



# Sands of Time

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## BURJORJI JAMASPJI PADSHAH - A CHRONICLE OF BRILLIANT SUCCESSES

Burjorji Jamaspji Padshah was born in Bombay in May 1864 in a highly talented family, hailing from Navsari. He was the fourth son of Jamaspji Padshah who died prematurely in 1880, leaving him at the age of 16 in charge of his business which included a horse-stable at Byculla, Bombay.



Burjorji Jamaspji Padshah

Being a versatile genius, Burjorji soon adapted himself to his new environment, ran his father's business most successfully. His association with horses generated in him a deep love for animals which manifested itself in his later life.

Burjorji's father was Jamsetji Tata's best friend. Young Burjorji therefore found himself the ward of a wise and considerate guardian when his own father died. Jamsetji's daughter, Dhunbai was engaged to Burjorji Padshah. Sadly she passed away in 1871.

Burjorji's life is a chronicle of brilliant successes. He passed his matriculation from the Proprietary High School at Bombay in 1881 and went to the Elphinstone College. He then passed his first year in Arts carrying away the Gibbs Prize in Physics.

*Continued on Page 2*

## EVOLUTION OF GANDHIJI'S CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENCE

*Burjorji Padshah and Mahatma Gandhi shared a close relationship. There were many letters exchanged between the two personalities. Reproduced below is a letter written by Mahatma Gandhi to Burjorji Padshah.*

*Saharmati Jail  
13th March*

*My dear friend,*

*I have your three letters - I always co-operate when I can, I non-cooperate when I must. You may depend upon my withdrawing every demand that cannot stand the test of reason. I shall yield nothing to expedience or brute force - you may publish my first letter and/or this at your option. Need I be sharper.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*M. K. Gandhi*



My Dear Friend,

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Yours sincerely,  
M. K. Gandhi

### In this Issue

BURJORJI JAMSPJI PADSHAH - A CHRONICLE OF BRILLIANT SUCCESSES	1
EVOLUTION OF GANDHIJI'S CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENCE	1
THERE IS NO VIRTUE IN NON-VIOLENCE AS LONG AS NON- VIOLENCE IS A THREAT	5
THE UNKNOWN TATA	6
THE TATA OIL MILLS - HOW IT ALL BEGAN	8

For more correspondence  
between Burjorji Padshah  
and Mahatma Gandhi  
please turn to Page 5



### BURJORJI JAMASPJI PADSHAH ...

*Continued from Page 1*



Prospecting for iron ore (Seated left to right) Dorabji Tata, the Maharajah of Mauyurbhanj, R. G. Wells. Standing (left to right) N. D. Renkin, H. W. Joyce and Burjorji Padshah.

When the plague struck the city of Bombay, it had a disastrous effect. Jamsetji Tata was one of Professor Haffkine's enthusiastic supporters. He instructed Padshah, to give every possible assistance to Haffkine. Padshah recruited all the young Parsi students then studying at St Xavier's College to help the Russian Professor, especially in the gathering and maintenance of statistical records of his work and, subsequently, of the inoculation programme.

A year later he passed the first B.A. of the Bombay University winning the Ellis Scholarship in English - and the James Taylor Prize in History and Economics. He graduated in 1884, standing First in First Class, and carried away the Cobden Medal in Political Economy. It is also said that he got cent per cent marks in his English papers for that year.

With such an academic record, it was natural that his mother wanted him to enter the I.C.S. as his elder brothers had done but Burjorji departed from the beaten track and studied Theosophy—a desire which left a great impression on him and which probably influenced various phases of his later life.

With the money he inherited from his father, he went to England with Madame Blavatsky, but soon left the Theosophists as their beliefs did not appeal to him. He then went to Cambridge for the study of higher mathematics. One amazing characteristic of Burjorji was that even though he passed all tests brilliantly he never went to take a degree, either at Bombay or at Cambridge. His name therefore does not appear on the registers of either University.

On his return to India he was appointed a Professor, and later on, Vice-Principal of the Dayaram Jethamal College, Sindh where with his profound knowledge his interesting lectures not only made him a popular figure in the institution but also endeared him to the students of the entire college who looked up to him as their *guru*. So devoted was Burjorji to his work and so eminently fitted was his talent to this activity,

that the connection would in all probability have become permanent had it not been for the occurrence of an incident which followed very shortly. Owing to the retirement of the then Principal of the college, Burjorji who was abundantly qualified for the post, should have been appointed to it in the ordinary course of events. Unfortunately he was unfairly passed over in favour of an Englishman.

This step, however, turned out to be a blessing in disguise; for when Burjorji came to Bombay again in 1894, Jamsetji Tata, who had once before asked him to join his firm, repeated the invitation. Burjorji, whose vision was wide and comprehensive, was specially qualified for the gigantic schemes which Jamsetji had in mind, and readily accepted the offer.

Jamsetji commissioned Burjorji to proceed to Europe and America, and make a close study of similar institutions on these continents. Burjorji made an exhaustive report to Jamsetji which in due course resulted in the establishment of the Indian Institute of Science.

From the very inception of the idea of manufacturing steel in India, Burjorji had collaborated first with Jamsetji and then with his sons and it is largely to his vision, foresight that the Tata Iron and Steel Company owes its foundation and growth.

It was Jamsetji's dream to harness the water power on the Western Ghats for the benefit of industrial India. Burjorji followed every inch of the investigations not merely on paper but with Mr. Gosling, walked over many miles of the Ghats before the final reports were made and the



## BURJORJI JAMASPJI PADSHAH ...

spots selected for the lakes. Again, after the floatation of the Hydro-Electric Company, when it was thought that there would be difficulty for all the power to be consumed, Burjorji, with, that broad view of sharing profits with others, induced the Directors of the Hydro-Electric Company to enter into an underwriting agreement with others who guaranteed the consumption of all the power generated by the Tata Hydro-Electric Company.

Jamsetji from his early years had several investigations made for the extraction of oil from seeds and had brought out experts to advise and, in fact, had erected an experimental plant in Bombay. Because of the work entailed in the establishment of the hydro-electric companies, the oil industry had been kept in abeyance. As soon as Burjorji's hands were a bit free he turned to this industry and as a result the Tata Oil Mills were floated in 1917.

In 1905, shortly after the death of Jamsetji Tata, Burjorji induced Dorabji Tata, Ratan Tata and other financiers in Bombay to establish an Indian Bank, as a result of which the Bank of India was started.

Burjorji studied prolifically every branch of insurance. Even before 1914 his mind had been working on insurance but the pre-occupations of the years during the War did not permit him to put forth a complete scheme for the floating of an Indian Insurance Company which would do insurance businesses of every kind. It was in 1918 that he was able to write his treatise on insurance and its benefits to the country which resulted in the establishment of the New India Assurance Company in 1919.

Such, was the great contribution of Burjorji towards the scientific and industrial progress of India. It is only when the amount of work and intellect that were put in perfecting these schemes and bringing them to their present state of maturity are considered that one can get an idea of the indebtedness of India to Burjorji's talent and constructive ability.

As an educationist, scholar and thinker, Burjorji had few equals. He was a voracious reader and was practically a living Encyclopaedia. His fine memory, his wonderful grasp of facts and figures, and his extraordinary mastery of the most complicated problems, were unique. There is no subject which he did not know and could not discuss with profundity. His views always compelled attention, whether one agreed with him or not. All those who came in contact with him were impressed by the vastness of his information on almost every branch of learning and human understanding. The variety and depth of his knowledge were amazing. Whether it was general literature or poetry, science or philosophy, history or religion, sociology or politics, he was equally familiar with them all. He was a great admirer of Robert Browning; and had read and re-read even his longest and most difficult poems, some of which he knew practically by heart.

Mathematics in particular was his forte; and it was surprising to see him poring with delight even over the pages of such difficult and abstruse works as Einstein's "Problems on Relativity." Burjorji had a marvellous memory. He could remember dates, incidents, figures that he could produce with mathematical accuracy.



Walwhan Dam, Lonavla.

One of the outstanding traits of Padshah's character was trust - trust in human beings, treatment of the opponent or the party with whom negotiations were being carried on as a gentleman, trust till that trust was abused. This was his attitude towards his staff.

Nothing locked up.  
Nothing kept secret.



New India Assurance Company.



## BURJORJI JAMASPJI PADSHAH ...



Burjorji Padshah.

I knew Burjorji Padshah by his reputation... I had never met him, but friends said that he was eccentric. Out of pity for the horses, he would ride in tram cars, he refused to take degrees in spite of a prodigious memory, he had developed an independent spirit, and he was a vegetarian, though a Parsi.

Mahatma Gandhi

He never used a slide rule. All his calculation was mental and there never was a mistake when compared with the engineers and scientists who brought out their slide rules from their hip pockets and calculated. He had no use for these mechanical aids and when a young engineer told him "Why tire the brain and not reserve its energy for higher things" he smiled and said "The more exercise the brain gets the more energy it generates."

Burjorji would grudge every minute that was taken away from his books. He was a student to the end of his life. The harder the problem he had to solve and the greater the effort he had to make, the deeper were his pleasure and enjoyment thereof.

As an individual, Burjorji was even greater. Modest by temperament and absolutely impervious to all ordinary human attractions such as the collection of money or the desire for distinction, he lived a simple, natural and selfless, frugal life. His existence was really an embodiment of the principle of "plain living and high thinking." He never cared for reward or appreciation. He pursued learning and acquired culture for their own sake, and ceaselessly did all he could, according to his own ideas, for the advancement of his country and the good of humanity.

After he left the House of Tatas in 1931 he began touring round the globe and moving freely in that greater society of the peoples of the world which he liked and enjoyed so much. People of all nationalities attracted by the wide range of his knowledge and information collected round this brilliant conversationalist.

He was a total abstainer, a non-

smoker and a vegetarian. He carried his love for animals to such an extent that instead of putting on leather footwear, he always used the products of canvas or some kind of synthetic manufacture; and never rode in a carriage drawn by animals but instead either went by mechanical traction or on foot, often also over long distances even though it entailed considerable personal hardship, before the advent of the motor. But he cheerfully bore it all in pursuance of his convictions. On one occasion the Governor of Bombay had asked the Tatas to meet him with others of the committee to discuss matters regarding the Institute at Government House at 10 a.m. Dorabji Tata was terribly tickled as to how Burjorji would be at Government House at 10 a.m, since he used no carriage. Burjorji merely grinned. He had walked from Bandra Hill to the Station, come by train to Grant Road, and walked from Grant road to Malabar Point and was in Government House ten minutes before Dorabji Tata who came by his carriage and horse.

Burjorji passed away on June 20, 1941, at the age of 77.

The House of Tata had lost a man who, in their pioneering days, moulded and shaped their gigantic schemes.

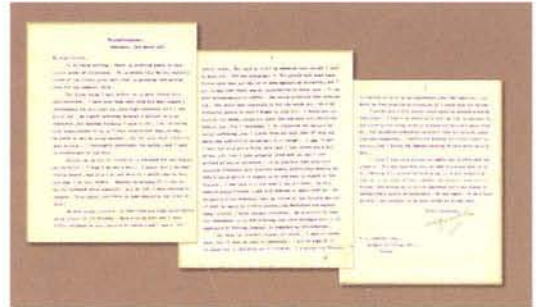
*B. J. Padshah's papers form one of the important collections in Tata Central Archives and the Tata Steel Archives. More than 3000 letters written to various persons, – J. N. Tata, Sir Dorabji Tata, Sir Ratan Tata, R. D. Tata, Shapurji Saklatvala, Tutwiller, Charles Page Perin, C. M. Weld, P. N. Bose etc. are available in these collections.*



## THERE IS NO VIRTUE IN NON-VIOLENCE AS LONG AS NON-VIOLENCE IS A THREAT

*"It is human to show one's strength; but it is certainly not divine to show the strength to intimidate an adversary into acquiescence in views of which he cannot be convinced without the intimidation."*

Burjorji Padshah to Mahatma Gandhi



Satyagrahashram,  
Sabarmati, 7th March 1922

My dear friend,

It is early morning. There is perfect peace in this little abode of retirement. It is broken only by the rhythmic sound of the little stone mill that is grinding life-giving corn for the inmates' food.

The first thing I have before me is your letter only just received. I have more than once told you what regard I entertained for you, that is, your high character when I was yet a lad. My regard continues because I believe in your character, but whereas formerly I used to feel like imitating your humanitarian views as I then interpreted them, to-day I am sorry we are as poles asunder. All the same your letter is most welcome. I thoroughly appreciate its motive, and I want to reciprocate to the full.

Believe me my non-co-operation I intended for the truest co-operation. I hope I am not a fool. I assure you I am absolutely honest, and if you do not know it I would like to tell you that I am also humble. Honesty is nothing if it has not as its handmaid utter humility. All my life I have stooped to conquer. Your appeal therefore in that direction can never be vain.

My difficulty, however, is that even you read intimidation in my letter to the Viceroy. When both my wife and I were little children (we were married at twelve), and I was a little tyrant lover, she used to repel my advances even though I used to beat her. Did she intimidate? You should have read those fierce eyes when she was up in arms against my brutality, but I see to-day that there was no intimidation in those eyes. It was grim determination to suffer. She could certainly have retaliated. She could have throttled me but she would not. When my brutality proved in vain I began to copy her. I would not eat food at her hands, would not share the bed with her, would not talk to her. Did I intimidate? We conquered one another by mutual suffering, but I learnt from her also that if only one party had suffered it would have been enough. It was enough. I have not told you a fairy tale, but I have given you a bit of the life that I have actually lived and the way I have arrived at non-co-operation. It is possible that your over powering intellect will discover subtle differences between my wife's intimidation in regard to me and mine in regard to the Viceroy. I can only tell you that I can see none. In this opinion among friends I had only Andrews to agree with me. He volunteered the statement that my letter to the Viceroy was one of what he calls my perfect pieces, but Natarajan and Jayakar whose opinion I value thought otherwise. My deduction is that our atmosphere is so debilitating that even strength when it is expressed in fitting language is regarded as intimidation.

All this is, however beside the point. I want co-operation, but it must be real co-operation ... I assure you I will strain every nerve to prevent a bloody revolution. I hope I am prepared to give my life to prevent it, but there is one thing in which perhaps you will not agree with me. The bloodiest revolution is better than the present unreality and inequality. I prefer the Turkish hot potato under the arm-pit, but I detest the Spanish pouring of cold water drop by drop.

I think I have told you all to enable you to form your own judgment. You may therefore tell me what you would have me to do. Nothing will prevent me from doing it if you convince me that it is the right method. Gokhale who knew me used to tell friends that behind my so-called obstinacy there was always an unconquerable spirit of compromise. He was right. He said this in 1915. His estimate is as true today as it was then.

Yours sincerely,

B. J. Padshah, Esq., Navsari Buildings, Fort, Bombay



## THE UNKNOWN TATA

*These are excerpts from a series of interviews with J. R. D. Tata on his life and times. The interviewer is M. V. Kamath.*

*This interview has been continued from the previous issue.*



J. R. D. Tata.

**"The Planners": Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata - Founder of the House of Tata; facing him Sir Dorabji Tata, elder son of the Founder; seated between them, R. D. Tata, father of J. R. D. Tata; and standing, Sir Ratan Tata, younger son of the Founder.**



MVK : Sir, on the last occasion we brought up your story to the time you return to India for good today, Today, I would like to concentrate on the two major loves of your time, of your life, Tata Steel and the founding of Civil Aviation in India.

MVK : To begin with, Sir, what was your first assignment on the staff of TISCO and what was Jamshedpur like in early 1930's.

JRD : Actually it was in 1925-26 a little earlier even than the 1930's. I was not put on the staff of TISCO, I was placed there at the instance or request of my father who was, I think, at that particular time Vice-Chairman of TISCO. I was sent there, with the idea that I'd spend a couple of years at Jamshedpur. Since I had not been trained as an engineer or had no formal education, I should learn the practical aspects of the steel industry. The sole purpose was that I would spend a month or so one after the other in every important department of the steel plant. Unfortunately, within six months my father suddenly died and so that project was abandoned. When I came back to Bombay, under the constitution of Tata Sons, the three partners - Dorabji, Sir Ratan and my father who were equal partners and were permanent directors, had the right to appoint a successor. The successor who will be a permanent director in his time and who would himself have the right to appoint a successor. After that there would be no more. Since my father had appointed me in his Will, I automatically became a Director of Tata Sons.

I came back from Jamshedpur and found myself a Director of Tata Sons. Sir Dorab Tata who was the then Chairman fixed my remuneration at Rs. 1000 a month.

MYK: Rs. 1,000 a month?

JRD : In those days Rs. 1000 a month was very good. That's how I returned to

TISCO. I was now an employee of Tata Sons who were then Managing Agents of all the Tata Companies. It is important to understand that in those days the Managing Agency system prevailed and the Managing Agents once having made their contract with the shareholders had executive powers. They were in position to appoint chief executives of every company in that contract for which they had contracted with the shareholders. Sir Dorabji Tata was the Chairman of Tata Sons the parent company and in those days automatically the Chairman of Tata Sons became the Chairman of other companies. I was supposed to be associated with Tata Sons and companies under its management. I had decided from the start that I would stick to TISCO.

I think, I must mention, that before my father died he had talked to the Managing Director of Tata Steel who was a Scotsman, who had been a leading ICS Officer in the Government of India, a very fine gentleman called John Peterson, a rather unusual man. In those days, British ICS Officers had their nose up in the air towards Indians but Peterson was a most unusual man. Apart from being a fine writer - who'd even written plays in English, including one I remember that I had read called Mary Queen of Scots - which had been staged in Germany, he somehow had an aversion to Britishers.

MVK: He had an aversion to Britishers?

JRD : For some odd reason when young Britishers came to see him, he was, I never knew why, a little hostile. But to Indians it was as if they were his children. Unusual, I never could quite understand why. Peterson had been very friendly with my father, and on one occasion he told him "Peterson, look after my son when I am no more". So when I came back from Jamshedpur,



## THE UNKNOWN TATA ...

Peterson had a desk put at the end of his desk, for the next five years. Before he retired to England he never had a moments privacy in the office. I was at the end of the table listening to everything. As a form of education, he made all the papers, come and go through me. I learnt a lot from him including ways to get on with people, to exercise judgement. He saved me sometimes from embarrassment.

On one occasion, a note had come from one of the other Directors of Tata Sons. I didn't know it was him and so I had extensively corrected it. Peterson was amused. But he had a copy made without the correction. He was a wonderful man.

He is the man who wrote the first application for protection of Tata Steel. Tata Steel was in a very bad way because steel was being dumped from all countries into India - imported steel bars at less than Rs. 100 a tonne. Tata Steel was, as we know, in those days very near not being able to pay wages. On that occasion, Sir Dorabji Tata pledged the whole of his fortune and the banks came forward. I remember, Peterson wrote the main thesis justifying protection to Tata Steel which went to Parliament, or the then Parliament. A very fine document which succeeded, thanks to perhaps Motilal Nehru and the Swadeshi Movement. I am very grateful to Peterson in being my guru of those days.

MVK: Did you make any special efforts Sir to go up from manufacture of steel and things like that?

JRD : There was a very wonderful book written for the United States Steel Corporation called "The Making, Shaping and Treating of Steel". It was a big black book, which covered the whole subject of those days. I had religiously read that book. Hence, I was pretty well aware. I had also spent six months in Jamshedpur, and I went back from time to time. The days when I could have spent the whole time in the plant, as I would have liked to, had gone by. Some

years later I became a Director of Tata Steel and of course, finally, Chairman from 1938 until last year.

MVK: I believe Sir, Nowroji Saklatvala was there till 1938, how did you relate to him?

JRD : Very well. He was a very fine and honest man. Having continued this principle of being Chairman of every company in Tatas, he had no time to do any administrative work. He relied a fair amount on me and I was as helpful to him as possible. As soon as I became Chairman, I decided that I shouldn't be the Chairman of all Tata Companies. I said I will not take the textile mills. Sir Nowroji Saklatvala had really come through the textile industry. I even said I don't want to keep the Electric Companies. I will keep only a few companies, since we were creating new industries.

MVK: Did he ever ask you why?

JRD : Yes, well I use to argue with him that this was wasting his time. He had to attend every board meeting, go through all the minutes, go from one meeting to another. It is alright for general supervision. You should not be the Chairman of a company unless you have time to give to it.

MVK : Sir, how did it feel like to be elected Chairman of Tatas at the age of 34. You have referred jokingly that your senior colleagues in a moment of mental aberration elected you Chairman. Were you prepared for the eventuality? You knew that you were going to be the Chairman and were you prepared for it?

JRD : No, in fact I didn't. I realised that they had some difficulty. The older man would have been Sir Sorab Saklatvala, who was only looking after the textile mills. He was not a very outgoing or forward looking man. Anyway they decided that I would do, even though I was reluctant, I had but to say yes, thank you very much.

*Continued in the next issue*



John Peterson.

A photograph of J. R. D. Tata around the time that he was appointed Chairman of Tatas.





## THE TATA OIL MILLS - HOW IT ALL STARTED



A panoramic view of the Tata Oil Mills factory at Tatapuram.

**TOMCO were the first to market an Indian toilet soap with an Indian name - HAMAM. The soap was launched in 1931 by J. A. D. Naoroji, who himself chose the name.**

For any further information, please contact :

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**We're on the Web!**

<http://www.tatacentralarchives.com>

Jamsetji Tata from his early years had several investigations made for the extraction of oil from seeds and had brought out experts to advise and in fact, had erected an experimental plant in Bombay.

The idea of an oil mill was born during World War I. Jamsetji Tata's close colleague Burjorji Padshah, travelled a lot. On board a ship from America to Japan he met a gentleman called Edward P. Thompson who styled himself 'Consulting Engineer, Vegetable Oil Industries'. The imagination of Burjorji was fired at the prospect of setting up a modern vegetable oil mill in India. Thompson suggested it should begin with the crushing of copra and claimed that he was engaged in the Philippines with doing just that. Burjorji asked Thompson to give the Tatas a report on the prospects of this industry for India and invited him to come to India. In his letter, sending the report Thompson observes "Before attempting to present you with a workable scheme, I have made a complete tour of South India visiting all the districts in which copra and oil seeds are cultivated and have made an exhaustive study of the conditions under which these products are grown, handled and marketed." Further on, Thompson says in his letter "I have come to the conclusion that there should not be only one mill. The scheme I now present to you calls for the installation of three mills to be located at different points for the separate treatment of copra and seeds found to be peculiar to the District at which they are to be located rather than one large mill for the common treatment of both copra and seeds as originally discussed by us." He told Tatas that America was substantially dependent on Indian copra and instead of sending copra to America, India should crush the copra, export the oil to America and use the coconut cake as cattle feed.

When the Tatas came to Cochin they were one of the first to start an industry. They

gave the coconut owning families a ready market for their products and they gave employment to the local people. Those with a steady job were able to get a steady income and educate their children and with education came social change and even a political change.

The Tata Oil Mills Co. Ltd. (Tomco) was registered on December 10, 1917. Sir Dorabji Tata was the first Chairman of the Board. The Board had Sir Sassoon David, who was a well-known industrialist; Sir Shapurji Broacha, a very well-known stock broker of Bombay; Sir Fazalbhoy Currimbhoy, the Head of Currimbhoy Ibrahim Textile Organisation; Sir Chunilal Mehta; Burjorji Padshah and A. J. Billimoria as its Directors.

The Company put up its first factory at Tatapuram with the main purpose of extracting oil from copra and seeds.

Unfortunately, the initial years were years of heavy losses. When it was found that the Company could not hold its own merely by working as an oil miller, it decided to utilise oils of its own crush for the manufacture of household products, such as soaps.

Mr. P. T. John had only just become a soap chemist. He visited J. A. D. Naoroji, Tomco's Director-in-Charge to start a soap plant at Tatapuram. Mr. Naoroji declined saying that he could find no job for John, nor did they have the money to start a soap plant. But John would not take a 'no'. He found out that J. A. D. Naoroji was going by sea to Cochin. He joined the same ship in order to continue his persuasion. He persisted and finally persuaded Mr. Naoroji to give him a chance. He gave him a chance to produce soap. The first boiling of soap was inaugurated in a three-tonne improvised soap kettle by J. A. D. Naoroji in April 1927 at Tatapuram with a view to utilise the accumulated soap stock obtained in the process of the refining of oils. A few cases of laundry soap were offered to the local market.