



Sands of Time

Newsletter of Tata Central Archives

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REMEMBERING J. J. BHABHA

Jamshed Jehangir Bhabha was born on August 21, 1914.

Mr. Bhabha belonged to an illustrious family with a long tradition of learning and service to the country. His paternal aunt was Meherbai, Sir Dorab Tata's wife.

Jamshed attended the Cathedral School in Bombay and in 1930, passed the Cambridge School Leaving Examination with Distinction. In 1931, he passed the Cambridge High School Examination with Distinction standing First in French in the British Empire Overseas.

A Cambridge graduate with a Historical Tripos, Jamshed Bhabha was due to take the Bar Finals at Lincoln's Inn, London, when the outbreak of hostilities interrupted his studies and brought him back to India in 1939.

He joined Tata Steel the following year and became Assistant Chief Town Administrator at Jamshedpur in 1941.

Jamshed was appointed Personal Assistant to the Chairman, J. R. D. Tata in 1942, and thus began a close professional association with J. R. D. Tata.

Jamshed Bhabha married Betty Irene in 1946.

He was Chairman and Director of several Tata Companies and Managing Trustee of the J. N. Tata Endowment, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Jamsetji Tata Trust, J. R. D. Tata Trust and the Lady Tata Memorial Trusts.



*Jamshed Jehangir Bhabha
1914 - 2007*

His active involvement in the Tata Group was evident all the way from heavy industries, through publishing, personnel management, power generation, engineering, social sciences and trade fairs to philanthropy.

In 1969, he launched his most recent and ambitious single venture- the National Centre for the Performing Arts, a multi-crore project to serve the national purpose of protecting, preserving and developing India's immensely rich legacy in the arts and culture.

He was also a Trustee of the Homi Bhabha Memorial Trust which was established on the premature demise of his brother, Dr. Homi Bhabha, to provide scholarships for young Indians of truly outstanding merit for further studies and research in their respective fields.

Despite the pressing preoccupation with several branches of industry, Jamshed was equally involved in various public causes.

Jamshed Bhabha played a pivotal role in the setting up of the Tata Central Archives.

Dr. Bhabha passed away on May 30, 2007.

In this Issue

REMEMBERING J. J. BHABHA	1
FROM THE ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS	2
CAREER GIRL	3
DIVIDEND WARRANTS	6
A UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL GIFT	6
MEMOIRS OF OLD SAKCHI	7

“Photographs are precious memories . . . A visual evidence of place and time and relationships...” *Tata Central Archives presents a visual representation of the precious memories of Dr. J. J. Bhabha on Page 2.*

FROM THE ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

THE BHABHA FAMILY



Jehangir and Meherbai with their two children Homi (left) and Jamshed (right).



Jamshed and wife Betty Irene.



The Bhabha Family (Seated L to R) Hormusji Bhabha and wife, their son Jehangir. Standing (L to R) daughter Meherbai, her husband Sir Dorabji Tata, and Jehangir's wife Meherbai.



Jamshed and his wife Betty Irene

VISIT TO TATA CENTRAL ARCHIVES



CAREER GIRL

So, you working women think you're pretty smart? But what would you say of a girl who did precisely that, in 1905?

In the early 1900's, women were very much meant to stay in the house, both here and in the West. But a slim, pint-sized Indian girl, Behroze J. M. Cursetjee, thought otherwise.

Born in Bombay, in a middle class Parsi family, she travelled widely over the province with her father who was a government servant. As a child, she lived in Thana. In 1890, she came to visit the new Victoria Terminus Station and the much talked of Esplanade House – the residence of Jamsetji Tata. The only person she met in the house was Jamsetji's wife, Hirabai. "She was one of the most simple, lovable women.", Behroze remembers, and how "she pulled out her bunch of keys from her sari and handed it to Maijee, the major domo of the house, to bring downstairs the new diamond bracelet presented to her by her husband. Which woman today, having a diamond bracelet, will give the keys of her safe to a household servant to bring the jewels and exhibit them to the visitors? Hirabai learnt, to put her trust in her servants from the fact that her husband placed implicit trust in those whom he employed."

Behroze Cursetjee's father, was a sportsman and a Cambridge Rowing Blue, a friend of Jamsetji Tata and his sons. Although Jamsetji died in Germany the year before she joined the organisation, Behroze had vivid recollections of the patriarchal old man with the deep, gruff voice and the snow white beard.

"I was always a very naughty child," she laughed. "I ran wild for years, never going to school till I was 13. Then I

caught up quickly and passed my Matric."

In those days girls weren't taught either mathematics or any of the subjects that would have been so useful to her later on.

Then came the day when Behroze fell on hard times, she decided to contribute to the budget. With much misgivings she was allowed to work in her own home, doing the genteel labour of embroidery and fine sewing. But one day a phrenologist read her "bumps" and told her she would definitely take to business life, advising her to study shorthand typing.

An elderly man and his wife taught her privately and taught her so well that she was soon writing 120 words a minute. Thus equipped, she started in on a stenographer's job at Sir Dorabji Tata's residence, at Esplanade House, Bombay.

On September 4, 1905, Behroze was shown into the Library of Esplanade House which had ornate Victorian bookshelves, two big tables at right angles, one where the staff worked, and the other loaded with files, reference books, magazines, maps and charts.

Burjorji Padshah (B.J.P.) sat in the centre of the room, which had a teakwood desk with an old clock. His greetings were cordial as he conducted her to the sofa in the window recess. The dreaded interview was friendly, encouraging. No questions of grades, nor of hours of work, nor duties. "Promotion will depend upon your work... Aiyar, here is Miss Cursetjee, she will join tomorrow, put her in the way."

B. J. P. always "Mr. Padshah" to the staff - not "boss" - an unknown word then. He was "our chief" - a friend radiating



Behroze J. M. Cursetjee.

Miss Cursetjee retired on 6th April, 1947 after nearly forty years of continuous service with the House of Tata. She held a responsible and important post for most of these years with the Tata Iron and Steel Company even before it was registered.

On the occasion of the Centenary Celebrations of TISCO, we remember and salute the spirit of this unique woman.

CAREER GIRL



*Behroze busy at work
in the office.*

friendship without familiarity. His loyalty to Jamsetji generated the same loyalty in his assistants. How vividly Behroze recollected that large room. Gentle Jerbai (Jamsetji's daughter) coming round to complete the touch of friendliness - the cup of tea and biscuits at 4 p.m.

K. S. Aiyar silent but not stern, the embodiment of loyalty. He knew no caste nor creed. Merwanjee Dubash had his desk-cum-safe at one end. He attended to the papers of the Research Institute and to the accounts and insurance of the J. N. Tata Education Scheme scholars. These were the only staff that worked in the Library.

Twenty-three year-old Behroze Cursetjee was paid the then quite handsome salary of Rs. 30.00 per month. When she left Tatas, thirty-eight years later, she was earning a four figure salary as Secretary of The Tata Iron and Steel Company and the years between tell a remarkable story of employer and employee.

Tatas has been a symbol of progress, and no old-fashioned ideas of the inequality of the sexes have ever prevailed in the firm. Today, there are many women holding executive positions in various Tata Companies.

When Behroze Cursetjee joined Tata's, there was only one other woman, employed as a stenographer, in the whole firm.

Behroze was given a table much too high for her in the Library of Esplanade House. Her legs dangled in mid-air and she had a soap box for her feet until someone disapproved and she took down the heaviest volumes from the bookshelves and had them made into a parcel

just the right size for a footstool.

Her typewriter was a prodigiously unwieldy instrument with 16 banks of keys for the lower case, four rows for the upper case and four rows of the figures and symbols!

There was no one to make use of her 120 words a minute shorthand, for in those days no one dictated letters. Even among Americans and British businessmen, it was rare to find one who dictated. She had to sometimes spend hours deciphering some of the cramped handwriting that was given.

There were no fans - not even the old-fashioned punkhas, and ever so often she had to pause and twirl one of those little hand fans. Imagine May and October in Bombay, without any fans.

But the biggest change, in office life since 1905 according to Miss Cursetjee, was the advent of the telephone.

"Oh, what hours of work the telephone saves," she sighed in reminiscence. "Many evenings I had to stay till 10 or 11 at night, putting long, two or three thousand word confidential cables into code to send to England. That was when J. N. Tata's sons were in England trying to raise capital for the Iron and Steel Company, and I had to keep a confidential daily diary and write a full, weekly report to catch the Saturday steamer to England. Just imagine all the work the long-distance telephone would have saved."

There was, of course, no electricity either and, in Navsari Chambers, the Tata offices in Hornby Road, where Behroze was transferred later on, there was not even a separate lavatory for women for the simple reason that women just

"I don't know how we survived so many years thinking of women as a separate chapter. We are not a separate chapter. We are half the book."

Rosario Green,
Mexico's Secretary of
Foreign Relations

CAREER GIRL

weren't expected to work in offices. But, on the other hand, there were compensations. The atmosphere was very intimate and in fact they were like one family group.

Both in Esplanade House and in Navsari Chambers, tea and cakes used to be sent to the staff from Sir Dorabji Tata's own kitchen. They were a small enough firm for everyone to know what everybody else was doing. In that way she got to learn a little of nearly everything that went on, especially about the Iron and Steel Company.

A slim, wiry figure full of nervous energy, Miss Cursetjee described the many times when she felt too discouraged to go on.

When she first joined Tatas, she was just a stenographer and even then she spent most of her time opening and shutting heavy files in the basement and other jobs of a similar nature. After some time she was given more and more work regarding the big iron and steel works. That was just at the time when investigations were going ahead for the steel company and she had to undertake a good deal of research.

With her lack of technical education Behroze had to study in her spare time and finally came a night when she flung herself on her bed and wept with despair. "It's no good," she told her sister, "I'll never make a success of my job. I can't learn all these things."

Her sister was thirteen years younger than Behroze and still at school. She seemed to have given her the right encouragement. Talking of Robert Bruce, she quoted, "The spider up there, defied despair he conquered, and why shouldn't you?"

It had the desired effect and Miss Cursetjee wiped her eyes and decided not to give up just yet.

How she smiled later when she was made Secretary of that enormous organisation TISCO, the largest iron and steel works in the British Empire and the third largest in the world. Little did she imagine in those early years that she would reach such heights.

Speaking at the farewell function of Miss Cursetjee, J. R. D. Tata remarked: "Miss Cursetjee was retiring after nearly forty years of continuous service in one undertaking, which, rare enough even for men, was really a unique record for a woman. She was perhaps the first woman in India to hold a responsible and important post in a business concern - a good augury for the future in a country where women have hitherto been considered capable only of running a household or building up a family. Miss Cursetjee, had seen the Steel Company grow to maturity and strength, not merely from its inception but almost from its conception, for she was already an employee of Tatas before the Company was registered. Mr. Tata went on to say that no great business or organisation could develop and flourish unless it inspired amongst its members a sense of loyalty and a spirit of co-operation, and the Steel Company had undoubtedly been fortunate in having had the benefit of such loyalty and devotion to duty as had been exemplified in the career of Miss Cursetjee."

Behroze had completed nearly forty years of a non-stop progressive career with one firm and would now be away from the firm that was part of her life.

Source: Matheson, Sylvia. Career Girl Number One, (The House of Tata, Diamond Jubilee Editorial Campaign:1947-48)



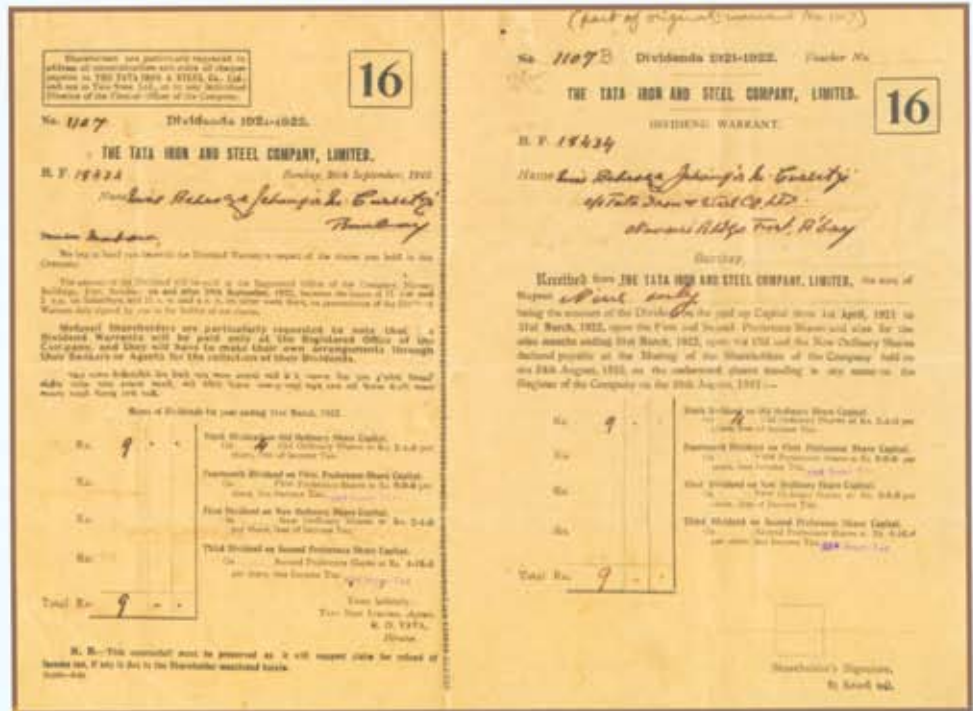
Behroze Cursetjee receiving the long service award for 40 years of service from J. R. D. Tata.

There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men.

Mahatma Gandhi

Copy of the Dividend Warrant No. 1107 issued to Miss Behroze Cursetjee in 1921-22 for holding four ordinary shares of The Tata Iron and Steel Company Limited.

DIVIDEND WARRANTS



Miss Behroze Cursetjee was one of the fortunate people who had bought her shares in 1907 and has been privileged to witness the birth, and the growth of the Tata Iron and Steel Company. The pride to have survived the temptation to sell

off her shares either in the lean years for the meagre returns earned, or for the temporary gain that would have been hers in times when the prices of shares rose sharply.

A UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL GIFT

J. R. D. Tata's letter to Miss Behroze Cursetjee thanking her for the petit point tapestry embroidered on silk obtained from the R. D. Tata Company.

TATA INDUSTRIES LIMITED
 BOMBAY HOUSE, FORT
 BOMBAY 1

August 30, 1955

Dear Miss Cursetjee,

I was deeply touched by your letter of the 26th instant and by the beautiful petit point tapestry which you have sent me on the 48th anniversary of the Steel Company. The fact that the work, involving such an astronomical number of stitches, was done by yourself and embroidered in silk obtained from the R. D. Tata Company forty-five years ago, attaches to it a personal and sentimental value and I shall always treasure it.

years have meant more to me than you can imagine and when I feel weary, depressed or discouraged - which happens not infrequently - I often think that the regard and affection of persons like yourself with whom I have been privileged to work for so many years, more than makes up for such weariness or discouragement.

I was glad to see that you looked as well and strong as ever, and I hope that I shall enjoy your moral support and esteem for as long as I am around. With renewed thanks and warm wishes,

Yours very sincerely,

J. R. D. Tata



Your friendship and loyalty all these

MEMOIRS OF OLD SAKCHI

It is now over 35 years since I first came to Sakchi, a little-known village lying snugly amidst sylvan surroundings, and it would be interesting to record a few impressions of those pioneering days. Leaving Nagpur on the 6th February 1908, with Mr. C. M. Weld, and Mr. Axel Sahlin of Julian Kennedy, Sahlin & Co., Construction Engineers to the Tata Iron & Steel Co. Ltd., and Mr. W. O. Renkin, Resident Engineer, I arrived at Chakradharpur Railway Station the next day. The journey had to be broken there, as Kalimati (now Tatanagar) was then a mere Flag Station at which no passenger or mail trains halted. After two hours' wait at Chakradharpur, Mr. Tiwari, Receiving Officer of the Tata Iron & Steel Co. Ltd., put us in the brake van of a Goods train which reached Kalimati Station a few hours later. No cars, buses or tongas plied and the 3-mile stretch to Camp had to be done by bullock cart and on elephant. The luggage was loaded into bullock carts and the passengers mounted on elephants. After a leisurely crawl, we were in sight of the Sakchi Camp, consisting of a few tents and a large thatch bamboo hutting used as the Officers' dining hall. We were met at the Camp by Mr. Wilcox, Office Manager, who showed us to our various quarters. It took us just one day to settle down. By the following morning, we found ourselves knee deep in work with characteristic American hustle. Drawings and charts were quickly scanned and a plan of operations was drawn up.

Clearing the Jungle

Clearing the jungle and road-making were our first concern so that transport facilities could be made available. Gangs of labourers, each under a supervisor, were engaged, each gang being allotted a certain section, to be finished within a scheduled time. Town planning, water

supply and sanitary arrangements were under way weather charts were prepared; water analysis was carried out; worksite grading, layouts of plants and buildings, railway tracks, etc., were taken in hand; and a large army of contractors and workmen were engaged to build the giant steel works and the residential town around it. All this was accomplished in the short space of a year. Once the industrial undertaking was started, the wild animals, which infested the place, gradually vanished into the interior and the once-small and obscure village of Sakchi soon became a centre of great activity.

Working Hours in the Old Days

In those hectic days, we had plenty of work and plenty of fun. Working hours were not regulated by Factory Acts. Outdoor workers commenced field work at dawn and broke up for lunch at noon; from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. they were again at their posts. Office work was carried on in the evening between the hours of 6 and 10. Even after this late hour, some of our boys had enough energy in them to spend a few more hours in amusement. In the beginning, we had an epidemic of cholera, but it was soon brought under control. Pure drinking water was provided and the entire area disinfected. For two weeks, however, our job was practically that of the undertakers. We had to search for dead bodies left lying all over the place and bury them. Gruesome and nauseating as this work was, it was all part of the game, and within a short time, the epidemic was effectively staved off. It was not an uncommon sight then to find people all in a flutter because a snake had suddenly reared its head from under a carpet within the tents. I well remember an occasion when in Mr. Wilcox's office, a cobra made its appearance whilst Mr. M. S. Kotwal was busy explaining the intricacies of



Road Rollers ready to go into operation — Sakchi, 1909.

A convoy of bullock carts — Sakchi, 1911.



MEMOIRS OF OLD SAKCHI



The Sakchi market.

accountancy to Mr. Wilcox. Mr. Kotwal's sharp eyes were the first to spot the reptile and all at once he reached out for his umbrella. Everybody expected the gallant Mr. Kotwal to deal a death blow to the tiny welcome visitor, but surprisingly enough he hurriedly tucked the umbrella under his arm and made a beeline for his own tent as fast as his legs could carry him, leaving the party in dismay. It was only when the "all clear" was sounded that Mr. Kotwal was induced to leave his tent.

No Communal Differences

Water for drinking and bathing purposes had to be brought from the Subernarekha, for which a buffalo was employed. When the supplies came, it was a case of "first come, first served." No queues were formed or ration cards issued; might was right, and devil take the hindmost. It was an amusing spectacle of a morning – that of people showing themselves at the office with unwashed faces and unkept hair, just as though they had been kicked out of bed in a rare hurry. In spite of a few frayed tempers, everything went on well at the Camp, and a spirit of comradeship sprang up amongst the various classes and types of people, unifying them into one vast brotherhood. Bengalis, Anglo-Indians, Parsis, Maharashtra's - Muslims and Hindus fraternised with one another, all distinctions of caste, creed or colour having merged in a common endeavour to build a great industry. Gradually, the tiny jungle-covered tongue of land called "Sakchi" grew into a busy industrial colony. Well-laid-out roads, attractive bungalows, tall chimneys and roaring furnaces made their appearance and a

sleepy little village in Bihar took its place on the steel map of India. Today, after 35 years, when we can claim to be the largest single steel-producing unit in the British empire, we cannot but feel proud of the noble hand - of peoples headed by that soaring visionary and sober realist, J. N. Tata, who by sweat and toil, have built up this great national enterprise.

Source: Karani, *Jal F. Memoirs of Old Sakchi*, (Tisco Review: March 1945).

WAYS TO GIVE



The Tata Central Archives is built on contributions from the Group companies. We are the proud guardians of thousands of documents, carefully preserved paintings and several such collections.

We encourage your involvement in our various project.

To discover how your Company can get involved with the Tata Central Archives,

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