

## Time for Planning Commission to Step Back!!!

Bhaskar Roy\*

Just sit back and think. Most of the big names in industry today have their roots in the pre-independence days, be it the Tatas, the Birlas, the Nandas or the Mahindras. The list of Indian-owned industries during that period spans the whole classification of the industrial sector. We had one aircraft company, an airline company, a steel manufacturer that accounted for almost 80% of domestic consumption, cement manufacturers that had a combined market share of almost 60%, besides scores of jute, cotton and silk mills.

So, was the process of planned economic growth, followed post-independence, really justified? Were the barriers to entry, of new players in the various 'heavy' sectors, based on any sound logic? These questions need to be answered with the perspective that most government-run enterprises generally languish at the bottom of the spectrum in the respective sectors and that entrepreneurial enterprise DID EXIST in India, even before independence.

Indian history is full of people who have dared to be different, they have dared to challenge the world in order to try and make a difference. Similar is the case with Indian industry. There are the better known names like Jamsetji Tata, Ghanshyam Dass Birla, Nusli Wadia and Jamnalal Bajaj, and certain names that the people haven't even heard of. The latter includes the like of Dwarkanath Tagore, Ardeshir Godrej and Laxmanrao Kirloskar.

Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1845) had formed a company called Great Western Bengal Railway Company (1843), sowing the seeds of Railways in Bengal. This was to build a rail line for transportation of minerals and other things from mines, at Raniganj and Rajmahal, owned by Tagore. The company's plans were in direct conflict with those of the state-owned Eastern Indian Railway Company, thus the company couldn't get its plans sanctioned. The two companies were merged to form the East India Railway (1847) after Tagore's death.

Besides the rail company, Tagore had a steamer that used to ferry passengers from one bank of the *Hooghly* to the other. He had also used his own steamer, *India*, for the journey to Europe. He took the steamer till Suez. This was in the year 1842, much before the Indian polity had opened up to the idea of having an Indian-owned shipping company.

Ardeshir Godrej (1869-1936) had the desire to have a swadeshi manufacturing company. He started with the manufacture of world-class surgical instruments, but the idea turned out to be a little too ahead of its time as the chemists were not willing to sell instruments made in India. Being the perfectionist that he was, Godrej turned his attention towards the traditional lock-making industry. He did extensive research and started manufacture of world quality locks to give competition to imported locks. Thus was born the Godrej Locks Company.

Laxmanrao Kirloskar (1869-1956) was the first Indian manufacturer of agricultural implements, like iron ploughs. He had a tough time convincing farmers to give up the wooden ploughs and take up his manufactures. This was mainly due to the belief among the farmers that use of iron implements will poison the land and render it infertile. It took him close to two years to sell his first iron plough. His perseverance paid off and he went on to open division for manufacture of chaff-cutters in the subsequent years.

Walchand Hirachand (1882-1953) was one of the pioneers in many fields. He set up India's first aircrafts company, Hindustan Aircrafts Limited (later renamed Hindustan Aeronautics Limited after being taken over by government of India), India's first successful shipping company, Scindia Steam Navigation Company, one of the first car companies in India, Premier Automobiles Limited, besides setting up the Hindustan Construction Company Limited, responsible for a range of construction projects around India.

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The very existence of such people contradicts to a large extent the image of India in the minds of the world. The image of India being a poor, non-enterprising and largely agrarian nation. Further, these people are only but a few of the many personalities in Indian history.

Clearly, as brought out above, Indian businessmen have never lacked either the will to innovate or the access to resources to bring their dreams to life. They have always made a difference in society, but only when the government has not interfered. Keeping this in mind, it need not be emphasized further that at the time of independence, there were many businessmen ready to take up the space left by the Britishers but were somehow stifled by the government policy of planned economic growth.