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EDITORIAL

## Icons of Industry and Philanthropy: The Tata Centenaries

*This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth; to set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer.... the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren.*

—Andrew Carnegie  
quoted by Frank Harris in  
*Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata*  
Blackie, London, 1958, p. xi

*His sturdy sense of character prevented him from fawning on any man however great, for he himself was great in his own way, greater than most people realized. He sought no honour and he claimed no privilege; but the advancement of India and her myriad peoples, was with him an abiding passion.*

—Obituary of J. N. Tata  
*Times of India*, May 1904  
quoted by R. M. Lala in  
*Beyond the Last Blue Mountain*  
Viking, India, 1992, p. 7

*I am convinced that of all the big problems that face India today, nothing is more important than the development of scientific research, both pure and applied, and scientific method. This is indeed the basis and foundation of all other work.*

—Jawaharlal Nehru  
21 November 1945

The development of science and technology in India over the last fifty seven years since Independence, has been based on Jawaharlal Nehru's unswerving faith in the importance of science and scientific institutions for national progress. Nehru's commitment to science has been shared by many successive governments. India's large network of laboratories and institutes has grown steadily over the past half a century. But two of the jewels in the

crown of Indian science, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai do not trace their origins to governmental initiatives; they were conceived by individuals and midwifed into existence by acts of private philanthropy. Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata (J. N. Tata) conceived of a 'University or Institute of Research' in a plan made public in September 1898. His biographer, Frank Harris notes that J. N. Tata drew his inspiration when Lord Reay, the Governor of Bombay speaking (in 1889) as the Chancellor of the University, pointed out that 'India was at the parting of the ways; higher education could no longer develop if the universities remained purely examining bodies'. Lord Reay exhorted his audience: 'It is only by the combined efforts of the wisest men in England, of the wisest men in India, that we can hope to establish in this old home of learning, real universities which will give a fresh impulse to learning, to research, to criticism, which will inspire reverence and impart strength and self reliance to future generations of our and your countrymen' (Harris, p. 116). Twenty years after J. N. Tata began to think about an institution for scientific research, the IISc was formally born on 27 May 1909, when Lord Minto as the Viceroy of India signed the Vesting Order. Its founder, J. N. Tata had died a few years earlier, on 19 May 1904. Seventy days after J. N. Tata's death, one of his most distinguished successors was born, Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhai Tata (J. R. D. Tata). About four decades later, Homi Bhabha would approach J. R. D. Tata with the idea of establishing an Institute for Fundamental Research. In a remarkably short time the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust had accepted the proposal for establishing an institute focusing on 'mathematics and physics (including nuclear physics)'. J. R. D. Tata's biographer, R. M. Lala, notes that the approval came in April 1945, 'four months before the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the world woke up to the power of atomic energy' (Lala, p. 302). This year, 2004, we mark the centenaries of two of India's greatest sons; the centenary of Jamsetji Tata's passing and the centenary of J. R. D. Tata's birth.

By all accounts J. N. Tata was a remarkable man. He founded the industrial empire of the Tatas. Beginning in the area of 'cotton spinning and general trading' Jamsetji

laid the foundation of an industry that was to provide India with steel and hydroelectric power, catalysing the industrialization of this country. He built the Taj Mahal Hotel in India in the dying years of the 19th century; a symbol of Bombay's rise as India's business capital. Alongside was to be erected many years later, that symbol of imperial grandeur, the Gateway of India. Today, the monument built to commemorate the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to India in 1911, for the Grand Durbar, and Jamsetji's hotel are tourist attractions at the waterfront; the former a symbol of a colonial past, the latter a testimony to an emerging vision of India's future. To view Jamsetji's contributions in perspective we must remember that he announced his scheme for a 'University or Institute of Research' in September 1898 at a time

ver set on the British Empire'. Gandhi had not returned to India from South Africa and many years were to pass before he was proclaimed Mahatma; Nehru was a child; self determination and independence were the dreams of very few public men. Philanthropy as a means of promoting higher education and research was a concept, novel even in the United States. Andrew Carnegie's famous endowment of \$1 million 'five percent gold bonds' to set up a 'Technical School' in Pittsburgh, now the Carnegie-Mellon University, was made in 1900. Jamsetji Tata's offer of Rs 30 lakhs (£ 200,000) in 1898 was princely by any standard. The Indian Institute of Science would take another eleven years of gestation before it was born in Bangalore, aided by the generous donation of 300 acres of land by the Maharajah of Mysore. The British government of the day under Lord Curzon was slow, almost deliberate, in its treatment of Jamsetji's offer; he died in 1904 unaware that his vision for science in India would indeed be fulfilled. The Council of IISc erected a monument to its founder in 1916, facing the handsome building that now is a symbol of the Institute's history. I have walked past Jamsetji's statue on innumerable occasions over the past thirty years, scarcely noticing the details of the monument. In researching for this essay I came across a description in Frank Harris' biography of J. N. Tata first published in 1925: 'Near the main entrance stands a noble monument, the work of Mr Gilbert Bayes. One relief contains the figure of Jove, with his thunderbolts to typify electricity, and Vulcan with his anvil ready for steel; in the other Minerva holds a distaff covered with flax, and Calliope represents research. A bronze rail has as its centre a lamp of learning, flanked by dolphins to symbolize the founder's travels. Abundance at one side, and Knowledge at the other, support the centre shaft. At its summit is a bronze statue of the benefactor, and at its feet is an inscription, which will serve to remind future generations of the generosity of Jamsetji Tata, and the persistence with which he worked for the welfare of India' (Harris, pp. 144 145).

The Tata empire was shepherded through much of the 20th century by another remarkable individual, J. R. D.

Tata. From 1938 to 1991, he presided with remarkable success, over a growing conglomeration of enterprises. This period spanned the movement to freedom, nearly four decades of socialism and government controls over private industry, to the dawn of the new era of a liberalized economy. He ushered, in the most romantic fashion, the aviation industry into India. The Tata Aviation Service, inaugurated in September 1932, would become the seed for the growth of Air India in the years to come. In his long innings at the helm of the Tata empire, J. R. D. Tata and his chosen colleagues carefully built upon the tradition of philanthropy set by Jamsetji and his son Dorabji. He played a key role in guiding Homi Bhabha towards the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust in 1944. The establishment of TIFR allowed Bhabha to recruit a nucleus of physicists and engineers, who would eventually build the Atomic Energy Establishment at Trombay, in the 1950s. Bhabha himself worked at IISc before moving to set up TIFR. The future leaders of many national programmes would emerge from these institutions. J. R. D. Tata was highly honoured by successive governments in India, receiving the Bharat Ratna in 1992, a year before his death, after a rich and rewarding life. J. R. D. Tata moved with the most powerful and influential politicians and leaders of his day. But in his own assessment 'the most outstanding of the distinguished men I have known was, undoubtedly, Homi Bhabha'. He noted that Bhabha was 'one of those who made me believe that some men in human history are born with the stamp of predestination on them which leads them to accomplishments beyond ordinary human capabilities' (*Keynote*, J. R. D. Tata, Tata Press, Bombay, 1986, p. xv). In many ways J. R. D. Tata's unflinching confidence in Bhabha's proposals set the stage for building a pillar of science in independent India.

Science in India owes a great debt to its benefactors, who persuaded colonial governments to permit and support institutions for research. In the history of science in India two events must stand out; the founding of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science in Calcutta in 1876 by Mahendralal Sircar and Fr. Lafont and the conception of the IISc in 1898 by Jamsetji Tata. In marking the Tata centenaries, we might do well to note that both IISc and TIFR have evolved from the very beginning in a manner in which private philanthropy and public support worked in concert for the benefit of institutional growth.

Anniversaries are a time of remembrance. On these occasions the exhortation 'Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us' (Ecclesiasticus 44) might be appropriate. In thinking of Jamsetji Tata and private philanthropy, Andrew Carnegie's simple assertion, 'To die rich is to die disgraced', may be fitting.

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