



# Sands of Time

Newsletter of Tata Central Archives

VOLUME IV No. 1

## A NOSTALGIC LOOK AT DAYS GONE BY



*"The Homestead" a manor and the property of Sir Ratan Tata and Lady Navajbai Tata in Matheran. The stained glass which was on the ventilator above the main door of the manor.*

*Oh! Matheran Hill is fair to behold,  
Its water is pure and its breeze ice cold,  
The views from the Points well deserve admiration  
And the English delight in this lovely hill station.*

(A translation from a collection of songs gathered on the Hill)

For the stressed out, the fatigued in mind and body, the tired and weary, there are few places like Matheran for a quick and effective rejuvenation of the senses and a mending of tattered nerves - enabling one to meet the world once again with a lighter and fresher step. The name Matheran is at once expressive and explanatory... "on the top a forest." The Governor of Bombay, Sir Roger Lumley while on a visit to Matheran commented that "The Homestead was one of the best bungalows."

To get away from the hustle and bustle of Mumbai, Zubin Mistry, an employee of Tata Services Limited closely associated with the Tata Central Archives was vacationing with his wife in Matheran in August 2002.

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## THE SIMPLE ATTIRE OF A FORMIDABLE MAN

It would be a dream to lay our hands on a set of clothes belonging to the Founder, Jamsetji Tata and sometimes, dreams do come true.

On January 14, 2005 a gentleman named Mr. Noshir M. Dastoor who was associated with Mr. T. R. Doongaji in Special Steels called on him at the office and handed over a set of clothes of the Founder.



To authenticate that the attire was genuine a photograph of Jamsetji Tata wearing the clothes was also handed over.

The clothes have been preserved by Noshir's grandfather, Rustomji Hormusji Dastoor. Hormusji

Dastoor was associated with the Founder as caretaker of Esplanade House - the residence of J. N. Tata in Bombay.

A photograph of the Directors of Tata Steel taken in 1917 was also gifted to the Archives.

In the letter to Mr. Noshir Dastoor acknowledging his contribution to the Archives, Mr. Doongaji said: "We in the Archives will not only be proud to display with reverence Jamsetji's set of clothes but will also ensure that your generous gesture is duly noted in the records of the Archives."

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## A NOSTALGIC LOOK AT DAYS GONE BY ...

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On a walk, besides coming across a galloping horse and troops of monkeys on their aerial paths up above in the trees or down on the forest floor foraging for food, there is nothing else to disturb one's peace of mind.



*Zubin and his wife Meher stumbled on the Homestead property. (Right) The sign post indicating the name of the property.*

On one of his walks Zubin went in search of Castle Hill (J. N. Tata's house), instead he stumbled on a magnificent manor known as "The Homestead".

Determined to find out more about the manor Zubin started asking around. He looked up the dictionary meaning of the word "The Homestead" - the home place; a home and the enclosure or ground immediately connected with it; the home or seat of a family.



*The painting of Sir Ratan Tata and a photograph of Navajbai Tata which has been relocated to the Archives.*

Tracing the history of this manor the Archives was able to locate the following: Amongst the houses belonging to the Tata family a mention may be made to the manor "The Homestead" which Lady Navajbai Tata had given away as a gift after the death of Sir Ratan Tata. The manor at Matheran along with a benefaction of Rs. 3 lakhs was given for use as a convalescent home for poor and invalid ladies.

Zubin then approached T. R. Doongaji, Managing Director, Tata Services who is our mentor and ever willing to assist the Archives. Mr. Doongaji contacted H. D. Malesra, Secretary and Chief Accountant, Sir Ratan Tata Trust with a request to permit a representative from Tata Services to visit this manor. Mr. Malesra went out of his way to assist the Archives in getting access to this priceless heritage.

In June 2004, Freddie Movdavalala of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Zubin and Rajendra Prasad Narla from

the Tata Central Archives visited "The Homestead" extensively photographing its priceless treasures.

Mr. Doongaji then wrote to the Chairman, Ratan Tata to seek his approval if certain items could be shifted to the Archives for restoration, thereby preserving the legacy of those whom all of us in Tatas owe so much.

Mr. Tata's reply was in the affirmative mentioning that he did not have any objection to the items being retrieved and retained in the Archives provided they were listed in conjunction with the Sir Ratan Tata Trust.

In December 2004, Zubin, Freddie and Rajendra found themselves in front of the bungalow once again.

Here's what Zubin had to say : "The property is approximately 22,000 square metres. It is situated at Little Chowk Point very close to One Tree Hill Point. The name 'The Homestead' was given by Sir Ratan Tata himself.

It was a wonderfully sunny day. Winter already had set in and there was a slight chill in the air. Standing in front of the circular pathway, I remembered someone narrating to me that Lady Navajbai Tata was proficient at



*Corner stands which have been relocated to the Archives.*



*Beautifully stained glass doors and windows adorn the rooms.*



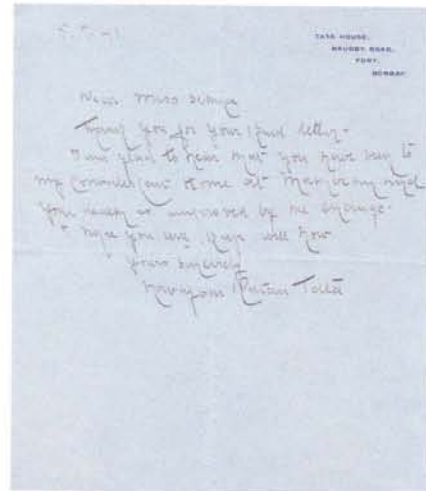
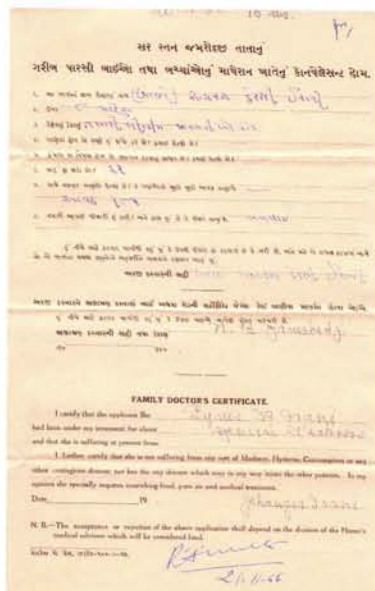
*Exquisite antique furniture found in the manor.*

horse riding in an age when women were rather shy and reluctant to indulge in such sports. It was more to keep company with her husband, Sir Ratan Tata, who enjoyed horse riding and played a little bit of polo. I could not but imagine them riding up to the manor. The circular pathway led up to the main door above which is the

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## REMINISCENCES FROM MATHERAN



One of the applications brought from Homestead which was converted into a Convalescent Home for Parsi Ladies and Women.

For nearly sixty years Mrs. Aran B. Katrak has preserved this handwritten letter of Lady Navajbai Tata thanking Miss Sethna for staying at her Convalescent Home in Matheran. This letter was forwarded to the Chairman, Mr. Ratan Tata who in turn has sent it to the Archives to be preserved.

## A NOSTALGIC LOOK AT DAYS GONE BY ...

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stained glass with the words 'The Homestead' on the ventilator. We then entered a small room. A large painting of Sir Ratan Tata and a photograph of Lady Navajbai Tata welcomed us. On the right of the room was a Hall where a dining table surrounded by



*Two more antique pieces found in "The Homestead" which have been restored.*



*Statues of cast iron knights which were at the manor.*

chairs was found. The two wedding chairs of Sir Ratan Tata were located in this room. Beautiful stained glass windows also adorn the room. This room leads on to a verandah which overlooks a magnificent view of the valley. On the left of the small room is a staircase leading up to a number of rooms which were the bedrooms - some of which overlooked the valley. The front of the bungalow overlooks a garden and a tennis court.

things were left to my imagination."

A few selected items such as the wedding chairs of Sir Ratan Tata and Lady Navajbai Tata, cast iron statues, furniture items, a stained glass ventilator with the words "THE HOMESTEAD" etched above its doors and a painting of Sir Ratan Tata by the renowned artist M. F. Pithawalla in 1913 and a few application forms of patients who wanted to stay at the home were carefully packed and transported to the Archives in Pune.



*The wedding chairs of Sir Ratan Tata and Lady Navajbai Tata.*

They are now in the process of being restored and would be on display when the Archives holds an exhibition on Sir Ratan Tata later this year.

The Archives would like to thank the Sir Ratan Tata Trust for their priceless contribution. Our thanks also to the Chairman, Ratan Tata; H. D. Malesra; T. R. Doongaji; Zubin Mistry; Freddie Movdvala and all those who were associated in relocating these valuable artefacts to the Archives.



## IT'S PICNIC TIME

TCCI Mumbai Region believes that people who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they are traveling together. That's exactly what they did.

A day's trip to the Tata Central Archives was organized by the Tata Council for Community Initiatives (TCCI), Mumbai Region headed by Mr. T. R. Doongaji, M.D., Tata Services and Guardian CEO, TCCI, Mumbai Region and assisted by Zubin Mistry, Regional Co-ordinator, TCCI, Mumbai Region. Over 50 volunteers from Voltas,

Tata Motors, Tata Services, Tata Power, Associated Building Company, TCS, Tata International and Nelco representing the TCCI Mumbai Region visited the Archives, Pune on Saturday 8th January 2005 to see the ongoing



*H. Raghunath welcoming the volunteers to the Archives.*

exhibition titled 'Images of Greatness'. The goal was to provide an informal atmosphere in which the volunteers could learn more about the Tata Heritage and share their experiences. This one-day trip was co-sponsored by Tata Services Ltd. and Voltas Ltd.



*The volunteers viewing the panels and showcases in the Exhibition Hall.*



The Staff of the Archives took the volunteers through the exhibition narrating interesting anecdotes on the three personalities J. N. Tata, J. R. D. Tata and Naval H. Tata. After viewing the exhibition, a quiz on the House of Tata was conducted by H. Raghunath in which 5 teams each consisting of 11 participants were formed. There were 3 rounds with 6 questions in each round. Team A won the



*H. Raghunath conducted a quiz on the House of Tata for the volunteers. (Right) Zubin Mistry distributing the prizes to one of the winning teams.*

quiz with 55 points. Attractive prizes were distributed to the three winning teams.

After going round the Exhibition Hall and a tour of the Archives, here's what some of the volunteers had to say :

- "I really appreciate the efforts taken to preserve the Tata Archives. The Archives and exhibition gives the correct and impressive image of the Tata Group."
- "Thanks a lot for inviting us to the Tata Archives Pune, besides enjoying it, we gained a lot of knowledge on the Legends. The exhibition was wonderfully organised and the replicas really took you years behind and touched your soul. In fact, I have not yet got over it, I have been talking to my colleagues and friends about the Archives."



*The volunteers enjoying a scrumptious lunch.*

After the mental stimulation a mouth-watering lunch awaited the volunteers.

It was a great day! Good food, good times, relaxing, yet educative.



*A group photo of the volunteers and the Archives Staff.*



## THE UNKNOWN TATA

Excerpts from the oral history recording of J. R. D. Tata with M. V. Kamath in December 1986 which has been continued from the previous issue.

**MVK:** But did you have any other narrow brush with life/death?

**JRD:** Only in flying.

**MVK:** Often?

**JRD:** No, really only once, when I was a bit too bold.

**MVK:** Where was that?

**JRD:** To be a good pilot you had to do acrobatics. As soon as I became licensed I decided to do some acrobatics. I had been sent solo, which is never heard of nowadays. It was quite wrong. We had an instructor Sir Victor Sassoon had got for us.

Sir Victor Sassoon created the flying club movement in India. He donated aeroplanes to Bombay, Delhi Madras and to Calcutta. In Bombay he got an instructor from the British navy, who use to fly onto aircraft carriers. He did an unpardonable thing, he never taught me how to spin and how to get out of a spin. I had read all the books. I had read every page written on flying and in doing my aerobatic training fortunately I'd go very high 8,000 feet.

**MVK:** That's not high?

**JRD:** Well, its high enough to, if you do something wrong you can get out but if you do it low like Sanjay Gandhi did and others, then you hit the deck. In this case I got into a spin and I didn't know how to get out of it. I was doing exactly the opposite because when you are in a dive and if you want to get up you pull.



Instead of that if you are in a spin you got to first release in order to stop spinning. Anyway, I knew, I

spun from 8,000 to 1,000 and recovered. That was very near. That was one time. The other times, occasionally in bad weather flying the mails.

**MVK:** How old were you when you had that spin?

**JRD:** This was in 1929 when I had just started.

**MVK:** Before you had done your trip from London to Karachi?

**JRD:** No, I had never done London to Karachi. That

An entry in J.R.D. Tata's log book indicating the meeting with Aspy Engineer.

was in 30's when the Aga Khan gave a prize of £ 500 to the first Indian who within a period of one month would go from India to England or England to India.

**MVK:** And what was your trip?

**JRD:** And so I had an aeroplane by then, I had bought for £ 1,000 a Gypsy Moth - and I was flying in India. I was a young pilot by then I'd learnt in 1929 and I'd got about 100 hours or 50 hours. I said: "well lets try it, it must be fun to fly to London".

**MVK:** You had no maps whatsoever?

**JRD:** No, so I had to get maps. You had to apply for maps - you got military maps. You could obtain maps from England for all the routes. That was in May 1930, so I flew to London. Well there was no danger there.

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## THE UNKNOWN TATA ...

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**MVK :** To come back just for a minute to your father I think he was a great practical joker. He had a grand time at Rippon Club, can you mention some incidents?

**JRD :** He had a lot of spirit for fun. He use to tease, but nothing outrageous. When he was in a party, he was a man who liked to pull the leg of people or to play practical jokes, which is not a very intelligent thing to do sometimes.

**MVK :** You don't have to answer this. By the time one is 20 one falls in love. Did you fall in love with any of the pretty girls in Bombay at that time?

**JRD :** No, I'd decided that when I fell in love I would marry after considering whom I would marry, how I would marry and why I would marry.

**MVK :** Were you so serious at that time?

**JRD :** Yes, I was 26 by which time I felt that I should start raising a family, if I ever did. I wasn't successful in that sense, I didn't have any children. No, the answer is no, until I found someone to suit me ideally. I was very Europeanized, I'd lived half in Europe, in Japan, India and France. I wanted to have a wife who would be as comfortable in India as elsewhere. I was waiting to find a girl who was like me, half and half, where there were foreign parents. My wife had an English mother and a Parsi father. She was born in America and educated partly in Italy and spoke Italian.

**MVK :** Very cosmopolitan.

**JRD :** Very cosmopolitan, and she was the most beautiful girl. Combining these three things I said now is the time before I miss her and somebody else grabs her.

**MVK :** How did it happen? What was the story behind it?

**JRD :** It so happened, that I had done a stupid thing. I had bought a racing car and when I brought that racing car into Bombay the police decided they had to nab me.

**MVK :** Why?

**JRD :** Because here was a man who was going to drive fast and make a lot of noise and all that. The British police wanted to nab me. On one occasion there was a crash - a very fatal accident of a Parsi gentleman coming back from Juhu. I had attended



*A Collection of photographs of Thelma Tata which are in the Archives.*

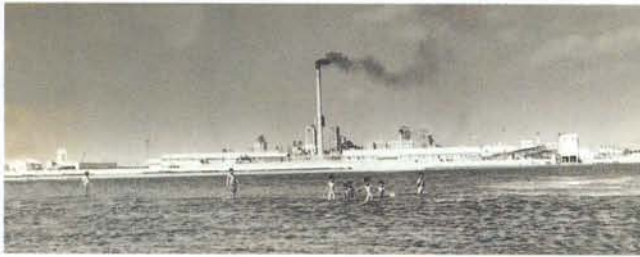
the party and the police concocted a case that I was racing with him neck to neck. He then crashed in a tree. I was nowhere near the place at that time.

**JRD :** For this bogus case I was asked to see a good criminal lawyer. He was the uncle of my future wife. There I saw my wife and her sister and that's where we got introduced. I was acquitted and in fact the judge wrote a judgment in which he very severely criticized the police for inventing, not only inventing but training these poor policemen to tell lies. Vicaji my lawyer had no problem, not only demolishing the case but the judge passed very severe stricture on the police. Anyway that's how I met my wife.

*To be continued in the next issue.*



## TREASURES FROM THE SEA



*Of all the Companies with which I have been concerned, none has had to overcome so many difficulties compounded with bad luck, as has been the lot of Tata Chemicals.*

**J.R.D. Tata**

In 1939, 13 miles away from Dwarka, Tatas built at Mithapur, a heavy chemical plant, which has transformed it, hitherto a small, arid uninhabited tract of land, into one of the dynamic industrial centres of India.

Steel, power and heavy chemicals, constitute the triple base of modern industrialization. Tatas had already endowed the country with the first composite steel plant at Jamshedpur; they had already furnished a network of power stations to the growingly industrialized state of Bombay. Only their entry into the field of heavy chemicals was required to complete their designation as pioneers of India's heavy industrialization.



*The pioneers of the Okha Salt Works Ltd. Seated third from the right is Kapilram Vakil.*

start an Indian heavy chemical industry in India. Tatas themselves barely recovering from the bruises of the Great Depression, responded and undertook the



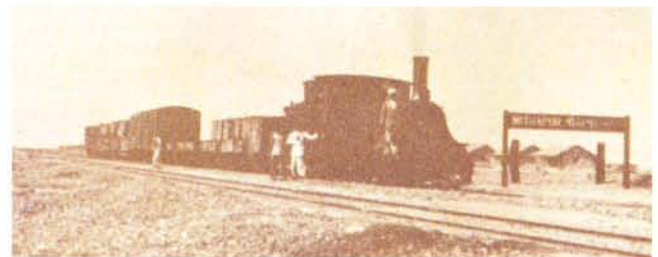
*Mechanical stacking of washed salt.*

The enlightened Dewan of Baroda V. T. Krishnamachari, supported by the pioneering vision of Sayaji Rao, appealed to Tatas in 1936 to come to the assistance of Kapilram Vakil, who was struggling single-handed to

fresh challenge of pioneering another heavy industry.

The search for a salt plant began before Tatas came on the scene. A chemical engineer, who had studied at Manchester University, Kapilram Vakil, had a dream to raise from the ocean its wealth of marine minerals of which salt was only the beginning. Salt and salt-based products were the virtual monopoly of foreign companies. Foreign companies then imported ordinary salt from Aden for India's consumption.

J.R.D. Tata became chairman of Tata Sons in 1938 and Tata Chemicals was launched in 1939, the year the Second World War broke out. Its first consignment of turbo-generators was sunk at sea. The second was ordered from Sweden, a neutral country. The manufacturers, to avoid the war zone, shipped it



*Old Mithapur Station.*

to Archangel in the Soviet Union. By then Russia was at war. Tatas gave up hope and placed a fresh order with the United States. A message then came that the Swedish consignment had arrived in Moscow, at the height of the war. Another message followed that the shipment had arrived overland to the Gulf. One fine day the shipment arrived in Bombay harbour.



*Soda Ash Brine Refinery.*

In spite of the best astrological forecast Kapilram could elicit, the first years of Tata Chemicals were disastrous. An international expert advised J.R.D. Tata that they were in the wrong place doing the wrong job. 'This is not the first time we have done this,' an undaunted J.R.D. Tata is said to have replied, 'when we go to a place we arouse hopes in people.' For their sake as much as for any other reason Mithapur had to succeed.

The question was: How?

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## TREASURES FROM THE SEA ...

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Darbari Seth

The rewarding business was production of soda ash of high quality. The formula and the process were the well-guarded secret of about six companies in the world. Tata Chemicals had cracked the code. It was negotiating with a German firm in the early 1940's to raise its capacity from 80 to 200 tonnes of soda ash per day. At that time a thirty-one-year-old chemical engineer called Darbari Seth was asked on his way back from America to visit the German firm. With his experience in America, he was not impressed by what he saw. On his return he told the management board that India did not need foreign help. 'We can do it. What is more we should aim not at 200 but at 400 tonnes which is the optimum capacity. And doing it ourselves, we shall spend much less than what has been budgeted for the 200 tonnes plant.' Of the sixteen on the management board, only one agreed with him - J.R.D. Tata. He was asked to take over the design, the engineering, fabrication and installation of the new equipment and machinery to renovate the Mithapur chemical complex.

To create the soda ash, Darbari Seth and his team had to design, engineer, fabricate and erect some twenty process and power plants and then ensure that not only each one of them worked right but all of them worked right together. The average age of the working team was then only twenty-nine. They worked early mornings and late evenings and the rest

of the day too. Once the plant was ready, the team was asked to take on the operation and to demonstrate whether they could produce the 400 tonnes per day. They worked with missionary zeal and in the first fortnight the plant touched a production capacity of 545 tonnes one day. The breakthrough had come. For the previous sixteen years not only was the company unable to pay dividends but for some years was unable to even keep aside funds for depreciation. During this period Tata Sons guaranteed all loans, did not

take their share of the commission as managing agents, and continued to provide the managerial skills.

With the breakthrough, there was rejoicing all around. But, alas, not for long. In 1962 the rains failed. Where the average rainfall was eighteen inches, only seven fell. Mithapur was fed by two lakes. Apart from the town, it was the chemical complex that devoured large quantities of fresh water which came from the two lakes.

For three successive years in the 1960's the rains continued to fail but production kept rising. While insulating the operations from the vagaries of the rains, self reliance on the water front has been achieved in a very innovative manner substitution, conservation and re-use. Mithapur is situated between the Port of Okha and Krishna's holy city of Dwarka. Fifty years ago it was a desolate place, with scanty rains. A martial tribe inhabited the neighbouring area. The land gave them little sustenance. Now the factory has not only given some of them employment but the company has adopted the surrounding areas to ensure that they get adequate water supply and health care.



Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of India visited Tata Chemicals in 1951.

Later, for four years running from 1983 to 1987, Mithapur had its lowest rainfall in living memory 'a mere 0.4 inch.' The Tata Chemicals factory and township functioned and produced results on about one per cent of the fresh water quota that any normal inland complex would have used. In 1988 the spell of drought was broken. 'Everything came alive,' said a rejoicing chairman to his shareholders. 'In my 45 years I have not seen the area look greener and lovelier.'

Tata Chemicals today is India's leading manufacturer and marketer of inorganic chemicals and fertilizers. It is also among the world's largest producers of synthetic soda ash, with the largest domestic market share. It is also one of India's leading manufacturers of urea and phosphatic fertilizers. The company is also a pioneer and market leader in the branded, iodised salt segment.

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