited, the longest reign in Indian corporate history came to an end. With it, an era came to an end. But the legend lives on.

Invariably, it is the new that corners attention. Not so when the old is JRD Tata. When the chairman of Tata Sons Limited handed over the reins of a Rs 10,000 crore empire to nephew Ratan Tata, an era in Indian capitalism came to an end. And logically, the media should have gone to town on the inheritor. Instead, a complete reversal took place: every newspaper in the country wrote about 87-year-old JRD, his life, his philosophy and his contribution to Indian industry. Nothing unusual really, when you examine the phenomenon. The media had only done what it never tires of. Singing hosannas of the legend.

The admiration is well-deserved. The only businessman comparable with JRD since independence has perhaps been G D Birla, whose industrial empire was far larger than that of the Tatas. But the Birlas have been fragmented since. While the Tatas have moved leagues ahead. This, despite the fact that G D Birla had the nation's leaders very much on his side, as opposed to JRD who had them only as friends. Mahatma Gandhi would hold his prayer meetings at the Delhi residence of G D Birla, which has the dubious distinction of also being the place where the Mahatma was assassinated. Not surprisingly, Birla's association with national leaders was often seen as the factor which helped his business grow.

The Tatas, on the other hand, maintained a forced distance, living in Bombay as they did. Time and again, JRD has spared absolutely no words to pulverise Nehru's brand of socialism. Although a great admirer of Panditji (JRD has admitted to calling him a knight in shining armour), he told the *Weekly* in an interview some years ago that, "There was no question of any kind of interaction or relationship between the two of us, except the inanely social one. Where we would talk of the giant pandas he had received from China. Or some other rubbish like that."

Apparently, nothing improved with Mrs Indira Gandhi in power. "She would doodle or pointedly ignore me while I spoke, cutting open envelopes and pulling out letters," said JRD in the same interview. It was only when Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister that the Tatas were given an ear. The Tatas, mind you. Not JRD.

"Rajiv is not interested in an old man like me. He believes in youth. So, in the Tatas, he sends for Ratan...." he said, "In a way, I am sorry. But I understand. You don't call a man who is 82 years old and expect your young team to work with his ideas."

But JRD never tired of attacking Nehruvian socialism nor did he ever miss the opportunity to demolish the licence-permit raj. In a widely quoted interview to *Time* magazine's Edward W Desmond in August last year, he described Nehru's socialism as "an economic dictatorship by the government."

With such strong views and opinions, it is hardly surprising that his group of companies stand apart from the rest. And it isn't surprising either that he held such views.

Born in 1904, shortly after Jamshedji the founder of the Tata business, passed away, JRD was destined to take over one day. His father was a Parsi and mother French. As soon as he finished his schooling in Paris at the Janson Besaillon and at the Cathedral High School in Bombay, he joined the French army and was posted in Algeria. At 22, he was

time and again, JRD has spared absolutely no words to pulverise Nehru's brand of socialism. Although a great admirer of Panditji he once said, "There was no question of any kind of interaction or relationship between the two of us, except the inanely social one. Where we would talk of the giant pandas he had received from China. Or some other rubbish like that." Apparently, nothing improved with Mrs Indira

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brought back to India and placed under the charge of a Scotsman, John Peterson, then the managing director of Tata Steel. Peterson's instructions were simple: JRD was to be included in every aspect of business that Peterson handled.

When Nowrosji Saklatvala, then the chairman of Tata, died, JRD was elected in his place. At the time he was 34. What he did was typical of the man. JRD immediately gave up the chairmanship of most Tata companies and began to induct diverse talent to run his companies. It was a style that was to later go into the building of several formidable careers like those of Darbari Seth and the late Suman Moolgaokar.

Typically too, JRD rarely let himself be confined to one field. His interest in aviation, after a chance joy ride in Bleriot's plane at the age of 15, ultimately led to the formation of the country's first airline. In 1929, JRD became the first Indian pilot with an aviator's certificate. A couple of years later, an En-

glishman suggested to JRD that he start an airline. Within the year, Tata Airlines had taken wings and in 1932, JRD was in a Puss-Moth carrying mail from Karachi to Bombay. Fifty years later, by the time he repeated his feat, Tata Airlines had long been turned into Air India. By 1978, he had been booted out as chairman of the airline by Morarji Desai and all he could do was look at the airline he gave birth to with nostalgia.

Now, of course, almost everything for him has moved into the realm of nostalgia. It is for Ratan Tata to look after his legacy. To strengthen his spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship.

Many years ago, someone happened to ask JRD what would happen to the Tata companies once he was not available to guide them, to unify them. He reflected on the question and finally remarked that they would perhaps go their own separate ways. But of course, he added, it all depends on the leadership.

Typically JRD rarely let himself be confined to one field. His interest in aviation, after a chance joy ride in Bleriot's plane at the age of 15, ultimately led to the formation of the country's first airline. In 1929, JRD became the first Indian pilot with an aviator's certificate. A couple of years later, an Englishman suggested to JRD that he start an airline. Within the year, Tata Airlines had taken wings and in 1932, JRD

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