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Philanthropic Contributions: Ardeshir Godrej

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Abstract: This article is about the founder of the Godrej Group, Ardeshir Godrej. This article will deal with the philanthropic contributions he made to society. It will also discuss why he established his business and his concept of India being a self-sufficient country. He started his business when one could not even think of strengthening locks and security. This chapter will also show how he helped the Parsi community by giving them employment. He has transformed the landscape of Bombay city by making a lasting impact on Bombay and India as a whole.

Index Terms – Ardeshir, Parsi, Agriculture, Self-sufficient, Godrej, Philanthropy, Bombay

Introduction

Godrej became a household name in the country. The roots of the 1897-founded Godrej Group can be found in the Swadeshi movement and Indian freedom. Just like Rome was not built in a day, all companies in the world were created by the decades of hard work by the founders. Similarly Ardeshir Godrej (1868-1936) worked hard enough to build the world famous Godrej Empire. This article will discuss about his life and how he started his career and failures. Most importantly, this article will focus on his philanthropy work and how he helped the Parsi community.

Early Life

Ardeshir Godrej was born on 26 March, 1868 in Broach (Bharuch), to Burjorji and Dosibai Godrej. His father was a businessman as almost every Indian Parsis. His father dealt in real estate. His father changed their surname when Ardeshir was three years old. The name Godrej has been taken from 'Guderz', the name of an important tribe in Iran. He was the oldest among six siblings. He had three brothers, Hormusji, Munchersha and Pirojsha and two sisters Shirinbai and Tehima. Only Pirojsha joined the business. Hormusji was not interested in business but he was more into literature and arts. Munchersha's joined Tata's firm and opened branches in Kobe, Japan and in Paris. Even R.D. Tata accompanied him while opening Tata's firms.

After his wife died tragically, Ardeshir parents wanted him to marry another girl, but he never got married and then he started focusing on building his career. He never spoke about his loss. He did not want anybody to share his burden with. He did not have children but he was fond of children. That is why he was close to his sibling's children. His story started in Zanzibar, in 1894 when he passed out from law school and went to argue a client's case on behalf of well known solicitors. The case was going quite well but there came a moment when a difficulty arose. The whole argument could have twisted in Ardeshir client's favor but he refused to do so. Ardeshir Godrej was an honest man with high principles. Since he could not lie in that case he realized he would never make law as his career. He returned to Bombay. In 1885, the Indian National Congress was established. At that time, there was hustle in Bombay. Many Parsi leaders were a part of it.

Insistence on India being a "self sufficient" country

Ardeshir was concerned with the political enslavement of India by the British. He was more concerned with the economic degradation of its people. He felt that India needs to become self reliant. After his law career ended he joined as an assistant in a chemist shop. There he became interested in manufacturing surgical instruments. This was his first business. But, unfortunately it did not go well.

With the advent of British rule in India, the textile industry declined because of the replacement of Indian fabrics by cheaper machine made British manufacturers. This made economic distress in the country. As a consequence of use of European cloth by Indian middle class weavers and spinners in several centers lost its arena. Weavers among the Parsi community abandoned. This led

to the decline by 1820 of most of the goods. This went same for the sugar industry. India was the largest producer of sugarcane and yet by 1907 sugar was imported from abroad worth rupees seven crores every year. These are few examples as how Indian industries declined with the advent of the British rule. It was not only the Indian industries that declined but also the agriculture, trade and shipping, banking and currency too declined.

Ardeshir was influenced by Dadabhai Naoroji's views about India and British. He was influenced by his Drain Theory. With that, he realized that the interests of the rulers were put above the interests of his own country. There was injustice, exploitation, unemployment, natural calamities and many more in the country. Dadabhai Naoroji also acknowledged British contribution too like introduction to western education, effective government, laws and courts of justice, means of transportation development and many more. But Ardeshir's main aim was to make India self sufficient. For him, this was the only way where Indians did not have to be dependent on the British and they can run their own country efficiently.

Ardeshir was quite influenced by Gandhi just like many other nationalist leaders. They both shared an interest to gain freedom for the country. But their views and methods were very different. Ardeshir's belief in India's ancient craftsmen enhanced his belief. The prosperity of the nation's natural resources, which Dadabhai Naoroji firmly described as being constantly exploited by the British rulers, had to be kept inside the nation and used for its own gain. The issue was that industrial dominance by one people over another receives far less attention than domination by an outsider. The Industrial Domination functions in a more sneaky, dangerous, and extensive manner and is less obvious. Ardeshir and Gandhi were able to leave at this point because the fight for independence was not progressing as quickly as was hoped. Ardeshir advised Gandhi that the only way was to not depend on foreign commodities, reflecting the nationalist beliefs of Swadeshi that were then prevalent. Their imports would stop, which would have an impact on the economy of the dominant nation while strengthening India's economy.

According to Ardeshir, Swadeshi did not mean only boycotting of British goods and buying Indian goods. For him, it meant that every country has to choose its technology, production, consumption habits and marketing techniques depending on its resources. No country should persuade or force another to export its production and marketing systems. Even Gopal Krishna Gokhale, supported this idea. Ardeshir was also encouraged its faith and belief in Swadeshi by his friend Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Tilak even organized a Parsi fund to help the Swadeshi movement's activities in production, trade and consumption. Gandhi later admitted that he was late to admit that Ardeshir Godrej was right. An article on 4th August was found which a letter was written by Jamnadas Udani to Ardeshir Godrej. There Jamnadas Udani penned down his thoughts as in 1930 Non cooperation movement was happening. There was a great loss in terms of economy in India. He accepted the concept of India being self reliant. This shows the weight of Ardeshir Godrej on people.

Business Initiatives

Ardeshir Godrej approached, Merwanji Cama, who was a philanthropist and he owned several properties in Bombay. So, Ardeshir took a loan from him of around 3000 rupees to start his business. It was in the year 1895. This is how he started his business in manufacturing surgical equipments. But the plan backfired as the quality of British equipments was far better than his. For him he wanted to show that even high difficult instruments can be made in India. He found that nobody wanted to buy surgical instruments which were manufactured in India. He found this very insulting. He was quite disappointed. With this, he tried hard again to prove everyone wrong.

Lock and Key

He then started making locks. Since it was during the time of Independence there was burglary going on in the cities. He came to know through a newspaper. In the newspaper, the Bombay Police Commissioner mentioned that people should be aware and they should make their security system better. This was quite simple but Ardeshir saw this in a business point of view. The thought occurred to his mind that he should develop locks which would be better in quality and stop the ongoing thefts and burglary happening in town. This changed his fate. Although locks were already available, they were manufactured by hand, which made them less secure. Ardeshir made the decision to create safe locks in this situation.

But, he once again needed more financial support for this, so he approached Merwanji with his plan. Ardeshir had the guts to approach Merwanji Cama once more to request a loan without paying back the prior loan. Nonetheless, he was fortunate, as Cama was taken by his concept. Ardeshir made a small beginning by hiring a tiny shed beside Bombay Gas Works at Lalbaug on May 7, 1897. Even better, he had learned that foreign-made locks had an internal spring that regularly broke down. His locks were less expensive than those imported from England. Without this characteristic, his locks sold much better on the market. As his company grew, Ardeshir went into the safe industry and obtained rights for his double-plate doors and door frame. Even the Queen of England used one of his reasonably priced safes on her 1912 tour of India. Safes made by Godrej continue to be well-known. He was determined to use modern methods and modern machinery. His factory cost him around eighty thousand rupees. So, in 1897, Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd. was set up. The name 'Boyce' was included because it was Mehrwanji Cama's nephew. When Ardeshir went back to Cama to return the loan after his business became successful, Mehrwanji did not accept it but wanted his nephew to work under him. Boyce did join the business but later lost his interest. His name was retained for legal obligation. Various locks were made with various techniques.

Safes

The locks sales exceeded Ardeshir's expectations. Even today, Godrej locks are well known and people still buys them. After locks, he manufactured safes. He built high fire resistant safes. With all the modern machinery and equipments he manufactured the best safes. With this Godrej became a household name. Every house had these safes till now. Hundreds of safe vaults were built and equipped by Godrej for banks and safe deposit concerns, both in India and in abroad. 92% security equipment in the country was Godrej. This included the equipments supplied to the Imperial Bank of India, now the State of India in 32 centers. The safe vaults business grew bigger and bigger in abroad too. Also, Ardeshir Godrej had deep relations with Mulchand Shah and they discussed about the plans for the future of India.

Soaps

After that he started making soaps by manufacturing soaps made from vegetable oil rather than animal fat. The soap name was 'Chavi'. He not only supported Swadeshi but also Ahimsa. Mahatma Gandhi highly inspired by his work. Also, Rabindranath Tagore and Annie Besant really encouraged people to use their products. After locks and soaps, they manufactured steel cupboards which are famous even today. Almost all Indian households have a steel cupboard of Godrej. People refer any steel cupboards as Godrej. Such was their name and still is. Later the safe business was looked after by his brother Pirojsha Godrej and he did an amazing job with it.

Ardeshir took Swadeshi so seriously, that when he saw his nephew having British cookies he threw it out of the window saying that they can eat only those biscuits that was made in India. His approach was very positive. He even took the initiative to launch a baking and confectionery. Ardeshir Godrej also wanted to make India the highest exporter of vegetables and fruits. Till now, India could not fulfill this dream of Ardeshir's.

Philanthropy

Ardeshir Burjorji Godrej Agricultural and Horticultural Institute for Parsis

A charity was created at the residue of the estate of Ardeshir Godrej on 9th May 1934 which is known as "Ardeshir Burjorji Godrej Agricultural and Horticultural Institute for Parsis". He gave it to Parsi Panchayat. The aims of the Charitable Institution were to settle poor Parsi families who are willing to work at the said Charitable Institution for the purpose of being trained in horticulture or agricultural farming or in any allied industries such as fruit canning, dairy farming, manufacturing dairy products and manufacture of jams, pickles provisions and also of poultry farming. Also it was formed to encourage the Parsi youths to gain knowledge in agriculture and horticultural farming as well as in textile and cottage industries for their future. It also stated to give employment to unemployed Parsis and to train Parsis in fruit growing, fruit canning and general agriculture. The trustees would invest all money forming part of the Trust Fund and the unexpected income that may remain in their hands from time to time and which may not be required for the immediate purpose of the said Charitable Institution and all other monies which may come to their hands in the authorized securities or in the purchase of agricultural land and buildings as they may deem expedient. Its main aim was to look after the poor Parsis or families or giving employment to the poor Parsis. Also, it was said that the name would not be changed even if it becomes necessary to sell the Nasik Farms and remove the institution at any place or at any time. But this charity created by the will of Ardeshir Godrej or the Institution hereby established is to be amalgamated with any other charity or charitable institution for Parsis the name of Ardeshir Burjorji Godrej shall always be associated in it. The will was under The Parsi Panchayat. This went on for three years, but since the farms were far off from Bombay, the odds were against him. Bombay Panchayat then sold this land as it could not fulfill Ardeshir's dream.

Tilak Swaraj Fund

After Bal Gangadhar Tilak's death, Gandhiji established Tilak Swaraj Fund in December 1921 to combat caste-based inequities and end poverty among Indians after Bal Gangadhar Tilak's passing. The aim was to collect a crore of rupees but it was then changed into collecting by about 10 lakhs or more. Many people donated but could not reach the bar. Some remnants were remained and 3 lakhs of rupees to be collected. It was Ardeshir Godrej who made a donation of 3 lakhs of rupees. But it was not cashed. Then he said he could not give any money. It was Shri S.K. Patil who was collecting for the fund at that time. He gave him his soaps which Ardeshir insisted him of selling. Patil took soaps of 3 lakhs of rupees and became a merchant and sold them, and possibly made a little more money for the Congress. Since he did not have cash, he gave soaps for him to sell. Ardeshir died on January 1936. Ardeshir believed the goodness in others. He spent his whole life suffering the wounds of heartless rivals and mindless rulers. It was during his funeral, that people became aware how he helped many people. Though there are less written records about it, a large number of poor Parsis came to pay their respects. He has helped the Parsi community by giving and helping them to get employment.

Legacy and Philanthropy after Ardeshir Godrej

After Ardeshir Godrej's death, his friends and colleagues carried the responsibility to continue his work. They converted the Baking and Confectionery into a charitable Godrej Memorial Institute which employs jobless Parsi Youth and provides them training in baking and confectionery. With this about twenty two to thirty men were employed.

Ardeshir did not believe that wealth needs to be inherited. That is why on his death bed, he donated his vineyards to the Parsi Punchayet. Ardeshir gave away everything to the public. It was Pirojsha who needed to buy steel product business by paying three and a half lakhs. Ardeshir did believe that Indian goods in terms of quality were inferior to the British goods. So, his aim was to make India self sufficient with proper quality of goods which he succeeded in it. Many Nationalist leaders also believed this including Gopal Krishna Gokhale. For Ardeshir, Swadeshi was everything. He gave a new dimension to the swadeshi concept by introducing how to be self reliant. "Self confidence leading to self sufficiency. Self reliance bringing self respect". This was the path Ardeshir chose for himself. He did not have greatness thrust upon him; he became great because he had it in him. In continuation with Ardeshir Godrej legacy, The Godrej Memorial Hospital which is a charitable hospital located in Mumbai that provides high quality healthcare services to underprivileged communities. Godrej LOUD (Live Out Ur Dream) is a social entrepreneurship program that aims to support young entrepreneurs who are working on innovative solutions to address social and environmental challenges. The program provides funding, mentorship and networking opportunities to help entrepreneurs scale their ventures. After Ardeshir Godrej, the company made the first ballot boxes for India's first elections in 1951. Cinthol soap was started, which made India second largest soap producer in the world, refrigerators in 1958, hair colour in 1974, in 1991 they started the agro based company, in 1994 GoodKnight mosquito repellent and Hit was produced. Godrej Good & Green is an initiative which aims at promoting sustainable development practices across Godrej Group's businesses. The initiative focuses on areas such as energy efficiency, waste reduction and sustainable packaging. Godrej Community Development Initiatives where it focuses on supporting underprivileged communities in areas of education, healthcare and livelihoods. These initiatives include programs such as Godrej Vikhroli Cares initiative, which provides support to local communities in Mumbai and the Godrej Community Development Trust which supports community development projects in rural areas. In 2003, Jamshyd Godrej received Padma Bhushan. Gourmet Retail, better revolutionary locks, Godrej India cultural hub, Godrej Aerospace engine power the Polar Satellite launch Vehicle where India send its satellite to Mars in 2014, they even build the world's tallest Continuous Catalytic Regeneration for Nigeria's refinery in 2019 and has made India proud. Apart from these business endeavours, the Godrej has innumerable trusts like the Pirojha Godrej Foundation, The Godrej Foundation, The Godrej Memorial Trust, The Soonabai Pirojha Godrej and many more which helps in education and health for the poor people. Apart from that, Godrej Archives was also established by Godrej Group which shows how they want to preserve their records and manages covering 125 years of the company's history. This shows their interests in promoting their business history and archives and also making it easier for the students if they want to learn about the Godrej's history. Overall, the Godrej Group's philanthropic contribution reflects the company's commitment to promoting social and environmental sustainability. Through these initiatives, the Godrej Group is working to make a positive impact on the lives of people and communities in India. Ardeshir Godrej not only helped the Parsi community from poverty but also helped the whole country to become self sufficient.

Conclusion

Ardeshir Godrej was a pioneering industrialist and philanthropist who made significant contributions to the development of the Indian industry and society. Through his various philanthropic initiatives as mentioned earlier, he aimed to improve the lives of people and promote education, healthcare and social welfare. He was a strong advocate for women's education and empowerment. His philanthropy work had a lasting impact on Indian society and his contributions continue to benefit people even today. He set a high standard for corporate social responsibility and inspired other business leaders to follow in his footsteps. Presently, the Parsi community was of the view that Ardeshir Godrej lock system helped India economically during the time of Independence. Because at that time not many were involved in business and with the ongoing protests and everything he managed to start his business for the people. This shows how capable he was in this field and how determined he was to make India strong economically and not to be dependent on the British. Many at that time started to express caution towards British actions. India's economy was in terrible shape. Ardeshir Godrej wished to strengthen Bombay's financial standing. One of his motivations for starting his firm was this. With his philanthropic and business efforts, Bombay was able to become economically sustainable, and many Parsis were able to find work because of him.

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