

DREAMER, DOER

Tata Group will keep benefitting from the many systems that Ratan Tata built

BY NACHIKET KELKAR

TATA MOTORS WILL launch Avinya, its new premium electric vehicle platform, next year. The company is already the largest electric car maker in India, with a market share of around 70 per cent, and Avinya is expected to cement this position. Ratan Tata was not directly involved

in the development of the platform and will not see a car made on it, but he was probably the biggest reason it happened, as Avinya is based on Jaguar Land Rover's electrified modular architecture.

Tata acquired the marquee British car brands in 2008. Till then a maker

of small mass-market cars, Tata Motors was instantly elevated to the league of Mercedes-Benz, BMW and the likes. More importantly, it brought access to technology, something that Tata Motors keeps benefitting from.

Many had questioned Tata's buy-out of JLR at the time, given it was loss-making and put a huge debt burden on Tata Motors. But JLR turned around soon and now contributes a major chunk of the profits of Tata Motors. "Ratan was a leader of vision and integrity and proved to be an excellent steward of Jaguar and Land Rover," said Bill Ford, chairman of Ford Motor Company which sold JLR to Tata, in his tribute. Ratan Tata was 86 when he died on October 9 in Mumbai.

He was 53 when he was appointed chairman of Tata group in 1991, succeeding the charismatic J.R.D. Tata. Questions were raised, as he



NEW BEGINNINGS

Noel Tata with RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das while paying homage to Ratan Tata in Mumbai

seemed too inexperienced to take on the powerful satraps who ran big Tata companies like they owned them. But Ratan turned out to be more than a match for them.

It was also the time the Indian economy was opening up to the world, which was both a challenge and an opportunity for Tata. "The way you navigated that environment, you could either be toast, which was what happened to many of the very large Indian names that used to be market leaders in the 1980s, or you could come into your own and become even bigger and stronger, which is what happened to Tata," said Mukund Rajan, former brand custodian of Tata Group.

The 1990s marked a period when Tata consolidated the group and gave it a structure, which is probably the biggest reason it is still the flag-bearer of India Inc. Then his many acquisitions well and truly marked the arrival of the group on the world stage, and they continue to play a pivotal role in the conglomerate's journey into the future.

Ratan Tata's first acquisition was Tetley in 2000—it was the second largest tea brand globally at that time. That was followed by the acquisition of several other tea and coffee companies in Europe and the US. In 2004, Tata acquired the commercial vehicle section of the the Korean automaker Daewoo. Tata Steel acquired Anglo-Dutch steel maker Corus in 2007. JLR followed in 2008.

"When the economic history of modern India is written, even one full volume will not suffice to describe Ratan Tata's phenomenal achievements," said Shaktikanta Das, governor of the Reserve Bank of India, in his tribute.

The challenges and opportunities before Tata Group are way different from those Ratan had when he took over. "These days, a lot of people talk about AI and automation and what that can do to disrupt industries, in-

cluding Tata's largest breadwinner at the moment, TCS, where you have a large number of people doing things like coding," said Rajan.

Tata Trusts swiftly appointed Ratan's half brother Noel Tata as his successor. Noel played an instrumental role in the success of Tata Group's retail arm Trent and its various ventures like department stores Westside and fast fashion brand Zudio. He has also been a trustee on the board of Sir Ratan Tata Trust since 2019 and Dorabji Tata Trust since 2022. His appointment signals continuity. "Noel is well-educated, accomplished as a business builder, humble as a person, and fresh with new ideas," said R. Gopalakrishnan, former board member of Tata Sons. "That is a great recipe for taking the trusts forward."

However, it will not be an easy ride for Noel. "In the coming years, one of his key tasks will be to ensure that the

trust continues to expand its impact, both in India and globally, while addressing emerging challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and digital transformation," said corporate and legal adviser Akshat Khetan. Managing the internal expectations of the trust's stakeholders, while adapting to external pressures in this competitive and globalised environment will be crucial to his success, he said.

Noel is married to Aloo Mistry, daughter of Pallonji Mistry. Her brother Shapoorji Mistry now runs the Shapoorji Pallonji Group, which owns around 18 per cent share in Tata Sons.

Noel and Aloo have three children—Leah, Maya and Neville. All of them are associated with Tata Sons in various roles. Leah has been with Indian Hotels, Maya works at Tata Digital and Neville leads Trent's supermarket chain Star Bazaar. ●