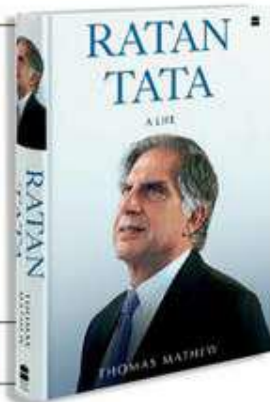


THE RATAN TATA YOU DID NOT KNOW

The face of India's oldest mega-corp for as long as most of us can remember, Ratan Tata, who died at the age of 86 last month, was both a well-known public figure and an enigma. As the first chairman to hand over the reins to a non-Tata, he seemed to be breaking the mould, and not for the first time. But he was also a steely guardian of corporate tradition. Thomas Mathew's newly-published biography is based on hundreds of hours of conversation with Tata as well as many of his confidants. Excerpts

RATAN TATA A LIFE | HARPERCOLLINS INDIA | Price: ₹1,499 | Pages: 712 | By **THOMAS MATHEW**



1944 CHILDHOOD LESSON

Ratan's parents had had a love marriage, a rarity in the socially conservative India and the equally traditional Parsi community of the pre-Independence era. But their whirlwind courting could not survive the normal vicissitudes of marriage and in 1944, they separated, with Soonoo moving to her parents' house. Soonoo filed for divorce and it was a traumatic period for the children. Ratan was going on ten and Jimmy seven when they had to do many rounds of the family court. It was an 'unpleasant' and hurtful experience, Ratan remembers. Soonoo eventually married Sir Jamsetji Jejeebhoy. Ratan says that separations or divorces did not happen 'every day' then as they do

today. The rift between his parents was sensationalised and the details of their separation, both true and imagined, travelled fast. It became a topic of discussion in schools. Both Ratan and Jimmy were 'ragged' and humiliated in school by their peers.

1962 FIRST LOVE

Interestingly, during this period, Ratan found his first true love too. She was nineteen-year-old Carolyn Emmons, the daughter of Frederick Emmons. Her father introduced her to Ratan. She said that she was attracted to Ratan at first sight. Her parents were also very fond of him. Her father 'loved' Ratan, Carolyn says. Her mother 'thought

he was wonderful [and] he was so polite', she adds. But their relationship was short-lived. From 1962 onwards, Lady Tata, who was eighty-five, kept indifferent health. As her health waned, she finally wrote to Ratan, telling him about her deteriorating condition. He realised that it would bring her immense joy if he returned to India though she never demanded that he do so. Finally, by July 1962, overwhelmed by concern for his ailing grandmother, Ratan decided to return to India. Carolyn was expected to follow but on 20 October 1962, war broke out between India and China. Although in just about a month, ceasefire was declared in the subcontinent, to an American, the situation looked too fraught. Soon afterwards, the two drifted apart.

1962-63 JOINING THE TATA GROUP

Ratan had started working with IBM on his return from the US. He would sit in the IBM office in the Vulcan Insurance Building near Churchgate. But JRD convinced him that his rightful place was with the Tata Group. Ratan says: 'I sat and typed out my CV because IBM had nice electric typewriters which no one else had at that time. I then handed over my CV to JRD; and that's how I got into Tata.' JRD wanted Ratan to begin on the shop floors of two of the group's best-run, best-managed and largest companies, the Tata Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO) and the Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), both situated in Jamshedpur in east India. It was a way to ensure that Ratan would start with the basics.

1991 AN UNEXPECTED LEAP

Surprisingly, virtually none of the close observers of the Tata Group could make a correct assessment of who would replace JRD as the chairman of TIL. And when the decision was announced on 21 October 1981, it took many by surprise. Few expected the softspoken, introverted Ratan to be appointed JRD's successor. One leading magazine termed it an 'unexpected

choice' and added that JRD, who was 'well-known as a conservative captain of industry who looks extremely carefully before he leaps ... leapt in an unexpected direction'... A leading business daily wrote that 'Tata directors like Nani Palkhivala, Russi Mody and Minoo Mody [CEO, Tata Sons] were bitterly disappointed at Ratan's choice.' Ratan himself, with his characteristic humility, said: 'I was as pleasantly surprised—it was as if my name had been something else.'

2000 THE TETLEY ACQUISITION

After taking over as chairman of the Tata Group in 1991 just two years short of its 125th year, Ratan renewed his commitment to transform the group from a primarily Indian entity to a conglomerate with a significant overseas presence. He declared it as his unwavering goal and was unremitting in his demand to the senior group leaders to accomplish this vision.

He drove home this point repeatedly during the meetings of Tata company CEOs. Addressing them at the AGMM in 2000, for instance, he said: '[The] World is the market'; the 'World is the competition'; 'We cannot put our head in the sand,' we have to be 'Leaders in the changing times'. He reinforced this message in 2002 at the same forum. And this goal found its first major practical expression in Tata Tea's takeover of the British tea brand, Tetley.

2007 TARGETING THE MARQUEES: JAGUAR AND LAND ROVER

When Ratan heard from his friend Lord Kumar Bhattacharyya that Ford was looking for a suitable buyer for its luxury brands Jaguar and Land Rover, he was excited. For a self-confessed car aficionado, the temptation was irresistible. Krishna Kumar was consulted and he supported the move. Having sensed Ratan's desire to explore the possibility of buying the marquee brands, Bhattacharyya arranged a confidential trip for him to the UK in 2007. Former Tata Motors MD Ravi Kant comments that during the visit, Ratan was impressed with what he saw...



CHILDHOOD TO CHAIRMANSHIP:

Clockwise from far left, Ratan Tata with brother Jimmy in 1945; Tata on his first visit to Telco plant in Jamshedpur; Tata with Russi Mody