



# Tata Steel Times

In Salutation : A Compilation of Anecdotes and Experiences of Ex-employees, with JRD Tata

India edition

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**Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata**  
(July 29, 1904 – November 29, 1993)



## When JRD's 'Favourite Child' was Taken Away



Dr JJ Irani  
Managing Director, Tata Steel

JRD was my father in the professional world and whatever I have achieved in my career at Tata Steel, I owe to his invaluable guidance and support.

I recall his precious words: "before you can be good at anything, you must be a good man." He exemplified this belief throughout his life, in all his actions and dealings with his colleagues and friends, thus leaving an indelible impact on anyone who was fortunate enough to come in contact with him.

I was a Tata Scholar under the Trust set up by our Founder Jamsetji Tata, the JN Tata Endowment for the Higher Education of Indians.

I studied Metallurgy at Sheffield University in the UK, without any obligation to return to India after the completion of my course. One fine day, I received a letter from Ms Pilloo Vesugar, who was, at that point, the Programme-in-Charge. She informed me, that JRD Tata had read the report on my progress and had made a note therein that read: "if ever this young man wishes to come back to India, he should first knock on the doors of Tata Iron and Steel Co." I replied in the affirmative and did just that during my next visit to

India and the rest, as they say, is history.

For me, joining TISCO was not completely smooth sailing. After the first few months in Jamshedpur, I was preparing to return to Sheffield when, almost providentially, I ran into JRD once again. This time, he made changes that ensured I stayed back in Tata Steel, for the rest of my working life!

In the 1970s, JRD became an ardent supporter of the family planning movement in India. We in Tata Steel, also started programmes, one of which was to give a stipend of ₹ 200, to every employee and their spouse who underwent the necessary minor surgery. When I proudly mentioned this sum to him, he exploded saying, "Jamshed! only ₹ 200? make it ₹ 2,000!" His reason being, population control was more important for India, than blast furnaces and steel melting shops.

He did not get on well with India's topmost political echelon,

particularly after Mr Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister. Mr Desai had suggested to JRD that Air India should stop serving liquor on all its flights. JRD politely refused as this would have had a negative impact on the Airline's passenger count. Shortly afterwards, the Government took the unprecedented step of removing JRD from the chairmanship of the airline, which he had built brick-by-brick, to being one of the best in the world. This drastic action was taken without the courtesy of even informing him. That evening, we had all gathered for dinner with JRD in Jamshedpur. When he entered the room, there was an ominous silence till someone raised the topic. I clearly remember JRD's sad comment: "I feel like someone whose favourite child has been taken away." Very often, after that unfortunate event, I had mentioned to JRD that I hoped TISCO was his second favourite child. I never got a reply. ✈️

### JRD Empowered Tata Steel to Succeed



Mr Prakash Ghosh  
Manager - Training

The great vision and leadership of JRD Tata enabled Tata Steel to cross all hurdles and achieve targets on all fronts. I have been a witness to the great transformation of the old Steel Plant into a modern one, which undoubtedly, is one of the best in the world. I am proud to have been associated with the Tata Steel plant for 37 years. ✈️

# My Experiences with JRD



Mr S Guru Bhaskara  
Secretary to Managing Director

**I** It was around 9.30 am as I rushed to the lift, half-panting, turning only to see JRD Tata alighting from his green American sedan. I stood aside, my eyes glued to the floor, waiting for Mr Tata to board the lift. As he approached the lift, he gently guided me into it before getting in himself. Just as the door was about to close, an elderly gentleman in traditional Indian attire got in. As we were ascending, I noticed him intently observing Mr Tata, when he finally asked, "Sir, are you Mr JRD Tata?" This was closely followed by, "I am sure you happen to be Mr Tata!" His awe was met with a smile and the reply, "Yes, I happen to be!"

**II** When I was working with Mr Sharokh Sabavala, Mr Tata's secretary, I used to visit Jamshedpur frequently, mainly on the occasion of Founder's Day, on March 3, which was attended by JRD Tata and most of the Directors on the Board. On one such visit, I was summoned by Mr Tata to his room in the Directors' Bungalow. I went in nervously. Asking me to have a seat, he said he wished to dictate a letter. It went off well and while taking his notes, I tried to understand what it was about. It was a letter to the Steel Ministry. When Mr Tata was done, I stood up and asked whether he minded if I asked him a question and when he said that I could, I expressed my difficulty in comprehending a certain point, which he

readily explained in detail. This is a rare quality, one that I felt set him apart from other business heads.

**III** During my days with Mr Sabavala, he called me one day and said that Mr Tata wanted to use a quote from Sir Winston Churchill on Russia, but was unable to get it. Mr Sabavala had by then, tried various sources and had drawn a blank. Those were pre-internet days and so one could not Google a quote! I decided to visit the British Council Library where I was a member. After some scouring, I was able to locate the quote. I copied it, rushed back to Bombay House, typed it out, and handed it over to Mr Sabavala, who promptly sent it to JRD Tata with the words, "Dug out by the Guru of TISCO." I recall that Mr Tata wrote back, "Thanks" on the note. An inspiring leader and yet so humble.

**IV** It must have been in the late-1980's. I was working for Mr Russi Mody on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of Bombay House. His secretariat, which I shared with his Executive Assistant, was in an adjoining room. One day, while Mr Mody was out of town, we had a surprise visitor. It was JRD Tata and he was accompanied by Mr Sharokh Sabavala and some aides. He inspected my room thoroughly, looked at the ceiling and remarking on the inadequate brightness, searched for the right word to describe what he had in mind. His aides suggested a couple of terms but could not satisfy him. I suddenly said out loud, "Could it be 'lumen, Sir?'" Mr Tata exclaimed, "That's it!" and gave me a look that I fervently hoped, was complimentary!

**V** This happened in the early 60's when I had just joined Tata Steel. Bruce Street, as it was then called, had a number of shoeshine stands on the kerbs on either side in front of the Sri Lankan Consulate and Central Bank, manned mostly by natives of Tamil Nadu. New India Assurance Company, closely associated with the House of Tata, had its own building less than a furlong away, in Flora Fountain. As Directors, JRD Tata and Mr JD Choksi attended the Board Meetings

of New India Assurance Company and used to walk down from Bombay House. On one occasion, when I was heading towards Bombay House, I saw them walking outside the Sri Lankan Consulate, on their way to the New India Building. To my great surprise and joy, I saw an elderly shoeshine person pointing out to the duo and telling a new recruit in Tamil, "Do you know who that person is? He is the head of Tatas and he is walking!" The incident by itself is minor, but it illustrates Mr Tata's modesty as a benchmark of his quality as a human being.

**VI** Though it does not pertain to any personal interaction, or an incident where JRD Tata was present, I am narrating this because of the impact his very name has. I am 85 now and I think this happened over 60 years ago. My brother, who was employed in the Tata Steel Sales Branch Office located in the New India Assurance Building, suggested that I try for a job in Air India, which also had an office in the same building. He arranged for an interview through a contact and as I was deeply interested in aeroplanes and the aviation sector, I was hopeful of making a mark. I visited Air India in my best hand-me-downs on the day of the interview! It went off very well, and at last, came the clincher from across the table, "Can you name the Chairman of Air India?" I couldn't believe the simplicity of the question. "JRD Tata!", I blurted out in my excitement. "Mr JRD Tata, young man!" The words came like a slap. At that moment, I knew the interview was over. I thanked the interviewer, wished him a good day, and tottered out of the door. Over-enthusiasm had cost me a job and taught me a never-to-be-forgotten lesson!



JRD Tata as a conscript in the French Army

## The Aeroplane and Other Stories



Mr S P Sarathy  
Chief Administrative Officer, Chairman's Office

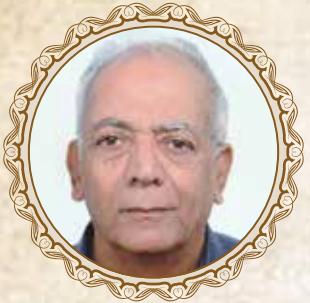
Once, JRD Tata on a visit to Jamshedpur, flew his plane over a large area and asked the gathering of the officers and their families to guess the height of the plane. A lady came up with the right answer and was given a prize! JRD Tata was the Chairman of

all the companies in Tata Sons and often, during meetings with his business heads, asked questions for clarifications but left the final decision for them to take. Mr Tata used to practise yoga every morning, even during his visits to Jamshedpur.

If you want excellence, you must aim for perfection.

- JRD Tata

## The Rickshaw Race



Mr A J Asok Kumar  
Divisional Manager

In the mid-1980's, on the occasion of Founder's Day, JRD Tata was present when a cycle rickshaw race was being organised. Russi Mody, the then CMD, drove one rickshaw with JRD Tata as the passenger and everybody had a lot of fun!

The Tubes Division was adjudged the winner for their floats. When the winning team was requested to collect the trophy from JRD Tata, Mr RK Bhasin, the then Head, Tubes Division, came and

collected it. Mr Mody asked Mr Bhasin to return the trophy to Mr Tata at once. When the award was returned, Mr Mody requested Mr Tata to award the trophy to himself. As I was standing just behind Mr Tata, I heard him whisper to Mr Mody, "Russi, in that case, I should be collecting the trophy!" (As he was the group Chairman).

Later, as the event drew to a close, a guard of honour by the security personnel was organised, followed by a Tubes Division band. JRD Tata asked one of the ladies sitting next to him: "Hey, what am I supposed to do now?" The lady responded, "You are not wearing any cap so you should just stiffen your body while accepting the guard of honour." He protested in a whisper: "But I think I still have a few strands of hair left on my head!"

## Our Team's Encounter with Mr JRD Tata

In 1979/80 our team was in Bombay and had made a hat-trick in winning three consecutive all-India tournaments. Viz:-Inter Zone at Hyderabad, All India Open, Nagpada Neighborhood and Ramu Memorial tournaments and both were held at Bombay. (Sankaran at that time had undergone a major operation at Vellore and recouping.) I was the captain-cum-Manager and we were invited by Mr S R Subbaraman (Company Secretary) for lunch at the Taj Mahal Hotel.

We were to meet him at Bombay House and the whole team, including the two seven-footers stood in line at Bombay House waiting for the lift. The elevator was very small and could take only 3 or 4 people at a time. When we were in line waiting suddenly Panda, one of our seven-footers, said in a whisper: "Peeche Dekhiye." I turned and saw our beloved Chairman, JRD Tata, standing in line for his turn. We all moved out to make way for him, but he refused and took his turn.

When we narrated this to Mr Subbaraman he just said: "He is always like that and will always wait for his turn, we are used to it."

This is an extract from the chapter, 'Basketball Anecdotes of Jamshedpur', from the book titled, 'Nuggets of Jamshedpur and Tata Steel', authored by Mr A J Asok Kumar.

## JRD at Jamadoba



Mr Uttam Chakraborty  
Supply Executive

The year was 1987. JRD Tata was visiting Jamadoba for the inauguration of the first Fluidised Bed Combustion (FBC) Power Plant, a first-of-its-kind captive plant in India, commissioned by BHEL.

JRD Tata, accompanied by Russi Mody, the then CMD, went up to the third floor of the plant control room with ease and interacted with the operators there. During the inauguration, there was a heavy downpour, and consequently, a severe electrical fault occurred in the plant, letting out huge amount of steam and a power outage.

JRD granted permission to stop the plant to check the steam emission and noise, in order to conduct the inauguration ceremony.

## On a Flight with JRD and other Stories



Mr Yezad Kapadia  
General Manager (Operations)

I was assigned to the Blast Furnace Department, which in the 60's was not performing as per targets due to some faults in the plan. On his annual visits, JRD Tata refused to stop by this department until we could increase our output sufficiently, so that the Company could start making reasonable profits again.

Perhaps my most enduring memory of JRD Tata was the time we both were on the same flight back to India. I greeted him casually and he asked me what was I doing outside India. He was told that the Company had sent me abroad to study the latest developments in iron and steel making. He was most interested to know what I had observed and said, "Kapadia, I will come and see you." He went to the First Class and I proceeded to the Economy. Suddenly, it was time to land in Mumbai. I thought maybe he had forgotten all about our conversation. At the baggage claim, we met once more. He

said, "Kapadia, I came to see you twice. Once you were asleep and the second time you were not in your seat!"

In another incident, it was either the 75<sup>th</sup> or the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Company's establishment. Indira Gandhi was invited. I was the General Superintendent then and a grand exhibition was set up in front of the west entrance to the GS Office. A gala function was to take place on the GS Office lawns. We had cyclonic weather, accompanied by heavy rain, the day before. The structure that was to house the exhibition was blown away. There was ankle-deep

water on the lawns. I suggested to JRD that we should prepare an alternate location for the function. He responded that the lawns would dry up by the day after! The exhibition was set up again overnight and the lawns did dry up the day after. The function was held as per schedule.

Before this event, we had a small statue of our Founder, adorning the main entrance to the plant. JRD Tata had commissioned a famous sculptor from Mumbai to make a huge statue of the Founder. The Management decided to shift the small statue to the plant at

Adityapur. The workers would have none of it. They said the Founder could not leave the hallowed grounds of the plant! I was asked to find a suitable location for this small statue. I could think of no better location than the GS Office lawns for the statue to overlook the main arterial road of the plant, so that the incoming and outgoing workers could pay their respects during the change of shifts!



JRD with Air India crew members

## JRD at the Asian Games



Mr P N Sankaran  
Sr Divisional Manager - Sports

Over my long association with Tata Steel, I had the good fortune of interacting with JRD Tata on a couple of occasions. The first was at the Inter Tata Sports Meet in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1962. I represented Tata Steel in the 10 km walkathon. JRD Tata hosted a dinner for all the participants, where I had the honour of meeting him and telling him about my participation in the event and also my role in Tata Steel. It took exactly two decades after this to meet him in person again and spend

some time with him under wonderful circumstances.

In 1982, India hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> Asian Games in Delhi. It was a great occasion for the country and I was closely associated with organisational aspects of the event. As a privilege, I was given two Golden Passes that gave me access to all the stadiums and facilities associated with the extravaganza. At the outset, I invited Russi Mody, our MD at the time, to come and have a look at the arrangements and watch the events up-close.

Mr Mody did take the opportunity and I took him around the facilities. He was highly impressed with the work that had gone in and mentioned that he would request JRD Tata to also come and witness the biggest sporting event India was hosting.

JRD Tata made a day-long visit to the Asian Games and we ended up in the evening at the Nehru Stadium, to watch a football

match. He commented with a great sense of humour that football should be played by penguins, as one was not supposed to touch the ball with one's hands! He was very happy to hear that I played for Tata Steel and Bihar. Upon being spotted by some children, he gladly obliged them with his autograph. He was very happy because the Asian Games promoted the construction of modern facilities in India.

When the work for the JRD Tata Sports Complex was to start, Mr Mody called me and asked me to take charge. We succeeded in finishing the job on time and at a very low cost. The day for the inauguration was fixed and I told Mr Mody that I wished for a helicopter, to escort JRD Tata from the Directors Bungalow to the Sports Complex. This was arranged and JRD Tata was delighted, particularly with the helicopter parade! ✈️



Dr Homi Bhabha introducing JRD Tata to Nobel Prize winner, Dr Neils Bohr, with Jamshed Bhabha

## JRD at the Rolling Mill



Mr Swastik Gupta  
Sr Manager (Maintenance System)

I was working in MLSM, Medium and Light Structural Mill at that time when we were told that JRD Tata would like to visit our plant, just to

see the operation of a rolling mill. While all others were viewing the mill, I observed that JRD Tata had quietly isolated himself and joined our small group, standing at attention. He quickly made us comfortable and started chatting with us. I admired his elegance and simplicity, wherefrom I understood why prominent people from around the world fondly called him simply "JRD". He made us feel at home with questions like, "Is the plant always this noisy? Doesn't the noise from the plant make you uncomfortable? Take care of

your hearing." We could feel how genuinely concerned he was for his employees.

I was told of an incident when the plan of JRD Tata Sports Complex was shown to him. He simply pointed out that the viewing gallery should be rectified suitably, so that the sun's rays did not affect the eyes of the spectators. We were amazed at his keen observation and sound technical knowledge as this aspect had been completely overlooked by all else. ✈️

## At Home with JRD



Mr S Ramanathan  
Manager, Pre-Projects

I had been sent to Nagapattanam on deputation as the Superintendent

of ISRM, a re-rolling mill. There was a get-together at the Beldih Club Grounds, to honour JRD Tata's visit to Jamshedpur. Dr JJ Irani very kindly introduced me to him, as the person who had just returned to the Company after his deputation. At once, JRD made me comfortable in his presence by asking me about my experience on deputation, the town, the products, the mill and the workforce. ✈️

## A Human Touch



Mr M K Venkatanarayan  
Divisional Manager - Industrial Engineering Division

In 1989, I lost my wife Rukmani in the tragic incident of fire in Jamshedpur on Founder's Day. JRD Tata cancelled his trip to France and returned to Jamshedpur. He visited my house and consoled with me in person. He met my children and interacted with them as well. It was an unforgettable moment. ✈️



At the U N Population Award ceremony 1992, with Boutrous Boutrous-Ghali, U N Secretary-General on his left

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Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without deep thought and hard work.

- JRD Tata

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## A Touching Gesture



Mr K N Prabhu  
Assistant Divisional  
Manager - Training

My wife had been visiting her parents for a short while with our four-year-old son in Santacruz, Mumbai. One day, she decided to meet some relatives, for which she had to avail of public transport from Santacruz (East). She was at the zebra crossing, but due to heavy traffic, vehicles were moving slowly. As they waited, a long and wide foreign car moved close to the pavement where my son was standing and a protrusion from the back of the vehicle brushed

against his head. He started crying uncontrollably. The chauffeur overheard the cries and immediately stopped the car to take them to a nearby hospital. After finding out from the doctors that it was a small bruise and ensuring proper treatment, the chauffeur dropped them back home. He requested my wife to write a small note to his boss explaining his delay in reaching office. My family was astonished when they came to know that his employer was none other than JRD Tata! My father-in-law wrote him a letter appreciating the good work done by his chauffeur. That very evening, the chauffeur brought a note from Mr Tata to my father-in-law, apologising for the unfortunate incident and mentioning a contact number to be reached should any further assistance be required in this regard. We were deeply touched by his gesture. ✈

## My Meetings with JRD

I had joined Tata Steel in 1961 at the Joda East Iron Mines and had started some initiatives on drilling and blasting of hard iron ore deposits there. This was well appreciated by Mr Morgan Leonard, who was at that time, appointed as Chief, Metal Mines & Collieries, Tata Steel, to improve mechanised mining operations at Joda, Noamundi and the coal mines. After about two years at Joda, I was transferred to Noamundi Iron Mines in late 1963. It took me about six months to make significant improvements in drilling and blasting operations, which ultimately led to an increased production of iron ore at Noamundi.

Mr Morgan Leonard lauded my work and introduced me to JRD Tata when he visited Noamundi. Upon meeting me, Mr Tata held my hand for about five minutes. He asked me about my native place and wanted to know how I felt being at Noamundi. For a young employee of about 26, it was the happiest moment of my life!

I met him for the second time on March 3, 1983, on the occasion of the Founder's Day celebrations at Jamshedpur. JRD Tata was visiting and the Company required high purity Dolomite, for the lining of the steel mills as the project had to start as soon as possible. I was

called by Russi Mody, the then MD, to prepare a project report within three hours, for Mr Tata's approval.

In the afternoon, when I was introduced to Mr Tata, to my surprise, he recalled our meeting at Noamundi 20 years ago! I presented the report and answered some points raised by the MD and Mr Tata and the project was approved. I have had the good fortune of meeting him on several occasions thereafter, but these two incidents have been the most memorable.

- Mohammad Fasihuddin  
General Manager - (OM&Q)

## Sharing a Seat with JRD



Mr H Ramakrishnan  
Manager - Administration (South)

I joined Tata Steel in February, 1992. Possibly in the month of August that year, there was an event in Dimna, where a dance recital was organised as part of a cultural event. I entered the enclosure for the guests a little after the event had started. I could

see JRD Tata seated in the front row amongst the guests. I was waiting at the entrance since there was no place to sit. After about five minutes, I saw JRD Tata waving at me. Taken aback, I went up to him and, as I got closer, he whispered to me to take a seat.

Touched, I thanked him profusely and assured him that I would help myself and manage to get a seat somewhere at the back. To this, he said that in case I didn't find one, I could return and share the seat with him. I was both amazed and moved by his humbleness and can never forget this incident. ✈

Uncommon thinkers  
reuse what common  
thinkers refuse.

- JRD Tata



JRD Tata and Sylla in Japanese costumes at Yokohama in 1917, where they spent a year and a half

## JRD: Simple, Humane and Caring



Mr B P Sarkar  
Head (Product & Market Development)

JRD Tata was a visionary who strongly believed in ethical practices and the welfare of his employees. People who came in touch with him were awed by his simplicity, humane nature and care for apparently even the most negligible things in life.

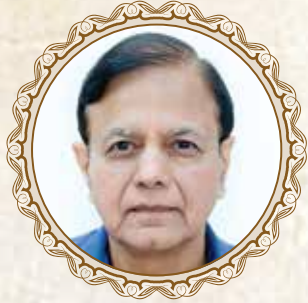
I had the opportunity of meeting him twice. Once, during a marketing conference in Mumbai in 1984, and again in the same year when he inaugurated the officers' residential building at Penn Road, Alipore, Kolkata. This was the first residential building, in Kolkata, built by Tata Steel for the officers. Russi Mody was hosting this inaugural function, attended by officers of Tata Steel, Kolkata.

Beyond the entrance of this building, there was a wide cemented road, meant for cars to go up to the main building. This space was also supposed to double up as the residents' children's play area. The joints in this cemented road had bitumen protrusions.

When JRD Tata entered the compound, he struck the protrusions with his toe a few times as he was visibly concerned about children getting hurt while playing. I was amazed to see that even a minor matter like this did not escape his attention.

I wish to convey my heartfelt respect and salutes to him through this edition.

## The Tall Hedge



Mr Vinaya Nand Pandey  
Sr Manager, Management Development

JRD Tata was visiting Jamshedpur on the occasion of Founder's Day in the 70's. Jubilee Park looked resplendent and was venerated with beautiful flowers. The Public Relations and Town Administration team escorted the Chairman around the park. The Superintendent of Parks & Gardens took him to the rose garden and showed him the hundreds of varieties of roses with

pride. Mr Tata admired the display with keen interest.

At that time, he also noticed a small child outside the rose garden who was jumping up and down in order to catch a glimpse of the roses, but his vision was blocked by the surrounding tall green hedge. JRD enquired why the hedge was made to grow so tall. He was told by the

superintendent that the hedge was being grown vertically in order to prevent people from coming over and stealing the prized roses.

Dissatisfied, JRD commented, "But surely, the hedge can be made shorter and wider. It will serve the same purpose!"

## Driving JRD Tata

JRD Tata would never miss an occasion to visit Jamshedpur on Founder's Day. He was extremely fond of Jamshedpur and its people, who, in turn, have always reciprocated his love. During one such visit, an elderly and seasoned chauffeur drove his official car and eventually grew very fond of Mr Tata. One day, he confided in his superior that he would love to have a photograph of himself with Mr Tata. His superior promptly passed on the request to Mr SP Sarathy, who was the secretary to Russi Mody, the then MD. Mr Sarathy conveyed this request to Mr Mody who, in turn, asked him to forward it to the Chairman's Office in Bombay, as JRD Tata insisted on personally going through and responding to all requests from

Company employees.

Upon receiving the request, Mr Tata could not recall the chauffeur. He asked his secretary to pass on the following instruction to the MD's Office in Jamshedpur: **"When I reach Jamshedpur by the Company's plane, Mr**

**Sarathy should be told to stand next to him. I will approach them and request him for a photograph".**

On March 2, the Chairman's flight landed at Sonari Airport and JRD Tata alighted to a rousing reception from the

senior executives led by Mr Russi Mody. Mr Tata walked up to his car and shook hands with the chauffeur. He then requested the chauffeur to pose for a photograph with him. The Company's photographer took a picture of JRD with him. JRD thanked Mr Sarathy and said, **"Please send the photograph to my office in Bombay. I will autograph it. My office will get it framed at the best studio and send it back to Jamshedpur. Please have it personally delivered to his home, with my compliments."**



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**When you work, work as if everything depends on you. When you pray, pray as if everything depends on God.**

- JRD Tata

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A view of Marine Lines, Bombay

### DISCLAIMER

As much as we would have liked to have incorporated all your valuable inputs, anecdotes and recollections, we have been able to include only those that were best suited and in keeping with the spirit of this special edition.