



# Sands of Time

Newsletter of Tata Central Archives

Volume III, Issue 3

July 2004

## Everlasting Memories



*"We have continued to enjoy prosperity even with adverse times to fight against. Our relations with all concerned are the most friendly. We have maintained the same character for straight forward dealing with our constituents and customers. Our productions have confirmed to be of the same high quality and therefore command the best reputation... I mention these facts only to point out with honest and straight forward principles, close and careful attention to details and ability to take advantage of favourable opportunities and circumstances, there is scope for success."*

**Jamsetji Tata**  
July 5, 1901

This year the House of Tata is celebrating the birth centenaries of J. R. D. Tata and Naval H. Tata. It is also observing the death centenary of Jamsetji Tata, Founder of the House of Tata.

The history of the House of Tata is a fascinating world that many wish to explore and we at the Tata Central Archives find it irresistible not to disseminate information to them. Building a better future needs secure foundations. It is our tribute to those individuals who have lived before us and have provided these foundations.

It is now our task to make sure that their lives continue to have a meaning by conserving their legacy and passing it on to the next generations which can be used to enhance the quality of life for all. It is the endeavour of the young and old to emulate the leadership qualities of

*Continued on Page 2*



### *Inside this issue:*

**Everlasting  
Memories** 1

**A Day To  
Remember** 2

**The Unknown 3**  
**Tata**

**Grateful 6**  
**Buggattiwallahi**

**Living A 7**  
**Little**  
**Dangerously**

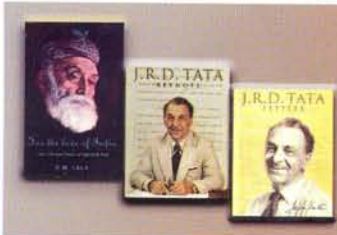
**Mystery 8**  
**Woman**

*We're on the Web!*

<http://www.tatacentralarchives.com>



## Everlasting Memories



Publications in which records from the Archives have been published.

these successful men as they belonged to the Nation as much as to Tata's.

During the course of the past few months, journalists from the print and visual media, authors, publishers, research scholars, sculptors, etc. have left no stone unturned to access the records of these great leaders at the Tata Archives.



Over 1500 photographic images and 700 documents and numerous speeches of these three personalities have been disseminated

in the past three months alone. This is in addition to the three hundred odd letters which were culled out from the J. R. D. Tata collection in the Archives for publication in a book which is specially brought out on the occasion.



## A Day To Remember

**"So far we have scratched the surface of this great land. Is it not time that all of us should... do something within our individual, humble spheres to raise metaphorically two blades of corn where one grows; produce out of the fullness of our own land, and with our own labours... something that will raise the comfort and the standard of the people; something for which, those who come after us in life will be happier, healthier and more prosperous than we are today."**

**Sir D. J. Tata  
November 7, 1918**

I entered the lift breathless. After what must have been an unintended attempt at the world walking record, and said to the liftman: "Fourth floor, — zara jaldi!"

It was 9.20 in the morning and, where I work, the first three-quarters of an hour are the most tension-packed and ulcer-laden moments of the whole working day. The brass-hats spend these forty-five minutes wearing themselves to a frazzle, drafting notes, drawing up charts, compiling analyses—in short, preparing themselves in every possible manner to answer questions, anticipated and otherwise, from the operating chief who would hand down the decisions for the day.

The liftman put his head out reflectively, jerked himself suddenly to life, straightened his uniform, fixed the top button of his coat and, standing ramrod—straight, announced. "Saab aha hai!"

Besides me, there were two Bombay-Housemen and a rather impressive looking gentleman in a brown suit. Each one of us spent the next few moments privately speculating on the identity of the 'saab'.

It wasn't long before the Chairman entered, taking us in as he stepped in and smiling his greetings. I froze in whatever attitude the moment found me—that is except for my knees which began a fast jig—and prepared for the longest elevator ride of my life.

As the lift rose I caught Mr. Brownsuit looking fixedly at the Chairman. He appeared to be struggling with a comprehension falling just short of conviction, and I knew at once that he was a stranger in the House. As we neared the second floor, unable to contain his curiosity any longer, he broke out with: "Sir, you look like Mr. J. R. D. Tata. Am I right?"

Amused more than surprised, the Chairman gave out a puckish smile, examined himself in the mirror as if to see whether the gentleman was right in his conjecture, and replied: "Do I really? I wonder why!"

This put Mr. Brownsuit in a state of uncertainty, but not for long. Coming on strong with conviction, he declared: "Sir, you ARE Mr. Tata. I am sure!"

Taking this with his characteristic grace and modesty, the Chairman conceded: "Well... yes, I happen to be—by coincidence!"

Mr. Brownsuit was visibly moved and, touching the sleeve of the Chairman's jacket, said: "I have been blessed, Sir. May God grant you long life!"

The Chairman thanked the gentleman, who got out on the third floor. The Stigler whispered up to the fourth, my knees stopped their morse and awe yielded to chest-swelling pride and a sense of belonging.

S. Guru Bhaskara  
Reproduced from the Tatasphere, 1974



## The Unknown Tata

*Excerpts from an oral history recording of J. R. D. Tata with M. V. Kamath in December 1986.*

*These excerpts seek to discover the unknown Tata. We shall begin with his recollection of his parents in this issue and in the course of the next few issues of the newsletter his childhood, his education in India, Europe and Japan, his final return to India, and his induction into Tata Steel will be reproduced.*

**MVK:** To start with, Sir, would you tell us about your genealogy and how you are related to Jamsetji Tata.

**JRD:** I am related to Jamsetji Tata by being the son of my father R. D. Tata, who was a young cousin of Jamsetji. And, although, Jamsetji Tata had two sons of his own who were in the business with him, evidently, Jamsetji thought highly of my father because he made him an equal partner in the business of Tata Sons in those days. That's all I really know from memory at this moment.

**MVK:** Sir, where was your father born and have you any memories of your paternal grandparents?

**JRD:** Not on his side. I do not remember any relatives or parents of my father. He was born in Navsari from a poor family and as far as I know he was an adopted son. Among the Parsis - one of the communities in India - it is quite a common practice for a family if it does not have a son, or if they would like to help out some youngster who happens to be particularly bright or is directly related, to adopt him. So, as far as I know, my father was himself an adopted son, probably because his father had died or he was an orphan.

**MVK:** Where was he educated, Sir?

**JRD:** In the beginning he must have been educated in Navsari, and then he was educated in Bombay.

**MVK:** Sir, I understand that your father had married young to someone from the Banaji family and that she died very early. Do you have any memories of that?

**JRD:** None at all because it was many many years before my birth.

**MVK:** Sir, your father was remarried in 1902 when he was about 46, to a young French girl he got to know in Paris. How did it begin?

**JRD:** My father for some reason that is not recorded, but my surmise is that on some subject or other of the firm, he disagreed with the head of the firm, Sir Dorab Tata, and he decided to do business outside Bombay. At an earlier period he had been in Japan, in Osaka. He had also been in Shanghai. Tatas were traders. Father got a liking for gems, and on this occasion he decided that he would like to go to Paris. So he established himself in Paris, and once he was there he decided that he would like to learn to speak French.

He had some Indian friends try and find him someone who would teach him French. It must have been in 1899 or 1900. So, the friends recommended a French lady called Madame Briere, of a fairly high middle class family of artists and professors - that kind of people - and who was separated from her husband. She had a daughter. Her daughter had been born in 1880 - that was my mother. Evidently, my father who by that time was 44 years old, must have fallen in love with this lady, this very talented young lady, and proposed. It must have created a bit of a sensation and evidently my grandmother who was a very intelligent woman, and although it must have seemed extraordinary for her to have a young daughter, married to someone from such an exotic and strange country like India, who did not believe in the same God, but evidently she agreed.



J. R. D. Tata.



R. D. Tata (centre) with Sooni and Sylla (right) and J. R. D. and Madame Briere (Left).



R. D. Tata with his beautiful wife, Sooni.



## The Unknown Tata

*Continued from Page 3*



**Sooni Tata.**

They got married in 1902. My mother, unfortunately, during the World War I, served as a voluntary helper in an American Hospital in Paris for the wounded of those days. In fact, during the Battle of the Marne, which was quite near Paris, and as we know during those days, infantry was moored down – quite a lot of wounded coming to Paris – so she worked there and in the course of that she seems to have got tuberculosis which ultimately ended her life many years later, in 1923, still a young woman.

In those 21 years she produced five children. These years were rather exciting years because World War I came along, and in any case we used to live partly in France and partly in India. So every two years my family – not my father – led by my mother, used to change homes and each time to a new home.



**Sooni with her five children  
(from left) Rodabeh, J. R. D.,  
Sooni, Jimmy, Sylla and Darab.**

My father did not have money, he was rather a spendthrift and so he earned well. There were no taxes, in those days. But he spent most of what he earned. He never had a home of his own until right at the end of my mother's life he built a house for her in Bombay, but she died in 1923 before it was completed.

**MVK:** *Your grandmother must have been a very extraordinary person. Can you tell us more about her.*

**JRD:** She was a formidable lady. She had very strong likes and dislikes and whose pet hate was of course, Germans, because she went through three wars against the Germans strangely enough, in the last war, by which time in 1940, she was already 90 years old. By that time probably her mind wandered at times. I think the old lady fell in love with (the idea) Marshal Petan. Who was himself was about 90 and a great hero of France. In the World War, 1914-1918, Marshal Petan was a great hero of the French army. Therefore, Marshal Petan could do no

wrong and when he surrendered to the Germans - she decided that there must be good reason and the reason she found for herself was that it was the fault with the British and that the British wanted to capture the colonies of France, some silly idea like that. So, she died no longer anti German. But otherwise during her lifetime she was really a very difficult person.

**MVK:** *How did she treat you? How were your relations with her?*

**JRD:** She was very, very fond of her grandchildren, particularly my younger brother who died recently (Darab). She was a very interesting and a very capable woman. Highly educated who really was responsible for the high standards of education of my mother.

**MVK:** *She accepted a stranger, a Parsi from outside required a great deal of adjustment.*

**JRD:** Well I don't think she was consulted. My mother was very independent and forthcoming and she decided if father wanted her to become a Parsi she would become a Parsi. It created a storm in India, and there was a long drawn battle in courts about whether a non born Zoroastrian can become a Zoroastrian. In the end father both won and lost the case.

**MVK:** *Was she allowed to go into the temple?*

**JRD:** No she was not allowed, but we were.

**MVK:** *What are your early memories of your mother?*

**JRD:** Wonderful memories of great love, and admiration. She was first of all a beautiful woman, an extraordinarily beautiful woman. A blonde with golden hair. Also amongst the talents of being a wonderful wife and mother, she also had an ability to carte up to five



**Sooni Tata.**

*Continued on Page 5*



## The Unknown Tata

Continued from Page 4

children from one place to another, finding homes and ruling the family with love and a very great efficiency. She had a wonderful voice. She used to sing in amateur performances.

**MVK :** *When she used to come to India how did she adjust to the food, climate, water, etc. did she at any time have any difficulties?*

**JRD:** She wrote detailed letters to her mother weekly. They were in extreme detail about what was happening and extraordinarily adaptable. After all coming to Navsari, seeing my father drink toddy from an earthen pot, walking about barefooted, having the kind of relationship with the servants. My father had an old servant who had brought him up and considered his rights to punish my father later on. They used to sometimes be a little physical and rough with each other. That old servant was really like a member of the family and my mother's first experience of relationship between master and servant in India was when she found that my father used to pick up his slippers and spank the old man on the bottom even with his hand. Until he found one day that the old man had put a pin cushion with a pin sticking out on his bottom. That was the kind of relationship that they had. At first my mother was astounded, then greatly amused. First of all they never had servants in France in those days. She got on extremely well with the local habits with Parsis. She spoke Gujarati and English – not so well.

**MVK:** *Was it an Indian style of living in those days. such as sitting on the floor?*

**JRD:** Since my father had married a European lady he saw to it that he had the kind of furnishings and life that she was used to. But there was no problem about putting a mattress on the floor when in Navsari and sleeping on it. She was a very adjusting lady.

**MVK:** *What did you inherit from her by way of qualities?*

**JRD:** I think love of poetry, love of music. Unfortunately she died when I was very young. She died in 1923 in France. I was there at the time of her death. She had been ill back and forth until the last year she was quite ill in France. She died in 1923 when I was 19 years old. There was a time when I was away in the French Army and for a year in England. So I always regretted that I did not spend more time with her and my father.

**MVK:** *Did you miss her a great deal when she died?*

**JRD:** Yes and also my father. He died in 1926 when I was 22.... So I lost both my parents very near each other.

**MVK:** *What kind of relationship did you have with your father?*

**JRD:** Unfortunately not close enough because I guess he was a much older man. He was very busy and worried about Tatas and Tata Steel and so he used to work long hours. Go to office early come back late and although we were very fond, and I greatly admired him, he did not have time for a really close and leisurely relationship. Whenever we were in Europe father would appear for a month and then come back to India. We were as close as could be but not in practice we never interfaced as much as we would have liked to.

**MVK:** *What you remember best about him?*

**JRD:** A view about one's father and a wonderful father that he was always subjective. To me, he was a man who saved the Tata and Steel Company. He was a workaholic only because the work needed him. So it deprived him of his life with his wife and his children and so he spent far less time with his family than he would have liked.



Sooni Tata.



Sooni Tata.



Ratanji Dadabhai Tata or R. D. - as he was called.

Continued in the next issue



## Grateful Bugattiwallah

*Excerpts from a letter written by J.R.D. to his father R.D. thanking him for giving him the money to buy a Bugatti.*

*A transcript of these excerpts are also reproduced for the benefit of the readers.*



Hotel Graziella

Juan les

25 Feb.

Dear Papa,

First of all excuse me please for writing to you with a pencil, but my fountain pen is not working for the moment and as I am in pyjamas I must perforce stay in here and use a pencil as I intend finishing this letter. Tomorrow morning I am afraid it will be the same then.

Papa, Papa, thank you ! Thank you so much for your wire which gave me the most acutely joyful shock in my life ! It made me all the more happy as I had resigned myself to not having a Bugatti now. So imagine what I felt, when on my arrival here I found the following wire : "from Bombay buy Bugatti", I couldn't believe my eyes and I think I was hopelessly fooled that evening and night. I jumped about and danced like a madman. I did not want to lose a single moment and didn't know what to do ! I thought of phoning up to Paris but who to ? It was a Saturday. I thought even among other things of taking the first train back myself. I must have schemed and schemed and dreamt of my dream car very late in the night !

Next morning, that is Sunday I was afraid to go and see on my table whether that wire had not been a child of my overheated mind or imagination. Thank God no ! So I sat down and wrote four wires and one letter. One wire to Bugatti asking them to keep for me the car I had seen before leaving if it was not sold yet. I sent the other wire to Max who having been with me in all my negotiations with Bugatti knew all about the question. The letter was also to him, asking him to get me a car as soon as possible and to wire to me when it would be ready.

Day before yesterday I got his reply saying that the car would be ready 11 days later. He phoned me up the following day asking for details. Incidentally I heard him as if he was only a few feet away.

He asked me to send 3000Fr for a deposit. I understand that these people won't take a chance this time ! Well, the position is this now, that I am writing about a letter a day to Max, that my impatience is almost feverish, and that most of all my heart is swollen with gratitude and thanks for you. I don't know what made you so happily change your mind and say yes, but I suppose it was my letter which persuaded you that swank was not the reason I wanted the Bugatti for. Anyway you have made me absurdly glad and happy. You wouldn't be sorry if you knew how much !

The car will be ready probably Thursday next. So I will leave here Wednesday use the car in or around Paris for three days to run it in and get used to it & will start back for Juan les Pius on Sunday, Hurrah !

Meanwhile, after spending four days here I have realised how useful a car is here. For trams or autocars are so slow & irregular to go about the coast, Cannes Antibes, Lice etc. The Bugatti will be paradise... I will not say anymore about the Bugatti as your telegram has settled all about that & so splendidly too ! You have actually ordered me to buy it !

It is on my arrival back at the hotel that I found that blessed telegram OO! Lala ! Thank you again... ! Of course, Papa 21000Fr are more than enough for 3 months. You have allowed me 3000Fr a month ! It is true that I will probably overreach that mark during my stay here. But after when I am back in the army I will spend much less. But these 21000Fr are going to be eaten up by the Bugatti and I hope you have arranged to send me more. 5000Fr more for the Bugatti & a few thousand more for living on.

Today is Darab's birthday. I have sent yesterday a wire to wish him and Jimmy many happy returns of the day, also thanking you a 1000000 times for the car.

I will stop now, again excusing myself for using a pencil. Good bye, Papa dear, I hope you are all very well & happy, as happy as I am. Thanking you again with all my heart, I send you all my most loving kisses.

*Yours grateful Bugattiwallah  
J.R.D.*



## Living A Little Dangerously

All his life JRD was keen on physical fitness.

Way back in 1921 in a letter to his father he said "Now in games and sports I have taken up boxing (twice a week) and football. And perhaps I will take up golf too. Of course when the season will come, football will be replaced by tennis. The thing I am most keen on is boxing, and the teacher, Sergeant Button, said I would be very fast. That is a main point in boxing. And I will owe it to my year and half of fencing. As for fencing, I think I will have to give it up here, because there isn't any good professor. And I would rather console myself with the thought of boxing..."

R. D. Tata's reply was equally amusing: "...don't have your beautiful big nose broken..." Prompt came the reply from J. R. D.: "I am playing a lot of games here: football, hockey and boxing (by the way my nose is not yet broken) and I have played this afternoon in football with our team against the Southwold reserves."

In 1925 while J. R. D. was in the French Regiment, he wrote to his father: "A friend of mine here who entered the army at the same time as I did has brought boxing gloves and we have rounds now and then which are far from being murderous! But my nose being eternally in advance of the rest of my body, I managed to get it scrapped properly! However, as we slap each other rather than hit, it was only scrapped by the strings that lace the interiors of the glove..."

J. R. D. Tata played tennis and especially golf till his mid-seventies. He was proud he took up skiing at forty, an age when people normally retire from the sport,



and continued to ski until he was eighty-four years old.



The exercise equipment which was in J. R. D. Tata's residence in Mumbai and is now on display in the Archives in Pune.

J. R. D. took the trouble to exercise until 1987. "Not only do I take fairly strenuous physical exercise every day

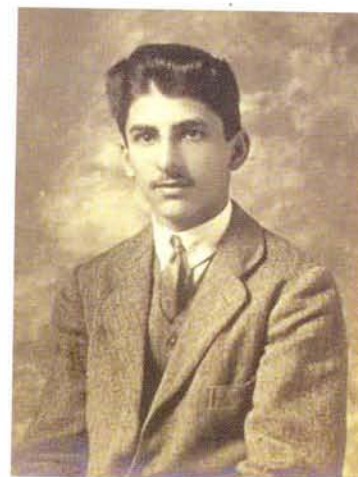
in my house, but also continue to indulge every year in downhill skiing in Europe which, combined with the altitude and consequent lower oxygen content of the air, is quite a rigorous sport.



"I even tried my hand at hang-gliding on skis last winter! I drive high speed cars every year in Europe — a much more risky occupation than flying a plane." His motivation was to keep fit for skiing till he fell off a ski cable car — "a stupid accident" he called it — and suffered a hairline fracture.

"Friends who tell me it is ridiculous and foolhardy for an octogenarian to ski, fly a plane or drive fast cars, do not understand the thrill and sense of self-fulfilment obtained from living a little dangerously."

J. R. D. Tata



"Although I have reached an age at which most men are somewhat or seriously diminished physically, I have, as you know, maintained myself in a state of health and physical capability of a much younger man."

J. R. D. Tata



## Mystery Woman



A view of the J. R. D. Tata's office in Bombay House which has been replicated at the Tata Central Archives, Pune.

For any further information, please contact :

Mr. H. Raghunath  
Archivist  
Tata Central Archives, TMTC Campus  
I, Mangaldas Road, Pune 411 001  
Maharashtra, India  
Phone: 91+20+4122019  
Fax: 91+20+4002704  
Email: tca@tata.com

We're on the Web!

<http://www.tatacentralarchives.com>



The painting of a wine-serving maid which is in J. R. D. Tata's office.

**Very often visitors to J. R. D. Tata's office - which has been replicated at the Archives - have asked the staff "is that lady in the photograph J. R. D. Tata's mother."**

**While going through the over 40,000 letters of J. R. D. Tata we found three interesting letters by him giving details about the painting in front of his desk. Excerpts of these letters are being replicated for the benefit of the readers.**

"My mother's maiden name was Suzanne Briere, her mother's was Mathilde, nee Tribout and her father Paul Briere..."

"Neither of the two portraits in front of my desk is of my mother. The photo is that of Thellys and the oil painting is of a wine-serving maid by my grandmother's brother, therefore, a grand-uncle of mine called Louis Tribout..."

"You may not know that my maternal grand-uncle was quite a good painter. He could have made a real name for himself if he had taken the trouble, but at the age of 18 or 20, some time in the 1860's, in the course of a brief stay in England to learn English, he fell ill, probably with some minor virus or bacillary infection, and the family with whom he stayed called a doctor. After examining him, the doctor seems to have dis-cussed his case with the lady of the house and my grand-uncle, whose English was still negligible at the time, thought he under-stood one word which he looked up in the dictionary. It was the name of an incurable disease. From that moment, until he died approximately 70 years later at the age

of 90, he refused to make a career in view of his impending death. Instead, he married a rich woman and painted as a hobby and lived happily ever after!"

"...To the sad tale about my French maternal grand-uncle's fatal illness contracted, of course, in the "Foggy, Foggy Dew of London", I might add the equally true story that on a visit to a London restaurant at about the 'same time, he decided to try the soup on the menu. It was hardly credible that the perfidious British would pronounce "soup" in the same manner as in France; so my grand-uncle (whose name, by the way, was Louis Tribout), looked the English waiter squarely in the eye, (they did not have any Italian waiters then) and asked for "sope". He was promptly served a cake of soap on a plate, from which time my grand-uncle lost all 'hope of a better understanding between France and England, a situation which persisted until the then Prince of Wales' partiality for French 'demi-mondaines' which called for repeated visits to Paris, brought about the 'Entente Cordiale' which has survived somewhat 'Clopine Clopant' to this day..."