

Sir Nowroji Bapuji Saklatvala (1875-1938): His Life and Times

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Abstract

Saklatwala was a son of Jamsetji Tata's sister. He was the first non-Tata to head the Tata industrial group. He started his career as an assistant in Svadeshi Mills and rose to the position of chairman of Tata Sons, the holding company of the group. Under his stewardship already established companies grow, especially the textile companies. He contributed to the survival of Tata Iron & Steel Company when it was engaged in a life and death struggle. He was associated with many commissions, committees and conferences. He met a pre-mature death. He was mourned by all concerned.

Key words: Textile mills, Tisco, Air transport, Insurance industry, Automobiles, Games, Sports

I. Introduction

Nowroji Bapuji Saklatvala was born on September 10, 1875. He was the son of Bapuji Hormusji Saklatvala and Virbai, sister of Jamsetji Tata who founded the House of Tata. He was educated at St. Xavier's School and College, Bombay. Being an ordained priest, he was simple in his behaviour and sympathetic to the helpless and poor.

He joined the Svadeshi Mills of Jamsetji Tata as an assistant in 1899 on a monthly salary of Rs. 50. In 1917 he was made a director of Tata Sons which was the holding company of the Tata companies. He became the chairman of some Tata companies like Tata Iron and Steel Company, Tata electrical companies, Investment Corporation of India, Tata Oil Mills, New India Insurance Company, Associated Building Company, etc. He became a trustee of Sir Dorabji Tata Trust in March and Lady Tata Memorial Trust in April 1932. In the same year he was elected the chairman of Tata Sons after the death of Dorabji Tata (the son of Jamsetji Tata) on April 5, 1932 and remained so till his demise in 1938. He was the first non-Tata to head the Tata group. Employees of the group affectionately referred to him as "The chairman."

He was honoured by the Government. In 1917 he was appointed a justice of peace. On September 5, 1922 he was sworn a member of the Central Legislative Assembly as a representative of the Bombay Millowners' Association.

The Government bestowed on him the honour of the Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (CIE) on the New Year's Day in 1923. *The Indian Textile Journal* reported then that the occasion was met with "warm approval of those connected with the trades and industries of this (Bombay) Presidency. Intimately associated with the undertakings of the Tata family, his work especially in connection with the textile industry has been of particular value and substantial benefit alike to the labouring classes and the investing public. The Welfare Work for the operatives under the Messrs. Tata's control owes a good deal to the personal exertion and sympathy shown by Mr. Saklatvala and to his practical knowledge of cotton mill management".¹ In 1934 the Government knighted him. Finally, in 1937 it made him Knight Commander of the British Empire (K.B.E.).

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¹ *The Indian Textile Journal*, January 1923, vol. 33, no. 388, p. 101.

As a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, he took positions which were pro-employers. In 1922 C.A. Innes (Commerce and Industries Member) moved a resolution in the Legislative Assembly proposing that in a commercial establishment there should be a weekly day of rest for the workers in the context of the thinking of the International Labour Conference. Saklatvala opposed it and pointed out that in the Conference "About 40 nations were represented... they all came to a unanimous conclusion that, instead of having a rigid convention it would be much better to pass a recommendation." He further said, "I say that the Local Governments are the best fitted to deal with the question which should be left to them for whatever action they think necessary"². However, his stint as a legislator was for a brief period. But his association with several industries the chief of which was the cotton textile industry was lifelong.

II. Cotton Textile Industry

Saklatvala commenced his career in this industry and remained closely associated with it throughout his life. He rose to be the chairman of the Bombay Millowners' Association in 1916 and thus became the uncrowned king of the industry. In his address to the Association, he reviewed the developments of the year and expressed gratification at the war loans (for the World War I 1914-18) which had been raised to support the war efforts. He then referred to the super tax. He was not critical of it but added, "I shall only point out that the super tax has induced some Mills to declare larger dividends than usual; to escape the additional levy as far as possible, and thus to fritter away an excellent opportunity to build up large reserves, which strengthen the Companies' position and are safeguards against lean years." He talked about the duty on imported piece-goods which was a "courageous and righteous measure" and added, "Of course, the Excise Duty still remains, but we recognize that at a time when every pie of the Imperial Revenue is needed to meet the exigencies of the war, it would not be an advisable step to repeal the duty altogether. The increase in the import duty without a countervailing increase in the Excise is in itself a tacit admission on the part of the authorities that the Excise Duty was a blunder - nay, an unjust and iniquitous measure. (It is) hateful not because of the amount to be paid (for I do not hold with those who maintain that the 3½ per cent. levied is crippling our Weaving Industry, nay, I am of opinion that the burden can be borne if required for revenue purposes), but hateful, because of its being unjust in the extreme, and of its having been imposed by weak ministers simply to placate the Lancashire vote." There was another matter of regret for him, "I refer to the embargo placed on the importation of Indian yarn into the United Kingdom, for the reason alleged of freights being required more urgently for important war goods. If this were really the case, we should be the last to complain, but when we find that at the same time cotton was freely allowed to be exported for trade purposes not only to the United Kingdom, but to other parts of Europe, and the restrictions as regards yarns applied only to the United Kingdom, it is hard for us to accept the plea of shortness of freight. In spite of the fact that Lancashire spins very little coarse yarn and gets it mostly from the Continent in ordinary times, the fear of Indian competition seems to have prevailed over all other considerations." He pointed the problems which the war brought for the industry. To begin with, it was the shortage of dyes (which were predominantly imported from Germany and hence ended) and then it was of stores and machinery parts. But there was a silver lining. "I, however, cannot allow this opportunity to pass without pointing out that the present is the most appropriate time for developing the resources of India, and for producing within the country those articles, for the supply of which we have hitherto relied on foreign countries, but which we can reasonably hope to produce here." German trade with Africa and Mesopotamia had come to an end, and hence it was a favourable time for the mill industry to cater to this market before the Japanese industry filled the vacuum. Referring to the shortage of labour, particularly skilled labour, he observed, "I am inclined to believe that the main causes are the want of primary education among the work-people, and the long hours of work in unattractive surroundings." The workers should be well paid, comfortably housed and provided with innocent amusements and recreation. The last subject which

² *The Legislative Assembly Debates (Official report of the third session) vol. 3. Third Session, 1922* (citation not available), pp. 368-69.

he touched was the shortage of coal because shipping became scarce. But the condition had happily improved of late³.

Saklatvala's links with the textile industry continued in the subsequent years. In 1920 the Assistant Registrar, Co-operative Societies, Government of Bombay, wrote to the Millowners' Association that one of the demands of the mill-hands during the late strike was that provision should be made for the supply of grain and other necessities at cheap rates to them. He pointed out that perhaps the best way to meet this demand would be to open co-operative stores for the sale of these articles in the mill areas and the government gave encouragement to their setting up. He suggested that the proposal might be discussed at a meeting of the representatives of the Association, mill-hands, Special Assistant Registrar and himself. The Association appointed Saklatvala and two others as their representatives and a meeting was held on August 24, 1920. It was decided that the Special Assistant Registrar should interview the agents of mills to discuss with them the possibility of setting up a consumers' society in their areas⁴. Subsequently, some mills established grain shops. But they were not a success because of, *inter alia*, the flexibility which the bania offered in terms of his dealings with the mill-hands like availability of credit, quantum of provisions, unrestricted accessibility, etc. Hence, they were discontinued after 1924.

As chairman of Tata Sons, Dorab Tata was also the chairman of the Tata Group of mills. But in 1930 Saklatvala was made chairman of the Central India Spinning, Weaving and Manufacturing Company. After Dorab Tata's death, he became chairman of Svadeshi Mills, Tata Mills and Ahmedabad Advance Mill. Under his leadership, Tata Sons, agents of the four Tata mills, sought to take advantage of the svadeshi spirit generated by the salt satyagraha. It advertised in *The Bombay Chronicle* that the mills produced svadeshi cloth from the Indian yarn and that all descriptions of cloth at mill prices were sold from the retail shop in Bombay as well as at wholesale and retail prices fixed by the mills in 32 cities⁵. Consequently, Tata mills did not face the wrath of the masses as happened in the case of the Sassoon Mills and others which were deemed foreign mills and whose manufactures were boycotted.

When Dorabji Tata died, the official chronicler says that Svadeshi Mills Company faced the most difficult days. It had serious problems. The demand for cloth was slack. There were frequent labour troubles. The operational results were reflecting stagnation year after year. But, Sir Nowroji was one who could see beyond the immediate troubles. He correctly diagnosed the real problem with the mills. The machinery in the mills had started ageing after working, in some cases, for over 40 years. He took steps to replace some of the old machinery⁶. Again, at his instance Ahmedabad Advance Mills, Ahmedabad began the production of fine counts during 1936-37. It purchased six combers, one ribbon lap machine and one silver lap machine.

For the sake of completeness, it may be added that in mid-1930s the Boycott Committee of the Bombay Congress Committee had classified the city's mills under the head 'Swadeshi' and 'non-Swadeshi'. Only cloth produced by the Indian mills under Indian management and without the use of foreign yarn was Swadeshi. The excluded mills were entirely or partially controlled by the Europeans. The Boycott Committee asked the public not to buy cloth which did not bear the name of the mill where it was produced. The boycott badly affected not only the European mills but also Indian merchants dealing in non-swadeshi cloth. A deputation of millowners led by Saklatvala met Mahatma Gandhi and laid before him the unfairness of the terms imposed by the Congress Boycott Committee on the Indian mills. They also brought to his notice the plight of the foreign piece-goods dealers. Gandhi explained to them the scheme sponsored by him and the

³ *Report of the Bombay Millowners' Association for the year 1916* (Bombay: The Times Press, 1917), pp. viii-xii.

⁴ *Report of the Bombay Millowners' Association for the year 1920* (Bombay: Publishers name not available, 1921), p. 52.

⁵ See, for instance, *The Bombay Chronicle* dated June 9, 16, 23 and 30, 1932.

⁶ Tata Economic Consultancy Services, Bombay, *Tata History Project: Svadeshi Mills Company* (Bombay: 1981), p. 5. Cyclostyled study in Tata Central Archives, Pune.

Congress to give relief to the foreign-cloth dealers. They had a further meeting with him and an agreement was arrived at between the two regarding the disposal of foreign piece-goods⁷.

After Saklatvala's death, *The Bombay Chronicle* pointed out that in course of time he became a mill-man through and through. His knowledge of the working of mills showed good grasp of every detail. He had really worked through the mill⁸.

III. Other Tata companies

Saklatvala contributed to the development of other Tata companies as well. He was involved in the working of the Tata Iron and Steel Company which was the flagship company of the group. He worked for the tariff protection of the steel industry as a whole in 1922 and thereafter together with R.D. Tata. The government was willing to give protection to it but wanted to introduce the system of imperial preference in the industry. This was an anathema to Motilal Nehru and other national leaders. They were willing to let the Tisco die rather than have imperial preference in India. But Saklatvala's thinking was flexible on this matter. Tisco was prepared to concede preference to Britain, as the price for ensuring adequate protection against continental competition. Its only efforts were to try and prevent the preferential margin from widening too much, but when the government proved unsympathetic it decided to leave well alone⁹. The steel industry received protection and Tisco was saved from certain destruction. The company's pragmatic policy towards the question of imperial preference paid off. The Company had received fiscal assistance to enable it to pass through the severest years of the slump. In his memo dated July 22, 1932, he wrote that the Company's first priority continued to be that of eliciting measures to keep continental competition at bay, and it appeared to recognize that an essential prerequisite of this objective was the maintenance of a flexible outlook in the matter of British competition. In general, it tried to steer clear of such controversial issues as imperial preference¹⁰. By 1937, as chairman of Tisco, Saklatvala was able to inform the annual general meeting that it could afford to dispense with tariff protection after 1940¹¹.

During the inter-war period, a unique achievement of Tisco was the implementation of the introduction of payment of bonus on production to labour from April 14, 1928. Saklatvala was primarily responsible for this scheme. The resultant bonus was to be paid monthly on production from April 1928 and disbursed to all workers drawing less than Rs. 300 a month or Rs. 10 a day who had been in employment for at least six months. Men with lower pay were to receive a higher bonus than those with higher. The amount of bonus was to be based on the total monthly finished production. There would be no reduction in wages because of the grant of bonus¹². However, the government introduced the scheme of profit-sharing bonus as late as 1965.

The Company employed a large number of foreigners. Saklatvala was keen about Indianization. As early as 1927, he observed that though technical experts might be employed from abroad, in the ordinary routine part of the work it will not be very long before we achieve practically complete Indianization and one of these days the rest of the world may come to India for men just as we now go to Germany¹³. At his behest Sir Jehangir Ghandy became the first Indian General Manager of the Company in 1938.

⁷ K. Gopalaswami, *Gandhi and Bombay* (Bombay: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi & Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1969), p. 258.

⁸ Sir Nowroji Saklatvala, *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 23, 1938.

⁹ Wagle, Dileep M., 'Imperial preference and the Indian steel industry, 1924-39', *The Economic History Review*, second series, vol. 34, no. 1, 1981, p. 129.

¹⁰ His memorandum dated July 22, 1932. *Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas Papers, File no. 117/1931*. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

¹¹ Speech in the AGM on May 25, 1937. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹² *Jamshedpur Chronicle* quoted in *Labour Gazette*, May 1928. Vol. 7, no. 9, pp. 759-60.

¹³ Quoted in Verrier Elwin, *The story of Tata Steel* (Bombay: Commercial Printing Press, 1958), p. 65.

Important developments took place in some other Tata companies during this period. They are summarized below¹⁴: (1) Tata Sons established the Aviation Department. The Government of India approved its airmail proposal and the contract was signed by them on April 21, 1932. Air transport began in India when J.R.D. Tata (who was destined to succeed him) flew the first plane from Karachi to Bombay on October 15, 1932; (2) In 1932 Tata Oil Mills commissioned its hydrogenation plant. It put grained *vanaspati* in the brand names of *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati* in the market. It also started a plant for the manufacture of household products like hair oils, and metal and other polishes. In 1936 it installed a plant to manufacture crude glycerine from the spent dyes of the soap plant which were hitherto going waste; (3) In 1932 New India Assurance Company extended its insurance cover to the aircraft of Tata Airlines. The first aviation insurance policy was issued on the occasion of J.R.D. Tata's first flight from Karachi to Bombay in the same year; (4) In 1933 the Ball Room in the Taj Mahal Hotel was expanded. New AC plant, Taj Soda Fountain, telephones and additional 40 bedrooms were put up. In 1935 its reorganization was completed as a result of which the hotel had 88 self-contained rooms, 28 suites and 127 bedrooms. In 1937, four suites and 21 rooms were taken up for air-conditioning; (5) In 1936 the first effort towards the modernization of Tata Press was made when automatic machines for letter presses were introduced; (6) Tata School of Social Work was opened in 1937; (7) Investment Corporation of India was floated as a private company in 1937; and (8) Sayajirao Gaikwad (ruler of Baroda) and V.T. Krishnamachari (his diwan) approached the Tatas with the proposal that the latter promote a chemical undertaking in Okhamandal, Kathiawad. The proposal was examined by a committee of experts which reported that it was sound. It culminated in the incorporation of Tata Chemicals in 1939.

Saklatvala had a burning desire that India should start manufacturing automobiles. The issue was first mooted in 1934. Next year a meeting of the representatives of the citizens was held at Bombay under his chairmanship. It was resolved that necessary preliminary investigations should be undertaken to start the industry. This responsibility was taken up by Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, who undertook a tour of America and Europe in 1935 to study the designs and other details of automobile manufacturing in the leading factories. After returning to India, he published a report entitled *Proposals for an automobile factory in India* in April 1936. However, the proposal did not materialise¹⁵.

IV. His contribution in government-appointed commissions and committees

Considering his eminence in the industrial field, he was requested to appear before government-appointed committees and commissions. He gave evidence before the Textile Factories Labour Committee which submitted its report in 1907. The Indian Factory Labour Commission, 1908 sought his views too. He told it that he had considerable practical experience of the textile industry. He advocated shorter hours of work for the workers, and thought that though at first the employers' profits might become less but they would be fair. Ultimately shorter hours would be beneficial for both the parties. He approved of a 11-hour working day for the workers instead of the then prevailing 13- to 14-hour day. But he thought that 11-hour day was long enough for women, considering that they had to perform household duties. He admitted that there might be trouble at first with the workers over their reduced earnings. But if the working hours were restricted by legislation, the matter would adjust itself. He estimated that on an average 10 per cent of the workers idled away their time by remaining absent from the work-room. The piece-workers were more attentive than the daily wage-earners. In the spinning room the loitering reached 14 per cent, while in the weaving room it was three per cent. He calculated that only 25 per cent of the workers were put in a regular month's work. He attributed the absence of workers to long hours of work. The latter needed rest and with a 11-hour work the owners would obtain better attendance. Workers took two hours off in a day but with shorter hours, the factory owners would be able to enforce better discipline. They had to employ extra hands to overcome this problem. In his mills

¹⁴ See the author's *Chronology of the House of Tata* (typed study for the Tata Central Archives, Pune, 1995).

¹⁵ V.S. Narayana Rao, Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya His life and work (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1973), pp. 182-84.

grain depots had been established to keep the sahkars away from the workers. Grains were sold at prices which were 10 per cent below the market price and the workers patronized them. The workers took their wages partly in tickets for grain and partly in cash. But he considered it necessary to keep the workers several weeks in arrears with their wages¹⁶.

The Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-18 sought his replies to its questions. He confined his remarks to the textile industry. He pointed out that the Tatas did not find 'the least difficulty in obtaining from the public as much capital as was necessary either to start new Mill Companies or to strengthen the position of their existing Mills.' He believed that the government aid was 'hardly necessary' for the mill industry which was already well established, but 'it is necessary for such other industries as have great possibilities of success owing to some natural advantages, but owing to Foreign competition are not in a position at the start to make any headway.' He clarified, 'This help may be given in a variety of ways, e.g., (1) there may be a certain import duty levied on imported articles. (2) The articles used for the Industry may be imported duty free. (3) Exemption from Income Tax. (4) Guaranteed or preferential Government purchase.' He further pointed out, 'There are certain industries in which Government help in this direction would be indispensable, as for instance *ship building*, and the manufacture of Electrical Goods (including Motors, Cables, Wires, Lamps, &c.), also making of Mill Machinery and production of coal tar colours. Great Technical skill and a large amount of capital are required for these, and private enterprise is not likely to take the initiative in such industries.' He said that the want of primary education obstructed industrial development. In the textile industry, he remarked, 'The great skill of the workmen in the Mills in England is due to several generations of people having followed the same craft from sire to son. This in the present circumstances is unattainable in India, as the Indian operative has usually two strings to his bow and follows two occupations. In certain seasons he works in a factory and at other times he returns to his native village to pursue agriculture. Again, the absence of concerted action on the part of the Millowners gives facility to the operatives to change their masters and to roam from factory to factory if the discipline in any one of them is not to their taste.'

He regretted that training in most technical schools left much to be desired. He observed, 'The training in Industrial Schools though excellent is bound by its nature to be somewhat defective as these schools cannot reproduce the condition and atmosphere of an actual working factory. The knowledge imparted is more theoretical than practical. The machinery that they have is insufficient, and it cannot be otherwise. Pupils taken from Industrial Schools have to be again entered as apprentices in our Mills.' Attempts were made to establish night schools. But they were not a success. He said, 'Night Schools are unsuited for children; for grown up operatives there is the same difficulty of fatigue and the consequent disinclination for mental work. Besides, in the adults, the frittering away of leisure hours in idleness has become a confirmed habit. Most of them, being illiterate, have no ambition to improve their faculties. Again, as the hours of work are from sunrise to sunset, or at least 12 hours per day, the operatives must go to bed early to rise early.' Other ways in which the millowners worked for the benefit of the workers were provision of sanitary chawls, dispensaries, grain shops, bonus for good work, pension funds, cooperative credit, primary education for children, etc. He raised his voice against the unceasing adulteration of cotton, 'Pure cotton from the districts of its origin is a rarity in the Bombay market and it is safer to buy on spot in the districts where the cotton is grown and to gin and press it under one's own supervision. There are many examples of whole districts which have deteriorated in the quality of their cotton until they have lost their reputation for their finer grades; and have become of secondary importance.' A serious problem was the shortage of coal because of the dearth of wagons. India could not compete with Japan owing to the high freights charged by the shipping companies. He wanted the government to be more helpful to the Indian industry. Its clothing

¹⁶ *Report of the Indian Factory Labour Commission, 1908*. Vol. II- evidence (Simla: Government Central Press, 1908), pp. 105-06.

requirements for the army, hospitals, etc., should be taken from the Indian mills. It should also promote research for the development indigenous dyes and chemicals¹⁷.

In 1920 the Stores Purchase Committee toured round India to examine the issue of stores purchasing by the government. The Millowners' Association deputed Saklatvala to give evidence on its behalf. He mentioned that it would be a distinct advantage to have a central purchasing agency to purchases for government requirements. The advantages of this system would be that all the requirements of the government would be handled by one responsible authority which would place orders on a standardized basis on a large scale. But quasi-public bodies should be allowed to make their own purchases¹⁸.

V. Miscellaneous contribution

The first ever Indian Commercial Congress was held on December 26, 1915 in the Town Hall in Bombay to discuss the commercial problems of the country. Saklatvala attended it as one of the delegates of the Bombay Millowners' Association.

In 1917 the Secretary of State for India wanted that efforts be made to develop India's resources for the military supplies in India, Mesopotamia and Egypt. Hence, the Indian Munitions Board was established in the same year. Its primary object was to build up India's resources not only for the War, but also for the general industrial development. Saklatvala rendered meritorious service as its member from 1919 to 1921.

The Third International Labour Conference was held in Geneva from October 25 to November 19, 1921. Saklatvala attended it as the employers' delegate for India. Afterwards he reported that there was throughout 'the greatest harmony' among the delegates of the Government, employers and workmen. The Indian delegation put up a strenuous fight on the subject of the disinfection of wool infected with anthrax spores and with the help of other countries succeeded in referring the whole question to a special committee to examine it from the points of view of the exporters, importers and consumers. When the maritime questions were discussed, it accepted the prohibition of the employment of young persons as trimmers and stokers, with special reservation for tropical countries. The convention regarding the compulsory medical examination of young persons at sea was also adopted. He concluded his report by saying, 'As far as India is concerned, I believe these Conferences have a great educative value, but on the other hand my firm impression is that Indian conditions and the customs prevailing here are so little understood by most countries that they hardly realize how impracticable some of their conventions or recommendations are when applied to this country'¹⁹.

All-India Industrial Welfare Conference was held in Bombay on April 6 to 8, 1922 to discuss the welfare of industrial workers. Saklatvala was the chairman of the Reception committee.

With the development of modern industries and railways in Bombay, the problem of air pollution emerged. Growing use of steam power led to smoke nuisance. The government established the Bombay Smoke Nuisance Commission to tackle this problem. Bombay Millowners' Association nominated him to represent it in the Commission in 1922 and 1923.

He became a member of the Board of Bombay Port Trust in 1922 and remained so till 1926.

¹⁷ *East India (Industrial Commission, 1916-18). Minutes of evidence taken before the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-18. Vol. IV.- Bombay* (Parliamentary paper Cmd. 237 of 1919), pp. 25-42.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Report of the Bombay Millowners' Association for the year 1920* (Bombay: The Times Press, 1921), pp. 24-26.

¹⁹ Report dated February 20, 1922. Quoted in *Report of the Bombay Millowners' Association for the year 1921* (Bombay: The Times Press, 1922), pp. 314-16.

He made a donation of Rs. 250/- to the Servants of India Society (founded by Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1905) during 1936-37 to help it work for the good of India.

When the Indian companies tried to enter the field of insurance, the foreign insurance companies adopted unfair means to put an end to the competition. For some years the Indian companies did not take any united action to safeguard their interests. Finally, in 1927 the Indian Life Assurance Offices Association was formed. Shortly thereafter on June 24, K.S. Ramachandra Iyer, its Secretary, wrote to the Bombay Millowners' Association, "Out of 86 mills in Bombay a portion of the insurance on only ten mills and full insurance on six mills are placed direct with Indian Insurance Companies. We think it is not unreasonable to suggest that such a big industry as the Bombay mill industry should support locally established companies (when satisfied as to the security) to a far greater extent than the above figures show, and our object is to endeavour to find out from your members what objections there are to bringing this about, and if possible, to overcome such objections." The meeting desired by him was held on October 4, 1927. Saklatvala was one of the seven members of the Millowners' Association. After the meeting, T. Maloney, Secretary of the latter, wrote to its members, "the General Committee of the Association considered the matter in all its bearings and reached the conclusion that the case of the Indian Companies deserves the most sympathetic consideration of the members of the Association"²⁰.

This was followed by the first conference of the Indian insurance companies in 1928 under the chairmanship of Saklatvala. In his address, he dealt with the inadequate development of the insurance industry in India. He observed, "it is not our object here to ask the non-Indian companies to quit and leave the field to us. On the contrary, there is ample room still for all the non-Indian companies and many more Indian companies for the different insurance business." He added, "India is still on the fringe of insurance business as far as Indian companies are concerned. The existing companies have a great responsibility. They have to demonstrate that they can develop along the right lines and inspire the same confidence among the public as some of the non-Indian companies with millions of reserves behind them." Referring to the life insurance business, he remarked, "I am glad to say that in life (insurance) some of the Indian companies have shown results for a series of years which have absolutely consolidated their position, and today can hold their own against the best non-Indian companies that are working here. That is not enough, and such life companies should not be counted on the fingers end but by scores." Nonetheless, the position was bad in other respects. "I have a mournful tale to unfold when coming to fire, marine and accident. Here the progress is painfully slow. The few Indian companies which have already started have demonstrated their utility and their right of existence. I am however grieved to record that the public have not responded to their efforts to the extent they have a right to expect"²¹. The first resolution was moved from the chair. It ran like this, "This Conference of the Indian Insurance Companies calls upon the Indian insuring public in general and the mercantile community in particular to place all their insurances whether (sic) life, fire, marine, accident etc. as far as possible with the Indian Insurance Companies." It was adopted unanimously²². Two other important resolutions were passed at the conference. One resolution expressed grave concern at the growing tendency of life officers as a result of the increasing competition in life assurance field, to pay excessively high terms of initial remuneration to the agents so as to secure a very large volume of business irrespective of the quality or cost of procurement. It further said that in the interest of efficiency and low ratio of expenses steps be taken to cut down the unduly high terms of remuneration to effectively safeguard the interests of the policy holders.

Another resolution expressed its "very great concern" at the practice of rebating which was increasing. It was against the interest of life assurance companies for it tended to increase the ratio of expenses and unsatisfactory business on the one hand, and to early and excessive lapsing of such

²⁰ *Report of the Millowners' Association, Bombay. Report for the year 1927* (citation not available), pp. 201-2 & 205.

²¹ *Betterment of insurance profession Proceedings of the first session of the Indian insurance companies' conference held at the Central Bank building Fort, Bombay April 4th & 5th 1928* (Bombay: Presidency Printing Press, undated), pp. 13-15.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

business. The Association almost strongly recommended life assurance companies to adopt propaganda among their agents pointing out the inevitable result of such practices and also set an example to their agents by refusing to allow commission except to properly appointed agents of the company. However, the Insurance Act of 1938 placed restrictions on the maximum commission that might be paid to the agents and made rebating illegal.

The Millowners' Association made a yearly donation to Nowrojee Wadia Maternity Hospital and it nominated its representative as a member of the Hospital's Board of Management. It appointed Saklatvala as its representative on the Board in 1928 and he continued for some years²³.

Saklatvala had a keen interest in games and sports. As early as 1904, he took interest in cricket. His private purse was drawn upon freely to assist the Cricket Club of India. He arranged a liberal donation towards the cost of the main house of this Club. When it was in problems, his one boast among his friends was that whatever might happen to it, nobody could remove from Bombay the magnificent Brabourne Stadium to whose building up he had contributed much. Apart from this Club, he was also the chairman of Parsi Gymkhana and Bombay Presidency Olympic Association, and Vice-President of Bombay Hockey Federation²⁴. In 1934 he was elected president of Bombay Olympic Association and held that position for some years.

VI. The end

He left Bombay at the end of April 1938 and planned to return in August. After a tour of the US, he spent some time in London and went to the continent. He died of heart failure at Aix-les-Bains (France) on July 21, 1938. He was buried at Brookwood Cemetery (England) on July 25, 1938.

The news of his death was received in Bombay with sorrow. As a mark of respect, offices of several companies were closed. They included the Imperial Bank of India in Bombay, Bombay Stock Exchange, Indian Stock Exchange, Bombay Millowners' Association, Indian Merchants' Chamber, Associated Cement Companies, Premier Construction Company, Century Spinning Mill, Bombay Shareholders' Association, Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Cricket Club of India, Scindia Steam Navigation Company and Globe Insurance Company. Many persons paid rich tributes to him. Sir Feroze Khan Noon, Indian High Commissioner in London, said, 'I feel the loss not only of a great industrialist and a countryman of mine, but also a personal friend. The House of Tatas made such wonderful progress under his wise guidance.' Lala Sri Ram of Delhi said, 'He was a very patriotic industrialist. His death is a great loss to the whole of India, particularly at this juncture when India needed men of his ability.' D.S. Erulkar, head of Scindia Steam Navigation Company (London), said, 'The death of Sir Nowroji is a great loss to India in general and Indian industries in particular. As a great and distinguished industrialist his able helmsmanship steered India's great Steel Industry safely through difficult times to its present position. His death at this time, when his long experience and knowledge would have proved of immense value in the progressive industrialisation of India, is a serious calamity.' The Secretary, Indian Merchants' Chamber, wrote, 'Indeed, the commercial community in general, and this Chamber in particular have lost in him a great man and a genuine friend, whose advice was always available and whose purse strings were always ready to be loosened for any deserving cause'²⁵.

In its editorial entitled 'A national loss,' *The Bombay Chronicle* wrote, 'India has lost a great industrialist, a great sportsman and a great gentleman in the unexpected death of Sir Nowroji Saklatvala at Aix-les-Bains on Thursday. A man of rich and varied achievements, his demise leaves a void which it will be literally impossible to fill. It can be said of the late Sir Nowroji, as of

²³ *Report of the Bombay Millowners' Association for the year 1928* (Bombay: G. Claridge & Co., 1929), p. 6.

²⁴ *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 23, 1938.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

very few others, that he adorned whatever he touched.ö It continued, öHis initiative and enterprise always sought to conquer öfresh fields and pastures newö and never did he display his foresight and vision to better purpose than when he decided to open the aviation department of Tatas!ö Referring to his interest in sports, the editorial said, öHis love for sport came only next to his devotion to duty and suffice it to say that the magnificent cricket stadium, which is the pride of Bombay, will itself remain as a monument to Sir Nowroji in the eyes of all who know the inner history of that scheme.ö He was of a charitable disposition and the editorial commented, öAs chairman of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, Sir Nowroji evinced remarkable discrimination and judgement in the distribution of the huge funds at his disposal. Charity, he knew can prove as much a curse as a blessing and while no deserving cause was denied help, he was never swayed by false ideas of philanthropy.ö The editorial concluded, öThis is not the place to expatiate upon his business achievement, but one cannot but mention the profit-sharing scheme which he only recently introduced at Jamshedpur. It is a very significant pointer to his vision and sympathy and viewed in a wider perspective that scheme will remain the greatest achievement of his careerö²⁶.

D.F. Karaka wrote about him afterwards, öHe was primarily a businessman. He had a sort of native talent for doing business. His method was little more advanced than that of the average businessman, for he believed in decentralizing his power and of delegating work to those under him in whom he had confidence. That way he showed not only great faith in the staff under him, but also trained them to think and act for themselves. But that did not mean that he ceased to take an interest in them. He knew every detail of whatever was in his charge, but he preferred not to interfere where interference was not necessary. He hated the idea of exercising authority. He preferred to be always one among equals.ö He also held strong nationalist views. D.F. Karaka says, öHe was an Indian at heart, as he should have been.ö He realized that his concerns should be Indian controlled. During his chairmanship the first Indian General Manager of Tisco was appointed²⁷.

On July 25, 1938, the Bombay Municipal Corporation adjourned for 15 minutes as a mark of respect to his memory. This was as per the rules. But some councillors were not satisfied in view of the eminence of the deceased. After 15 minutes when the House met again, Mahomedbhoy I. Rowji moved that the House adjourn again. P.D. Shamdasani seconded proposition which was carried out. So the House adjourned till July 28, 1938²⁸.

Appendix

Apart from the Tata companies, Saklatvala was associated with a number of other companies. The Bombay Shareholders' Association informed the Tariff Board (Cotton Textile Industry) that he held the directorships of the following companies (both Tata and non-Tata): (1) Ahmedabad Advance Mills; (2) Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Company; (3) Central India Spinning, Weaving and Manufacturing Company; (4) Century Spinning and Manufacturing Company; (5) Tata Mills; (6) Svadeshi Mills Company; (7) Tata Iron and Steel Company; (8) Imperial Bank of India; (9) Cement Marketing Company of India; (10) Gwalior Cement Company; (11) Shahbad Cement Company; (12) Indian Cement Company; (13) Bombay Electric Supply and Tramway Company; (14) Andhra Valley Power Supply Company; (15) Tata Power Company; (16) Tata Hydro-Electric Power Supply Company; (17) Tata Hydro-Electric Agencies; (18) Kundley Valley Power Supply Company; (19) New India Assurance Company; (20) Bombay Telephones Company; (21) Tata Oil Mills Company; (22) Associated Building Company; (23) Bombay United Building Company; (24) Indian Hotels Company; (25) Tata Electro-chemicals; (26) Broach Electric Supply and Development Company; (27) Poona Electric Supply Company; (28) United Eastern Agencies; and (29) Tata Sons. (Source: *Indian Tariff Board Cotton Textile Industry, Vol. 2* (Manager of Publications, Delhi, 1934), pp. 247-48)

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ öSir Nowroji Saklatvala,ö *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 26, 1938.