

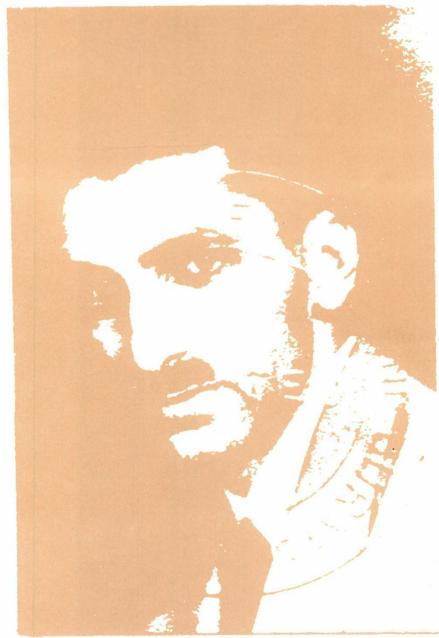
# 'JEH' A LIFE OF J.R.D. TATA

BAKHTIAR K. DADABHOY

Pioneer aviator, numero uno industrialist, institution-builder, philanthropist, and man manager par excellence, J.R.D. Tata was a nation builder, who was and continues to be a source of inspiration to both young and old. Having placed India on the aviation map of the world with his pioneering flight in 1932, he went on to guide the destiny of his child Air-India with the same enthusiasm and eye for perfection which informed his other ventures.

As an industrialist, JRD is credited with placing the Tata Group on the international map. Apart from being a businessman par excellence, he was a patron of the sciences and the arts, a philanthropist and yet a man with a passion for literature, fast cars, skiing and flying. As a philanthropist, he was respected for building and keeping alive the tremendously active Tata charitable trusts and adding some of his own. As a founder of institutions he played a seminal role in the founding of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, National Centre for the Performing Arts among many others, and advocated family planning long before anybody had visualised that population would be a problem.

But it is as an inspirer of men that JRD will always be remembered. With an uncanny knack for selecting the right man for the right job, his greatest achievement lay in his ability to weld a team and get the best out of persons who differed greatly in outlook, character and ability. Filled with an unmistakable zest for life, his desire to instil and inspire a spirit of initiative and enterprise was always evident; and he led those working for, and with him, in the only way he knew: with affection.



Changin V.D. Yata  
(Signature of Holder)

'JEH'  
A LIFE OF J.R.D. TATA

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BAKHTIAR K. DADABHOY



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*In memory of*

**MY GRANDFATHER DADABHOY MEHERWANJI DADABHOY,  
AND MY GRANDMOTHER DINBAI BURJOR THANAWALLA**

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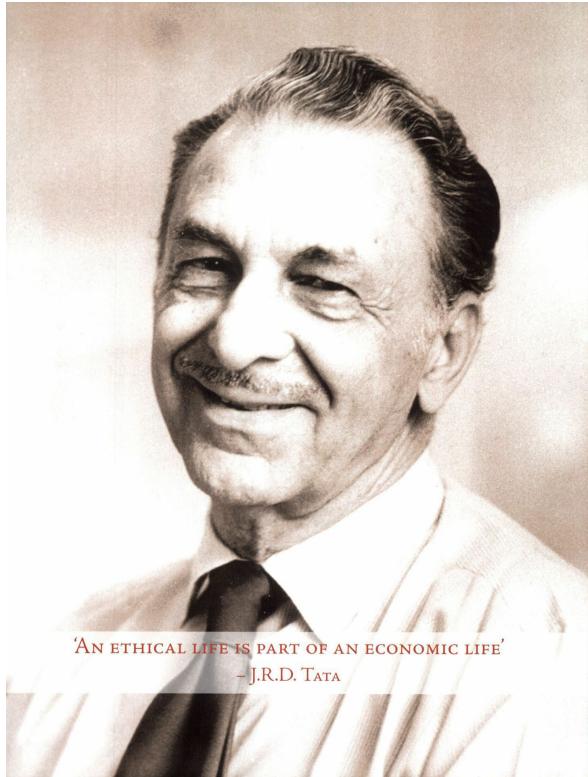
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'AN ETHICAL LIFE IS PART OF AN ECONOMIC LIFE'

-J.R.D. TATA

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Finally, a big thank you to my sister Tushna Kotwal and my brother-in-law Phiroze, who politely accepted my excuse of doing research, while I idled at their home in Pune. And last, but not the least, thanks are due to my nephew Navroze, who played the role of messenger, courier and odd-job man with a minimum of fuss (apart from wondering out aloud if anyone would ever publish what I had written).



*An artist's impression of J.R.D. Tata*

# 1

## THE SAGA BEGINS

---

On 15 October 1932, a slim young man dressed in white trousers and a white short-sleeved shirt takes off from Drigh Road airport, Karachi, southbound for Bombay via Ahmedabad. His only equipment consists of his goggles and a slide rule. The chief officer of the Karachi Municipality and the postmaster are part of a small party that has gathered to give him a send-off. The time is 6.35 a.m. The aircraft, a primitive Puss Moth. A few hours later the little aircraft lands. The time is 1.50 p.m. and the venue is Juhu airport, Bombay. The cargo is fifty-five pounds of mail and the achievement is the completion of India's first airmail flight. The moment is a historic one because civil aviation in India started from these humble beginnings.

Fast forward to 18 April 1971. The venue is Santa Cruz airport. The time is 8.20 a.m. A magnificent Boeing 747, resplendent in its red and white colours and escorted by two Indian Air Force Mig-21 fighters, appears in the morning sky. A slim, erect and bright-eyed sexagenarian rises to address a distinguished gathering. He is chairman of the airline, which is welcoming its first Jumbo jet into the fleet. It is a big moment for the gentleman since he was also the pilot of the first flight. His name: Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, known to the world as JRD, and affectionately called 'Jeh' by his relatives and friends. The name of the airline: Air-India International.



*Sooni and Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata*

## THE HERITAGE

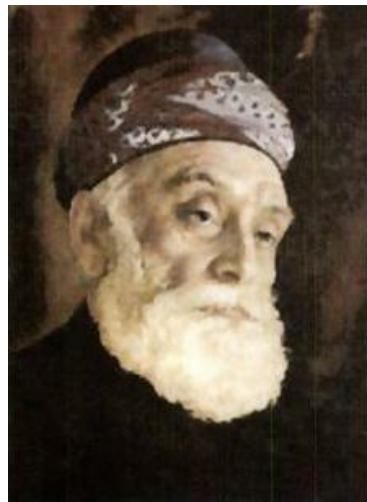
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Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (JRD) was born in Paris on 29 July 1904, the second of five children of Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata (RD) and his French wife Suzanne (later Sooni). JRD's father Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata was the son of Dadabhoy Tata, a brother-in-law of Nusserwanji Tata, a distant relative of Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the illustrious founder of the House of Tata. In 1887, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata established Tata & Sons and took as his partners his eldest son Dorab and his young cousin Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata, JRD's father. The story of the Tatas starts with Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, and it would be pertinent to take a closer look at this illustrious founder of India's oldest and most respected industrial house.

Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata was born in 1839 in a family of Parsi priests in Navsari, Gujarat. He came to Bombay at the age of fourteen and joined Elphinstone College at seventeen from where he passed out as a 'Green Scholar' (the then equivalent of a graduate) a couple of years later. After trading ventures in the Far East and Europe in 1868, he started a private trading firm with a capital of Rs 21,000. A lucrative contract to furnish supplies to the expeditionary force of General Napier in Abyssinia generated enough profit to launch him on his career in textiles. He floated the Central India Spinning, Weaving and Manufacturing Company in 1874 with a capital of rupees fifteen lakhs subscribed by his friends and himself.

On 1 January 1877, the day Queen Victoria was formally proclaimed Empress of India, the 'Empress Mills' were inaugurated in Nagpur. Well ahead of his time, Jamsetji instituted a pension fund for his mill workers in 1886, and in 1895, introduced accident compensation. A strong belief that much of India's poverty was due to lack of opportunity led him to establish the J.N. Tata Endowment for Higher Education in 1892 for talented young Indians.

Some of India's finest professionals were 'Tata scholars'.



*Jamsetji Tata*

Jamsetji believed that the three basic ingredients essential for industrial advance were steel, hydroelectric power and technical education coupled with research. In 1896, he offered half his fortune consisting of fourteen buildings and four landed properties worth rupees thirty lakhs, to the British government to establish a University of Science. For the last eight years of his life, he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the British government to make a contribution equal to his gift and pass an enactment to start a university. Lord Curzon, who had arrived in 1899, got the impression that a baronetcy was Jamsetji's ultimate aim and delayed his approval of the scheme. It was only a year after Jamsetji's death in May 1904 that Lord Curzon agreed to the scheme for the University of Science with the share of the government being equal to the interest from Jamsetji's benefaction. Thus was born the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, which became the fountainhead of scientific and technological manpower for the next half century. (Swami Vivekananda was Jamsetji's companion aboard the *Empress of India* on their voyage to America in 1893 and the founder of the House of Tata was deeply influenced by Swamiji's ideal of self-reliance. Later Swamiji helped Jamsetji in setting up the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.)

Jamsetji's dream of setting up India's first steel plant was realised on 16 February 1912, when the first ingot of steel rolled on the lines of the Sakchi plant. In the next decade, the Tatas supplied 1,500 miles of steel rails to Mesopotamia, Egypt, Palestine and East Africa during the First World War.

Lord Chelmsford, the viceroy acknowledged this contribution in 1919 when he ordered that henceforth Sakchi would be known as Jamshedpur.

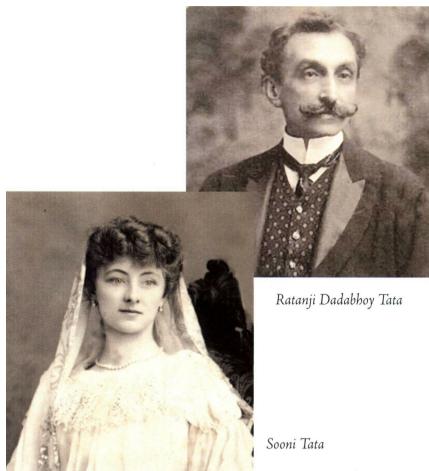
Jamsetji established Tata & Sons in 1887 with his first-born Dorab and young RD as partners. He had been impressed with Ratanji's handling of the textile business in Nagpur and decided to make him a partner when he set up Tata & Sons thirteen years later. RD was born in Navsari in 1856 and according to an interview JRD gave many years later, was, in all probability, adopted from a poor family. After completing his graduation from Elphinstone College in Mumbai, (then Bombay) RD did a course in agriculture in Madras before joining the family business with the Far East. He spent time in Hong Kong importing silks from China to India and exporting rice from Burma to the Far East. He also opened branches in Kobe and faraway New York.

RD had been married at an early age to a girl from the Banaji family who died childless soon after the union. He remained a widower till his mid-forties when fate intervened in the form of the lovely Frenchwoman Suzanne Briere, the twenty-year-old daughter of his French teacher in Paris. RD had gone to Paris hoping to trade in pearls and silks. The forty-six-year-old Ratanji confessed that he had been struck by Cupid's arrow. He asked for permission to marry from the patriarch Jamsetji, with what must have been much trepidation and little hope, since marriage outside the Parsee community was taboo in those days. A visionary in industry, Jamsetji proved that he was progressive in the social sphere as well. His enlightened consent led to the union of Ratanji and Suzanne in Paris in 1902. Soon after the marriage, RD gave his bride a Parsee name, Sooni. Sooni was a good cook and made excellent pastry. Witty and alert, she had golden hair and blue eyes and was also an accomplished seamstress. Within six months of coming to India she learnt Gujarati. It was obvious that RD had chosen well.

The marriage created a sensation in Bombay because, not only had RD married outside the community, he had also taken the revolutionary step of converting his wife to the Zoroastrian faith. The uproar raised at the time still echoed ninety years later when JRD died. When R.M. Lala his biographer asked JRD if this incident had coloured his attitude to the Parsees he replied, 'I don't think so.' All his life JRD was against organised religion, including

Zoroastrianism. He opposed what he called the 'outward priest-created manifestations of religion', which he believed to be the cause of disunity and backwardness. JRD was against the insistence of the orthodox Parsees in not accepting into the Zoroastrian faith children of Parsee girls who had married outside the community. This still remains a highly controversial subject and one, which never fails to excite many passions among the Parsees. JRD's secular and national outlook was obvious, when at a felicitation by the Parsee Panchayat in Bombay, he remarked: 'As an Indian, I am proud to be a Parsee'.

Jamsetji not only delivered the nuptial oration, but also lavishly entertained the newly weds at Kingston-on-Thames, hosting 'the largest gathering of Parsees which had hitherto been held West of the Suez Canal.' This was the last gathering Jamsetji attended. He fell seriously ill in May 1904, and passed away on 19 May 1904 at Bad Nauheim in Germany. Both Dorab and RD were at his bedside when the end came. Though they shared a slightly strained relationship, the two decided to work together to achieve Jamsetji's vision. Under their able stewardship Jamsetji's three dreams would become reality within the next eight years.



Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata

Sooni Tata



*Sooni Tata with her children: (from left) Rodabeh JRD, Sooni, Jimmy, Sylla and Darab*

# 3

## CHILDHOOD

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JRD was born on 29 July 1904 (seventy days after Jamsetji's death), in the second house on Rue de Halevy, a spacious road to the left of the Opera in Paris. This year also saw the birth of Pablo Neruda, Graham Greene, Bing Crosby, Marlene Dietrich, Alexei Kosygin, Lal Bahadur Shastri, (and his colleague in Tatas for nearly half a century, Naval Tata). It was the year in which King Camp Gillette introduced the safety razor and work on the Panama Canal began.

He was named Jehangir or 'Conqueror of the World'. JRD's earliest childhood memory is of being thrashed by his father when he was four for kicking the maid and using her poverty to justify his misdeed. ('I can hit you, kick you because you are poor.') As R.M. Lala his biographer puts it, he was 'an interesting product of two continents' and schooled in Paris, Bombay and Yokohama. His education was disrupted regularly and he schooled in Paris with French as the medium of instruction for a few years, then in Bombay in English, then Paris again, before returning to Bombay once more. In between he spent about two years in Japan. Most of his education was in France and one of the problems Jehangir faced was of language – a result of his mixed heritage.

JRD later recalled: 'When I attended one of the government schools in Paris, the Janson De Sailly, I was a much better student in French than I was in English at the Cathedral School in Bombay.' Maths and Physics interested him but he was indignant about learning British history. JRD hardly had any recollection of the time he spent in Cathedral High School. Unimpressed with the pedagogy, he claimed that he was bored stiff with the way he was taught. Cars and aeroplanes fascinated him from the start; the latter interest put India on the aviation map of the world. The one single strand, which connected his

childhood reminiscences, was his family's peripatetic existence.'What I remember most vividly is that we always seemed to be on the move, and that my lovely and cultured mother had to uproot herself every two years or so to find a new home – alternatively in France and in India.'



*JRD with his sisters Rodabeh and Sylla*

There was no denying that it was an unusual childhood – nomadic and unsettling with the father mostly absent and no permanent home to speak of. Except for a holiday home in Hardelot, a summer resort on the Channel coast of France, they moved from house to house every few months. Some stability came in the form of a house on Ridge Road, Malabar Hill in Bombay, which he named 'Sunita' after Sooni. Unfortunately, Sooni did not live long enough to enjoy it to the full, passing away aged only forty-three in Paris.

RD felt that his family was more comfortable in France and kept them there. Sooni wrote him regularly in a unique form of personal cipher: French written in Gujarati script. Soon there were additions to the family. After Sylla and Jehangir a daughter, Rodabeh was born in 1909, and a son, Darab, in 1912. All the children were born in Paris, with the exception of Jimmy (Jamshed) the youngest, who was born prematurely in 1916 in Bombay, after Sooni suffered a fall from the steps in the Taj Mahal Hotel. She would have died of haemorrhage had timely medical attention not been provided round the clock.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, RD was in Bombay and Sooni in Paris. The children were away on holiday in Switzerland with their granny. His grandmother was according to JRD a very formidable lady. As JRD was to tell R.M. Lala many years later, 'Her husband was a humorist

and after some time with her the gentleman ran away as anyone would have, had he been married to my grandmother.' Perhaps JRD inherited his sense of humour from his French grandfather. When they returned from holiday, they found that their mother had volunteered to work as a nurse at the American Hospital in Paris. The strain of looking after a family and nursing took its toll, and Sooni contracted tuberculosis. RD summoned the family to Bombay and must have kept his fingers crossed as his family sailed from wartime France to India. The journey was, however, without incident.

Sooni's tubercular lungs found Bombay's humidity unsuitable. RD had good business links with Japan, and since the temperate climate was also suitable, he decided to send the family to Yokohama, where they stayed for all of 1917 and a fair part of 1918. Most of JRD's early education was divided between Paris at the well-known Lycee (high school) of Janson De Sailly and Bombay's Cathedral School. The Janson De Sailly was very close to where they lived and JRD called it 'a very fine school, a great public school of Paris, but not in the British sense.' JRD recalled how he was the fastest down the stairs and how for some strange reason his teacher called him *L'Egyptien*. He showed some talent for writing and even won a story writing competition.

JRD was by his own account a naughty boy and played practical jokes on people. He was also fussy about food, and Rodabeh his sister recalled an incident when RD got up from his chair at the dinner table to teach him a lesson and how JRD ran round the table saying, 'No Papa, No Papa.' It can only be assumed that the connection between JRD's hand and mouth acquired a regularity and urgency not seen before. This trend continued throughout his life. JRD did not enjoy his food. For him food was just something one ate and he usually couldn't remember what he had eaten. His only weakness was for prawns, which were sometimes the cause for his stomach upsets. Describing himself as 'an ordinary boy' JRD was fond of sports and confessed that he was initially shy of girls. The move to Japan meant yet another school and change of environment. He was admitted to an American school run by Jesuit priests where the teachers ill-treated a fat Jewish boy. JRD went out of his way to befriend him because most of the other American boys were anti Semitic.



The house near L'Opera Paris where JRD was born



JRD with his siblings



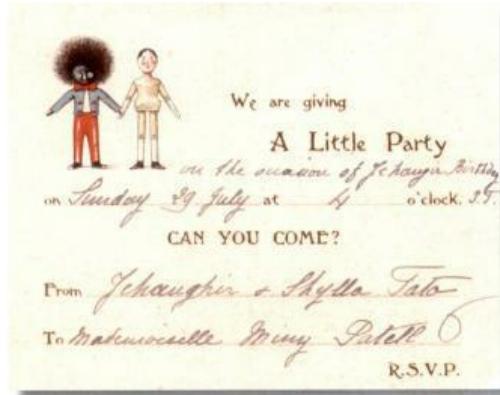
JRD's favourite picture of himself as a young boy

The family stayed in Japan until 1918, and it was nearing the end of the war when RD decided to bring the family back to Bombay. Their passages were booked on a Japanese ship called *Hirano Maru*, and fourteen-year-old JRD occupied himself fruitfully by teaching himself to type on an old Remington typewriter he had ferreted out in the ship's lounge. This skill was something he would use a few years later in France. They disembarked at

Colombo and the family took another ship back to Bombay. The ill-fated *Hirano Maru* continued on its voyage and was torpedoed off the coast of England.

The Tata family returned to France in 1919 when the Versailles Peace Conference was being held. JRD was only fifteen at the time, and like every French schoolboy, felt that the area of Alsace-Lorraine belonged to France, and rejoiced when France got it back after the Treaty of Versailles.

*The invitation card to JRD's birthday party*



*JRD Tata and his sister Sylla dressed in traditional Japanese attire*





*JRD in a sailor suit*

## 4

### A SEED IS SOWN

---

RD decided that the family needed a home in which to spend their holidays. He picked on a new beach resort on the Channel coast of France called Hardelot where he bought a villa, which he named 'La Mascotte'. Every summer in postwar France, the family went to their home on the beach resort of Hardelot. (Hardelot, it may be recalled, was the site of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, where in 1520 Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France met for the purpose of arranging an alliance. Both kings brought large retinues, and the name given to the meeting place reflects the unexampled splendour of the pageantry. The political consequences though were negligible.) Later RD was to add some more villas and shops as a real estate developer. It was on holidays here that JRD was to make the acquaintance of Louis Bleriot Jr, the son of the legendary Louis Bleriot, who achieved world fame when he became the first to fly a plane across the Channel in 1909. (He is also credited with being the originator of sand-yachting.) Bleriot was their neighbour, and apart from a villa 'La Villa Bleriot' he had also built a hangar on the beach near the Tata home. It was here that his personal plane used to land to the wonder and excitement of all present. This was the time when JRD developed his passion for flying. An abiding interest, it would one day put India on the aviation map of the world.

The Tata family was witness to a Bleriot plane landing in the beach hangar from time to time. They were flown not by Bleriot but by Adolphe Pegoud, one of the most dauntless and indeed foolhardy, of the early pilots. A daredevil by any standard, Pegoud was a pioneer in aerial acrobatics and the first man to loop-the-loop, as well as the first man to fly inverted in an aeroplane! JRD reminisced about one incident involving the French ace:'I remember Adolphe Pegoud once landed on the beach near us but the sand being wet the plane went onto its nose and broke the wooden propeller. So

they cut up the propeller into small pieces and Pegoud autographed the pieces and distributed them all round! Everyone was of course thrilled!'

JRD's first joyride came in 1919 when he went up in a Caudron Bagnet, an early French plane, in the days just after the First World War. At the time wartime pilots went around giving joyrides, something that was called 'barnstorming' in America. JRD was fifteen years old and he says that this was the time when he resolved to be a pilot. Apart from Louis Bleriot Jr, JRD's other fast friend during this period was a boy called Zent D'Alnoys. Unfortunately, both were to die young. Bleriot Jr, a chip off the old block, was planning a trans Atlantic flight from France to America at almost the same time that Charles Lindberg was making preparations for his own epoch-making flight from New York to Paris. Tragically, Bleriot Jr died after an appendicitis operation just before his attempt. Zent D'Alnoys was made a prisoner-of-war during the Second World War and was never heard of again.

In 1922, RD decided to move his family from France to Bombay. He acquired a beautiful house at Malabar Hill and Sooni enthusiastically joined in the project selecting furniture and other home accessories. But her health was flagging and in 1923, the day RD boarded the P&O liner to meet her in Paris, he received the news that she had died. He called the house 'Sunita' in his wife's memory. By the time he reached Paris, Sooni's mortal remains had been interred in the cemetery of Pere Lachaise. RD spent a hectic week making arrangements to take the family back to India. All went with the exception of JRD, who was sent to a crammer in England to brush up his English prior to his admission to Cambridge. JRD's writing to RD about how he was incapable of holding a serious conversation in English, and the fact that his French studies were absolutely useless for his future, might have had something to do with this decision. JRD intended to pursue Mechanical Engineering, and Gonville and Caius College, which had been the recipient of a munificent donation of £25,000 from his cousin Dorab, seemed the logical choice. (Cambridge proved elusive for JRD, as did a university degree, but five years later in 1927, a distant relative and future visionary called Homi J. Bhabha studied there.)



'The Cairn': JRD's residence in Bombay

The crammer that JRD had been sent to was at Southwold, Suffolk, on the east coast of England, which looks bleakly out into the icy North Sea. There were many students at the crammer, mostly foreigners who needed training for entrance into British universities. It seems to have been a busy time for JRD, and in his own words, 'I worked. I learnt. I boxed.' He also narrates how on a bright summer day he plunged into the North Sea and nearly froze! Quite obviously, the 'Indian Summer' did nothing to make the freezing North Sea more hospitable. Some of the letters JRD wrote to his father at this time are revealing. He was, to use his own words, 'rather lonely and *depayse* (disoriented)' but later seemed to get used to it. He also judged his schoolfellows rather harshly, writing to his father that 'they are all insincere and thoroughly false'. This comment brought forth a sharp rebuke from RD, who chided him for such 'hasty and haphazard judgements' issuing the rather ominous warning that such judgements would make him a failure in the world! Later JRD wrote about his routine and the fact that he had taken up football and boxing.

In 1922, RD  
decided to  
move his family  
from France to  
Bombay.

An examination of the correspondence between father and son reveals a certain concern on JRD's part about his weight, slim physique and pale face. A letter written by him at this time makes interesting reading: 'As I promised you when I left I am doing regularly exercises every day two or three times, and I have bought a sandoor exerciser with which I develop my chest and its muscles. I have already made good progress. But the hardest part of my body to improve in shape and colour is my face; ...my face is still pretty thin though not half so pale. And unluckily it's the face people generally see first.'

- TIME TABLE -						
	Monday	Tuesday	Saturday	Thursday	Fri Day	Saturday
9.15 - 10	French Ge. Eng.	French (Ge. Eng.)	French Ge. Eng.	French (Ge. Eng.)	French	French (Ge. Eng.)
10 - 11.15	Maths Lat. French	English Ge. Eng.	Maths	English	Maths	English
11 - 12	Physics (Ge. Eng.)	Physics	Physics	Physics	Physics	Physics
12 - 1	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths
1.15 - 2.15	Hindi & History	Hindi	Hindi	Hindi	Hindi	Hindi
2.15 - 3.15	English Ge. Eng.	English	English	English	English	English
3.15 - 4	Science Ge. English	Science Ge. English	Science	Science	Science	Science
						Playing Tello

JRD's school time-table

JRD's obsession with staying fit was to last a lifetime, and no doubt RD's example must have been influential in this regard. Extremely fit even into his eighties, JRD was probably the only octogenarian on the ski slopes of Europe in 1989. Skiing remained a passion with him ever since he started at the age of forty-two and he even received the Chamois Bronze, an award for proficiency bettered only by the Chamois d'Or (The Golden Chamois). His cardiologist Farokh Udwadia recalled how even in his late seventies JRD did twenty-five push ups when he himself who was much younger could barely manage ten (a regimen he apparently followed to keep in shape for his skiing expeditions). He also enjoyed a game of tennis and his house 'The Cairn' in Bombay had a room that was a workshop and a gymnasium. JRD worked out with weights well into his old age. He also played golf till 1980 when Thelly his wife got her stroke. He was not particularly good at it though if Keshub Mahindra is to be believed. Even when JRD's own stroke carried him only 30 yards to Mahindra's 150 yards, he did not hesitate to tell Mahindra what was

wrong with his game!

An interesting exchange between father and son concerns JRD's request for a motorcycle when he took his courage 'in both his hands' and asked for a motorcycle! Apart from justifying the desired vehicle, and a placatory promise to acquire only a moderately powered motorcycle, the letter ends with a most amusing delineation of what is surely every child's dilemma: And don't say "Ask Mama, for she said, Ask Papa"! The permission was never granted. It is difficult to judge how much his stay at the crammer improved his English, but it seems to have imbued in him an abiding interest in finding and using exactly *the* right word for that particular context. Correcting and re-correcting his drafts many times, he was always looking for the perfect gem in its perfect setting. This trait blossomed forth even more when he was taken under the wing of John Peterson, a retired ICS officer who was then Director-in-Charge of TISCO. Many years later, Dr John Matthai would refer to this trait when he asked JRD to stop 'ill-treating his drafts'. His advisers felt that this destroyed the spontaneity of an inspired moment, and his attempt to incorporate suggestions often obscured the clarity of his own vision.

Towards the end of his crammer course, and just when JRD thought that Cambridge beckoned, the French passed a law of conscription that made it compulsory for all French boys at the age of twenty to do two years of military service. The eldest of the family was to be given a concession and could get away with serving for only one year. As a French citizen, JRD was obliged to enlist, and Cambridge had to be postponed.

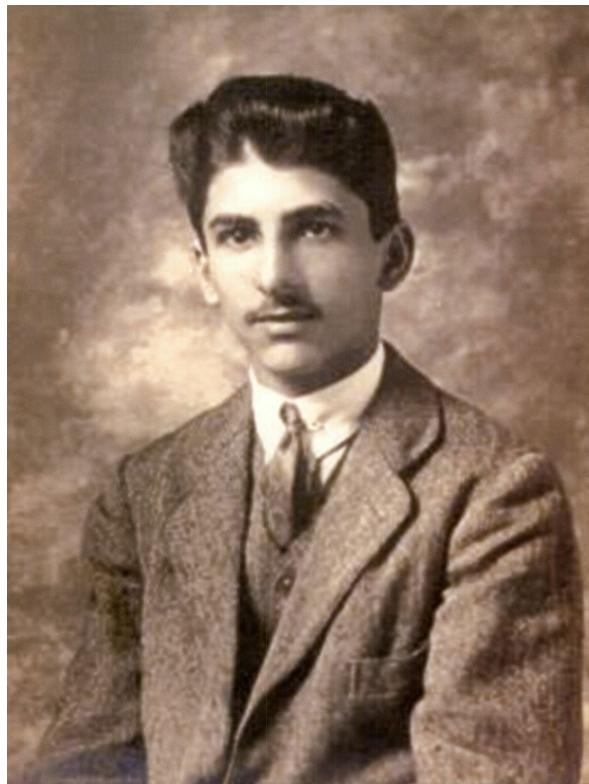
JRD's  
obsession  
with staying  
fit was to last a  
lifetime.

JRD had always been keen to ride after seeing polo matches in Bombay and Poona, and he thought that if he got into a cavalry unit his purpose would be well served. Pulling a few strings through his maternal grandmother (who listed a French general among her acquaintances), JRD was admitted to the

Fifth Cavalry Regiment of the Spahis (*Le Spahis*). The regiment was based at the small town of Vienne, in the beautiful valley of the Isere. But the training had its share of problems. The Spahis had to ride Arab-bred horses, which required a different riding technique, as compared to the European-bred horses and had a different kind of saddle. JRD recalled how within the first two days he had blisters.

The regiment comprised Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans and a few French. Most were illiterate and had coarse manners. JRD with a privileged upbringing found himself among a group whose background vastly differed from his. This is where his typing skills learnt on the *Hirano Maru* came to his rescue. When his captain discovered that he had a literate recruit who could type, he pounced on this chance to catch up on his paperwork. JRD was instructed to move out of the barracks and into a closet-like storeroom next to the captain's own office. A small cot, and of course an old typewriter, were provided and the captain's dream of catching up on his paperwork seemed close to realisation. But this was not to be. The colonel noticing the typewritten reports, pulled rank, and commandeered JRD for his own paperwork, which predictably was equally in arrears. JRD was transferred to the relative luxury of the colonel's office and a bed was provided to him in the back room where he had the added advantage of being alone. JRD was a great favourite of officers applying for leave whose applications he typed. He said, 'During my year in the Spahis, I may have proved to be a good clerk, but I acquired little of military value for the possible defence of France.'

At the end of the twelve-month period, JRD discovered, that the educated soldier who volunteered for an extension of six months, could get a commission as an officer in the famous cavalry school at Saumur, a small town in the Loire valley. JRD decided to apply but had the good sense to seek parental advice. RD would have none of it, and JRD had to return to India. As future events showed, RD's advice was providential. The regiment, shipped out to Morocco to suppress a rebellion by the famous Moroccan chief Abdel Karim, was wiped out to the last man.



# 5

## BACK HOME

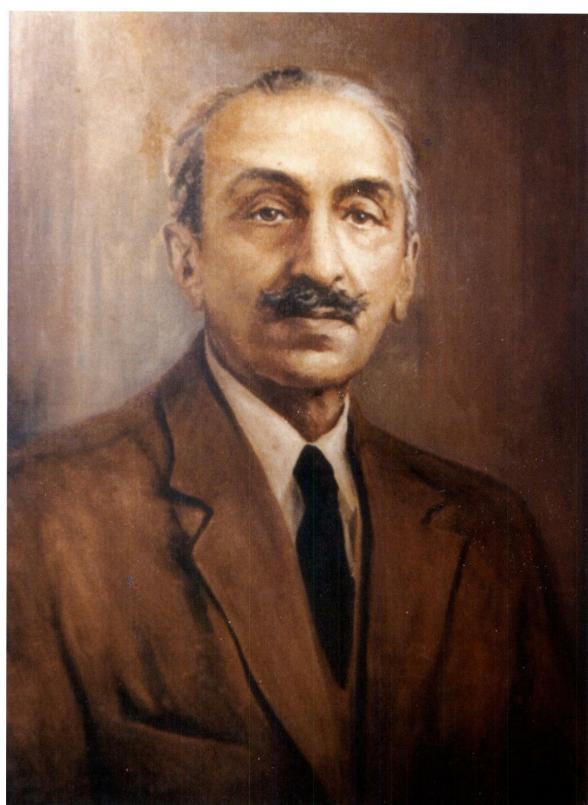
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On his return to India from France in 1925, JRD joined Tatas as an unpaid apprentice. Cambridge proved to be eternally elusive, and this was to be JRD's life-long regret. It rankled that he had missed out on a University education and not specialised in any field. This fact made him try harder and determined to excel in whatever he did. Many years later JRD told R.M. Lala:'Maybe Father did not realize that while a university education may not be necessary, it is important.' Despite his lack of formal education JRD's English was excellent, he was well acquainted with poetry both English and French and was a fine editor. He was also widely read, with history being a favourite. There was a whole shelf of books on aviation, another on military ventures and warfare, and one on sports cars and motor racing. Short stories by American writer O Henry were a special favourite. He also liked Ernest Hemingway and westerns by Louis L'Amour.

A little before his return a crisis had been brewing in Tata Steel when steel was dumped into India from Belgium and England. The Tatas, riding high on the prosperity of the war years, had invested money for a five-fold increase in production. The Steel Industry (Protection) Bill was introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly in May 1924 to introduce legislation to protect the Indian steel industry. It was a historic bill since this was the first time that Indian industry was being protected at the expense of British industry. The bill was passed in June 1924, but the company had been struggling against great odds for too long and a day came when Jamshedpur cabled to say that they had no money for wages. Sir Dorab pledged his entire personal fortune towards the loan of rupees two crores needed at the time. Fortunately, by the end of 1924, they turned the corner and Tatas were saved. The battle to save Tata Steel and its impact on the nationalist struggle brought Motilal Nehru and RD closer, and Motilal even stayed at 'Sunita' when he visited Bombay.

JRD recollects being visited by Jawaharlal and Vijayalakshmi during one such visit.

RD put JRD under the tutelage of John Peterson who was Director in Charge of Tata Steel at Bombay. Peterson, a burly and amiable Scot was a retired ICS officer. RD had met Peterson during the First World War when the latter was munitions director, and it was RD's job to ensure TISCO's delivery of artillery shells and steel rails. The two developed a good rapport and after the war, RD invited him to join Tatas. He agreed and had his office in Navsari Building next to RD's own office. (The Tatas operated from Navsari Building till the George Wittet designed Bombay House, off Flora Fountain, was inaugurated in 1924.) After RD had left him in Petersons care with the words,' I would like you to look after my boy', Peterson had another desk put in alongside his own. For the next four or five years JRD sat by his side examining every paper going to and coming from his desk. JRD recalled, 'Every single paper going to his desk was routed through me. I studied it before I sent it up. And I studied his comments before I sent them out. I must say that was a very formative and important time of my career, when I saw how a highly trained ICS administrator worked.'



*Ratanji Dadaboy Tata*

In early 1926, RD decided that JRD spend a year in Jamshedpur to understand the working of the company. On his arrival, he shared a spacious bungalow with three junior managers: J.K. Sondhi, Jehangir 'Joe' Ghandy, and Joe's brother Dinshaw who was called 'Dinsi'. The former two were to play a major role in assisting JRD later in his career, and 'Joe' became Tata Steel's first Indian general manager.

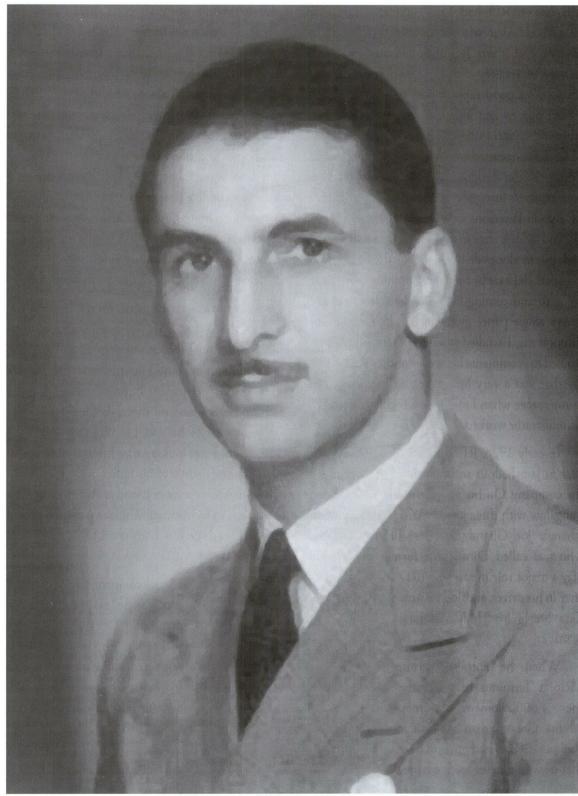
When he entrained from Victoria Terminus to undertake the 1,600-kilometre journey on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, JRD had no inkling that he would never see his father again. In the summer of 1926, RD left for France to be with his children. One Saturday in Hardelot RD complained he felt unwell after a dance with Sylla. He collapsed in the toilet, succumbing to a fatal heart attack. Though always very fit physically, RD may just have been burning the candle at both ends. JRD's letter to him in August 1925 from Vienne is revealing: 'I was filled with admiration at reading your dancing feats! I honestly think you are perfectly amazing to be able to stand the strain of business all day, and then finding it not sufficient, spending your nights banqueting and dancing. Men even one-third of your age would not bear up long!'

RD was seventy when he died and JRD who was twenty-two at the time found himself the head of the family. Sylla was twenty-four and yet unmarried. Rodabeh was nineteen, Darab fourteen and Jimmy only ten. He inherited his father's position as a permanent director of Tata Sons, a position he retained till the end. This period was the watershed of his life. He was faced with the twin challenges of looking after his four siblings and taking on the mantle of his father in business. JRD had no trusted relative or friend of RD's to whom he could turn to for counsel. The one person he could turn to for advice was Dinshaw Daji, a solicitor of Crawford Bailey & Company.

JRD recalled,  
'Every single  
paper going to his  
desk was routed  
through me.'

Holding the family together was not an easy task and the cranky Sir Dorab

Tata did not make life any easier. Short-tempered and diabetic, he was by then a shadow of his former self. A keen horseman who had scoured the jungles of Bihar in search of minerals in his salad days, he was famous as the brave man who had pledged his entire personal fortune (that included the famous Jubilee Diamond, which is twice as big as the Kohinoor) to save Tata Steel. Sir Dorab was also responsible for India's participation in the Olympics when he organised the support necessary to send a contingent to the 1920 Games. But that was a thing of the past. He was at best cantankerous and the group's financial woes did nothing to improve his humour. RD had borrowed from Tata Sons and from Sir Dorab personally. On his demise, the directors of Tatas decided to write off the debt, but Sir Dorab insisted that his personal loan be repaid in full. (One of the first things JRD bought for himself once the family's finances had stabilised was a £1,200 plane in May 1929.)



*JRD on his appointment as Chairman of Tatas in 1938*

JRD sold off 'Sunita' to Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas a Tata director, and moved into the Taj with his family. The house at Ganeshkind and the property at Hardelot followed. RD's offices in London and the Far East were wound up and the debts repaid. All that remained were their shares in Tata Sons – a third of the total. The will stipulated that JRD should get the first Rs.

3,000 a month, Darab Rs. 2,000, Jimmy Rs. 1,000 and the remainder be divided equally among the five of them. After consulting Dinshaw Daji, JRD ignored the will, deciding that the family income would be divided equally including the shares. He knew that after he got his first Rs. 3,000 there would be nothing left for anybody else. Years later, in a fit of temper Darab sold his shares to construction magnate, Shapoorji Pallonji. It took a long time for JRD to forgive him for this.



*With his wife Thelma*

## JRD MEETS THELLY

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JRD's other major interest was in cars. He admitted that if he hadn't taken to flying he would have taken up motor racing. JRD regularly drove high-speed cars every year in Europe – something he considered more risky than flying a plane. We have seen before that JRD had requested RD for a motorcycle when he was in England. That permission was never given and it was only after RD passed away that JRD bought a second-hand motorcycle for a hundred rupees. But it was his blue Bugatti that was the apple of his eye. It had no mudguards or roof and JRD could cover Bombay to Pune in two-and-a-half hours. JRD was so happy when he received a wire from Bombay, which said:'From Bombay buy Bugatti' that he signed his letter of thanks to RD as 'your grateful Bugattiwallah Jehangir.' Unfortunately, it also attracted the attention of the Bombay police, who seemed intent to nab him at all costs. They got their chance when his friend Russa Mehta's car was involved in an accident on Peddar Road. His companion, the brother of the famous cricketer H.D. Kanga, was killed. The police filed a charge against JRD that he and Mehta had been racing at the time of the accident. JRD was advised to hire a criminal lawyer and Jack Vicaji's name was suggested. Since it was a Sunday, he had to visit Vicaji's home behind the Taj Mahal Hotel. This was the time when he first set eyes on Thelma (Thelly) the girl who would eventually become his wife. Thelly was a niece of Jack Vicaji and JRD found her 'a very beautiful woman'. (RD retained his ability to appreciate the fairer sex throughout his life.)

Thanks to Jack Vicaji's stiff cross-examination of the witnesses, the case was dismissed. The judge also passed strictures against the police and this served to annoy them even more. Eventually the harassment became unbearable and JRD decided to part with his beloved Bugatti. JRD's love for cars remained an abiding one and he regularly read one magazine on cars as

he did one on aviation.

JRD lived at the Taj and got glimpses of Thelly whose flat was directly behind his room. Thelly, and her sister Kitty, whom Jack Vicaji looked after, were daughters of Jack's brother Sohrab and his British wife Muriel. The marriage broke up, and since neither Sohrab or Muriel seemed to care about their daughters it was left to Jack to look after his nieces. Thelly was born in America and had some of her education in Italy. Extremely attractive by all accounts, she had studied art at the J.J. School of Art, sketched, and painted portraits. An accomplished swimmer and dancer, she usually wore a sari or a skirt.

At the time the household also had under its roof a precocious youngster called Bobby who was the son of Jack Vicaji's other brother Rustom, and his Belgian wife. This marriage had also broken up, and the wife realising that she was terminally ill requested Kitty to look after her young son. So, Bobby was very much around when JRD showed up as a gentleman caller at the Vicaji household. JRD's visits soon became a rich source of income for young Bobby who needed to be bribed to leave the young couple alone. A time came when Bobby only needed to open the drawing-room door to receive his money, which JRD handed to him without a word. After Jack Vicaji's death, Bobby moved in with JRD and Thelly and managed to get a new French bicycle out of JRD!

JRD loved children even though he and Thelly never had any of their own. Maneck Dalai, who set up Air-India's London office in 1946, recalls how JRD himself drove a Fiat but the servants' children used to be ferried to the park and beach in a bigger car. Thrifty and opposed to ostentation, JRD remained unpretentious till the very end. R.M. Lala relates how he thought that the room in which he interviewed JRD was his study, when it was also his bedroom! When Lala asked him about it, he simply said, 'It suffices me.' There can be no better example of simple living and high thinking. In fact, 'The Cairn' on Cumballa Hill where JRD stayed, belonged not to him, but to the Avabai F. Petit Residuary Estate Trust. The sale proceeds (rupees four crore) from his flat in Sterling Apartments were donated to the J.R.D. Tata Trust.

JRD and Thelly were married on 23 December 1930. Rather ill advisedly

they chose Darjeeling as the place for their honeymoon.' The only important thing about our honeymoon was that it enabled us to see Kanchenjunga from close proximity', recalled JRD. There was also the interesting anecdote involving the Bengal Governor Sir F.S. Jackson. Driving back after their honeymoon, the police halted traffic as part of the governor's security arrangements. It was a bitterly cold morning and the furious young couple decided to ventilate their grievances to His Excellency. It was decided that Thelly would stand in front of the governor's car while JRD gave him a piece of his mind. Unfortunately, Thelly also decided to say her piece when JRD was saying his, and the driver seeing a clear path sped away.

On their return to Bombay, they moved into an apartment at 'Heliopolis', a new building in Colaba. In the months that followed marriage, Thelly started helping at the Swadeshi shop at Flora Fountain but JRD was always the centre of her universe. She tried her best to be a good wife, but there must have been times, when according to Rodabeh, JRD must have felt a little boxed in with all the attention.

JRD loved  
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*J.R.D. and Thelma Tata with Indira Gandhi*



*J.R.D. and Thelma Tata with Mother Theresa*

After RD's death, responsibility for the three younger children devolved on JRD and Sylla. After his mother, Sylla was the greatest influence on JRD. She was by far the best of the four members of the Tata family and certainly

the bravest', according to JRD. A tennis enthusiast, she was also the first Indian woman to get a Hying license. She married Fali Petit and divided her time between Bombay and the south of France. JRD was heart-broken when she died of cancer in Nice in 1963.

Slim and aristocratic, Rodabeh's features were a feminine version of JRD's: a long Parsee nose, arched eyebrows, pointed chin and sharp eyes. She was a skilled interior designer and the Sea Lounge at the Taj was her creation. She married Colonel Leslie Sawhney, an executive with Killick Nixon who left his firm to become JRD's right-hand man. She suffered from Alzheimer's in her old age, and JRD had to look after both an ailing Thelly and his sister till the time he died. Rodabeh passed away nine months after JRD and Thelly in September 1994.

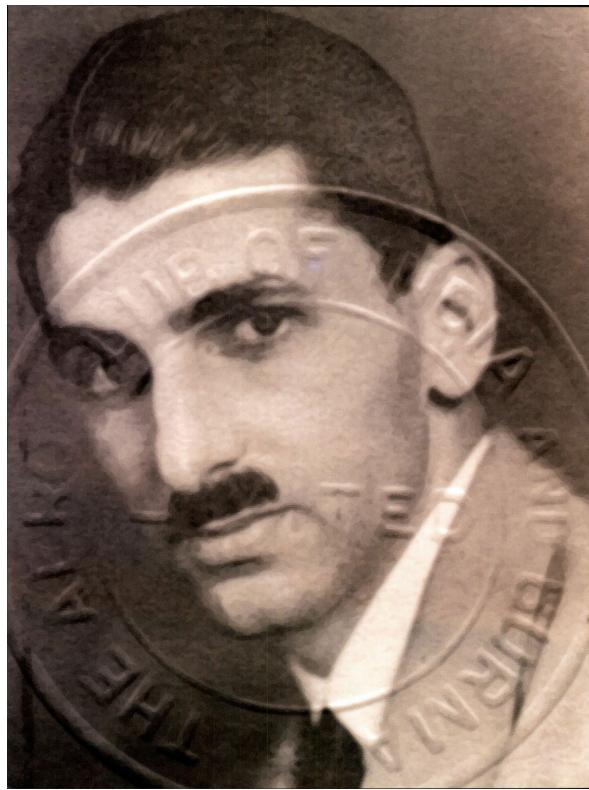
Jimmy and Darab were at boarding school but joined JRD and Thelly during vacations. Jimmy was born prematurely in Bombay and was the only one who was born with blue eyes. They changed to brown later. By his late teens, he was a giant of a man with rich blond hair and was as crazy about flying as JRD was. After school, he went to England to train at the Air Service Training School. According to Bobby Vicaji, who was about the same age as Jimmy, he was an excellent flyer and navigator. JRD was very fond of him and expected nothing short of perfection from him. This made JRD seem rather too critical at times. Jimmy took this in his stride but Darab who was slightly unstable to begin with took this badly. Tragedy struck in May 1936. Jimmy was killed in a plane crash in Austria along with his friend Hans. He was only twenty-one.



*Sylla, JRD's elder sister*

JRD had always shared a closer relationship with Jimmy than with Darab, whom he described as somewhat difficult and obstinate and with a violent

temper. Darab joined JRD at Bombay but the two never saw eye-to-eye. JRD was furious with him for selling off his shares to Shaporji Pallonji. He was with the Taj Mahal Hotel but after a while JRD kept him out of the business completely. Darab suffered from a nervous disorder from the age of fifty, till his death, a quarter of a century later. JRD's relationship with him was an uneasy one for most of their lives. Rodabeh lived with Darab after the demise of her husband, and also managed to bring about some kind of reconciliation between her two brothers before Darab died in 1987. This was something JRD did not talk about often – it was obviously a sad relationship in his life.



## THE AVIATOR

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JRD, as we have seen earlier, decided to become a pilot after having been up on a joyride with one of Louis Bleriot's pilots. He was fifteen at the time, and would have to wait another ten years, before he could fulfil his dream. JRD reminisced: 'As regards the earliest stirrings in me about my interest, or perhaps I should say, my craze, for flying and aviation, I think I must go back to the age of five! Perhaps more accurately from the time I came into contact with aeroplanes in France before World War I, say, sometime between 1908 and 1914.' When Charles Lindbergh made his pioneering trans-Atlantic flight, JRD made his own ink drawing of *The Spirit of St. Louis*, Lindberg's plane, and copied a poem in French by Maurice Rostand in his red scrapbook. All his life JRD kept a scrapbook, where he jotted down select poems in French and English along with occasional sayings that were either witty or profound.

The first Flying Club opened in Bombay in 1928. This was a result of the magnanimity and vision of the great Jewish businessman and philanthropist Sir Victor Sassoon. It was a small east-west airstrip on the edge of the sandy beach near the small fishing village of Juhu. A thatched shed housed two Gipsy Moths, yet another example of Sir Victor Sassoons generosity. The De Havilland Gipsy Moth was the brainchild of Geoffrey De Havilland, and was the first truly affordable light aircraft capable of bringing flying within the reach of ordinary people. It became the basis of the formation of the flying club movement in Britain, and elsewhere, and was the mount of many pioneering pilots, including Amy Johnson and Francis Chichester. India now had its second flying club, the first having opened in Delhi.

JRD was in Europe when the Bombay Flying Club actually opened. A British naval pilot named E.D. Cumming had been appointed as the flying

instructor, and another Britisher called King was the engineer. JRD signed up as quickly as he could for lessons. On 22 January 1929, he signed the receipt of his first Pilot's Log Book and had his first taste of flying on the same day. His unhesitating facility at the controls was obvious, and on 3 February after only three hours and forty-five minutes of dual flying experience, (RD was allowed up for his first solo flight. A part of a little boy's long-cherished dream on a beach in Normandy had at last been realised. Later he would quote his hero Antoine de St. Exupery, a pioneer aviator, and today remembered as the author of the children's classic *The Little Prince*, to describe this first flight:'The pilot in full flight experienced neither giddiness nor any thrill, Only the mystery of metal turned into living flesh. JRD had in fact met Antoine de St. Exupery who had given him a copy of his book *The Little Prince*. JRD's Log Book entry was brief and to the point:

*February 3, 1929 – Time in air, 15 minutes.*

### *Pilot – Self, Remarks – Ist solo.*



# JRD's pilot's licence - Licence No. 1

JRD did solo flights of thirty to forty minutes' duration for the next seven days, building up confidence, experience and flying hours. On 10 February, JRD did a forty-five minute solo flight to qualify for his 'A' licence. On the same day he received an envelope, which contained a cloth-backed blue card with gold lettering. It was an Aviators Certificate issued by the Royal Aero Club of India and Burma on behalf of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI). It was signed by Sir Victor Sassoon in his capacity as chairman. It bore the number '1' betokening the fact that he was the first one

to have qualified in India.

In JRD's own words: 'No document has ever given me a greater thrill than the little blue and gold certificate delivered to me on 10 February 1929 by the Royal Aero Club of India and Burma on behalf of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI). The fact that it bore the Number 1 added to my pride in owning it, even though it meant nothing more than that I was the first one to have qualified in India.' On another occasion, he noted that his elder sister Sylla was the first Indian woman to get her flying licence in India, and his younger sister Rodabeh was the second. But he had no doubt in his mind it was his youngest brother Jamshed ( Jimmy) who was the most naturally gifted airman, and unquestionably, the best flyer of them all.

JRD, though he had no formal training, had a mechanical bent of mind. He was an excellent motorcar driver and liked to take things apart to see how they worked. He read technical magazines and books and in the years to come could follow technical details with a competence, which would have done any qualified engineer proud. The story goes, that once when JRD was in a wheelchair with a hairline fracture and wanted a particular spanner, he directed a friend: Second shelf third item from the right. 'JRD had a workshop at home, spread over 250 sq. ft., with pliers, drillers and tools all neatly arranged in rows.

JRD, though he  
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JRD's initial flying experience had its share of risk, for Cummings was not a trained instructor. JRD felt that he must also acquire some aerobatic skills if he was to call himself a complete pilot. Cummings was disinterested in imparting acrobatic skills but gave him a valuable tip: 'Go high enough before you try anything.' So JRD started doing loops and then moved onto Immelmann Turns. (The Immelmann Turn is a dogfight manoeuvre named after Max Immelmann who was Germany 's first air ace of the First World

War. It comprises a simultaneous loop and roll, designed to allow the pilot to dive back at a pursuing airman, and became standard practice during the remainder of the war.) JRD confessed that he didn't do them too well but things seemed all right, and after practising them for a few days, he ventured to do a roll. This is when he got the fright of his life! He had never been in a spin before and didn't know what to do, and it was only by keeping his nerve that he managed to land in his own words, very, very shaken'. Cummings, who had been watching the near disaster, was nonchalant when an irate JRD accosted him with: 'Do you realise you nearly got me killed?' JRD met Cummings again thirty years later at an IATA conference in Sydney, a reunion about which JRD reminisced: 'He looked pretty old. I greeted him warmly and reminded him that it was no thanks to him that I was there attending that party!'

By the end of March 1929, JRD had flown in excess of twenty hours and was keen to fly all over India. He decided to buy his own plane and ordered a Gipsy Moth from De Havilland in England. It cost £1,200 and he decided to take delivery in England. He got his 'A' licence at this time, which permitted him to fly 'all types of landplanes.' On 15 May 1929, JRD had a refresher dual instruction with his new aeroplane at the De Havilland Flying School at Fulford, England. Soon after, he was the proud owner of a new Gipsy Moth bearing the number 1010-G-AAGI. Two days later, JRD's Journey Log Book records his very first international flight from Stag Lane, Croydon, London to France. He had planned on reaching Le Bourget, Paris but the flight was foiled by bad weather. His entry in the Log Book was as follows:

*May 17, 1929 Stag Lane dep: 12.30. Took 5½ gallons petrol at Lympne. Badly bumped from Griz Nez to Abbeville. Good landing 16.45. Unintended stop for night at Abbeville due very bumpy weather. Airsick. Aircraft and Engine Perfect.*

Aircraft and Engine Perfect! This phrase was to appear regularly in JRD's Log Books and inspired the name of Murad Fyzee's account of JRD's aviation career. As Fyzee notes in his book *Aircraft and Engine Perfect*, 'It gives a sense of triumph against odds, human error and nature, and over many unrecorded problems. It also senses the kinship between JRD and his aeroplane.'



*A view of one of the showcases in which the tools were placed*

Over the next two months, JRD made a number of short flights in northern France and took several family friends for joyrides. He also took his sister Rodabeh to visit his younger brother Darab, who was at the College de Normandie. In his enthusiasm, Darab had placed a white double bedsheet (as instructed by JRD) on the rugger field, but completely overlooked the fact that the tall goal posts would impede JRD. JRD was ultimately forced to land in a field way outside the college!

In September 1929, JRD made arrangements for his new plane to be shipped back to Bombay. On his return, he flew all over India and made his first flight to Delhi. He flew to Kanpur and then onto Jamshedpur, where he landed on the old polo ground. JRD continued to fly regularly and he flew to Jamshedpur a number of times. One of the visits was to provide much excitement. JRD's compass failed when flying over the Vindhya Hills between Jamshedpur and Nagpur. Forced to land in a field, he discovered that he was near Ramtek, more than a hundred miles from his intended course. JRD relates that Kish Naoroji, who was accompanying him, was terrified thinking that his last moments had come!

When JRD landed at Juhu, Bombay, he asked the engineer to test the compass, which was obviously malfunctioning. This incident was to be significant, as future events would show. By this time the Flying Club had a new instructor, a Major Vetch, an Englishman with boundless, if sometimes, misplaced enthusiasm. JRD rated him as a superb instructor but unfortunately, the Flying Club fired him because his tendency to crack up planes was costing the authorities a fortune! JRD also related how he used to

do a lot of formation flying with his younger brother Jimmy, and narrated an incident when Major Vetch grounded both the brothers for taking inexcusable risk during one such flight.



## THE AGA KHAN PRIZE

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In the 19 November 1929 issue of the London *Times*, there appeared a news item, announcing that the Aga Khan had offered a prize of £500 to the first Indian who would fly solo between England and India, starting at either end. It stipulated that the flight must be a solo one and should be completed within six weeks from the date of starting. The prize was to remain open for one year from 1 January 1930. On the same page of the *Times* was an announcement of the proposed extension of the airmail service from Croydon (London) to Karachi and on to Delhi by Imperial Airways. It was the forerunner of momentous events.

Among the competitors was a young Sikh called Manmohan Singh, who was short on navigational skills but long on enthusiasm. He took off from Croydon airfield in London, lost his way and returned to base. Another attempt produced a similar result. He was lost in fog over Europe and returned with much difficulty. For C.G. Grey, founder-editor of the well-known British aviation magazine *The Aeroplane*, Manmohans antics provided unwitting fuel for his condescending attitude towards the non-White members of the erstwhile British colonies. He wrote:'Manmohan Singh called his aeroplane *Miss India* and he is likely to!'Grey himself was quite a character. A maverick writer he joined Fred Jane, the famous compiler of *All the World's Fighting Ships* and *All the World's Airships*. When Jane died in 1916, Grey became an equal partner with his daughter. Grey will, however, always be remembered for his capacity to coin a phrase. Some gems include, 'Aviation will have arrived when people get used to being killed!' and the one, which impressed JRD greatly: 'Mails may be lost, but never delayed. Passengers may be delayed but never lost.' This was also the motto of Aero-Postale, the French airline, which flew from France to Chile in South America.

Another competitor starting from England was eighteen-year-old Aspy Engineer. The third was J.R.D. Tata from the Indian end. In fact, on 29 March 1930, Aspy and another Indian R.D. Chawla (as first pilot), a member of the Karachi Aero Club, had arrived in London after more than four weeks of flying from Karachi. This did not qualify for the Aga Khan Prize, which was to be a solo flight in either direction. Still, Chawla's fine effort did not go unrecognised. The director of Civil Aviation announced that the viceroy of India had granted him an award of £560 in recognition of his achievement, and the two were feted at a reception hosted by the British Empire Club.

On 1 May 1930, JRD took off from Juhu for Karachi, from where the Aga Khan Prize race was to start. He had got King, a ground engineer of the Flying Club to put some new fabric on the plane so that he could get an additional five miles per hour. Earlier, on his return from the eventful Jamshedpur flight, he had instructed King to check the compass, which had made him stray way off course. It had taken about fifteen days to get maps and route details. The only persons who knew of his plans were his two sisters and Jal Naoroji his colleague and co-director in Tatas. The latter also had the responsibility of keeping in touch with JRD by means of a series of cables at predetermined places along his route.

On 3 May 1930, JRD took off from Karachi, stopped at the port of Gwadar and flew on to Jask. He spent the first night at the home of a Burmah Shell representative. From Jask he flew to Hormuz, Lingeh, Bushire and Basra. JRD departed from Rutbah on 6 May 1930 following what should have been a straightforward course till he hit the Mediterranean coast. His flight course was over the Dead Sea, a long narrow stretch of water, but JRD found himself flying over a distinctly round small body of water, which was not on his planned route. Suspicious, because he kept drifting north, he initially attributed it to strong winds from the south. But at the back of his mind a doubt about the compass kept nagging him. And so it turned out to be. He had been flying over the Sea of Galilee, a hundred miles north of where he should have been. He did a forced-landing on a disused First World War airstrip, and about an hour later after some rather difficult communication with a peasant, concluded that he was near Haifa. His map confirmed that he was a hundred miles north of his course. He then knew for sure that it was his compass, which was at fault. In JRD's own words:'My thoughts flew back

immediately to Juhu and I didn't exactly have very kind feelings about a certain Mr. King, the Flying Club engineer! He was supposed to have checked the compass after the Jamshedpur flight. Obviously, he hadn't done a damned thing. As a result I lost nearly a whole day with this unnecessary delay.'

JRD halted at the Gaza airstrip for refuelling. He saw another De Havilland Gipsy Moth approaching. After touching down it taxied at full throttle and turned to park alongside JRD's plane, missing it by inches. It was the irrepressible and perpetually ebullient Manmohan Singh who had made it this far on his third attempt. A remarkable character, he hunted desert gazelles by flying low over them and shooting them with a revolver! He joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) as a pilot officer during the Second World War and was tragically killed in Western Australia in 1942. After refuelling and having his plug-settings checked JRD took off from Gaza for Cairo.

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JRD reached an RAF aerodrome outside Cairo and was sent on to Aboukir, near Alexandria, where the Air Force ground engineer repaired the compass. It was a full twenty-five degrees out and the engineer marvelled at JRD's navigational skills when he told him that he had flown all the way from

Bombay with it! At Alexandria, JRD noticed another Moth parked there and concluded that this was Aspy Engineer, the third competitor in the race. Having heard that a Moth flown by a pilot from India had landed, Aspy came out and greeted JRD. He told JRD that he was waiting for spare plugs. Since JRD's was a four-cylinder aeroplane, and he had a set of eight, he promptly gave him four of his. An overjoyed and eternally grateful Aspy insisted that he take his Mae West life jacket, something, which JRD wore when he crossed the Mediterranean. (Allied soldiers called their inflatable life jacket 'Mae West' during the Second World War from its resemblance to the legendary Hollywood star's curvaceous torso.)

With JRD's compass repaired and Aspy having got his spark plugs, both flew off in their Moths in opposite directions. JRD arrived at Benghazi where he stopped for the night. When he arrived at Tripoli he was handed a cable from Jal Naoroji urging speed. It read: Hurry Aspy at Jask. JRD calculated that Aspy had about one day's flying left to make it to Karachi. He resolved to get to Rome as soon as possible, calculating that if he left Rome the next day, he just might be able to make it to London via Paris the same day. In those days with small planes, everything depended on the weather. But JRD's luck was to run out. For some reason, probably the adverse weather, JRD landed not at Rome but at Naples. To his surprise, he was told that he could not leave at first light and would have to await the arrival of the commandant. Finally, after much difficulty, he took off at 9.30 a.m.

JRD arrived at Paris on 12 May 1930 and set off for the last sector of the race at 8.30 a.m. He arrived at Croydon, London at 12.16 p.m. The flight had ended. It had taken seventy-two hours and fifty-five minutes. Aspy Engineer had reached Karachi on 11 May, the day before, and since his time was two and a half hours less than that of JRD he was declared the winner. Manmohan Singh also made it to Karachi but was disqualified because of the time taken to complete the course. He had started on 11 January and finally reached Karachi on 10 May. The rules stipulated that the race was to be completed within six weeks from the date of starting. JRD later recalled how Amy Johnson had shamed them by doing the London-Karachi trip in only three and a half days on her pioneering flight from London to Australia.

Naturally, JRD was disappointed at not winning. He said that he was glad

Aspy had won because it helped him get into the Indian Air Force, which was then in its infancy. Aspy would win the DFC during the Second World War and later rise to become the second Indian to be chief of staff of the Indian Air Force. He was the son of K.H. Irani, a rich merchant in Karachi. As a boy he showed a talent for things mechanical and was nicknamed 'Engineer' by his schoolfellows. He adopted the name permanently and Engineer was the name with which he was to court fame in later life. (This is not uncommon among Parsees who have adopted English vocational names.) Reflecting on the loss JRD reminisced that apart from his compass, which cost him a day, he had also erred in selecting his route. Another factor, which played an important role, was that JRD was the only one who flew westward. On the westbound route the weather was always more uncertain whereas Aspy and Manmohan would have been assured of more predictable weather on their eastbound flight. These were exciting times for aviation. On 12 May 1930, the day JRD landed at Croydon, London, the famous Amy Johnson landed at Calcutta, midway through her pioneering solo flight from England to Australia.

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The day after the completion of the race, JRD flew his plane to Stag Lane, where he left it with De Havilland to be put up for sale. He thought it a little slow and wanted a new one. A week later JRD returned to India by an Imperial Airways flight, which had its share of excitement. The airplane, a tri-motor De Havilland DH-66 Hercules, was due to land for refuelling near a bleak sandy spot called Rutbah Wells. The pilot missed the spot and was forced to land on a makeshift runway alongside an underground fuel storage dump, which the RAF maintained as an emergency fuel stop. It was in fact JRD who pointed out to the pilot that they had left Rutbah Wells behind. When the pilot asked JRD how he knew about the place, he told him in a matter-of-fact manner, that he had landed there a week ago on his solo flight from India to England!

When they landed at Drigh Road, Karachi, the next day, JRD was in for a pleasant surprise. A group of Boy Scouts formed a small guard-of-honour, and on landing, a young man came forward and presented him with a small box containing a silver medal. The Boy Scouts broke into a lusty cheer at the presentation and JRD was visibly moved. The young man was none other than Aspy Engineer; and the inscription engraved on the medal appropriately read: To J.R.D. Tata – For Sportsmanship.



*JRD at Air India's Fifth Avenue Ticket Office in New York in January 1974 with models of the Puss Moth and Boeing 747*

## THE BEGINNINGS OF AN AIRLINE

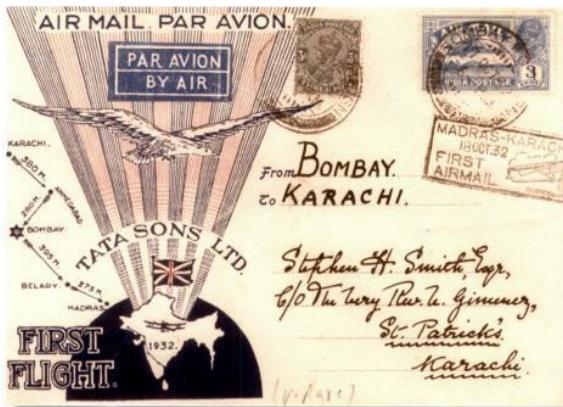
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Imperial Airways, which already operated an air service from London to Karachi, were planning to extend their service eventually onto Australia in stages. In fact, on the same page of the 19 November 1929 issue of the *London Times*, which advertised the Aga Khan race, an article had appeared informing of a delay in the proposed extension due to recent mishaps. It said that it expected the new service to start by the end of the year.

About nine months before this newspaper article, a meeting had occurred between two individuals that would have an important bearing on the future development of aviation in India. One was J.R.D. Tata, who had received his pilot's licence only four weeks prior to the meeting, and the other was Nevill Vintcent, a retired RAF pilot. Vintcent, a tall strapping blond with blue eyes, had flown all the way from England in a De Havilland biplane of First World War vintage. He along with his companion, a Captain J.S. Newall, had been going around India barnstorming and giving joyrides. A remarkable man, Vintcent had been heavyweight boxing champion of the RAF in the Middle East. On one occasion, he lifted the rear of his biplane on his shoulders to help his navigator fire at the Arab tribesman who had attacked them in the Arabian Desert during the First World War.

Vintcent was aware of Imperial Airways' air service from London to Karachi, which would also carry mail. Realising that this would exclude Peninsular India he contacted Russa Mehta, son of the textile magnate Sir Homi Mehta, with a proposal that they form a company to pick up the mail from Imperial Airways at Karachi and fly it down to Bombay. This meeting came to nothing and someone suggested to Vintcent that he meet JRD who had recently got his pilot's licence. The two hit it from the start and JRD called vintcent a remarkably fine man'. Vintcent found a willing partner for

his pioneering idea, and JRD for his part welcomed this chance to enter commercial aviation. They proposed to bring the mail to Bombay via Ahmedabad and then onward to Madras via Bellary and Bangalore. When Vintcent's proposal came to the Tatas they were still recovering from their earlier downswing, and the chances of the chairman of Tatas, Sir Dorab, viewing the new scheme with much favour, were small. It was John Peterson who finally saved the day, convincing Sir Dorab that the initial investment of rupees two lakhs would not burn too big a hole in the Tata finances.



*First Airmail: Madras-Karachi, 18 October 1932*

The first letter to Sir B.N. Mitra, member, Department for Industries, Government of India, was written by John Peterson as early as 20 March 1929 probing the government's interest in supporting the development of aviation in India. Mitra indicated that they were more interested in a Karachi-Delhi link than a Karachi-Bombay one.

The Tatas had initially proposed seaplanes as the flight was to be between two ports but high capital and operating costs ended any such plans. Secondly, they decided on a mail service after internal debate on how many people would avail of this air service. Tatas requested the government for a subsidy of Rs. 1.25 lakhs but were turned down. Between mid-1929 and the end of 1931, a plethora of correspondence between Tatas and the government severely tested JRD's patience. In May 1931 Vintcent wrote to JRD relating how he had spoken to the viceroy (Lord Willingdon) in Simla who appeared in principle to favour the development of aviation in India.

Vintcent left India for England to get married, and Newall went to visit his wife who was ill. At about this time, the relationship between the two was

founding much to the disappointment of JRD who tried to achieve a rapprochement. Ultimately, the relationship broke down completely. The Tatas chose to continue their association with Vintcent, partly because he had been the author of the air mail proposal and also because he and JRD had become good friends – both united by the common passion of initiating an airline. The dilly-dallying by the government continued much to the disgust of Sir Dorab. Vintcent tried his best to prevent an early demise of the proposal. Writing on 31 December 1931 to Jal Naoroji who looked after airline matters in JRD's absence, he said:'I hope you will use your influence to prevent the other Directors of the firm from losing interest on account of delay.'

The Tatas had requested the government for a guarantee of rupees one lakh for a year. The government was not interested. So JRD and Vintcent proposed a guarantee of Rs. 50,000 for the first year and Rs. 25,000 for the second after which there was to be no guarantee at all. The government still did not relent. JRD and Vintcent then changed tactics completely offering to donate an air service to the government. This offer was accepted and Tata Air Mail came into being. Detailed negotiations followed, and on 24 April 1932, the contract was signed for ten years. It involved no subsidy of any kind but only payment of a certain rate per pound carried, based on a sliding scale according to the distance over which the mails were flown. The contract stipulated that government aerodromes could be used without any restriction; the airline should employ only British subjects and use British built aircraft unless otherwise permitted; and the airline should extend its service to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) if so desired. Jal Naoroji (Dadabhai Naoroji's grandson) who was deputed to work out the details of the new venture was arrested at this time for his political activities. They started with two Puss Moths with Nevill Vintcent as the chief pilot and manager. The other pilot, the first on the payroll, was Homi Bharucha. Bharucha, a colourful character, used to wear top boots and breeches as his uniform for flying. JRD also pitched in as part time pilot whenever he could.



*Arrival of the inaugural mail flight from Karachi to Bombay on 15 October 1932: (from left) Nusserwanji Guzder, Homi Bharucha, JRD, Nevill vincent and an official of the postal service*

## HISTORY IS MADE

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After the government approved the plan for the new airline, JRD went to England to purchase two Puss Moths. He visited the de Havilland factory and met Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, the universally acknowledged father of British aviation. Sir Geoffrey was a keen entomologist and this is why he named his aircraft designs after 'Moths'. (He also had two very attractive nieces: Olivia De Havilland and Joan Fontaine.) JRD had hoped to fly one of the two planes back to India but fate had other plans. He developed a high fever at Naples and was forced to board the **Victoria**, which was leaving from Naples soon. The plane was hitched onto the deck and it came along with the Tatas as their personal baggage. It arrived at Ballard Pier and was taken to Juhu by a bullock cart. Back in India, the new Moth was re-registered in its Indian markings: VT-AND. JRD's Log Book at the time showed: *Total in Air – 388 hours 10 minutes*. On 24 May 1932, he got his 'B' licence in London that certified him competent for 'passenger, mail, goods flying machines.'

On 15 October 1932, J.R.D. Tata, aged twenty-eight, took off from Drigh Road airport, Karachi at 6.35 a.m. southbound for Bombay via Ahmedabad carrying India's first airmails. Dressed in white trousers and a white short-sleeved shirt, his only equipment consisted of his goggles and his trusty slide rule. The chief officer of the Karachi Municipality and the postmaster were part of a small party that had gathered to give him a send-off. Just after he took off another small plane took off to give'a fine salute to the new plane and its pilot'. It was the beginning of civil aviation in India.

Recalling this historic event many years later, JRD said: 'On an exciting October dawn in 1932, a Puss Moth and I soared joyfully from Karachi with our first precious load of mail, on an inaugural flight to Bombay... I breathed a silent prayer for the success of our venture and for the safety of those who

would work for it. We were a small team in those days. We shared successes and failures, the joys and heartaches, as together we built up the enterprise which later was to blossom into Air-India and Air-India International.' The flight had initially been planned for 15 September 1932 but was postponed because heavy rains had inundated the mud flats of Juhu. Many years later, this pioneering flight was to inspire another modern day hero: a young girl from Haryana named Kalpana Chawla.

JRD recalled that the flight was actually bumpy and hot. At Ahmedabad, Burmah Shell refuelled the plane, with a bullock cart bringing the four-gallon cans of petrol to the little plane. He deposited eight pounds of mail before departing for Bombay. JRD reached Bombay two hours and 35 minutes later at 1.50 p.m. The flight was without incident except for a bird, which had to be killed because it had flown into his cabin. With pardonable pride, JRD's Log Book entry is written in bold capital letters:

*1st Air Mail Flight Tata Airlines – Karachi-Madras, Air Service Inauguration.*

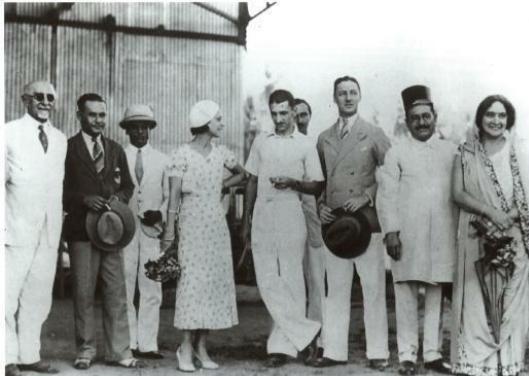
He was received at the airport by Thelly, Nevill Vintcent and Sir Phiroze Sethna, a senior businessman of Bombay. The postmaster of Bombay was also on hand to take custody of fifty-five pounds of mail for Bombay. Within twenty minutes of JRD's landing, the mail was transferred to the second Puss Moth. Nevill Vintcent climbed aboard with forty-seven pounds of mail for Madras, and six pounds for Bellary, where he was to halt for refuelling.

The service was initially only a modest weekly one. For the remaining months of 1932, JRD piloted numerous flights of the infant airmail service, mainly on the southern Bombay-Bellary-Madras sectors. JRD recalls how in April 1933 he was obliged to make a tricky night landing at Bellary with no other light than that provided by the half moon. Nevill Vintcent, who was supposed to meet him on hearing the sound of the Moth, failed to turn up, and JRD was forced to spend the night in the open under the wing of the plane. Up to the Second World War, their operations were with Puss Moths, Fox Moths and WACOs – planes, which had no radio or navigational aids thereby necessitating only daytime operations.

Nevill Vintcent's contribution to the airmail service was outstanding. He

was not only the progenitor of the original idea, but also managed the airline with professionalism and the enthusiasm of a person who loves what he is doing. Homi Bharucha, as we have noted before, was the first pilot on the payroll with JRD as a part-time pilot. The second pilot was the boyish B.K.N. Rao whose flying received special praise from JRD. The engineers were V.G. Gadgil, P.E. Menezes, R.N. Fernandes and an Englishman by the name of Mac Wade. In tact, there were only Vintcent, Gadgil, a chowkidar and MacWade when they first started out. Mac Wade was fired when JRD found out that he was moonlighting on the side, repairing cars during lunch. Captain Vishvanath joined in 1936 and rose to become director of Operations, Air-India. Bobby Kooka was taken on in 1938 at a monthly salary of Rs. 100. The famous Maharaja was born sometime later when Kooka decided to decorate the newly opened office of Tata Air Lines in Churchgate with a symbol of Eastern hospitality. The Maharaja smoking a hookah on a flying carpet clicked, and since then the Maharaja has been clothed in a variety of attires over the years depending on the kind of service he is advertising. Jal Cawasji, the art director of Air-India and his team did the drawings and Kooka gave the words. Kooka, as it turned out, didn't mince words. JRD was kept busy through the years explaining and defending his position to irate MPs and dignitaries who took umbrage at Kooka's humour. In Tatas, J.D. Choksi and Sir Gurunath Bewoor were Kooka's long-suffering victims.

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plane.



15 October 1932: Juhu Aerodrome after the arrival of the inaugural mail flight from Karachi to Bombay.-(from left) Sir Phiroze Sethna, Capt. Homi Bharucha (first staff pilot), a postal official, Thelma Tata, JRD, C.M. Eastley (Chairman of the Bombay Flying Club), Nusserwanji Guzder and Lady Sorab Saklatvala

The first year of functioning brought forth a word of praise from the Directorate of Civil Aviation. It commended the 100% punctuality record of the fledgling airline, and even suggested that the Imperial Airways might send their staff on deputation to Tatas to see how it is done. High praise indeed! In January 1934, Nevill Vincent told a Bombay audience that the unsubsidised airline had made a profit of Rs. 10,000. It would do well to remember that the Tatas got only the four annas per letter, for which a postage stamp had to be fixed and nothing more. Sir Frederick Tymms, the director-general of Civil Aviation writing in the *Times of India* in October 1934 pointed out that there was no airline in the world operating without government support. He said that this could only be possible if the individual operator took the financial risk, something, which the Tatas were prepared to do.

In 1933, the airline started the Bombay - Calcutta route via Nagpur with Jamshedpur as a halt. In 1935, a flight to Madras via Hyderabad started. In the same year, Trivandrum was linked via Goa and Cannanore. This service was inaugurated by B.K.N. Rao, who had JRD's colleague Jal Naoroji and a Bombay merchant, Seth Kanji Dwarkadas, as his first passengers. As the new airline progressed, they went in for newer aeroplanes such as Fox Moth, Leopard Moth, the Miles Hawk, the Miles Martin, the De Havilland Rapide and the WACO C-6.



*JRD apologises for landing his plane a minute early. The occasion was the inaugural Delhi-Bombay flight: (from left) Lady Nowroji Saklatvala, Sir Roger Lumley (Governor of Bombay), Sir Nowroji Saklatvala, Lady Lumley, K.M. Munshi and Sir Sorab Saklatvala*

In 1934, JRD flew from Bombay to Allahabad via Mhow and Jabalpur to officiate as a ground marshal in the MacRobertson Air Race from London to Sydney, which had stops at Karachi and Allahabad. C.W.A. Scott and T. Campbell Black in a Comet Racer won the race. The famous Amy Johnson along with her husband Jim Mollison also took part. She was the first to reach Karachi but had to drop out of the race when her engine burnt out at Allahabad. Failing to get high-octane fuel at Karachi, they had to manage with ordinary fuel, which damaged the engine. JRD also narrated how his friend, who received them at Allahabad, told him how the couple was having a blazing row. Poor Mollison stayed on in Allahabad drinking for two days!



*Juhu Aerodrome, 1937: (from left) JRD, Nevill Vincent, Lady Lumley and Sir Roger Lumley (Governor of Bombay), inspecting a De Havilland Rapide.*

In 1936 Tata Airlines made its first flight to Colombo. Nevill Vintcent inaugurated the service in a Miles Merlin with Sir Gurunath Bewoor, ICS, who was then director general of Posts and Telegraphs in the Government of India as his first passenger. (We have also heard of his son: General Gopal Bewoor who succeeded Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw as chief of Army Staff in 1973.) Later, Sir Gurunath was appointed as managing director in charge of both Air-India and Air-India International, where Bobby Kooka, the man who created the 'Maharaja', mercilessly lampooned him.



*A postal peon with the mail bags which JRD Tata carried from Karachi to Bombay on October 15th, 1932*

In May 1936, tragedy struck the Tata family. Jimmy, the youngest of the five siblings, was tragically killed in a plane crash in Austria. He was only twenty-one. Rodabeh who was in Paris at the time went to bring back the coffin from Austria. Jimmy was buried next to his parents, at the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris, in a beautiful yet simple, granite mausoleum. He had almost completed his flying training course at Hamble in England and was one of the most popular and brilliant pupils of the class. JRD was shattered. He had hoped that on his return Jimmy would assist him in his aviation activities. JRD recalled, 'For Jimmy I had planned, after finishing his training to come back and join us in the airline. He was the most gifted and talented flyer I had known. A wonderfully natural born flyer.' Jimmy's death brought JRD closer to Nevill Vintcent.

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A wonderfully  
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flyer.’

On 8 November 1937, the airline inaugurated its first service in a WACO C-6, from Willingdon aerodrome in Delhi to Juhu aerodrome in Bombay. Two planes started this service, one piloted by Vintcent. The mail plane carried 3,500 letters and a passenger, and the other carried three journalists. The planes were to halt at three princely states – Gwalior, Bhopal and Indore. It was a grand affair and a report of the ceremony was broadcast.

In 1938 the British government decided on an 'Ail-Up Empire Airmail Scheme.' Both Tatas and the Indian National Airways received mail carriage payments for their respective routes. The profit of the Tatas jumped to Rs 6 lakhs from Rs 66,000 in the previous year. Thanks to larger planes, the volume of passengers registered a six-fold increase and that of mail, a four-fold one.

When he joined Tatas, Nevill Vintcent had been promised a third of the profits. With the introduction of the new scheme, the profits, which were then in the thousands, now ran into lakhs, and it was thought fit to work out a new arrangement. Vintcent was justifiably upset and wanted to quit. A troubled JRD went to the trusty Dinshaw Daji for advice. Daji told him that legally Vintcent was not entitled to the original share but morally he was. That sealed it. JRD asked Vintcent to stay, convincing his colleagues with the argument that Tatas had always respected the moral aspect.

Within the first five years of operation, the aviation service owned fifteen planes, fifteen pilots, and thirty-four maintenance engineers. It had maintained an enviable track record of punctuality: 99.4 per cent, and flown a distance of nearly 15 lakh miles. It was also around this time that they

acquired their first four-engine plane – a De Havilland 86, which carried mail and eight passengers.



## THE INDUSTRIALIST

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The Tata group had greatly overextended itself during the First World War and found itself seriously under-capitalised. In 1924, RD and John Peterson had convinced the government to give protection to Tata Steel, but much needed to be done. They pulled out of various projects and even gave up Tata Industrial Bank to the Central Bank of India. In the middle of this restructuring, Sir Dorab passed away at Bad Kissengen, Germany, in 1932. Sir Nowroji Saklatvala, a nephew of the founder Jamsetji Tata, succeeded him. He was in his mid-sixties at the time and was a popular figure in Bombay society. According to JRD, he was a fine person but not one with great intellectual capacity or a real leader. Saklatvala's dependence on JRD grew. His office was next to JRD's and a secret window allowed the passing of documents between the two.

The period 1931-38 witnessed many changes in the top personnel of the Tatas. Sir Ardeshir Dalai replaced Peterson who left for England in 1931. In Jamshedpur, Joe Ghandy, JRD's old roommate had become TISCO's first Indian director-in-charge. The old guard included Sir Homi Mody and the new faces included JRD recruits such as J.D. Choksi, the economist Dr John Matthai, Bobby Kooka, Kish Naoroji, PA. Narielwala, A.D. Shroff and Colonel Leslie Sawhney who was married to JRD's sister Rodabeh. JRD was accepted as the de facto leader of this group of luminaries.

In 1932, TISCO drew up plans to extend its range of products and to double its capacity. Most of JRD's working hours at this time were devoted to TISCO. The expansion plans envisaged a Rs.1-crore galvanised sheet mill and a Rs. 1.3 crore coke oven and clearing blast furnace gas plant. The Tatas were unable to provide the finances, but JRD was reluctant to give up the sheet mill idea since a lot of effort had been invested in the project. Sir Homi

Mody, a senior Tata director and a close confidante of JRD, had successfully lobbied for a clause in the Ottawa Pact of 1932 by which India could import under special preference galvanised sheets made in the UK using Indian sheet bar. On the basis of the Ottawa Pact, JRD, Mody and Dalai worked out a joint venture with a British steel manufacturer Summer & Company, according to which both parties would put down fifty percent of the rupees one crore and Summer would take on the entire technical and works management. The joint venture never became a reality. Recent research suggests that JRD was worried that adverse Indian political opinion might endanger the case for protection. Eventually, Tatas built the mill single-handedly and in record time.



*Suman Moolgaokar, J.J. Bhabha and JRD at TISCO, Jamshedpur, 1965*

At around the same time, JRD initiated talks with Oriental Steel Company. The plan was that Oriental would import TISCO's sheet bars to Britain, roll them as galvanised sheets and re-export these to India with lower duty under imperial preference. This understandably attracted flak from all sides. It was felt that TISCO would lose its market share. JRD favoured imperial preference because he saw it as a way of gaining access to the British market for Indian pig iron and sheet bars. Given the atmosphere of general distrust, the Oriental-TISCO tie-up was doomed. Disputes over the division of the market in India and breaches of agreement did not help matters.

Financially, these were precarious times for Tata Steel. In 1932, the total consumption of saleable steel hit its lowest mark of 725,000 tons, of which TISCO supplied 431,000 tons. The plant had excess capacity of more than twenty-five percent and during a critical period in 1934, the workers even

accepted a wage of rupee one per day. JRD and Sir Dorab had collaborated with entrepreneurs in the 1920s to start steel processing units at Jamshedpur. The firms would get steel with minimal transport costs and TISCO would get a large and ready market for its steel. A failure at the time, JRD revived this strategy working closely with Indra Singh, a railway engineer who had resigned his job to settle in Jamshedpur where he founded a business house which ultimately figured in the top twenty. TISCO also promoted its own cluster of companies and by 1935 the demand for TISCO's products revived. Production and profitability revived and in 1936, the board paid Rs. 22.50 as dividend on a Rs. 100 share.

Since India's steel imports were rising steadily, it was apparent that there was scope for a plant producing around 250,000 or 300,000 tons. The Raja of Mysore began to consider extending his Mysore Iron Works pig iron into steel and in Calcutta Martin Burn and Sir Biren Mukherjee of Indian Iron and Steel Company did the same. JRD, for his part, was also drawing up expansion plans. A tripartite joint venture with TISCO, Martin Burn and Sir Edward Bentall, head of Bird and Company, one of India's biggest managing agency firms was planned, but the venture eventually came to nothing.

TISCO had been working on a 7-crore plan for a new steel complex but this mega-project was scrapped, yielding instead to a more modest Rs. 5.5-crore plan for modernisation. Critics have argued that this softer, and more conservative option left TISCO unprepared for the events of the Second World War and the license-permit regime of independent India.

## **ASSOCIATED CEMENT COMPANY**

The Tatas had entered the cement business in 1912 with India Cement Company and promoted a second firm, Shahbad Cement, in 1915. The manufacture of Portland cement in India ensured that supply far outstripped demand. Cut-throat competition and imports reduced margins and Indian cement companies applied for protection from the Tariff Board in 1924. Their request was turned down, but in 1926, the Board did respond by raising import duty on cement, also suggesting that the manufacturers control production and rates by mutual agreement. Thus was born the India Cement Manufacturers Association (1926), the Concrete Association of India, and the

Cement Marketing Company of India (1930).

While the above measures did help, profit margins continued to be small and JRD along with a lawyer called EE. Dinshaw began to examine the benefits of merging the plants. Dinshaw was not only a lawyer but also had a few industries of his own and received a ten-percent of the managing agency commission for Tata Steel. He played a key advisory role in the Tata group and often dropped in to chat with JRD and Sir Nowroji Saklatvala. The idea of ACC was born during this period. An ambitious plan, it needed the collaboration of some of the biggest houses in western India. It was argued with success that the quota system, which guaranteed each factory a minimum off-take, had not increased profits or created brands. It was also an inefficient use of capacity and increased transport costs. A merger was seen as the answer to these problems.

JRD revived this  
strategy working  
closely with  
Indra Singh, a  
railway engineer.



Ten out of the twelve cement companies bought the argument. It was a feather in JRD's cap, because Dinshaw, who was the architect of the scheme, died before the deal was concluded. ACC was formed in 1936 with an authorised capital of rupees eight crores. Though all major groups were represented on the board, there was no denying that it was a Tata-run and Tata-controlled company. ACC soon faced a challenge in the form of Ramakrishna Dalmia who had refused to merge into ACC. A price war resulted in 1938, which ended when JRD and Dalmia formed a cartel in 1941 dividing the market on a 75/25 basis. It is said that G.D Birla had intervened on behalf of Dalmia, when the latter found that his very existence was at stake. At about this time (1941) JRD walked out of FICCI, which had been formed by G.D. Birla. Though they collaborated together on the Bombay Plan in 1944, they shared an uneasy relationship. JRD once accused Birla of poaching on his pilots, and the austere Marwari and the dapper JRD had little in common. Birla once wrote to JRD enclosing an article on the evils of smoking and drinking. JRD wrote back saying that he had given up smoking and hardly consumed alcohol or coffee. He said jokingly, that if he had to give up anything, he would like to give up work. Later, JRD told R.M. Lala that he finally kicked the smoking habit on 31 December 1967, when he smoked till midnight, and then never again.



## AT THE HELM OF AFFAIRS

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On 26 July 1938, four directors of Tata Sons met in the boardroom on the fourth floor of Bombay House. Apart from JRD, those present were Sir Sorab Saklatvala, Sir Homi Mody and Sir Ardeshir Dalai. The meeting had been necessitated by the sudden demise of the Tata chairman Sir Nowroji Saklatvala in Aix-les-Baines, France, the third Tata chairman to die in Europe. The meeting was a sombre affair, and the board, after recording a brief tribute to the departed chairman, moved on to the main agenda of the meeting – the election of a new chairman. The proceedings were, however, little more than a formality – they merely set the official seal on a decision that had been taken in advance. Sir Sorab Saklatvala proposed JRD's name for the chairmanship, and Sir Ardeshir Dalai seconded the proposal. Three days short of his thirty-fourth birthday, JRD found himself at the head of India's biggest business group.

Possible contenders included Sir Sorab Saklatvala who, according to JRD, may have been overlooked because he 'was old and not too bright', and Naval Fata, the adopted son of Lady Navajbai Tata. Lady Navajbai Tata was the largest shareholder, inheriting her share from her husband Sir Ratan in 1918. JRD's father RD, the third main partner had bequeathed his shares to JRD who had generously split his share five ways, giving an equal share to each of his siblings. JRD had taken Lady Navajbai's blessings before the board meeting since nothing could have been done without her consent. In any case, there weren't all that many candidates to choose from, and by then JRD had already made a name for himself.

R.M. Lala relates that JRD often said that he was appointed chairman 'in a moment of mental aberration.' On another occasion, he said that maybe it was because he was the only surviving director of Tatas (other than Lady

Navajbai Tata) who was permanent under the firm's constitution. Whatever the reasons for his elevation, JRD found himself at the head of fourteen companies with combined sales of Rs. 280 crores.

Unlike his predecessor, JRD decided that he would divest himself of the chairmanship of certain companies. Until then, the chairman of Tata Sons was the chairman of all Tata companies. In consonance with this line of thought, he gave up, among others, the chairmanship of the Hydro-Electric to Sir Homi Mody. JRD adopted Jamsetji's philosophy and value system as his guidelines as a captain of industry. Keeping in mind Jamsetji's concern about 'What does the nation need?', JRD held that 'What is good for India is good for Tatas.'

When he became chairman in 1938, JRD was by far the youngest member of the Board. His senior colleagues included Sir Homi Mody, Sir Ardeshir Dalai and Sir Sorab Saklatvala. Naval Tata was co-opted at the instance of Lady Navajbai in 1941. JRD added his own advisers like J.D Choksi, Dr John Matthai and Colonel Leslie Sawhney. Key executives included Sir Jehangir Ghandy and Kish Naoroji in Jamshedpur and P.A. Narielwala in Mithapur.

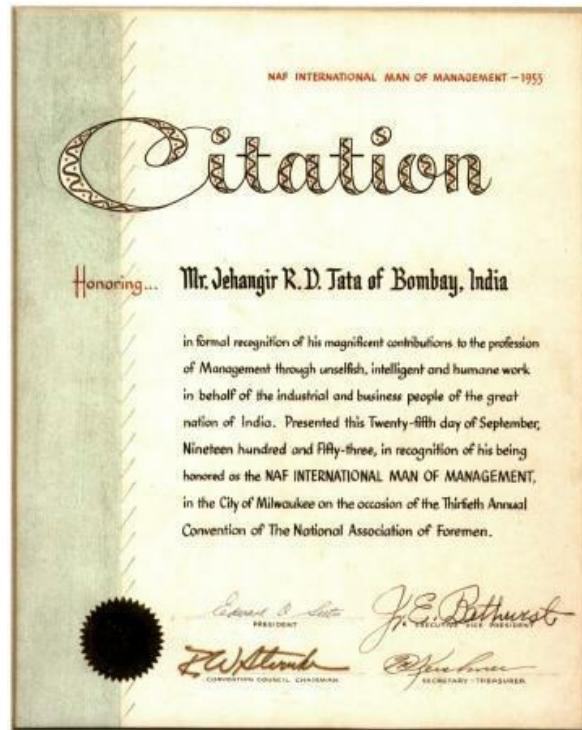
Sir Homi Mody was JRD's first friend among the Tatas after he took over as chairman. Many years senior to the young chairman, Mody, a well-known figure in India's industrial life, treated JRD with an almost paternal concern. A member of the viceroy's Executive Council during the Second World War, and then after independence, the governor of Uttar Pradesh, he was especially known for his sense of humour and ready wit. His exchanges with Dr John Matthai, the apotheosis of dignity, enlivened Tata meetings with a welcome levity. Mody was one of the few who could take liberties with Matthai. The story goes that on one occasion, Matthai entered Mody's room in Bombay House and started smoking a very foul smelling cigar. Mody 's response to this odious intrusion was:'Will you please go to my bedroom and smoke your cigar to drive away the mosquitoes.' For his part Matthai admired Mody's sense of humour, remarking that one could not work with Mody without feeling that life was every bit worth living.' Mody was also the father of two famous sons: the parliamentarian Piloo, whose wit regaled Parliament, and the peerless man-manager, Russi Mody.

Dr John Matthai, an economist by training, was the finance member of the

viceroy's Executive Council, joined as minister for Railways and Transport in 1946, and then became minister for Commerce and Industry. He resigned as finance minister in 1950 after differences with Jawaharlal Nehru. He had a number of firsts to his credit: he was the first chairman of the State Bank of India, the National Council of Applied and Economic Research, Administrative Staff College of India and the National Book Trust. Known for his unimpeachable integrity, Honest John' was a stickler for protocol and precedent. Extremely punctual, he left the office at 5.20 p.m. and was in the car by 5.30 p.m. His first love was reading and he read all the twelve volumes of Toynbee's *Study of History* rather than adopt the customary short-cut by reading the summary. He rejoined Tatas after resigning from the government serving as director-in-charge of Tata Steel for the next seven years. He also served as the first non-Parsee chairman of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

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Sir Ardeshir Dalai, in contrast with Sir Homi Mody, adopted a perpetually serious mien. Tall and well groomed, he was disciplined, methodical, neat and precise. Stern and at times forbidding, he did not suffer fools gladly. He topped the ICS in October 1908 and rose to become the first Indian municipal commissioner of Bombay, joining Tatas in 1931 after resigning from government service. Sir Ardeshir once sacked a European supervisor for insolence, serving a practical warning that foreign workers at Jamshedpur did not constitute a privileged community. His initial opinion of JRD was not particularly favourable. He thought him to be a rich playboy. It is possible that this was the disapproval of a self-made man for a young man who had inherited his position. In any case, whatever views Sir Ardeshir may have had on achievement versus ascription, JRD's obvious dedication and application soon made him change his opinion.



In 1953, at its Thirtieth Annual Convention in Milwaukee, the National Association of Foremen honoured JRD with the International Man of Management Award



With Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

JRD's longest serving colleague on the Board of Tata Sons was Naval Tata. He was appointed director in 1941, a post he held till his death in 1989. A valuable contributor in the textile and electric companies, he was also involved in the management of Tata Oil Mills and the aviation department. As an almost exact contemporary of JRD, Naval Tata was destined to be overshadowed by his high profile cousin. He was doubtless quite happy to let things be this way because it enabled him to focus his attention on the human resources aspect of industry. Naval Tata was a humanitarian first and he devoted his life to his employees. In those days, labour laws did not exist and there was a big gap between labour and management. As president of the Employers' Federation of India, Naval did a great deal to bridge this gap.

If someone was  
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him off.

Naval's forte was in labour issues, and he holds the distinction of having being elected to the Governing Board of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) thirteen-times in thirty-eight years. He was the father of the ILO's family planning programme, being the first to get the ILO interested in the issue of population management. He was also the president of the Indian Hockey Federation for fifteen years, and was at the helm when India won in 1948, 1952 and 1956. In fact, it was largely thanks to him (who prevailed upon Nehru to sanction the necessary funds) that India sent a team in 1948. When Nehru asked him if the standard of India's hockey was going down after India's narrow 1-0 victory over Pakistan in 1956, Naval replied that the standard of the other teams was going up!

Naval Tata had more patience than JRD and his leadership style, too, was different. If someone was wrong about something, JRD would not hesitate to tick him off. Naval would be more kind. The one similarity between the two was their generosity. But JRD and Naval did have their differences. JRD

wanted to steer clear of politics, but Naval stood for parliamentary election from South Bombay as an independent candidate and lost. Naval, for his part, felt that JRD's open support of C. Rajagopalachari's Swatantra Party in 1961 was imprudent since it antagonised Nehru. Their personal relations remained warm and whatever their differences, they worked together over nearly half a century to further the cause of both Tatas and India.

A look at JRD's management philosophy, which was based on consensus, will reveal how he managed to knit the diverse group into a family. In his own words: 'When a number of persons are involved I am definitely a consensus man... But basically it is a question of having to deal with individual men heading different enterprises. And with each man, I have my own way. I am one who will make full allowance for a man's character and idiosyncrasies. You have to adapt yourself to their ways and deal accordingly and draw out the best in each man... If I have any merit, it is getting on with individuals according to their ways and characteristics... To be a leader you have got to lead human beings with affection.'

Another factor, which may have contributed to this philosophy, is the fact that since he was not a specialist in any subject he probably thought that his best contribution to the management would be as a mediator and facilitator. This would allow those with specialised skills to function effectively in the best interest of the Tatas. Apart from the airlines where he was involved in line-management, in other fields his decisions had to be executed by others, and he always made sure that 'the superior knowledge of my advisers confirms the soundness of my decision.' He recalled, 'Therefore all my management contributions were on the human aspect through inducing, convincing and encouraging the human being. The exception was in the field of aviation, where I knew the technical side and perhaps half my love for aviation comes from the fact that it was the only field in which I have felt competent.'

Often criticised for being too much of a consensus man, JRD admitted that he disliked unilateral decisions but maintained that he always expressed his own views. He is credited with creating powerful and independent corporate chiefs. He shared a personal bond with them and relations were governed by mutual affection. But this creation of a group of *satraps* was to prove a little

problematic at the time of JRD's succession.

If JRD believed in consensus it did not mean that he was slow in making decisions. When the need arose, he handed down decisions promptly. He did not suffer fools gladly and he was very put off by pompous people. JRD never took himself too seriously, and though he could be impatient at times, he had a basic respect for human beings and was particularly sympathetic to the lower echelons of his staff. One of JRD's greatest qualities was his ability to treat everyone as an equal. He'd argue fiercely for what he thought was right, but he never tried to impose his views. He was keen to convince but could also be persuaded to accept the opposing point of view.

Ratan Tata recalls how JRD would grill someone who came across as cocky. But he would also not hesitate to break a lance in favour of someone who was besieged. S.K. Bandyopadhyay, secretary of the Gandhi National Memorial Trust (Gandhi Smarak Nidhi) recalls how JRD stood by the Trust in its time of crisis, unlike another top industrialist and close confidante of Gandhiji, who preferred business expediency to moral courage. Bandyopadhyay came into contact with JRD in 1984 when the Kudal Commission set up by Indira Gandhi was inquiring into the so-called illegal acts of all voluntary institutions associated with Gandhiji. This was, in reality, nothing more than retaliation against all those Gandhian workers who had sided with Jayaprakash Narayan during the protests against the excesses of the Emergency. JRD, of his own accord, issued a public statement, that as a founder Trustee he had noticed nothing illegal about the functioning of the Trust, and in case the charges were well-founded, it was his responsibility as well. The question of resigning did not arise till this question was cleared up. Nothing could be found against any of the Gandhian institutions and the farce ended with Indira Gandhi's death.

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When JRD took over as chairman, the Tatas had fourteen companies with combined sales of Rs. 280 crores. By the end of the Second World War the activities of the group had multiplied, and JRD concentrated on turning round older existing companies with good results. The forties were a period of growth and the Tatas made forays into new fields like venture capital (Investment Corporation of India and Investa), consumer electronics (NELCO) and soda ash (Tata Chemicals).



*With Jayaprakash Narayan*

At the beginning of his tenure as chairman, JRD had to face a possible strike at TISCO. This strike had its genesis in the 1936 demand for higher bonuses led by the fiery Professor Abdul Bari, the president of the Tata Steel Workers' Union. Bari's idea of vigour was extravagant charges and vituperative language. The dispute had gone into arbitration and the union had accepted the award of the adjudicators, i.e. Bari, Sir Ardeshir Dalai and Subhash Chandra Bose (who was then president of the Indian National Congress). The discontent continued to simmer, and a flashpoint was reached when three workers were sacked and the Union refused to take part in the centenary celebrations of the founder Jamsetji Tata. JRD wrote to Nehru requesting help. Nehru and Dr Rajendra Prasad were accepted as arbitrators,

and after the agitation was over JRD wrote to Nehru to thank him for his efforts at mediation. This incident is significant because at the time Nehruvian socialism had few adherents in the business world. Fears about Nehru's Marxist leanings among the Bombay business community had been reinforced by his presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in April 1936 where he advocated socialism, which he defined as the ending of private property. All his life the words 'lucrative' and 'profit' were abhorrent to him.

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In May 1936, twenty-one mercantile leaders published a manifesto against Nehru, which appeared in the *Times of India* and the *Tribune* on 20 May 1936. From the Tatas, Saklatvala, Dalai, Mody, Sethna and Shroff signed the manifesto. The glaring exception was JRD who refused to sign. In time, a distance brought about by serious ideological differences would replace this closeness. Talking about this gulf JRD told R.M. Lala many years later that it was largely due to Nehru's devotion to the socialistic pattern. He recalls how Nehru once told him, 'I hate the mention of the word profit.' He found it a dirty word' and the fact that JRD, on that particular occasion, was talking about the public sector making a profit did not seem to make a difference to him.'That he was out of tune with me is something I could deplore, but there was nothing I could do.'

In January 1955, when communism was at its peak, JRD had written an almost prophetic letter to Jayaprakash Narayan, who was then a convinced Marxist. He said that he did not share his understanding of the capitalist system or its place in history. JRD wondered if Jayaprakash was not making the mistake of viewing the capitalist system as it was years ago, and not in the present form, or the one into which it was developing. He went on to add:'I believe that in most parts of the world the system of free enterprise, far

from dying, will be given a renewed lease of life in recognition of its ability and willingness to serve the community well and also from a revulsion against the unpleasant reality – as distinct from the myth – of state socialism.' History has vindicated JRD's words.

JRD's humane approach towards labour brought about a change from the earlier policy of confrontation. VG. Gopal, who headed the Tata Workers' Union in the 1970s, opined that, The trade union became not only acceptable but also an association which was vital to the interests of the workers.' Gopal was tragically shot dead on 14 October 1993, a month before JRD's demise and a letter JRD wrote in this regard from Geneva was one of his very last. JRD even managed to establish a friendly relationship with the fiery Professor Abdul Bari, despite the union leader's intemperance on public platforms, from where he harangued the Tata management on grievances, real and imagined.

The Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939 when Hitler marched into Poland. Two days later, a downcast Neville Chamberlain, unable to secure 'peace for our time', declared war on Germany. Lord Linlithgow, the viceroy, did likewise on behalf of India. JRD like Nehru supported the war against Hitler's Nazis but still wanted to throw off the English yoke. He detested Hitler but seemed to have a kind word for Mussolini. At the Quit India session in Bombay in 1942, JRD occupied a seat close to the dais. Regarding his personal involvement in politics and the freedom struggle, he wrote in the preface to his book *Keynote*: 'I've never regretted my decision to stay out of politics which I rationalised to myself at the time by concluding that I could do more for the country in business and industry than in politics, for which all my instincts, in any case, made me unfit.... Who knows, I thought, I might one day have an opportunity to serve in more useful ways than going to jail today!' JRD says that his attitude towards the British at this time was correct but cool.' Still this did not prevent Sir Jehangir Ghandy, the general manager of the Tata Steel plant at Jamshedpur, from donating Spitfires to the RAF as a token contribution to the war effort by the people of Jamshedpur.

JRD's humane approach towards labour brought about a change from the earlier policy of confrontation.



*With Russi Mody*

In 1939, a young man called Russi Modi joined TISCO. He was Sir Homi Mody's son and when Sir Ardeshir Dalai, the director-in-charge of TISCO interviewed the nervous young man, he could not have foreseen that the son would achieve an eminence that would equal, if not surpass, the father in the company. Appointed to the junior-most-post, Russi also worked as a *khalasi* and did manual jobs on the shop floor. This was to give him an insight and keen understanding of the workforce that would prove invaluable as he rose in the hierarchy. JRD once commented, Russi has not had an easy time.... It is all very well to feel amused at the idea of his having been a helper, a rougher, a *khalasi*, but knowing Jamshedpur as I have in all these years, it was very tough to go through (this ordeal). And Russi went through it well. JRD must have recognised his talent in handling labour because when he started the Personnel Division of TISCO in 1947, Russi was one of the first to join. Just six years later, he would become director of personnel and conduct the affairs

of the company with 'The Three Cs' – credibility, courage and compassion. For his part, Russi admired J RD and said that if he had not known him he may have grown into a very pompous person. Unfortunately, the relationship was to sour in the end when Russi thought that he was going to succeed JRD as chairman.



*With Ferdinand Marcos of Philippines*

Lord Wavell replaced Lord Linlithgow in August 1943. JRD met him but was unable to strike a rapport with him. At about this time feelers were sent to JRD on how he would respond to being knighted. JRD was not interested and said as much. His views on the British of the Raj period may provide a reason for this refusal: ...But I always had an angry opposition to their continuing as rulers and was always hoping that we could break away or they would get away....'

During the war years, TISCO's capacity stagnated at 800,000 tons. JRD told the shareholders that TISCO had provided approximately three million tons of steel to the war effort. It should have been a time for supernormal profits for Tatas but JRD's code of ethics did not allow him to profiteer. While other companies made supernormal profits, Tatas supplied steel to the British government in India at pre-war prices. The famous anthropologist and scholar Verrier Elwin, the author of *The Story of Tata Steel* and the greatest champion of India's tribal people, wrote on how there was very little expansion or indeed replacement during this period. Elwin was a friend of JRD who had helped him publish his *The Agraria* and *The Muria and their Ghotul* with timely subsidies at critical periods.

But JRD's sacrifice was wasted and ironically from July 1944, TISCO found itself subsidising imported steel. The only benefit from TISCO's contribution to the war effort was incidental. A Research and Control Laboratory had been opened in 1937. Its researchers were able to innovate under pressure and Tatas were able to manufacture and supply in addition to carbon steel, an extensive variety of special steels. The lab also made a high-tensile alloy steel – Tiscrom – which made it possible to construct the Howrah Bridge from entirely indigenous material. The most popular Tata war product was the Tatagar, an armoured car fitted with a bullet-proof plate forged by Tatas and which saved many lives.



*JRD standing before the statue of the founder jamsetji Tata at Jamshedpur*

## TRUSTEESHIP AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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The concept of trusteeship fostered by Mahatma Gandhi received a much-needed fillip in Tata enterprises. Jamsetji Tata, the founder, had always placed the needs of the nation above narrow commercial concerns, and his schemes for steel, hydro-electric power and the institute of science all reflected such wider concerns. He started giving scholarships to deserving students for pursuing higher studies abroad in 1892, and in 1924 it was calculated that out of every five Indian ICS officers, one was a Tata scholar. (From 1977 some major Tata companies have been making annual contributions to enable the J.N. Tata Endowment to augment the number of awards.)

Jamsetji's sons Sir Dorab and Sir Ratan not only continued the good work started by their illustrious father but also established pioneering trusts geared to building the educational, social and scientific infrastructure of India. Sir Ratan supported Gopal Krishna Gokhale with generous contributions, and contributed a sum of Rs. 1.25 lakhs to Mahatma Gandhi's campaign for racial equality in South Africa. His annual donations to the London School of Economics for research into the causes of poverty and its alleviation led to the establishment of the Sir Ratan Tata Department in 1912 (now the Department of Social Sciences) at the School. In 1913, the post of lecturer in the newly created department went to a young man called Clement Attlee. Thirty-two years later he became prime minister of Britain and India gained her independence during his tenure as prime minister.

At a time when most charities were communal in nature, the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (1918) and the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (1932) stressed the secular nature of their charity. The Sir Ratan Tata Trust has contributed generously to schools, homes for the homeless, hospitals, and the like. Major beneficiaries

include the National Metallurgical Laboratory, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the National Centre for the Performing Arts. Other institutions that have benefited assistance of the Trust include the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and the Delhi School of Economics whose library is called the Ratan Tata Library. Sir Ratan Tata's exquisite art collection was donated to the Prince of Wales Museum (now the Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sanghralaya) where it is housed in a special wing along with Sir Dorab's collection.

The Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, which started with a bequest of rupees one crore gave India some pioneering institutions: The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (1936), Tata Memorial Hospital (1941), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (1945) and the National Centre for the Performing Arts (1966). Sir Dorab had also created another smaller trust, the Lady Tata Memorial Trust, for research primarily in leukaemia three months before he died.

## **TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES (TISS)**

The Tata Institute of Social Sciences was the result of the pioneering work of an American missionary, Dr Clifford Manshardt, who pioneered urban community development programmes in the *chawls* of Nagpada in Bombay in the 1920s. His initiatives were supported by Sir Dorabji Tata, and it was during this period that the idea of an institute for social work took root. In 1936, the Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work was established for professional training in social work with Dr Manshardt as its first director. The concept of labour welfare in India directly evolved from the work of the Dorabji Tata Graduate School. In 1944, it was renamed the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. JRD was the chairman of the governing board and continued to guide and inspire the working of TISS. The present campus of the Institute, at Deonar in Mumbai, was opened on 6 October 1954, by the then prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. A decade later the Institute was recognised as a deemed university by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Since then it has expanded continuously, both in educational programmes and infrastructure. It has responded to the changing needs of social and educational system in the country and has gone far beyond its initial concern of social work education. What started as a small institution offering postgraduate diplomas in social work has grown into a university with

diversified activities.

## **TATA MEMORIAL CENTRE**

After Lady Meherbai Tata died of leukaemia in 1932, her husband, Sir Dorabji Tata, wanted to bring to India a facility similar to the ones where his wife was treated abroad. After Sir Dorabji's death, Sir Nowroji Saklatvala, the next chairman of the Tatas pursued this dream. But it was JRD's support that finally made the dream a reality. The Tata Memorial Centre (TMC), a seven-storey structure, opened in Parel, Bombay, on 28 February 1941. It was thanks to JRD's vision that TMC is involved in the triple objectives of treatment, research and education. The trustees at this time only wanted to minimise expenses and nothing was further from their minds than research. It was for nine years the only one of its kind in the subcontinent. The Bombay government contributed rupees one lakh per year after some time, but the Tatas contributed the lion's share.

In 1957, the Ministry of Health took over the Tata Memorial Centre (TMC) but proved unequal to the task. JRD and Homi J. Bhabha, the pioneer of India's nuclear energy programme, had the vision to foresee the role that radiation would play in cancer treatment. Homi J. Bhabha persuaded Nehru that like the US Atomic Energy Commission, which ran four cancer hospitals in the US, the Atomic Energy Department should be given the responsibility of running the hospital. Nehru agreed, and since 1962 the hospital has functioned under the auspices of the Department of Atomic Energy. After four years the Cancer Research Institute (set up in 1952) and TMC were merged. Starting as an 80-bed hospital covering an area of 15,000 sq ms, TMC now has more than 440 beds spread over almost 54,000 sq ms. Its annual budget, rupees five lakhs in 1941, is now more than rupees twenty-eight crores.



*With Homi J. Bhabha*

TMC is a comprehensive centre for the prevention and treatment of cancer, and for research. It is a landmark on the global health map and particularly important to this part of the world. Nearly 25,000 patients visit the hospital each year, not only from all over India but from neighbouring countries as well. Nearly seventy per cent of patients seeking primary care are treated free of charge. Over the years TMC has also realised the importance of preventive activities and is reaching out to create awareness even in rural areas.

In 1945 Homi J. Bhabha founded an institution, which became the cradle' of the Indian atomic energy programme: The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay.

## **TATA INSTITUTE OF FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH (TIFR)**

Homi Bhabha returned to India at the outbreak of the Second World War after a distinguished career at Cambridge and accepted an offer of Readership from the Physics Department of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He received a small grant from the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (his aunt Meherbai was married to Sir Dorab) with which he established the Cosmic Ray Research Unit. At thirty-one, he was elected to the Royal Society, the second youngest after the mathematician Ramanujan to be so honoured. At that time, JRD had on Nehru's recommendation, suggested to the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust

that a grant also be made to Meghnad Saha in Calcutta for building a cyclotron.



*With a patient at Tata Memorial Hospital*

The story of TIFR starts with a letter Bhabha wrote to JRD in August 1943 in which he lamented that the lack of proper conditions and intelligent financial support' was hampering the development of science in India. He expressed his reservations about the development of science at a pace, which the talent in the country warranted. He also hinted that after the War he was likely to accept an assignment at Cambridge or Princeton. But he also added that in case suitable facilities were made available in India he was ready to continue as, 'it is one's duty to stay in one's country and build up schools comparable with those in other lands.' JRD's reply was characteristically warm and supportive: '... if you and/or some of your colleagues in the scientific world will put up concrete proposals backed by a sound case, I think that there is a very good chance that the Tata trusts would respond.'

Taking JRD for his word, on 12 March 1944 Bhabha wrote a formal letter to Sir Sorab Saklatvala, chairman of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. He proposed the creation of an institute, which he hoped 'to build up in the course of time a school of physics comparable with the best anywhere.' Prof Rustum Choksi, a member of the Trust, first studied Bhabha's letter. After he recommended support, the trustees then met on 14 April 1945 to formally consider the proposal. Bhabha waited outside with hope in his heart and a prayer on his lips as JRD advocated his case that fundamental research was critical. Luckily, for Bhabha and for India, the trustees were persuaded by the argument. The trustees then interviewed Bhabha before giving their final consent. They also prudently suggested that the responsibility should be shared from the outset with the Bombay University and the Bombay

government. Bhabha was to give a final form to this suggestion when he formulated a tripartite arrangement between the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, the government of Maharashtra and the Government of India (operating through the Department of Atomic Energy). This Bhabha formula' has been employed with notable success in other cases as well. JRD also served on the board of the Atomic Energy Commission for twenty-six years till Morarji Desai dropped him in 1977.

TIFR began functioning in Bangalore on 1 June 1945. Six months later it moved to Bombay. Bhabha rented one-half of a building named Kenilworth' on Peddar Road, which was owned by his aunt Coover Panday. In fact this was the building where Bhabha was born. Today the old bungalow has given way to an apartment complex (of the same name) which houses officers of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. Sir John Colville, the governor of Bombay, inaugurated the Bombay premises on 19 December 1945. From these humble beginnings the TIFR has evolved into the huge complex we know today. JRD was president of the Governing Council for decades. He was also president of the Court of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

## **NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS (NCPA)**

The National Centre for the Performing Arts provides yet another example of JRD's vision and enlightened support of projects whose importance escaped lesser mortals. Inaugurated in October 1980 by the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, the 1,010-seat Tata Theatre, as it came to be christened, provided special acoustics of short duration reverberation time and an innovative fan-shaped auditorium for the first time in India. Top class acoustics and a visual proximity to the stage for every one of its thousand-plus seats make it a truly world class facility. The complex also houses among other facilities the 300-seat Experimental Theatre, a 200 seat Dance Academy Theatre, Art Gallery, Reading and Listening libraries, a Computerised Music Research Laboratory, Visual Arts Centre, Creative Arts Centre and an Audio-visual Archival Vault.

But it was JRD's  
support that  
finally made the  
dream a reality.



*With Indira Gandhi*

The initial grant of rupees forty lakhs by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust was later supplemented by generous donations from the corporate sector. This was the first public project sponsored by the Trust that sought financial support from other trusts and individuals. Registered as a society on 8 June 1966, it was also established as a public trust. The NCPA was the brainchild of Jamshed Bhabha, (Homi J. Bhabha's younger brother) who at the time was a young trustee of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust. The idea for the NCPA was born when he recorded a proposal that while the Trust had funded and supported institutions of national importance, all were in the area of medicine, science and technology. There was a crying need for a similar

pioneering institution in the area of the arts and humanities, particularly music and theatre arts. While some of the older trustees voiced their misgivings, Bhabha received the unstinting support of JRD, and the equally enlightened managing trustee, Prof Rustum Choksi. They succeeded in getting the sanction of an initial grant to the NCPA project of rupees forty lakhs on the condition specified by the older trustees, that an area of five acres would be found for the project in Bombay. Jamshed Bhabha also proceeded to set up a Board of Advisers consisting of not only distinguished Indians who had contributed to the performing arts, but also eminent foreigners like Yehudi Menuhin and Andre Malraux.



*Avabai Wadia presenting a scroll to JRD at the International Planned Parenthood Federation Members Assembly and 40th anniversary celebrations*

When first approached for the allotment of an area of five acres, the state government offered a large area in the vicinity of the Ajanta caves. This was obviously an absurd location given the nature of the project envisaged. Bhabha then suggested that a plot of five acres opposite the Taraporewala Aquarium on Marine Drive be reclaimed. The government of Maharashtra agreed subject to certain conditions. The government's consent, in principle, for reclamation emboldened Bhabha to approach and secure the government's consent to reclamation being effected at the other end of Marine Drive. Permission was granted, and at this time JRD played a crucial role in persuading the government to agree to release to the NCPA three additional acres that it had earmarked for a public park. JRD countered with the plea that an even greater public purpose would be served by the NCPA making available to the public, programmes of music, dance and theatre arts. According to R.M. Lala, who was a director of the Trust for many years and the author of *The Heartbeat of a Trust*, which tells the story of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, the first grant of rupees forty lakhs literally went into the Arabian Sea for reclaiming the land.

The noted architect Philip Johnson was appointed as the architect, and a

professor at Columbia University, Cyril Harris was the acoustic consultant. They charged no professional fees and their brief was to design an auditorium for performances, which would not need electronic amplification. The unique fan shape was inspired by the traditional practice in India of the audience sitting in a semi-circle around performers. The outstanding acoustics are a result of a unique acoustic device in the shape of tetrahedral forms, alternately convex and concave, and raised into position individually on the ceiling. Both Bhabha and JRD had regular meetings with the architect and were intimately connected with the details of the construction. One does not know JRD's opinion on Johnson's competence as an architect, but there can be no doubt that he must have had a much higher opinion of him, than he did of the famous French architect, Le Corbusier. Corbusier stayed with JRD on more than one occasion and JRD was aghast, at not only the man's vanity, but also at some of his designs.



*JRD laying the foundation stone of the headquarters of the Family Planning Foundation*

The rest, as they say, is history and Jamshed Bhabha, even though he is over ninety, continues to be the moving spirit behind NCPA. A new 1,150 seat Jamshed Bhabha Theatre was inaugurated on 24 November 1999. It is equipped with state-of-the-art stagecraft and engineering suitable for staging Western operas and ballets and is yet another feather in the NCPA's cap. JRD had voiced an opinion, that grand as the National Theatre was, he missed a classical proscenium with a stage-curtain. Indira Gandhi too had once remarked to Jamshed Bhabha that it was a pity that the Theatre did not have an orchestra pit. The new Jamshed Bhabha Theatre makes up for both these shortcomings, and fittingly honours the man, who not only conceived the NCPA but also piloted its growth into an institution of national importance. It also boasts a magnificent Carrara marble staircase donated by Sir Dinshaw

Petit, the Third Baronet and husband of Sylla, JRD's elder sister. Sir Dinshaw also donated the four magnificent chandeliers that adorn the National Theatre.



The Tatas also had a hand in starting the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund. Soon after Partition, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences sent a team to assist with refugee relief. As millions poured in to flee the carnage, JRD suggested to Nehru that a national fund for relief and distress should be started in the name of the prime minister. Naturally, Tatas would make a substantial grant. The idea became a reality in December 1948 and a representative of the Tata Trustees also found a place as a trustee of the fund. In 1944, JRD started the J.R.D. Tata Trust as a multipurpose trust for the advancement of learning and the relief of human suffering. In 1991 he started the J.R.D. and Thelma Tata Trust for the benefit of disadvantaged women and children. The sale proceeds (rupees four crores) of his flat in Sterling Apartments was donated to the J.R.D. Tata Trust.



*JRD speaking at the 20th anniversary of the Family Planning Foundation*



Citizen 'Jeh' also played a pioneering role in the family planning movement in India. J RD had always been keen on population control and had raised this issue with Nehru soon after Independence; but Nehru seemed to see population as a strength. When the government showed no interest – in fact, it was not even alive to the potentially disastrous situation – JRD set about addressing the situation himself. On his prompting the Demographic Centre for Training and Research started in July 1956 as a joint venture of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, the Union government and the United Nations. This later became the International Institute of Population Studies (HPS). Population control was almost a fetish for JRD. He thought India's destination would be defined by two factors: population and education. He felt that the country's destiny lay in controlling its population and in educating its people, fervently believing that India had great intellectual talent.

JRD was not content to tackle the problem with this indirect approach. He favoured direct intervention, and to this end founded the Family Planning Foundation of India in 1970. It received a donation of \$200,000 from the Ford Foundation, and JRD wanted it to focus on scientific research in the field of demography. The Foundation has supported numerous studies and

programmes, and JRD as its founder president was very particular about attending the Foundation's frequent meetings in New Delhi.

In the last decade the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust has started the National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore, and enabled the Dr M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation to start the J.R.D. Tata Centre for Ecotechnology in Chennai. The National Institute of Advanced Studies was inaugurated by JRD in 1991. The Trust has also helped start Asia's first training institute for the rural blind, and the International Institute of Demographic Studies.

The Tata tradition of social responsibility continues unabated. In 2004 the Tatas are trying to evolve the concept of corporate social responsibility, an as yet nebulous concept in India, on a tangible scale by drawing up a special CSR index called the Tata Index for Sustainable Human Development. The index has been developed by the Tata Council for Community Initiatives (TCCI) to benchmark the contributions of Tata companies toward social development and protection of the environment. Fifteen group firms have already adopted this benchmark and five others have completed an initial benchmarking exercise of their CSR activities.



*In the Boardroom at Bombay House. Behind JRD is a bust of the founder Jamsetji Tata*

## GROWTH AND EXPANSION

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The decade following JRD's appointment as chairman in 1938 was an important one for the Tatas. Tata Chemicals, Mithapur, was launched on 1 January 1939 (though production started only in 1944), TELCO was born in 1945, and in 1948, Air-India International operated the first scheduled flight from Asia to land in London.

### TATA CHEMICALS

We have seen JRD's support of innovation in the Research and Control Laboratory at Jamshedpur, which did creditable work during the war. Tata Chemicals provide the best example of JRD's willingness to support innovation. The brainchild of Kapilram Vakil, a Manchester trained chemical engineer with a vision, Tata Chemicals, Mithapur, was the Okha Salt Works in an earlier *avatar*. Vakil saw the potential of recovering salt and marine minerals from the sea, with an integrated heavy inorganic chemical complex manufacturing soda ash, as the ultimate aim. A former Tata employee, (he had worked as manager at the Jamshed Oil Mills at Kurla) he started his venture in 1926, with the support of the Gaekwad of Baroda, in whose territory Okha was. After initial success, the project foundered when the Tariff Board withdrew salt protection in 1938. He approached JRD and Jal Naoroji for help. Tatas bought it for Rs. 11.5 lakhs and Vakil also submitted a proposal to establish an alkali industry in India.

The implementation of the Mithapur plant was delayed due to the deaths of Jal Naoroji and Sir Nowroji Saklatvala. Slated for 1937, work could only commence in 1939, with Sir Ardeshir Dalai at the head. According to JRD, of all the companies with which he was associated, Tata Chemicals had the worst luck and had to overcome the most obstacles. Production started only in 1944. Before that, Kapilram Vakil had narrowly escaped death twice, first,

when his ship was torpedoed, and again, when his plane crashed. The machinery ordered by him never reached because the ship carrying it was sunk, and an order was placed on Sweden, a neutral country. When the consignment left via Russia for India, Germany invaded Russia. JRD placed a fresh order, thinking that it was lost, only to receive news that the consignment had arrived in the Persian Gulf. Ultimately, both consignments arrived, but Mithapur's problems continued. The plant was designed to produce soda ash, caustic soda and other alkali products. Vakil's technical know-how was inadequate and the quality of soda ash did not pass muster. Nor did the plant work at rated capacity. Vakil died in 1946 before these problems could be addressed and JRD was forced to call in a succession of foreign experts. It was left to the technical brilliance of Darbari Seth to steer Tata Chemicals away from imminent disaster. Under his leadership, Tata Chemicals became one of India's top 100 companies.

In 1974, Darbari Seth and Tata Chemicals spearheaded the founding of the Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI). While in the initial period the focus was mainly on documentation and information dissemination activities, research activities in the fields of energy, environment, and sustainable development were initiated towards the end of 1982. The genesis of these activities lay in TERI's firm belief that efficient utilisation of energy, sustainable use of natural resources and large-scale adoption of renewable energy technologies would move the process of development towards the goal of sustainability. In 2003, it changed its name to The Energy and Resources Institute.

## **THE BOMBAY PLAN**

The year was 1944. Forty-year-old JRD hosted a group of eminent industrialists and technocrats in Bombay. The guest list was a distinguished one: G.D. Birla, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Sir Purshottamdas I hakurdas, Sir Shri Ram, Sir Ardeshir Dalai, A.D. Shroff and Dr John Matthai. It was no ordinary gathering and nor was their one-point agenda: a plan for the economic development of India. Their brainchild was a Rs 10,000-crore, two part, 90-page economic plan that became famous as the Bombay Plan. (The document was entitled, 'A Plan of the Economic Development for India. )

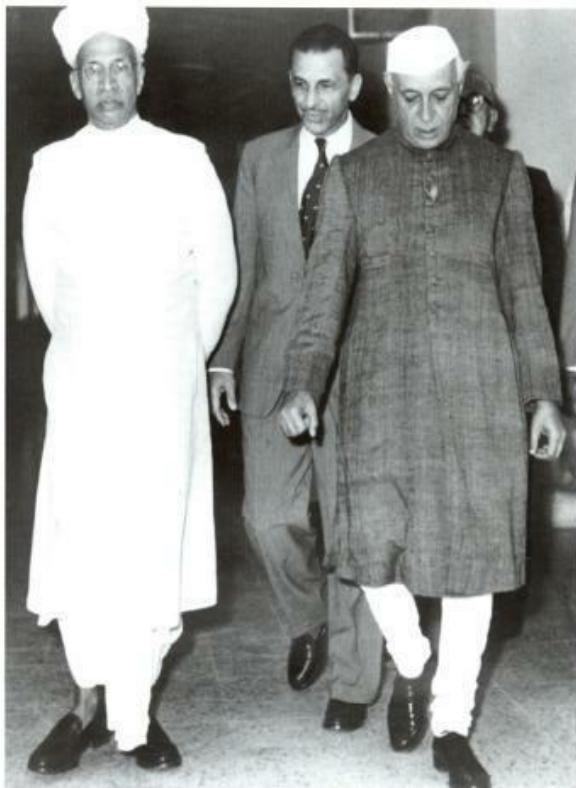
Tata Chemicals  
became one of  
India's top 100  
companies.

The group took its cue from a book published ten years previously by India's most celebrated civil engineer and the Dewan of Mysore, Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya. His *Planned Economy for India* highlighted the need for organising villages into effective economic units. His famous one liner was Industrialise or perish. In 1938, four years after Visvesvaraya's thesis, Nehru set up the National Planning Committee with the economist Professor K.T. Shah as member-secretary. Its reports on health and sanitation, food, etc. began to appear by 1940. The current mood also embraced the Soviet model with its focus on heavy industry.

JRD and his colleagues acknowledged, that 'Planning without tears is almost an impossibility.' They presented 'the objectives to be kept in mind in economic planning in India...and the demands which planning is likely to make on the country's resources'. Part II of the Plan appeared in December 1944. It was entitled Distribution-Role of the States.'

Drafted by Dr John Matthai, the Plan had one predominant objective: how to double the per capita income (rupees sixty-five in 1931) in fifteen years, providing for an increase in population of five million per annum. To achieve the target, the group proposed that net output of agriculture be doubled and that of industry be increased five times. They took as a baseline a minimum standard of living and quantified needs, estimating that an adult person required 2,800 calories a day, 30 yards of clothing and 100 sq ft of space. Then they went on to calculate the costs, the sources of funds and the industries the government needed to develop. According to JRD, G.D. Birla suggested this approach when the committee was struggling to find an appropriate method to articulate their ideas and concepts. Their work was facilitated by the fact that the Economics and Statistics Department built up by the Tatas since 1940, and the government, had comprehensive figures with respect to food consumption, cloth consumption, and the average life

expectancy of an Indian.



*JRD with Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan*

With life expectancy an abysmal 26 years and just one doctor available for every 9,000 people and one nurse every 86,000 people, the plan also outlined a minimum health standard. The aggregate amount of income required to meet the barest requirements of human life is Rs. 2,900 crore,' wrote Matthai. This figure included the cost of food (Rs. 2,100 crore), clothing (Rs. 260 crore), recurring expenditures on housing (Rs. 260 crore), health and medicine (Rs. 190 crore) and primary education (Rs. 90 crore). The Plan provided sector wise break-ups estimating a total expenditure of Rs. 10,000 crore. Industry accounted for Rs. 4,480 crore, farming Rs. 1,240 crore, communications Rs. 940 crore, education Rs. 490 crore, health Rs. 450 crore, housing Rs. 2,200 crore and miscellanea Rs. 200 crore.

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Tatas for talent

After listing the expenses, the planners considered the sources of income.' The sources of external and internal finance which would be available to us are the hoarded wealth of the country, mainly gold (Rs. 300 crore); our short term loans to the UK, like sterling securities held by the RBI (Rs. 1,000 crore); our favourable balance of trade (Rs. 600 crore); foreign borrowings (Rs. 700 crore); savings of the people (Rs. 4,000 crore) and new money (Rs. 3,400 crore) created against ad hoc securities.'

The Bombay Plan's avowed objective was to framework development, and it contained no reference to the methods required for carrying out the plan. The domination of industrialists showed: it paid little attention to agriculture, a point JRD admitted later. The government took due note and Lord Wavell wrote to the secretary of state Leopold Amery, that a considerable stir has been created by the Rs. 10,000 crore Economic Plan for India.' It was even published by Penguin in the UK and did discomfit the British rulers insofar that the Indians were shown to be ahead in planning for the country. An immediate consequence of the publication of the Plan was that Lord Wavell requested JRD for the services of Sir Ardeshir Dalai to start the Department of Planning, an offer that was accepted. This was not the first occasion when the government poached' on the Tatas for talent.

Nehru never regarded the Plan very seriously, but must certainly have noted the fact that Indian trade and industry had pledged their support to the national economic plan. Also as a result, planning was no novelty to the public when the First Five-Year Plan was announced. The importance of the Plan lay in the fact that they were the first capitalists in the world to draft a plan, which voiced strong social concern.

In October 1944, nine months after the publication of the first part of the Bombay Plan, the Government of India invited a group of Indian industrialists and businessman to visit England and America with the object of studying the industrial organisation and the technical advances made by them. The government obviously had an eye on the future; and the way Indian industry had risen to the occasion during the War years might also have had something to do with it. It was to be an unofficial mission, paid for by the participants, who were free to plan their own itinerary and choose their travelling companions. The government would facilitate their visits to industrial establishments and make accessible foreign business leaders.

The mission was to consist of all the big names in industry including JRD, G.D. Birla, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Sir Sultan Chinoy, Krishnaraj Thackersey and Sir Padampat Singhania. JRD was supposed to co-ordinate arrangements, but the task fell on G.D. Birla since JRD was down with pneumonia. On 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered. On the same day the group of industrialists was greeted by a bombshell in the papers. The *Bombay Chronicle* carried a statement from Gandhiji asking them to wait till all leaders were free, saying that freedom would come 'only after business foregoes crumbs from Indo-British loot. It took everyone by surprise. G.D. Birla cabled Gandhiji the same day and on 8 May 1945, JRD issued a rejoinder to Gandhiji, which he released to the press. He forwarded a copy to Gandhiji with a covering note expressing his unhappiness about his views and the strong language in which they were couched.

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Gandhiji, after this public attack, sought to make amends with private missives. He wrote to both G.D. Birla and JRD. In his handwritten postcard to JRD he addressed him as Bhai Jehangirji (in Gujarati) and then proceeded to write in English: 'I have your angry note, if you can ever write anything

angry. If you have all gone, not to commit yourselves to anything, my note protects you. My answer is to the hypothetical question. If the hypothesis is wrong, then naturally the answer is wrong and, therefore, it is protective of you all.' One does not know what JRD thought of this rather convoluted logic! R.M. Lala says that since both JRD and Nehru were modern men they found a common wavelength. With Gandhiji, even though he held him in the highest regard, JRD could not find an equation the way he did with Nehru (notwithstanding their divergent views on economics).



*With the economist Prof. J.K. Galbraith*

The mission, which left soon after, consisted of JRD, G.D. Birla, A.D. Shroff Sir Sultan Chinoy, Laik Ali, Ajaib Singh and Nalini Sarkar. Part of JRD's entourage was forty-year-old Sumant Moolgaokar who would play a major role in TELCO soon after. When they reached Britain in mid-May 1945, JRD's hosts were taken aback by his request to fly over German cities devastated by the war in order to see for himself the destruction, which India had been spared. The flight was made in rather bumpy weather and most of them were airsick. The mission visited the Federation of British Industries and various Chambers of Commerce and the State Department in the US. The Americans even opened up their high security installations for the Indian delegation. The mission returned enriched with first-hand knowledge of the 'significance, scope, needs and complexities of modern industry.'

## **TELCO (NOW TATA MOTORS)**

Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company was launched in September 1945 as Tata Locomotive and Engineering Company. JRD felt that Tatas were competent to establish an engineering complex of a kind not available in the country. The company was promoted to manufacture heavy engineering equipment apart from boilers and locomotives. For this project,

JRD put his faith in Sumant Moolgaokar, the executive director of Associated Cement Companies (ACC). A mechanical engineering graduate of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London, Moolgaokar had proved his mettle with ACC, and it was with great reluctance that Sir Homi Mody allowed him to leave. TELCO's project started with boilers and then graduated to underframes of wagons and then on to locomotives. The technology was British and they were understandably reluctant to part with it. Tatas found a German firm Krauss Maffei, near Munich, who agreed to assist with technology transfer for boilers and locomotives.

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The year 1947 was a difficult one for TELCO. Most of the workers were Pathans and they fled to Pakistan following the riots, which rocked the country during Partition. The workers had to be trained afresh and till that time they were kept busy keeping the plant clean. The workshop at this time must have been one of the cleanest in the world!

Locomotives followed boilers and more than a thousand Tata locomotives joined Indian Railways within the next decade. With the Railways as its only customer, TELCO was in a vulnerable position, with regard to both demand and price. Just as JRD had begun to worry about their dependence on a single customer, he read about how Daimler-Benz was interested in locating a partner for commercial vehicles in Asia. The two parties met in Geneva in May 1954 to discuss the possibility of a joint venture to make trucks in India. J.D. Choksi, Tatas' legal adviser and Moolgaokar accompanied JRD. Choksi found the draft agreement submitted by Daimler-Benz to be too one-sided and said as much. When the talks appeared set to fail, the Daimler-Benz chairman told JRD: '**You** draft the agreement and we'll discuss it.' The Tata

draft was accepted. Now all that remained was to get a licence from the government. In this JRD and Moolgaokar were pleasantly surprised. The then Industries minister T.T. Krishnamachari (TTK) not only gave them the go ahead, but also personally intervened to cut the red tape. The first Tata truck rolled out on 15 October 1954, less than five months after the Geneva meeting. JRD admired TTK for his decision-making ability, even though he admitted that TTK was difficult, authoritarian and arrogant. JRD had much to thank TTK for. Apart from the TELCO project, TTK also allowed JRD to double production to two million tons in 1955, at a time when G.D. Birla's application for a steel plant was making little headway. Later, JRD wrote to TTK about this promptness, bemoaning the present situation, where the problem was not to get a decision on time, but to get one at all!

The initial collaboration between Benz and Tatas was to be for fifteen years. The Germans were perfectionists, and this suited both JRD and Moolgaokar who were against muddling through with second best. With both seeking to consistently achieve better standards, the culture of attending to minor details (which was at first an alien concept) soon caught on and resulted in raising the overall standard at TELCO.



*Sumant Moolgaokar explaining the operation of a machine to JRD*

Moolgaokar was not simply interested in manufacturing trucks. He felt that TELCO should also have machine-tool capability, i.e. it should also manufacture the machinery, which created the machines that made the parts of a truck. In keeping with this philosophy, Tatas set up a TELCO factory and a research division at Pune. In this, he had the full support of J RD though there were murmurs that the present should first be secured before planning for the future. Numerous suppliers provided TELCO with ancillary

parts and TELCO experts were sent to train them to conform to TELCO's exacting standards. This resulted in the upgradation of engineering skills all over the country.

JRD, who was busy with TISCO, left TELCO in the capable hands of Moolgaokar. He gave him full freedom to do things his way and Moolgaokar never let him down. Both had workshops at home where they tinkered around. Moolgaokar supplied the castings for JRD's workshop and the two exchanged gifts for their workshops when they travelled abroad. JRD was always curious about technology and the way things worked. He was interested in doing things with his hands. S.A. Sabavala recalls that no one who came to see him was safe from his inquisitiveness, particularly if he or she had a new watch or a new piece of jewellery. He would want to take the stuff apart and then put it together.

He was also inquisitive about the people who worked for him; he wanted to know everything about them, particularly the manner in which they worked. His peon once told Sabavala when he first came in, never to hide papers that he had not worked on by putting them away in a drawer, because *saab* would come and open every drawer to see what work was pending. He detested shallowness but was tolerant in accepting a genuine mistake. What he would never accept was slackness of any kind. He hated settling for second best, and persons found themselves on the wrong side of his famously short temper if he suspected that they were careless, or not pulling their weight in the organisation. A stickler for cleanliness and tidiness, JRD also detested anyone who told lies. He was very quick to gauge whether his staff was working hard or not. JRD spent many hours in his office. The result was that his subordinate staff had to spend even longer hours. But if he had a short fuse, he was also big enough to admit his errors. He once wrote a hand-written note to Moolgaokar apologising for an outburst citing stress and insomnia. He ended by saying that his affection and admiration for him (Moolgaokar) would never change. Little wonder then, that JRD commanded the lifelong loyalty, respect and affection of some of the finest technocrats in India.

JRD's handling of Moolgaokar is ample testimony of his managerial style. He believed in getting along with his directors, making allowances for their

idiosyncrasies if he thought that this would further the general good. TELCO's success owes a great deal to Moolgaokar's vision and JRD's management by consensus. (Trivia; It is said that TELCO's 'Sumo' was named after Sumant Moolgaokar.)

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An interesting story concerns the recruitment of lady graduates to TELCO. A certain Sudha Kulkarni who had topped her computer science class at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore was disappointed to note that the advertisement had a footnote which said, 'Female candidates need not apply.' She shot off a postcard to JRD, asking him how a progressive industrial house like the Tatas, could impose such a restriction. The missive had its desired effect. A telegram soon arrived asking her to appear for an interview with a promise of reimbursement of first class fare, both ways.



*With Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed*

Selected as a graduate trainee in 1974, she was the first lady technical officer at TELCO. After stints at Pune and Jamshedpur she was shifted to

Bombay House. She later learnt that JRD had himself intervened in the matter instructing the board that 'if she was found up to the mark in her subjects, she should be taken.' She recalls how after having put in her papers in February 1982, she wanted to meet JRD to convey her gratitude. She had become Sudha Murty by then. It was a chance meeting on the stairs when she told him that she was leaving the job since she and her husband were starting Infosys.

She still remembers JRD's words:'When you are successful, you must give back to society. Society gives us so much; we must reciprocate. I wish you all the best.'This was to be the source of the inspiration for the Infosys Foundation, which she manages today. When asked by her colleagues as to what she wanted when she left Tatas, she said: A black and white portrait of Jamshetji Nusserwanji Tata and another of J.R.D. Tata in his famous blue-suit.'

TELCO has three major plants at Jamshedpur, Pune and Lucknow (started in 1992). A fourth plant at Dharwad has recently been restructured to operate as two distinct business units – one for commercial vehicles and the other for passenger cars. The company has seen, and successfully combated, trying times. TELCO faced labour problems in the eighties and quality problems with the Indica, but by far its biggest challenge came when it booked a loss of Rs. 500 crore in 2000-01, largely due to a huge drop of 45% in demand for its products. Sales, which had reached Rs. 10,000 crores in 1997, fell dramatically to Rs. 6,637 crores. It could not have come at a worse time because the Indica project had absorbed Rs. 1,700 crore. In one of the greatest turnarounds in Indian corporate history, the company posted a profit before tax of Rs. 500 crore in 2002-03. The new model, Indica V2, was at the top of its segment in sales and in 2002, it launched its sedan, the Indigo.

On 29 July 2003, the birth anniversary of JRD, the company changed its name from Tata Engineering to Tata Motors. The new name reflects the company's core business of designing, manufacturing and marketing automobiles. Less than a month later, in August 2003, Tata Motors produced its three-millionth vehicle, reaching a landmark that exemplifies the company's ambition and progress. The year 2003 also marked the trailblazing debut on European roads of the City Rover, an improved version of the

Indica. This is the first time that an Indian-engineered automobile is going back overseas, and will actually be used by a European manufacturer under its own name. Things have come full circle considering that India developed its own cars by borrowing from foreign designs. On 27 September 2004, Tata Motors listed its securities on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) to become the first Indian engineering and motor entity to do so, and the second Tata company after VSNL.



In 1945, at JRD's instance, a wholly owned subsidiary of Tata Sons called Tata Industries was set up. Tata Sons was a select body and at the time was limited to only six directors. JRD wanted to get the best out of the professionals he had hired, encouraging their active involvement in not only running their own companies, but also to plan for Tatas as a whole. Tata Industries, owned entirely by Tata Sons, became the managing agents, and the directors of all the major Tata companies sat on its board. Anybody who was in charge of the operations could be called for discussions. This step heralded the advent of professionalism in the management of Tata companies. Since this was at the directors' level, JRD started the Inter-Departmental Conference to involve the heads of departments of the Tata companies. Many of the issues discussed at such meetings were irrelevant from the point of view of individual companies, but JRD's idea was to give them a wider perspective and involvement.

JRD wanted  
to get the best  
out of the  
professionals he  
had hired

Two years later, JRD would take another important step. In 1947, he set up the Personnel Department of Tatas. This had its genesis in a note written by him to his colleagues in Tata Steel in 1943, which spoke of the need for a Personnel Department. Personal equation with the labour leader was all very well, but he was of the opinion that communication should take place across the board. He wanted to associate labour with the task of management. It was

at the time a very progressive view. In 1956, two agreements set out the basic rights and obligations of employees and management, and provided for Departmental Councils where management and employees could discuss their problems regularly. Nowhere else have these Councils enjoyed as much success.

In 1948, Nehru selected JRD as a delegate to the United Nations' session in Paris. Vijayalakshmi Pandit headed the delegation. JRD recalled that he had been assigned to the Economic Committee but mostly kept his mouth shut, preferring to listen to the proceedings of the General Assembly, which he found more interesting. It turned out to be a good policy. Vijayalakshmi told everyone what to say, and how to say it, and had no hesitation in ticking off members when she felt like it. Nehru invited him again the next year but JRD refused. In fact a little earlier he had also refused the chairmanship of what became Indian Rare Earths, a post, which ultimately went to his deputy J.D. Choksi. (After independence JRD arranged for a domestic Air-India aircraft [Air-India International had not started at the time] to fly Vijayalakshmi Pandit to the Soviet Union when she was appointed India's first ambassador to that country.)



*JRD in his office with a model of the Boeing 747*

## AIR - INDIA IS BORN

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In 1946, Tata Air Lines went public, becoming a joint stock company. The new company was called Air-India Ltd. Four years previously, the Tatas had submitted a project to the British government for the large-scale production of the De Havilland Mosquito aircraft at Pune. The war had severely restricted airline operations, and both JRD and Nevill Vintcent felt that the field of aircraft manufacture presented an excellent opportunity. Realising that the production of an all-metal aircraft would require an elaborate factory they selected the all-wood Mosquito, which they felt, could be easily produced in India. Permission was granted and work on the factory progressed.

A new company, Tata Aircraft Limited was formed to this end, but suddenly the British government changed its mind deciding that invasion gliders be built. Since the work on the factory had progressed too far to be abandoned, the Tatas agreed reluctantly. It was at this time that fate dealt Tatas and JRD a cruel blow. Nevill Vintcent, who used to fly to England for discussions with the British government on the subject of the manufacture of Mosquito planes, was killed when an RAF Hudson bomber in which he was travelling was shot down off the coast of France. Vintcent was a close friend of JRD and this hit him hard. In keeping with the adage, misfortune never strikes once, the British cancelled the entire project. The reason was that the invasion gliders made by Tatas in Pune could not be used in the war because there was no aircraft to tow them. This was a bitter pill to swallow for JRD who had set his heart on the project.

After Vintcent's sudden death, JRD requested the government for the services of Sir Frederick Tymms, director-general of Civil Aviation on loan. Tymms became a good friend of JRD – a friendship, which was to endure

into the future. In 1943, the government commissioned Tymms to make a report on post-War plans for the development of aviation in India. He calculated that India would require forty Dakotas and also recommended that the number of private airlines be limited to four. After the War, the government published its own report agreeing with Tymms that the number of airlines should be limited in number.



*JRD with members of the crew in front of Air-India's 747 Emperor Shahjehan*

In 1946 Tata Air Lines carried about one out of every three passengers in the country and owned eighteen of the forty-eight Dakotas operating in the country at the time. It was JRD's dream to extend services to the West. Soon after partition, in October 1947, JRD proposed the creation of a new company called Air-India International. He proposed that the Indian government take forty-nine per cent of the capital, Tatas twenty-five per cent and the rest be publicly subscribed. This was the first ever proposal of a joint venture between the public and private sectors in India. What surprised JRD was that the government cleared the proposal within weeks. When JRD spoke about this to Babu Jagjivan Ram, a Cabinet minister, the latter responded with unexpected candour:'We did not know any better then.' But that was only half the story. The Tatas had already placed an order for three Lockheed Constellations and the new airline was to be managed by the Tatas' domestic airline Air-India Ltd. The advantages of this could hardly have escaped the government, who would otherwise have been faced with a gestation period of at least two years had it wanted to start out afresh.

JRD proposed  
the creation of  
a new company  
called Air-India  
International.

Air-India International was formally incorporated on 8 March 1948. Exactly three months later on 8 June a gleaming forty-seater Lockheed Constellation, the *Malabar Princess* was ready to take off from Bombay to London. The planes were not due till six months later but a cancelled order meant early delivery. The passengers included JRD and Thelly, the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar and Neville Wadia. JRD's sisters, Sylla and Rodabeh, looked on with sororal pride, proud of their brother's achievement. JRD told R.M. Lala years later: Seeing the Indian flag displayed on both sides of the *Malabar Princess* as she stood proudly on the apron at the airports of Cairo, Geneva and London filled me with joy and emotion. JRD stepped out of the plane to a battery of floodlights and cameras, triumphantly telling Maneck Dalai, Air-India's London office-in-charge, 'Set your watches, boys! We are right on schedule.' The first flight by an Asian airline to link the East with the West, it was yet another historic first from a man for whom pioneering achievement seemed to be routine and commonplace.



JRD, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi at the Boeing demonstration flight in New Delhi

Air-India's manager in Geneva was Gianni Bertoli, who was married to Thelly's sister, Kitty. He would tragically die in 1966, in the same plane

crash, which claimed the life of Homi J. Bhabha. Fali Nariman managed the Cairo office. At the helm in Bombay was S.K Bobby' Kooka, the traffic manager, who not only gave Air-India its most ubiquitous and best-loved symbol, the Maharaja, but also was to play an important role in the growth of the airline.

JRD stepped  
out of the plane  
to a battery of  
floodlights  
and cameras,



*The Amul hoarding after JRD's second re-enactment in 1982 of his historic first flight*

Critics questioned the wisdom of entering the hugely competitive field of international aviation but Air-India proved that it was equal to the challenge. JRD, aware of his limitations with regard to size, ensured that the airline excelled in the quality of service. A perfectionist, JRD kept detailed notes on his observations during a flight and he would ensure that these were acted upon when he returned. His favourite one liner: Always aim at perfection for only then will you achieve excellence.' L.K. (ha recalled how once on a flight, JRD disappeared for a long period of time. When Jha asked him about it, he said that he had been checking if the toilets were clean and had toilet paper!

In 1948, JRD clashed with the government and more specifically one of Nehru's closest Cabinet colleagues, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, over the introduction of the Night Air Mail scheme. Aeroplanes carrying mail would

take off from Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Delhi and meet at Nagpur to exchange their mail and fly back. JRD objected to this because the night flying involved a problem of safety. But Kidwai was very keen and the scheme started on 31 January 1949 operated by Indian Overseas Airlines, which soon ran into financial difficulties. This was followed by the All-Up Scheme, which envisaged carrying all letters by air and of which the night mail scheme was a part. Kidwai wanted all airlines to join on the same terms. This was not acceptable to Air-India and the four other airlines that put up a consolidated front.

When an agreement was reached the government withdrew the subsidy. Kidwai was very keen for Air-India to take on the Night Air Mail scheme but JRD had reservations given the financial conditions of the airlines. The issue snowballed into a controversy and Kidwai made certain statements in Parliament about the health of the aviation industry, which JRD found necessary to refute in the press. Nehru intervened and there appeared to be a temporary ceasefire. Nehru, while publicly complimenting Air-India, in Parliament seemed to back Kidwai. The Rajadhyaksha Committee (1950), assigned the task of advising the government on the aviation industry, vindicated JRD's stand when it said that the government's system of licensing was the cause for the sad plight of the industry.

Kidwai's bee in the bonnet, the Night Air Mail Service, continued with the full support of the state. Passenger fares were reduced and JRD's fears on safety proved to be unfounded. Many years later, JRD admitted that his stand on the night service had been wrong. He said that while he had realised the potential of the idea, he was wrong in allowing the American experience to prejudice him.



*JRD at the controls of a Boeing 707 while flying over North America*

## NATIONALISATION OF AIR - INDIA AND BEYOND

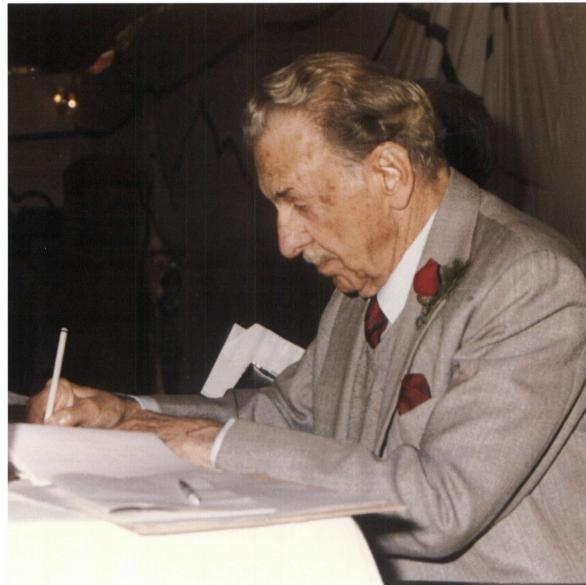
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The date, 1 August 1953, was a sad day for JRD. It was pouring rain and the inclement weather was in keeping with the gloom, which pervaded the Tatas in general and JRD in particular. It was the day Parliament nationalised nine privately owned airlines and clubbed them into two state-owned corporations: Air-India International and Indian Airlines, the domestic carrier. G.D. Birla's Bharat Airways had also been nationalised, but Birla was no aviation pioneer or passionate about flying the way JRD was. (In fact, he had entered aviation only at the prompting of his son Basant Kumar.) Understandably, JRD felt the blow more keenly.

JRD had seen the writing on the wall. For the past seven years, JRD had waged a war against nationalisation in every possible forum. He had even warned G.D. Birla about it but he had responded by saying that there was room for everyone. JRD felt that Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, then Jagjivan Ram and even Jawaharlal Nehru had deceived him. The only saving grace was that he had been appointed chairman of Air-India and a director of Indian Airlines. (He had been offered the chairmanship of both but declined that of Indian Airlines because the work pressure would leave him no time for anything else. Always a consensus man, he had summoned his heads of department to him on 10 December 1952 to decide the question of whether he should accept the chairmanship. One of the main factors, which led him to accept the post, was that he wanted to ensure that it would maintain the standards he had introduced from the start.)

The government had decided by November 1952 that it wanted to nationalise the airlines. The plot had already thickened and the denouement was left to the Communications Minister Jagjivan Ram. He presented JRD

and Sir Homi Mody, who met him on 5 November 1952, with a fait accompli. What hurt JRD most was that the government did not think it fit to consult the Tatas on this issue. All Jagivan Ram wanted from him was a suggestion regarding fair compensation to the companies for their assets. Nor did he listen to the alternative plan, which JRD had proposed. Despite a few brushes with Jagjivan Ram, JRD seemed to have a soft corner for him. S.A. Sabavala relates how Jagjivan Ram would dig into his pocket for a piece of paper which contained the name of a relative or friend and hand it to JRD, who was supposed to oblige with a job in the Tatas. Among the other politicians JRD had great personal admiration and respect for was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, whose sound common sense and clarity in thinking greatly impressed him. He had great respect for C. Rajagoplalchari but absolutely none for Morarji Desai. He was also close to Jayaprakash Narayan (despite his being an ardent socialist) whom he found to be both sincere and reasonable.



A distressed JRD met Nehru. Mincing no words at what he perceived to be shabby treatment by the government, JRD ventilated his grievances in no uncertain terms. Nehru for his part did not commit himself. A few days later he wrote to JRD where he tried to correct JRD's impression of a conspiracy against civil aviation in general and Tata Air Lines in particular. He ended by saying: 'We want your help in this and other matters and it is a bad thing to suspect motives and nurse resentment. Coming from an old friend like you, this distresses me greatly. JRD replied by saying that his idea was only to

convey his views to Nehru and also reiterated the alternative scheme, which Jagjivan Ram had ignored. He concluded by saying that his only anxiety was to see a strong and efficient air transport system, and that justice was done to the investors and staff who had suffered heavily. After the nationalisation, the relationship between JRD and Nehru was damaged beyond repair.

On 31 July 1953, a day before the nationalisation, JRD sent a touching message to the staff of both the companies. A nostalgic farewell was written by Bobby Kooka, traffic manager of Air-India International in blank verse entitled 'Farewell'. A commercial artist Umesh Rao depicted the Maharaja, with bowed head and hands clasped behind him, walking sadly away.

JRD's fellow chairman in Indian Airlines was a B.C. Mukharji. When Ram had consulted JRD he had recommended the names of H.M. Patel, an ICS officer (who later rose to be finance minister in the Janata government, 1977-79) and S. Lall. Mukharji was hostile from the start because he apprehended interference from JRD at every step. The two subsequently patched up when it became clear to Mukharji that he had misjudged his man. JRD helped him to get a general manager to assist him by putting in a word to Jagjivan Ram.



*JRD at a reception at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore*

## THE 1950S: A PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION

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The decade of the 1950s was a period of settling down for India after the upheaval of Partition. The government was initially supportive of JRD, but things soon turned sour for him and by the mid-1950s he would no longer be looked upon with much favour. With the acceptance of the socialistic pattern of society and the Industrial Policy Resolution of 1956, things were going to be very different.

It was in the early fifties that the Tatas made their foray into the world of cosmetics. Lakme was born in 1952, when Indian women protested against the stopping of all imports of foreign cosmetics due to foreign exchange constraints. Angry delegations met Nehru who asked his secretary M.O. Mathai why India could not manufacture these cosmetics in India. Mathai sent for K.A.D. Naoroji, the local director of Tatas and asked if Tatas could manufacture the whole range of cosmetics in India. The Tatas agreed and Lakme started with French collaboration. TOMCO was the parent company. Simone Tata, Naval Tata's Swiss wife, made an important contribution in making Lakme what it was. In 1998, it was acquired by Hindustan Lever.

The Tatas had acquired a number of managing agency firms at this time. Some of the new entrants included Forbes, Forbes Campbell and Company, Bombay Safe Deposit, Gokaka Mills and Indian Vegetable Products. The Tatas also acquired the entire share capital of Sassoon J. David, a large investment company in Bombay, and also a minority stake in MacNeill and Barry in Calcutta. In 1954, the Tatas formed a new company called Voltas to take over the Swiss-owned Volkart Brothers.

JRD was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award, in 1955. In the same year he was faced with the loss of one of his

aircrafts, the *Kashmir Princess*, due to political sabotage. It had been requisitioned for the use of the Chinese premier Chou En-Lai who was to meet the leaders of the non-aligned nations in Bandung. There was an explosion on board after the plane took off from Hong Kong, in which the pilot D.K. Jatar and the air-hostess Gloria Berry were among the sixteen killed. Apparently Chou En-Lai had been warned of the attempt on his life and had sent a handful of junior officers instead. When Captain Vishvanath, who had gone to Singapore for supervising the rescue effort, met him there, he was shocked to learn from Chou En-Lai that they had, all along, known about the sabotage. As to why they had not informed anyone, and got a number of innocent people killed, will always remain a mystery.



*Receiving the Padma Vibhushan from President Rajendra Prasad in 1955*



*Jawaharlal Nehru admiring the Padma Vibhushan awarded to JRD. Thelma Tata is on the extreme left*

JRD was always exploring ways in which to get the best young men into Tatas. His aim was to create a long-term high-grade service to man the higher positions in the Tata organisations. To this end, he set up 'The Superior Staff Recruiting Committee'. He and his colleagues interviewed candidates and selected three bright young men. As luck would have it all three left within two years and JRD's scheme became the target of jokes. But he persisted and out of this persistence was born the Tata Administrative Service (TAS) in 1956. Dr Freddie Mehta, a London School of Economics trained economist, was the first to join. He subsequently became chairman of the Forbes, Forbes & Campbell group, heading seventeen companies. Xerxes Desai of Titan Watches and Camellia Panjabi of Indian Hotels are two famous names associated with TAS, and today this elite service attracts the brightest and best engineers and MBAs.

JRD was also  
interested  
in providing  
management  
inputs.

At about this time JRD was also interested in providing management inputs to those who manned important positions in Tatas. The Turf Club in Pune was hired for a month and Tata directors and distinguished guest speakers lectured to Tata officers. JRD's vision of a Staff College was finally realised in 1964 when the Tata Management Training Centre came into existence in Pune.

In 1956, the government nationalised life insurance by an ordinance and the New India Assurance Company, which had been developed by Tatas, was taken over. Later in 1973, General Insurance was also nationalised. JRD was upset but there was nothing he could do.

Two years later, in 1958, the Communists led by S.A. Dange tried to wrest control of the Tata Workers' Union. It was decided to reactivate the Jamshedpur Mazdoor Union and win over TISCO workers by obtaining

concessions from the management, which included a twenty-five percent increase in basic pay and de-recognition of the recognised union under Michael John. JRD sent J.D. Choksi to Jamshedpur to control the situation. The labour commissioner awarded rupees forty-five lakhs to the workers, but Dange wanted more. After processions, threats and assaults to workers, he called for a strike on 28 April 1958. It was declared illegal and ultimately fizzled out. On 12 May, party workers picketed the gates and production was hampered. The culmination came on 20 May when the TISCO management closed down the plant stating that it was not a lock out but a safety measure. Violence broke out the next day with arson and looting. At the end of it all Dange was forced to call off the strike.



*J.R.D. Tata inaugurating the Tata Management Training Centre, Pune*

JRD's Personnel Department had been effective and TISCO's experiments in labour relations set new standards for Indian industry. J.D. Choksi's firm handling also went a long way in instilling confidence. Choksi joined Tatas in 1938 as a legal adviser and served the group with distinction for the next thirty years. It was thanks to his foresight and tenacity as chairman of the Tata Electric Companies that the government granted approval for extra power in Bombay. When he was in his eighties, Choksi's memory started failing him. JRD continued to visit him, long after the others had stopped calling on a man with whom they found conversation difficult.

If 1958 was a difficult year at TISCO, it was a high for JRD as far as aviation went. This was the year he was elected president of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). He had attended his first IATA meeting at Cairo in October 1946 piloting Air-India's first DC-3 from Bombay to Cairo, via Karachi and Sharjah. In April 1952, he became a member of IATA's

Executive Committee at the insistence of Sir William Hildred, the IATA president. JRD had turned down a similar offer in 1948 citing work pressures. His term expired in 1955 but Sir William asked him to continue, which was all to the good. He was elected president for the year 1958-59, and in this capacity hosted the first IATA conference outside Europe and America at the newly constructed Ashoka Hotel in October 1958. Nehru inaugurated the opening session at the Vigyan Bhavan on 27 October 1958. The conference was a huge success and will always be remembered for the magnificence of the venues (Agra and Jaipur) and for the personal interest taken by Thelly Tata and the wives of the airline staff in entertaining the delegates and their wives.

JRD's vision of  
a Staff College  
was finally  
realised in 1964.

In January 1960, Air-India received its first Boeing 707. It entered the jet age on 19 April 1960, when its Boeing 707s went into service for the first time on its Blue Ribbon route to London. JRD had ordered the Boeing in 1956, after a demonstration in Seattle, where other leading lights of the aviation industry had also been present. In February 1960, JRD had flown in one of the new planes in the course of a delivery flight in which they had covered the distance in eight hours and five minutes. He later recalled that it had taken that many days and hours to cover the same distance when he flew solo from Bombay to London.

The introduction of the Boeing marked a quantum leap in the operation of the airline since it was not only twice as fast as the other planes but also had a capacity which was thrice that of the Super Constellation. Its introduction necessitated a change in the orientation of the flying and the service departments. And the perfectionist that JRD was, he checked and approved each of the 5,000 individual items needed to run an efficient service down to the crockery and cutlery! The personal attention he bestowed upon the smallest problem of the two air companies remains an object lesson in business management. Those who worked with JRD tell us that his motto was

that the best in India, must be as good as the best in the world. This is what guided him in the institutions the Tatas set up in numerous fields, ranging from atomic research and social service training to the performing arts. In every one of them, the emphasis was on quality. Tata Airlines (and Air-India afterwards) was JRD's fondest love. This bias was so obvious that some senior Tata directors would jokingly criticise him for spending more time with Air-India than he did on the entire Tita group of companies!



## RAJAJI AND THE SWATANTRA PARTY

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TISCO celebrated fifty years of its existence in 1958. The mood should have been upbeat, but JRD was angry over the government's nationalisation spree and its compensatory policies. Irritated with Nehru's socialism, he was increasingly being foiled by the bureaucrats in Air-India, the Steel Ministry and other government departments. The Communist party had emerged as a major block after the 1957 elections and JRD was ready for a change.

This was the mood in which C. Rajagopalachari's request in May 1961, for support for his Swatantra Party, found him. While Rajaji accepted that JRD could if he so chose help the party in power, he said that in the interest of good government and parliamentary democracy, it was essential to build up an effective opposition. Within the Tatas, Minoo Masani was pro-Swatantra, but Naval Tata advised caution. He asked JRD not to openly support Rajaji and earn Nehru's displeasure. Masani had helped Rajaji in the formation of the Swatantra Party in 1959. JRD asked him to resign since he did not want his shareholders to suffer for the actions of a Tata employee. Masani was disappointed, and JRD confessed that he didn't know what to do with him. Ultimately, JRD made him a consultant, and even helped him design his letterhead.

It was not a decision to be taken in a hurry and JRD took his time. He replied two months later, saying that he realised that it was imperative to ensure that the Communists were not the only effective opposition to the Congress. He went on to say that it was important that India's polity developed around two main opposing parties neither of which was extreme Left or extreme Right. He assured Rajaji of his support, but also indicated that he would continue to support the Congress as well.

JRD had told Nehru about his decision to support Rajaji, and predictably, Nehru was very upset. JRD had expected this, but was a little surprised at the extent of his displeasure. Thinking that it was wiser to send him a letter explaining the situation, which Nehru could read with a calm mind, he wrote to him on 16 August 1961. He reassured Nehru that the Tatas had not withdrawn support to the Congress and also agreed that the Congress had brought both stability and unity to the country. JRD's main argument was that it was time to think of the future when the strong leadership provided by Nehru may not exist. He outlined the dangers of a Communist alternative and then opined that the only party, which seemed to offer the possibility of developing into a responsible opposition was the Swatantra Party, which after all, consisted of people nurtured in the Congress tradition. He asked Nehru to try and understand the situation and ended by saying that he did not want a reply.



Nehru did reply though. He said that he did not think the Swatantra Party would be a viable opposition since it was both out of date and out of step with events. However, he added that JRD was free to help the party in any way he saw fit. It turned out that Nehru was right. The Swatantra Party fizzled out after a lack lustre ten-year existence. But the peril apprehended by JRD sprouted in the form of the Emergency eleven years after Nehru's death. Ironically, JRD was one of Indira Gandhi's most vocal supporters during this period.

JRD felt that  
a presidential  
system of  
government  
would provide  
stability.

While JRD always advocated that businessmen should not mix politics with business, he felt that in their capacity as responsible citizens they should take an interest in political issues since 'no intelligent analysis of economic issues is possible without taking into account the dominating influences of politics.'JRD was in favour of the presidential system of government for India. The late sixties was a period of instability when Indira Gandhi and the Congress were elected at the Centre but needed the support of the Left parties to stay in power. The Congress lost its hold on states like Uttar Pradesh, and defections and horse-trading became the order of the day. JRD felt that a presidential system of government would provide stability to India, in much the same way, that the introduction of this form of government had provided stability to France after its introduction by Charles de Gaulle. His concern for political stability stemmed from his desire to improve the economic climate, and he believed that the parliamentary form of government was unsuited to the conditions in the country.



*Thelma and JRD in front of the Leopard Moth in which JRD made a commemorative flight in 1962, on the 30th anniversary of the first mail flight from Karachi to Bombay. Alongside is an Air-India Boeing 707*

## THE FIRST RE - ENACTMENT

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JRD's interest in personal piloting carried on unabated. It was in early 1962 that the germ of an idea first started to develop. Fifteenth of October would be the thirtieth anniversary of his first flight, and the intrepid pioneer wanted to do a re-enactment.

There were a number of issues, which needed to be addressed: First, an old Puss Moth would have to be found and refurbished. If unavailable in India, would De Havilland be able to supply one? Secondly, JRD was now national property and the wisdom of undertaking such an adventure at the age of fifty-eight, notwithstanding JRD's physical fitness, was questionable. Sweeping aside all opposition, JRD decided that he was going to do it, and the necessary machinery was set in motion.

No Puss Moth could be found, but a De Havilland Leopard Moth was available with Associated Airworks at Dum Dum airport, Calcutta. K.G. Appusamy, Air-India's dynamic engineering manager visited Calcutta to see the Leopard Moth for himself. The owner of the facility, a Mr D. Ghosh was thrilled and more than willing to loan his Leopard Moth – which was very similar to the Puss Moth - for the re-enactment. The Moth was brought to Bombay, and was completely taken apart at Santa Cruz in the new engineering facility set up to service the Boeing 707s, which had recently joined Air-India. Nothing could have been more anachronistic than the sight of a small petrol-driven, single-engine plane made of plywood and fabric in the middle of a massive workshop with modern engineering machinery. Still, a sense of history triumphed over the marvels of modern engineering, and the humble little Moth became the cynosure of all eyes and the object of everyone's attention.

The airplane was completely renovated and refurbished, with experienced engineers and mechanics going over every bit of it. Appusamy's report in this regard makes interesting reading, wherein he mentions in some detail, what Murad Fyzee has described as a ritual rebirth', for the little airplane. His report ends, with what is in the present context, an astonishing shopping list for repairing an airplane: timber, plywood, fabric and glue. A Mr Neville, who was a senior engineer with Air-India, was training with Rolls Royce in England at the time. Neville, it turned out, had been in De Havillands employ in the thirties and had worked with wooden aircraft before. He was recalled to assist with the renovation, and De Havilland also promptly dispatched a Mr Brown to check on the overhaul and rebuilding work.



*JRD's Puss Moth was fuelled by petrol brought in a bullock cart by the Burmah Shell Aviation Service in 1932. Seen above is a re-enactment of this event for the 30th anniversary flight in 1962*

Work progressed at a feverish pace at the Associated Airworks' workshop under Appusamy's watchful eyes. All seemed to be going well when a mishap, which could well have put the whole enterprise in jeopardy, occurred. Eleven days prior to the Leopard being ferried to Bombay, an accident during a test flight badly damaged the right-hand landing gear. JRD was told about the unexpected hitch and he seemed almost resigned to his fate. But Appusamy was not one to give up easily. His team worked round the clock in shifts, and a few days later, a second report from him dispersed the gloom brought on by the pessimism of the first.

‘So in some ways  
I have perhaps re-  
enacted that first  
flight a little closer  
to the original than  
I had intended!’

On 11 October, Captain Ghosh of TISCO ferried the Leopard Moth from Calcutta to Bombay. Appusamy's and his team's never-say-die attitude had won through. The only change was the installation of a Murphy VHF radio: otherwise, the Leopard was almost identical to the Puss Moth. Wasting no time, JRD did a practice flight the next day. He put the plane through its paces and appeared satisfied. The next day, on 13 October, JRD took off on a positioning ferry flight to Karachi, with a refuelling stop at Ahmedabad. Captain Vishvanath, one of Air-India's veteran pilots and then Air-India's director of operations, accompanied him as a passenger, travelling in the space originally meant for mail.

The flight from Karachi on 15 October was delayed by two hours due to power/radio failure. JRD records that they left without the radio. On his arrival at Juhu he was to remark: 'So in some ways I have perhaps re-enacted that first flight a little closer to the original than I had intended!' Logging the entries in GMT JRD took off from Karachi at 03.05 arriving at Ahmedabad at 07.25 for refuelling. Once again the fuel was hand-filled with a bullock-cart doing the honours as it had done the first time. In fact, JRD had received a letter from an Englishman called Charles Rossiter-Smith of Burmah Shell in August who requested the honour of being entrusted with the refuelling duties as they had done for the first flight. He ended with: 'It would of course be necessary for you to sign our fuel receipts as you did thirty years ago, but I assure you on this happy occasion we would not present you with our bills!'

JRD took off from Ahmedabad at 07.55 for the last leg of the re-enactment. Three hours and fifteen minutes later (11.10 GMT) he arrived at Juhu airport at 4.40 p.m. 1ST. It had been an uneventful flight apart from the episode of the failed radio. Before landing he flew low over the cheering crowd and waggled his wings – the traditional airman's salute. Congratulatory messages poured in from all sides, including one from Sir Geoffrey De Havilland, who also apologised for being unable to find a Puss Moth for JRD.

Why did he do it? This is best expressed in his own words: The purpose of the flight apart from the personal, sentimental one, was to illustrate the truth and the tact that from absurdly small beginnings worthwhile things can be built and built fairly quickly.' He also confessed that he decided to re-enact the flight because he feared that he might not be around for the fiftieth. Lack

of prescience of the future is one of the vexations of mortality, but JRD's fears proved to be without foundation. He did it a second time on 15 October 1982, aged seventy-eight, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of that first historic flight, and in the same airplane.



## THE ERA OF CONTROLS

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The sixties were a relatively quiet period insofar as expansion was concerned for the Tatas. TISCO completed its expansion in 1959. Their next big proposal came only in 1967 when Tata Chemicals proposed its big fertilizer plant. It was mostly a period of consolidation but also a period where getting approvals proved to be increasingly difficult. JRD insisted that it was difficult to make plans in such a climate of uncertainty. No doubt, the denial of permission to make cars and fertilizer must have been uppermost in his mind at this time.

Still there was some progress. In 1962, Tata Robins Fraser came into being, as did Tata Exports. But 1962 will always be remembered as the year in which Mithapur had its water crisis. The rains failed, and the two lakes, which supplied the town, and the chemical complex, were almost dry. There was talk of evacuating the town but they had not reckoned with the fighting spirit of the doughty Pathan, Darbari Seth. With grit and determination, Seth and his team introduced numerous innovations to conserve, substitute and produce fresh water. They even observed a 'Lakeless Week' when no water was drawn from the lakes for one week - the ultimate victory of man's ingenuity over nature's niggardliness. Rains tailed for three consecutive years but production increased: innovation had insulated Mithapur from the vagaries of nature.

It was also at this time that Tata Finlay, a joint venture with James Finlay Company, started manufacturing packed tea for the domestic market and instant tea for export. It made only tardy progress, and when in 1976 James Finlay wanted to divest itself of plantation assets in India, JRD welcomed this chance to enter the tea industry. Darbari Seth, the boss of Tata Chemicals, who would subsequently head the new entity called Tata Tea in 1983, said

that Tata Chemicals was ready to make good the deficit if any other Tata company hesitated.

In 1963 there was a setback on the personal front for JRD. Sylla, his elder sister, passed away in Nice after a courageous fight with cancer. JRD described her as by far 'the best of the Tata family and certainly the bravest.' Universally loved, even drivers and shopkeepers attended her funeral. JRD's life was punctuated by mortality at regular intervals. The loss of Homi J. Bhabha and his brother-in-law Gianni Bertoli in 1966, and Colonel Leslie Sawhney, Rodabeh's husband, affected him the most. Sawhney's passing was a particularly crushing blow. JRD admitted that he had considered his brother-in-law as a possible candidate for chairman of Tatas after him.

In the 1960s the government made concerted efforts to control the big industrial houses. Between 1964 and 1969 the government appointed four powerful panels to this end: the Mahalanobis Committee (1964), the Monopolies Inquiry Commission (1965), the R.K. Hazari Committee (1966) and the Industrial Licensing Policy Committee or Dutt Committee (1969). The Monopolistic and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act was promulgated in 1969 and managing agencies were abolished in 1970. The restrictions, these commissions brought in their wake, completed the stifling of JRD's entrepreneurship that had started with the nationalisation of Air-India.



*Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh with JRD at the latter's investiture as Honorary Air Commodore*

TISCO had lost its position of leadership, and after the expansion in 1958, Tatas discovered that their assumptions regarding productivity had been a bit too optimistic. Worse still, there were the price controls. The only silver lining was that JRD's penchant for innovation and experimentation turned adversity into opportunity. JRD's sagging spirits may have got a boost if the government had allowed him to make cars. In 1960, four Mercedes-Benz cars had been loaned to the Commerce and Industry secretary, to use for a year before making a decision. (VK. Krishna Menon also used one.) The cars were much appreciated, but nothing came of it.

In January 1966, Indira Gandhi became prime minister and accelerated the campaign against big business, which had started in Nehru's time. She subsequently abolished the privy purses of the princes, and nationalised banks, ostensibly in pursuit of a socialist dream. While JRD shared a warm personal relationship with her, she was as impervious to his views on economic development as her father was. Whereas Nehru adopted the expedient of staring out of his window when JRD started discussing economics, Indira for her part took to doodling and opening her mail to dissuade him. But she did consider his views on Air-India and also made sure

he was invited whenever a French dignitary visited India. In October of the same year, JRD was made an honorary air commodore. JRD had the distinction of receiving his letter of appointment from President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. In April 1974, JRD rose further in the hierarchy. He was made honorary air vice-marshal.

In 1968, Tatas diversified in four consultation units, planning for the impending introduction of the MRTP Bill. They were Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Tata Consulting Engineers, Tata Economic Consultancy Services and Tata Financial Services.

Tata Consultancy Services, now very much the jewel in the Tata crown, had a faltering start till a brilliant electrical engineer called Faqir Chand Kohli arrived on the scene. In 1968, Tata Sons Limited, the Tata Group's holding company, started TCS as a strategic initiative based on the insight that management problems in Indian industry would be mitigated through effective use of information technology. Under the leadership of F.C. Kohli, TCS pioneered the Indian effort to create a globally recognisable brand for the Indian software industry, and today TCS is India's first billion-dollar software company. Now retired, Kohli gave the credit to Nani Palkhivala who was chairman of TCS for thirty years, for supporting him at a time when few understood the potential of software.

TCS is the single largest software services exporter from India (in fact the largest in Asia), servicing clients in more than fifty countries around the world. With over sixty-five offices outside India, TCS is now truly transnational in character and reach. It employs more than 18,000 consultants and serves hundreds of clients, providing information technology and business consulting services to organisations in government, business and industry around the world. It went public in 2004, with the Rs. 5,000-crore IPO opening coinciding with the birth centenary of JRD.



## THE END OF THE MANAGING AGENCY SYSTEM

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In April 1970, legislation by the government terminated the Managing Agency System. Tata Sons was a managing agent of all Tata companies, and after the termination of this system, the Board of Directors of each company was independent of the parent company. JRD found himself in a position where he had to persuade and cajole where once he had ruled. JRD's personality saw to it that the same group ethos continued to pervade though the structure had been radically altered.

The man who played the most important role in helping JRD to restructure the group after the termination of the managing agency system was a brilliant lawyer called Nani Palkhivala. With as much as seventy-four per cent of the Tata group companies being run by managing agencies, the abrupt termination of the system posed a huge problem for Tatas. Companies had to be run by boards and a huge number of directors needed to be appointed.

Palkhivala joined Tatas in 1961 after he attracted the attention of A.D. Shroff a Tata Sons director, who felt that Palkhivala would be a suitable replacement for J.D. Choksi who intended to retire. Palkhivala, a taxation expert, was in great demand given the plethora of tax legislation and the importance of tax planning at the time. This, and the group's legal problems, ensured his meteoric rise through the Tata ranks. He soon became JRD's trusted lieutenant and occupied a cabin just next to him.

The end of the managing agency system was a shock to JRD because it was his only real source of control over the group. JRD had allowed the family stake in the companies he controlled to dwindle to disastrously low levels, something which was to have serious consequences in the future. As Ratan

Tata was to point out later, the Tata share in the companies they managed ought to be more than merely symbolic. Every company had to be restructured and given a board of directors and a managing director. A large number of directors had to be appointed to avoid attracting the provisions of the MRTP Act. Under Palkhivala's advice, the Tata family's low equity holding was shrewdly used to counter the MRTP provisions, with the group being able to claim that the companies were professionally managed independent companies with JRD as only a part time chairman.

But the strategy was to pose problems later. In the seventies, the group was held together by the intense loyalty the handpicked technocrats had towards the ageing patriarch, JRD. His authority was an excellent example of what Max Weber called charismatic authority, and there was no denying that JRD was a uniquely charismatic leader. While charismatic authority is more appealing, legal authority is more certain and binding. In the eighties, JRD's hold seemed to slacken as the *satraps* saw no need to collaborate or co-operate with each other. It became a collection of small empires and JRD found it difficult to make his barons see that their company was but a part of the whole group.

The year 1971 was an important one for Air-India. In April, India's first Boeing 747 arrived in Bombay. It was christened *Emperor Ashoka* and was welcomed by two MiG-21s and a large and distinguished gathering at Santa Cruz airport. This was the result of two years of intense preparation. JRD had placed the order in 1967 when he was first shown the plane at Boeing's headquarters in Seattle. Unfortunately, it was also the first 747 to crash when it plunged into the sea off Bombay on 1 January 1978 killing all 213 people on board. The advent of the Jumbo jet resulted in a boost to the tourism industry, and it was thanks to JRD's vision that Tatas foresaw the boom in tourism that the 747 brought in its wake.

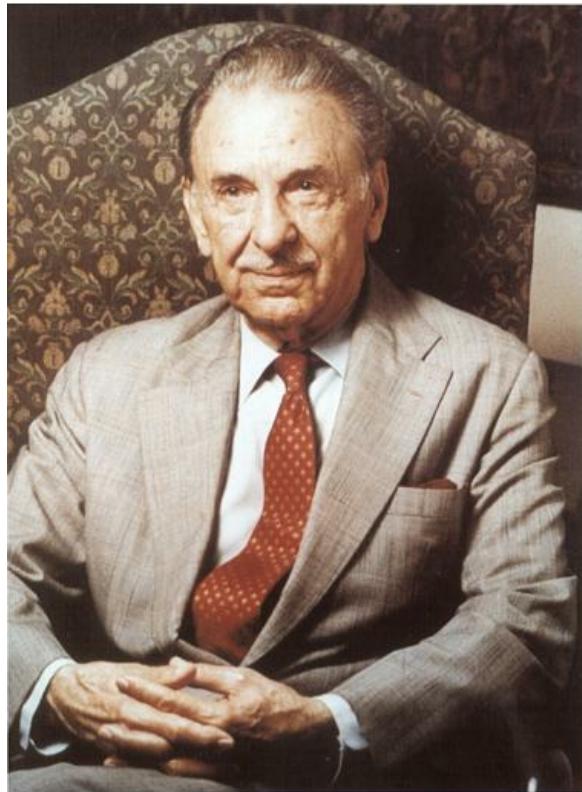
Till 1970, the Indian Hotels Company could boast of only the Taj. The man whom JRD entrusted with expanding the chain was Ajit Kerkar, the managing director. In keeping with this, old palaces in Rajasthan were restored and turned into hotels. A mid-tier range called Gateway Hotels and Getaway Resorts were set up for those who could not afford five-star rates. St. James Court in London was also refurbished and converted into a hotel.

By the turn of the century, the group had sixty-four hotels in India and abroad. JRD retained the chairmanship of Indian Hotels for a long time. Finally, at eighty-four, he made way for Ajit Kerkar.

In the mid-70s, Birlas overtook Tatas in both group sales and gross profit. Data revealed that the Tatas had grown slowly and in particular, there was great dissatisfaction with the performance of TELCO. TISCO too had in fifty-five years only managed to double its licensed capacity from one to two million tons. Murmurs were heard against JRD who was blamed for the slump in the 1960s and '70s. Some of the blame must certainly attach to the fact that government permissions for Tata projects were lagging behind. The other industrial houses seemed able to get what they wanted. Since the Tatas avoided any under the table dealings, it was no surprise that they were stymied.

It was thanks to  
JRD's vision that  
Tatas foresaw the  
boom in tourism.

JRD made it amply clear that the Tatas were not open to the idea of paying for favours, even if it meant a setback to their interests. This insistence on adhering to certain rules of conduct also made the rest of the business community rather uncomfortable in his company. It also did little to endear him to authority. But in the mind of the public, the name Tata commanded much respect. JRD once told R.M. Lala, 'I don't think I have contributed anything in economic matters except in ethics and values where I have my own views. An ethical life is part of an economic life.' Some of the projects whose refusal hurt the most were ACC's plans for a one-million-ton plant, the generation of 500 MW of power and TELCO's expansion from 36,000 trucks to 56,000 trucks to clear the long waiting lists.



JRD often blamed the climate of suspicion and general hostility towards private enterprise as an instrument of growth for the lost opportunity. Indira refused to allow the fertilizer plant at Mithapur or allow Moolgaokar to make cars, but JRD still backed her during the Emergency. He believed it was good for the country.

Relations between Indira and JRD took a blow when Nani Palkhivala, India's legal luminary and a senior Tata director, withdrew his brief soon after Emergency was declared. She had lost the case, which challenged her election to Parliament in 1971 in the Allahabad High Court. Palkhivala argued her case on 23 June 1975 in the Supreme Court and was confident of victory. But the defender of the Constitution was stunned when only two days later she declared a state of Emergency. An incensed Palkhivala wanted to return the brief at once, but the Board of Directors advised caution fearing the effect a vindictive Indira Gandhi would have on the House of Tata. JRD privately advised against it, but was far too democratic in his functioning to prevent Palkhivala from following the dictates of his conscience. Palkhivala returned the brief and predictably, Indira was very upset, accusing JRD of harbouring Tata directors, who were against her.

When Indira Gandhi lost the 1977 election, JRD solaced her with a hand-written note:'You have been much in my thoughts these last few days. I can imagine the physical and emotional strain to which you have been subjected and my heart and Thelly's go out to you in your ordeal and distress.'

Ironically, it was George Fernandes as Industries minister in the Janata government who finally gave Tatas the permission for both ACC's expansion and the green signal for the 500 MW of power, which Tatas wanted to generate. The latter proposal had been hanging fire with Indira Gandhi since 1971. But if Fernandes was obliging in these matters, he had a rather unpleasant surprise in store for JRD. He had plans to nationalise TISCO and appoint JRD as chairman at the helm of a public sector steel company. In 1969, JRD had offered Fernandes the leadership of the Tata Workers' Union at Jamshedpur. Nine years later, one can only imagine his thoughts when he offered JRD the chairmanship of a public sector steel company, at a lunch at which Biju Patnaik the Steel minister was also present. There was an outcry in the press and the Tata Workers' Union wrote to the Prime Minister Morarji Desai on 4 October 1978 stating their unhappiness over the proposed move. In the end Morarji blew the whistle and called Fernandes off. Fernandes' licences allowed Tatas to regain its number one position by 1980. The removal of price controls on steel also had a positive impact on profitability.

JRD had offered  
Fernandes the  
leadership of the  
Tata Workers'  
Union.

Till the early eighties, TISCO managed to get the most out of its machinery, some of which was of Second World War vintage. At around this time, the then General Manager Dr J.J. Irani told JRD of the need to modernise the plant. JRD heeded the advice and the modernisation was implemented from 1988 till 2001. Ordinary steel manufacture was phased out to manufacture only special steels and a capacity of three million tons was reached. The workforce was reduced from 78,000 to 43,000 and TISCO exited from all other activities (it owned a cement plant and a captive power plant) to focus on its core competence: the manufacture of steel. Its profits

rose from Rs. 282 crores in 1999 to an astonishing Rs. 1,000 crore in 2002-03, at a time when steel plants worldwide were shutting down. The man who made this possible was Dr J.J. Irani, TISCO's managing director during 1992-2001.

A Tata scholar and a gold medallist at Sheffield in metallurgy, Irani was persuaded to return to India after working in England for five years. He was initially given a research job in Jamshedpur. When he said that he wanted to return to England, he was shifted to the plant, which is where he stayed till 2001, occupying the posts of superintendent, works manager, general manager and finally managing director. He is currently a director of Tata Sons.



## **DISMISSAL FROM AIR-INDIA AND JRD'S FLIGHT BACK INTO HISTORY**

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The year 1978 could not have started more tragically for Air-India and JRD. On the very first day of the new year, Air-India's first 747 *Emperor Ashoka* plunged into the sea off Bombay, killing all 213 people on board. Exactly a month later, the government decided that JRD's name be dropped from the board of both Air-India and Indian Airlines. This unconscionable act of authoritarian arrogance had the blessings of Prime Minister Morarji Desai. The pettiness of the decision was rivalled only by the utterly disgraceful way in which it was conveyed to the outgoing chairman. JRD came to know about it only when the new chairman, Air Marshal PC. Lai (who was in fact employed as chairman and managing director of Indian Tube Company, Jamshedpur at the time) rang him up and told him about it. According to Lai when he asked Morarji, 'What about JRD?' he was told, 'He has been there long enough'.

JRD was deeply hurt. Morarji wrote a letter to JRD on 4 February that contained, among other things, the highly insincere, 'Let me assure you that we are very sorry to part with you.' In reply, JRD submitted that given his long standing association with Air-India, it would not have been too much to expect to be informed of the decision directly and a little in advance of the public. Worse still, JRD had met Morarji on 24 January and had been given no inkling of what was to come. JRD considered it a stab in the back and conveyed as much. It had always been an uneasy relationship right from the time when JRD had almost walked out of Morarji's room when he was chief minister of Bombay. JRD and Sir Homi Mody had made a certain assessment about the power needs of Bombay in which they envisaged a shortage in the future. Morarji thought otherwise and said so. JRD got up to leave the room saying that he did not wish to waste his or Morarji's time! It turned out that

Tatas were right, and permission for extra power generation was granted, but neither of them forgot this incident.

All of Air-India was shocked, at what was in effect, a dismissal of the chairman. Managing Director K.G. Appusamy and the Deputy Managing Director Nari Dastur resigned, and there were protests from the Cabin Crew Association and the Officers Association. Watching from the sidelines it was now Indira Gandhi's turn to send her commiseration in the form of a handwritten note. She said she was sorry that JRD was no longer with Air-India.'We were proud of you and of the Airline. No one can take this satisfaction from you nor belittle debt Government's you in this respect.

The effect on Air-India was one of demoralisation. On 8 June 1978, the thirtieth anniversary of Air-India's first flight, the staff presented him with a silver replica of the Puss Moth he had flown in 1932. On the same day he got the news that he had been selected for the Tony Jannus Award instituted in Florida, in honour of one of civil aviation's earliest pioneers.



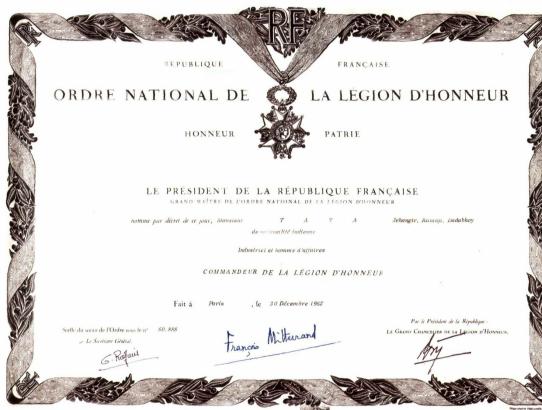
*The Tony Jannus Award. In 1979 JRD became the first Asian to receive this prestigious award which is given in recognition of outstanding contribution to the development of commercial aviation*

On 30 March 1979, JRD was awarded the Tony Jannus Award, one of the most prestigious awards in the field of aviation. It was named in memory of

Tony Jannus, the American pilot who started the first scheduled airline service in the world. JRD was the seventeenth recipient of this award, making him part of a very select list of aviation greats who have received this honour. The list includes Juan Trippe of Pan American airline, Sir Frank Whittle the inventor of the jet engine, and Bill Allen the former chairman of Boeing. In July 1989, JRD received yet another prestigious award for aviation: the Daniel Guggenheim Medal. He was also presented with his own portrait, specially commissioned by Boeing, and painted by the well-known artist warren McCallister. Over the years JRD received numerous honours and awards. The international honours include: Knight Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great (a Papal Honour), 1964; Commander of the Legion of Honour of the French Government, 1983; Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1978; Gold Air Medal of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, 1985; Bessemer Medal of the Institute of Metals, London, 1986; Edward Warner Award from the International Civil Aviation Organisation, 1986; and the Dadabhai Naoroji Memorial Award, 1989. Surprisingly it was the last, a comparative lightweight, of which he was the most proud.



*The Daniel Guggenheim Medal. This Award honours persons who have made a notable contribution to the advancement of aeronautics*



*JRD was promoted to the rank of Commander of the Legion of Honour of the French Government. The citation bears the date 30 December 1982*

JRD was re-appointed to the board of Air-India in June 1980 after Indira Gandhi returned to power. When the board was reconstituted in 1982, the government appointed only officials and dropped both JRD and Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. (JRD was reappointed later in the same year as we shall see later, but Field Marshal Manekshaw was not. JRD continued to be on the board till 1986, the same year in which Ratan Tata became the chairman.)



*The Legion of Honour Medal*

The year 1982 marked the golden jubilee year of the first flight. Though JRD was no longer chairman, he was keen to repeat his 1962 re-enactment. The idea came to him in early 1981, and the first prerequisite was to find a Leopard Moth for the proposed flight in October 1982. In May of the same year, JRD set out to put the nuts and bolts in place. He contacted De Havilland in London who put him in touch with the Moth Club. The possibility of taking a plane on loan was remote, but Cliff Lovell, proprietor of a firm called Light Plane Service in Hampshire, was willing to do a complete restoration. His mind made up, JRD wrote to Raghu Raj, chairman of Air-India, in June 1981, telling him about his idea. He suggested that his old Leopard Moth that was hanging in the Customs Hall at Sahar airport be refurbished in England or a new one purchased. What JRD wanted from Raghu Raj was a confirmation that the board of Air-India would support him in this venture. He also cited his physical fitness to allay any misgivings about his ability to re-enact the first flight fifty years later.



*JRD with the Leopard Moth in 1982 on the 50 th anniversary of the inaugural mail flight*

Raghu Raj responded both quickly and positively. The Air-India board sanctioned an expenditure of Rs 1.75 lakhs for rebuilding JRD's old Leopard Moth in England since there was no Moth available for sale at the time. JRD contacted Cliff Lovell immediately, and in December 1981, the Leopard Moth, which had hung for nineteen years at Bombay's Sahar International Airport, was brought down to do duty one last time. It was packed and duly dispatched to London to be refurbished for the flight the next year.

Six months later, the little plane had made good progress but there had also been an escalation in the expenses. Air-India promptly sanctioned the extra Rs. 1.3 lakhs. All seemed ready for the re-enactment when a new development arose. In June 1982, Raghu Raj wrote to JRD saying that all along they (the Air-India board) were under the impression that JRD would be accompanied by a co-pilot, and expressed grave reservations about a solo flight, given JRD's advanced years and his standing as an would continue solo to Bombay and was expected international figure. JRD in his reply made it clear that it was to be a solo flight or nothing at all. ('I did this flight solo in 1932 and again in 1962, and the whole purpose would be lost if I did not do it in exactly the same way as on the previous two occasions. Otherwise, I might as well do the flight as a passenger, which would be pointless. I would prefer in that case to forget the whole thing.') In his reply to Raghu Raj, JRD emphasised not only his flying skills but also his physical fitness, adding that he skied every winter to bolster his case. In his reply, Raghu Raj said that it was only right that 'JRD should fly again', but asked him to reconsider his decision about a co-pilot.



*M.S. Raghavan, Postmaster General, Gujarat Circle handing over a mail bag to JRD at the Ahmedabad Airport*

At the end of it all, it was decided that JRD would do the Bombay-Karachi leg accompanied by a co-pilot with a Tata Steel Bonanza accompanying the Moth. On October 15, he would fly solo to Ahmedabad. He would be in constant touch with the Bonanza and in case of difficulty would land at Bhuj. All going well the Bonanza would land ahead of him in Ahmedabad. After refuelling at Ahmedabad he would continue solo to Bombay and was expected to land at Juhu airstrip at 16.00 hrs.

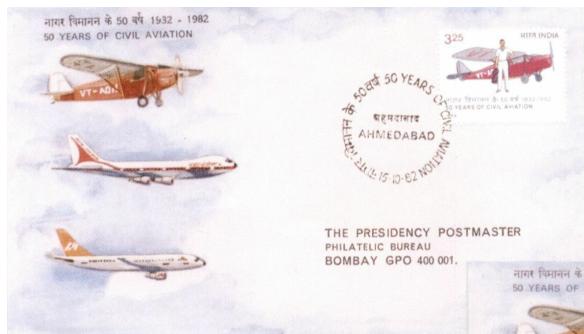
And this was the way it finally happened. On October 13, he took off on the positioning flight from Bombay to Karachi. Accompanying him as co-pilot was his old friend Captain Vishvanth. M.M. Salim, the managing director of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) who had started his career as an employee of Tata Airlines received him at the airport. On October 15, JRD took off from Karachi at 8.00 a.m. (IST). A large number of Parsees and officials of the PIA saw him off at the airport. Accompanying him was Capt. Chauhan, chief flying instructor of the Bombay Flying Club.

JRD  
emphasised not  
only his flying  
skills but also  
his physical  
fitness

JRD reached Ahmedabad at 12.20 p.m. The Governor Mrs Sharda Mukherjee, the Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki and the Director General of Police P.N. Writer were among those who received him at the airport. The

refuelling of the Moth revived memories of the 1930s. A bullock cart entered the tarmac with fuel cans and Indian Oil Corporation officials dressed in khakhi outfits and turbans poured fuel into the little plane. It was here that JRD was told that the government had belatedly named him as a director of Air-India. His first question was, 'Is Maneckshaw also on the board?' The letter from the government reached him only on 19 October, four days after his flight back into history. At 1.20 p.m. JRD took off for a solo flight to Bombay.

A little before 4.00 p.m. the august gathering at the Juhu airstrip saw what seemed to be a tiny sliver of glass glinting in the hot October sun, accompanied by two small specks alongside. The specks took the form of two escort helicopters and the sliver was transformed into a small single engined plane. The father of Indian civil aviation was about to complete the second re-enactment of his historic 1932 flight. JRD covered the distance in two and a half hours. Arriving ten minutes early, he hovered above the Juhu airstrip to land at exactly 4.00 p.m.



He was received at the airtstrip by the Governor I.H. Latif Chief Minister Babasaheb Bhosale, the chairman of Air-India Raghu Raj, the chairman of Indian Airlines Rusi Billimoria, Naval Tata, Nani Palkhivala, Jamshed Bhabha and Ratan Tata among a galaxy of eminent personalities, friends and well-wishers.

Wearing a grey-blue safari suit, JRD alighted from the plane and completed the landing formalities in the presence of the Inspector General of Police K.P. Medhekar. He handed over five bags of mail weighing nearly thirty kilograms to the Post Master General V.N. Cyril. There were messages from the Pakistani president to his Indian counterpart Zail Singh and from the governor of Sind for I.H. Latif the governor of Maharashtra. Air-India's

airhostess Colleen Hai and Indian Airlines airhostess Meera Diwan garlanded him before he was escorted to the podium.

After speeches by Latif Bhosale, Raj and Billimoria, JRD rose to speak. He said that he had done it to dedicate a gesture to the early pioneers and indeed all the thousands of men and women who had helped him build Air-India. It was also he said intended to inspire a little hope and enthusiasm in the younger people of our country that despite all the difficulties, all the frustrations, there is a joy in having done something as well as you could and better than others thought you could.' JRD said that the old lady' had performed well with the old pilot. Shrugging off all praise with his usual self-deprecating modesty he said that it had been an easy flight.'There was no storm, no fog, no mountain to cross - this was a simple flight, a matter of just staying in the air.'JRD also thanked all those who had made the flight possible, including P.D. Balivala, the former deputy director (Engineering) of Air-India who had been given the task of refurbishing the little plane for the flight. He also gleefully narrated how the Tata Steel Bonanza his 'nurse-maid had broken down while he himself had made it.



*First day cover released on the occasion of the completion of fifty years of civil aviation in India*

When a BBC correspondent asked him if he hoped to be around for the 100th anniversary of Indian civil aviation, JRD affirmed with his customary wit, Of course I 'll be there. I'll come back. You see I believe in reincarnation.'The BBC correspondent was to make a name for himself in India. His name: Mark Tully.

A little known fact associated with the second re-enactment is that JRD had suffered a mild heart attack just three weeks before the flight. His cardiologist Farokh Udvadia decided to let him continue, averring that the emotional strain of not doing the flight may have been worse for JRD than the actual

exertion of the event. Future events justified this decision. Keshub Mahindra recalls how he was dispatched to go and talk to him and JRD greeted him by saying,'Oh, you have arrived. They have sent you.' When he said that he had come only to see him he replied, I know why you are here.' Mahindra went back to Bombay House and told them,'Don't stop him. You will kill him if you stop him.'



## THE SUCCESSION ISSUE

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In the eighties, the succession issue was the biggest problem facing the Tatas. It appeared that JRD had made up his mind when he appointed Ratan Tata as chairman of Tata Industries in 1981. Ratan Tata was Naval Tata's eldest son and had joined Tatas on the prompting of his grandmother Lady Navajbai. A Cornell trained architect, Ratan joined Tatas in 1962, spending six months at TELCO and then the next six years at TISCO. On his return to Bombay, he was put in charge of NELCO and Empress Mills, both ailing companies, and till he was picked up by JRD in 1981 no one would have taken his candidature as JRD's successor very seriously. Nani Palkhivala, Russi Mody, Darbari Seth, EC. Kohli, S.A. Sabavala and H.N. Sethna were all likely candidates but apparently JRD was not very clear in his mind, about not only his successor, but also as to the timetable for this change of guard. On one occasion when he was asked, if Ratan was the heir apparent, he replied that this was something for the board to decide.

Ratan Tata took the Tata group into hi-tech areas and pioneered strategic thinking in the group. His 1983 Tata Strategic Plan in which he advocated the entry into high-risk areas was discussed by the board. It had been written in New York where Ratan had spent four months to be with his ailing mother, Soonu, at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre. Not surprisingly, it failed to win acceptance among the conservative senior directors who felt that Ratan was poaching on their turf. Given the prevailing laissez-faire environment, they found it difficult to subordinate their companies' interest to that of the group. Outwardly, it seemed to have JRD's consent but some felt JRD was actually only lukewarm in his support. The rest of the directors took their cue from the chairman. This sent conflicting signals to those who thought that Ratan was the chosen one. Still it was to Ratan's credit that he managed to establish six new enterprises under the umbrella of Tata

Industries. Tata Honeywell, Tata Telecom, Hitech Drilling, Tata Keltron and Tata Finance.

One of the success stories of the eighties was Titan Watches. It was launched in association with the Tamil Nadu government and in collaboration with France's Ebauches and Citizen Watch Company of Japan. Titan succeeded in edging out smuggled watches and JRD was greatly impressed with the performance of the company. The 'titan' who made this possible was Xerxes Desai.

With the implementation of Rajiv Gandhi's liberalisation policies in 1985, there was a considerable expansion of Tatas, and between 1985 and 1989 fourteen companies were born. In fact that was the number of companies in the group when JRD took over. When he demitted office, fifty-two years later, the number had swelled to ninety-five.

In May 1987, JRD and Tatas were faced with an uncomfortable situation when VP. Singh the former finance minister openly accused the big business houses of being traitors to the nation at a rally in Allahabad on 12 May. He levelled the charge that they were running a parallel economy and staging a flight of capital to foreign companies. JRD was deeply disturbed by the charges and asked him to retract categorically the unjustified allegations. JRD showed the letter to all Tata directors before dispatching it. Receiving only silence as a reply, he went to the press, which supported Tatas in the clash with V.P. Singh.

The year 1988 saw the unsavoury episode of the ACC convertible debenture issue. In March, ACC had announced a rights issue to raise rupees twenty-six crores for a major overhaul in its operations. On the last day, ACC received three large applications causing a huge oversubscription. Darbari Seth had applied for 8 lakh debentures worth Rs. 10 crores, Shapoorji Pallonji for 6 lakh debentures worth Rs. 7.5 crores and Nusli Wadia for 5.6 lakh debentures worth Rs. 7 crores. After charges and counter-charges were freely traded, Palkhivala, the chairman of ACC declared that the board had rejected all three applications as *henami*. But Seth was not to be denied; he bought Mahendra Swarup's seven percent share and joined the board of ACC. Throughout the eighties and nineties, there was talk of how some Tata *satraps* were building stakes in their companies, which were larger than those

held by Tatas themselves. Such reports raised the issue of the group's unity and JRD must have been a worried man. Outwardly, though, he held that Tatas' unique tradition would never allow the group to disintegrate.

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As the eighties drew to a close JRD realised that he had to appoint his successor. By 1988, Russi Mody had emerged as the frontrunner. In October 1984, JRD had stepped down from the chairmanship of TISCO in favour of Russi Mody. According to the plan Mody was to succeed Moolgaokar at TELCO as chairman when the latter retired so that as chairman of two of Tatas flagship companies, he could stake a claim to the chairmanship. Ratan was to become Mody's deputy at TELCO. Most of the higher echelons of Tatas accepted the decision but Moolgaokar provided the dissenting voice. Mody did nothing to further his cause when he went prematurely to the press. His interview to the *Business Standard* set the alarm bells ringing at TELCO. TELCO was passing through a slightly rough time with profits of only Rs. 2.9 crores on sales of Rs. 1,200 crores and Mody's supporters only damaged his case when they boasted that Mody would easily solve TELCO's problems. An incensed Moolgaokar refused to step down. He insisted that Ratan be inducted as executive deputy chairman, which he was on 7 April 1988. When JRD and Palkhivala asked Ratan to resign and publicly state that he would accept the position only under Mody, he refused. Mody blamed the press but the damage had already been done. It was now becoming obvious that Ratan and not Mody would succeed JRD.

Ratan formally took over the chairmanship of TELCO from Sumant Moolgaonkar in December 1988. Trouble had been brewing at the company's plant in Pune for a few months and a flashpoint was reached on 31 January

1989. When Ratan visited the plant he was greeted with a tool-down strike. His antagonist was Rajan Nair, a former general secretary of the Telco Kamgar Sanghathana, who had been sacked for a murder threat to a security guard. He vowed revenge as he left and throughout the summer and monsoon months, a strike appeared imminent. Mediation by the chief minister Sharad Pawar did not help. Ratan refused to be intimidated by Nair. The culmination came on 29 September in the form of Operation Crackdown when the police cordoned off Shaniwarwada Fort, where Nair's followers were on a fast, and evacuated all the workers. Ratan had won his spurs.

The succession actually took place on 25 March 1991 when the board of Tata Sons unanimously voted Ratan Tata as chairman. His name had been proposed by JRD and seconded by Pallonji Mistry. Russi Mody was the only director who did not attend. JRD who had recently suffered an attack of angina and spent five days in Breach Candy Hospital must have realised that there was no point in postponing the inevitable. On 18 March 1991, he called Ratan to his office and asked him what was new. When Ratan replied that he had already updated him in hospital on all the goings-on, JRD revealed to him his plans of handing over the reins to him at the next meeting of Tata Sons. He also told him that he would fix the day after consulting Ajit Kerkar about an auspicious date for the change of guard.

Having appointed Ratan as chairman of Tata Sons, JRD helped Ratan gather back the chairmanships, which he had shed over the years. This diffusion of chairmanships further dissolved the links between Tata group companies, a process, which had started with the termination of the managing agency system. Ratan had warned JRD of this policy but JRD did not take him seriously. JRD was now faced with the difficult task of reversing the trend in the nineties. It was not an easy task because as Naval Tata had once warned, 'There's a Mughal emperor in each of the Tata companies.'

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In November 1991, Russi Mody sought to introduce sweeping changes in the management at TISCO without taking the board into confidence. This was done with the obvious intention of ensuring the succession of his protege (and constant companion and legal heir) Aditya Kashyap. J.J. Irani was demoted from joint managing director to additional managing director and Kashyap moved up from executive director (corporate) to Irani's position. Predictably, the unilateral decision raised many hackles. Mody apologised to the board, and Irani was now clearly second in command at TISCO with the others being only executive directors. This was the beginning of the end for Mody.

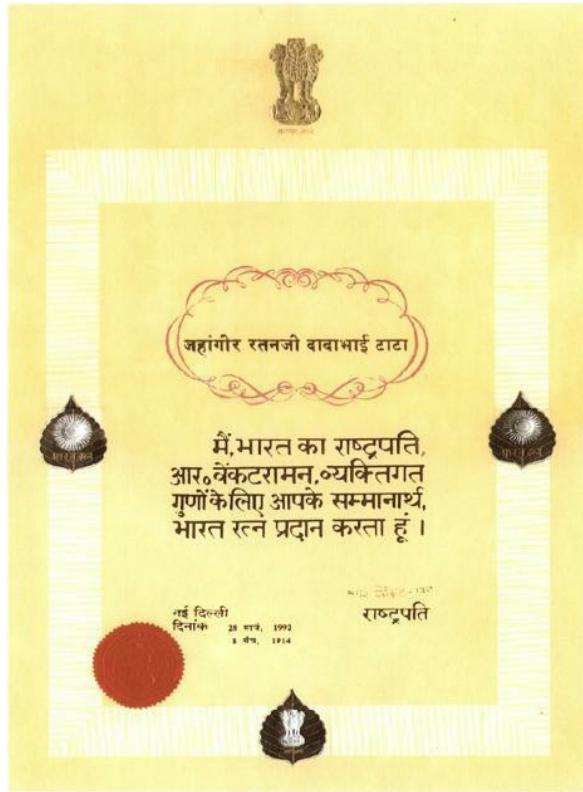


*Receiving the Bharat Ratna from President R. Venkataraman in March 1992*

In April 1992, JRD moved a resolution at a board meeting of Tata Sons where sixty-five was stipulated as the retirement age for directors and seventy-five for chairmen. There were protests, and even defiance, with a few questioning the legal validity of such a diktat. The sacking of Russi Mody on 19 April 1993 subdued the protesters and one by one, they surrendered their chairmanship. On 11 March 1993 when the board introduced the retirement policy, Mody had behaved in an appalling manner. He picked up his papers and declared the meeting closed. The board adopted the retirement policy, and it was decided that Mody should be allowed to quit on a date decided by him before the next AGM, which was slated for July. Mody had, in the meanwhile, taken to bad-mouthing TISCO's performance in the media. He avoided the 13 April meeting by being away in New Delhi. JRD told him of the decision and Mody asked that the date be set as 21 May. The notorious interview in *The Hindu*, where he accused Ratan, the deputy chairman and J.J. Irani the managing director of mismanaging the affairs of TISCO and causing a fall in its share price, proved to be the last straw.



*The Bharat Ratna – the medal*



*The Bharat Ratna – JRD's citation*



*JRD with Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, President R. Venkataraman and Vice-President S.D. Sharma after being conferred the Bharat Ratna*

Mody was told to go on 19 April 1993, a month before he was to retire. His exit was a sad day in Tata's history. No chairman had even been forced to resign, leave alone dismissed. But even Mody's staunchest supporter could not have denied the fact that he had brought it on himself. His hubris had undone him. It was a sad end for a man who was once the toast of corporate India and who had so ably served the Tatas. His father Sir Homi Mody in his

farewell speech in May 1959 had praised JRD with the following words:'Tatas are singularly fortunate in having as their Chief a man of such wide vision and such a fine sense of right or wrong.' To have to fire the son of his old friend and adviser in the evening of his life must have pained JRD, but Mody's arrogance left him with no choice. After all Mody had once said, There are only three great men who have come out of Harrow in this century – Jawaharlal Nehru, Winston Churchill and Russi Mody.'

In March 1992, JRD was awarded India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna. He is thus far the only industrialist on whom this honour has been bestowed. JRD accepted it with his characteristic modesty saying that all he had done was his duty. Still, it must have been a nice feeling to be finally recognised by the government. Years ago he had once remarked that he had received much greater recognition abroad than in India. In the same year, he was awarded the United Nations Population Award, in recognition of his pioneering contribution to family planning in India.



## THE FINAL JOURNEY

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Three weeks after stepping down as chairman of Tata Sons on 25 March 1991, JRD underwent an angioplasty in San Francisco to unblock two arteries. Feeling fine after his angioplasty, JRD continued his punishing routine. In June of the same year JRD felt breathless at a Tata Industries meeting in London and underwent an emergency angioplasty. His doctor, Dr Gool Contractor, was flown in from Bombay. A few days later he underwent another angioplasty. Dr Gool Contractor had a very special place in JRD's life. She was not only his doctor, but also tended to Thelly who had become an invalid after a stroke in 1980, and his sister Rodabeh who had Alzheimer's. JRD was often a difficult patient and Dr Contractor was forced to be firm with him, a fact that explains why on occasion, he introduced her as Saddam Hussein. When she was tragically killed in a road accident in August 1993, JRD was shattered. He survived her by only a few months.

On 9 October 1993, JRD left Bombay for Geneva. He was never to return to the shores of the country he had so ably served for more than half a century. On 4 November, he was admitted to the Geneva State Hospital with a high fever and a urinary infection. His cardiologist in Bombay, Dr Farokh Udwadia, who was in London at the time, flew in to see him. When Dr Udwadia met him he had no fever but he realised that all was not well. JRD had stopped eating, and on being asked what his major complaint was, said that it was old age. It was apparent that JRD had lost the will to go on.

JRD, the doyen of Indian industrialists, passed away in his sleep in the early hours of Monday, 29 November 1993. A friend of the family was holding his hand when he appeared to cough once, before passing on to the Great Unknown. Yet another Tata chairman had passed away in Europe! JRD it appears wanted to die abroad, since that way there would be much less fuss

associated with his passing. The hospital staff only realised the stature of their patient when the telephone lines were jammed with queries about his demise. Four days before his death Simone Tata, Naval Tata's Swiss-born widow who had been one of his closest friends, visited him in hospital. He looked weak and frail and was drowsy due to the medication. She visited him again the next day. He seemed to be stronger and smiled and there was a hint of that famous sparkle in his eyes. JRD told her, You know, I'm going to another world, and its exciting, very exciting.' He then closed his eyes and said no more. He had expressed similar sentiments to Eleana Bertoli, sister of Gianni, when she was with him in the hospital. Obviously, JRD had a presentiment of mortality; and he had decided to depart with the same grace and elegance with which he had lived his full and extraordinarily successful life.



*Ratan Tata, Nusli Wadia and Simone Tata at the funeral*



*Parsee priests chanting prayers in front of the coffin*

According to R.M.Lala the pursuit of the higher realm' had not been a preoccupation in his life. He believed that God was love and later agreed that too much would be inexplicable if there was no God. 'Whatever his views on

God and religion, JRD believed in reincarnation. Probably, JRD's views on this subject, are best expressed in what he told Rev. Fr. M.M. Balaguer, former principal of St.Xavier's College, Bombay: To me religion is service – one must play one's role.' And there can be no denying that JRD, did just that, all his life, and with peerless aplomb and humility.



*The simple unembellished coffin bearing the legend Jehangir Tata 1904-1993*

On 1 December, a Parsi *navar* who had flown in from Germany conducted a short prayer service before the coffin was sealed. JRD's body was taken by road to Paris to be buried in the Pere Lachaise cemetery where his father RD had bought a plot in perpetuity for the family vault. The Pere Lachaise is not only the largest cemetery in Paris but also its most celebrated. Some of the biggest names in art, music, literature and science are buried here. JRD has a distinguished complement of luminaries for company: Chopin, Rossini, Proust, Balzac, Pissaro, Ney, Ferdinand de Lesseps, Sarah Bernhardt and Isadora Duncan are some of the celebrities whose mortal remains have been interred here.



*The mausoleum of the Tata family at the Pere Lachaise cemetery, Paris*

3 December 1993, was the day of the funeral. The body was brought to the chapel in a plain unembellished walnut coffin and bore the legend: Jehangir Tata 1904-93. A single red rose had been placed on the lid. The gathering consisted of government ministers, diplomats, businessmen, friends and family. The External Affairs minister and the Ambassador to France represented the Indian government. S.A. Sabavala who has movingly described the last journey recounts how the entire chapel was covered with flowers – the ultimate tribute in the dead of winter. Two of JRD's favourite hymns were played and two Zoroastrian priests from London chanted passages from the *Avesta*.

Ratan Tata expressed his gratitude to the assembly and led the congregation in single file around the coffin. Six pallbearers placed the chrysanthemum-covered coffin onto a glass-covered hearse, which slowly made its way to the Tata vault. It was preceded by a van carrying wreaths. There was absolute silence as the coffin was lowered into the vault.

JRD's last earthly journey had ended. Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata who had conquered this world, was presumably all set to storm the next one too, no doubt insisting that everyone call him 'Jeh'.

\*

*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.*

This message from Air-India on JRD's death couldn't have been more

poignant. The words pay homage not only to the person and aviator, but also aptly describe the passion and essence of JRD's life.

## CHRONOLOGY

1904: Born in Paris on 29 July.

1909: Birth of sister Rodabeh.

R.D. Tata purchases a house at Hardelot.

1912: Birth of brother Darab.

1916: Birth of brother Jamshed ('Jimmy').

1917: The Tata family moves to Japan. Returns to France after the War.

1923: Mother Sooni dies in Paris.

JRD sent to a crammer in England.

1924: Drafted into the French army for a year.

1925: Joins Tatas as an apprentice.

1926: Death of father R.D. Tata. JRP inherits his directorship in Tatas.

1929: Renounces French citizenship.

Receives pilot's licence, the first in India. Buys his first aircraft.

1930: Marries Thelma Vicaji.

Aga Khan Air Race.

1932: Aviation Department of Tatas set up.

Historic Karachi-Bombay airmail flight.

1936: Death of brother Jamshed in a flying accident in Austria.

1938: Appointed Chairman of Tata Sons.

Aviation Department is renamed Tata Air Lines.

1939: TISCO strike.

1941: Leaves FICCI.

Tata Memorial Hospital set up.

1944: Tata Chemicals starts.

Draws up Bombay Plan.

1945: Leads delegation of industrialists to UK and USA.

Initiates Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

1946: Tata Air Lines becomes Air-India Ltd.

1947: Sets up Personnel Department at TISCO.

1948: Air-India International incorporated in the joint sector.

United Nations delegate.

1952: Lakmé.

Appointed a member of the Executive Committee, the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

1953: Aviation industry nationalised. JRD appointed Chairman of Air-India International.

1954: Nominated Officer of the Legion of Honour by the French Government.

1955: Awarded Padma Vibhushan.

1956: Sets up Tata Administrative Service.

1958: TISCO lockout.

Elected President of IATA.

1961: Supports Swatantra Party.

1962: Re-enacts Karachi-Bombay flight to commemorate 30th Anniversary of Indian Civil Aviation.

Mithapur water crisis.

1963: Death of sister Sylla.

1964: Knight Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great (Papal Honour).

1966: Honorary Air Commodore, Indian Air Force.

National Centre for the Performing Arts, Bombay.

1970: Appointed Chairman, Family Planning Foundation.

1974: Honorary Air Vice-Marshal, Indian Air Force.

1978: Dropped from board of Air-India by Morarji Desai.

Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

1979: Presented with Tony Jannus Award.

1980: Re-appointed Director of Air-India.

1982: Dropped From Board of Air-India.

Re-enacted Karachi-Bombay flight to mark the golden jubilee of Indian Civil Aviation.

Re-appointed Director of Air-India.

1983: Bestowed with the rank of Commander of the French Legion of

Honour.

1984: Steps down from TISCO Chairmanship.

1985: Presented with the Gold Air Medal by the Federation Aeronautique Internationale.

1986: Bessemer Medal of the Institute of Metals, London.

Edward Warner Award from the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

1987: Death of brother Darab.

1988: Daniel Guggenheim Medal Award and the Dadabhai Naoroji Memorial Award.

1991: Steps down from the Chairmanship of Tata Sons.

JRD and Thelma J. Tata Trust.

1992: Bharat Ratna and the United Nations Population Award.

1993: JRD passes away in Geneva on 29 November.

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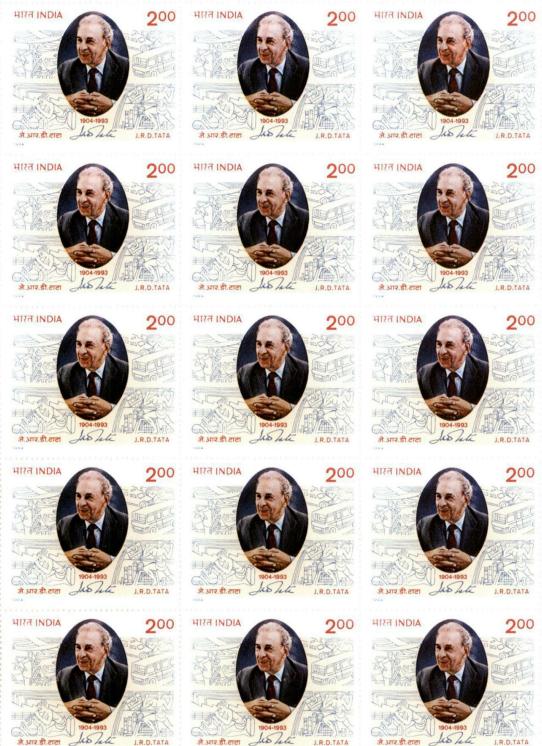
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[www.tata.com](http://www.tata.com)



Stamps issued on JRD's first death anniversary in 1994

Fédération Aéronautique Internationale.  
British Empire.

We the undersigned,  
recognised by the  
F. A. I. as the  
sporting authority  
in the British Empire  
certify that

Nous soussignés,  
pouvoir sportif  
reconnue par la  
F. A. I pour l'  
Empire Britannique  
certifions que

M. Jehangir R. D. Tata

Born at Paris on the 29-7-1904

having fulfilled all  
the conditions stipulated  
by the F. A. I. has  
been granted an

AVIATOR'S CERTIFICATE.

ayant rempli toutes  
les conditions  
imposées par la  
F.A.I a été breveté

PILOTE - AVIAUTEUR.

On behalf of

THE ROYAL AERO CLUB  
THE AERO CLUB OF INDIA & BURMA.  
ASSOCIATED ROYAL AERO CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Victor Savory Chairman.

P. R. Ruhe Secretary.

Date Feb: 10<sup>th</sup> 1929 No. 1



Bakhtiar K. Dadabhoy was educated at Hindu College, Delhi University, and the Delhi School of Economics. A Mumbai based civil servant, he is the author of *A Dictionary of Dates* and *A Book of Cricket Days*.

*Rupa & Co*

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