

Indian industry's finest hour

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Nano is a milestone as it is testimony to the fact that a world-class product can be conceived of and designed by Indian engineers and produced in India. Ratan Tata, the man who dreamt big and built small, deserves a Bharat Ratna, says P. V. INDIRESAN

Distinctive features			
Characteristic	Administrator	Manager	Leader
Goal	Follow rules	Get results	Excel
Emphasis	Conformity	Interaction	Creativity
Norm	Quantity	Quality	Breaking barriers
Driven by:	The past	The present	The future
Approach	Tactics	Strategy	Vision
Structure	Hierarchy	Matrix	Delegatory
Response mode	Reactive	Proactive	Pre-active
Organised by	Procedures	Systems	Vision
HRD	Supervise	Coach	Inspire
Driving Force	Control	Success	Innovation
Power	Unsharable	Sharable	Amplifying

The fortnight that was, was undoubtedly the fortnight of the Nano. Never before has Indian industry made headline news all over the world except, possibly, in the case of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal. Bhopal was news for all the wrong reasons; Nano is amazing news for all the right reasons.

Tata's Nano is like Roger Bannister breaking the four-minute barrier for running the mile. For decades, many athletes had attempted it but a psychological barrier held them back. Within a few weeks of Roger Bannister breaking the four-minute barrier, it was re-broken twice.

Similarly, after Tenzing and Hillary conquered Everest, many more are doing so. Once athletes realise that the barrier can be breached, many follow suit. However, to the pioneers alone, to pioneers like Bannister, Tensing and Hillary goes the sole credit for making the unthinkable thinkable.

The same is true of Nano also. In the years to come, there will be many copycats who will imitate what the Tatas have done. However, the credit of thinking that a Nano is possible, not impossible, will remain forever with Mr Ratan Tata.

For decades, if not for centuries, Indian technology was known as copy-cat technology. Indian businessmen were considered good for nothing more than buying technology know-how, certainly not for manufacturing innovative products. Likewise, Indian engineers were deemed techno-coolies, good for performing repetitive routine tasks on black boxes whose insides were a mystery to them.

Watershed event

Twenty years ago, when Maruti first appeared on the scene I wrote in *Economic Times*, why it spelt no progress technologically. Somebody protested and I retorted why Indian

engineers could not be trusted to design door handles at least, why the know-how of every nut and screw had to come from Japan? That was the end of the argument; apparently, Indian engineers those days were not good enough to design even door handles.

Times have changed. Indian engineers are doing well all over the world but not equally spectacularly here in India; we still buy technology that engineers from India developed elsewhere.

That is why Nano is a watershed in the history of Indian technology. It has demonstrated that a world-class product, particularly one deemed impossible by every reputed manufacturer in the world, can be conceived, designed and produced in India. That is a different ballgame altogether from making Maruti cars or even the Indica. To paraphrase Oliver Goldsmith, when it was exhibited in Delhi, the Nano:

Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small car could carry all it would.

This is the era where management takes the hype to the extent that the importance of leadership is relegated to secondary status. Undoubtedly, lot of good management went into the making of Nano. Yet, it was only great leadership and not mere management that could dream of a Nano. Nano is the triumph of one man, a man who was a dreamer-leader. To Professor Uday Parekh, I am indebted for the distinction (with some changes made) between administrators, managers and leaders (see Table).

Managers and leaders



As we witness, day in and day out, administrators worry about growth, about quantitative increases. Good managers concern themselves about keeping their product up to date and competitive. Leaders visualise products that never existed before.

Administrators are ever busy fire-fighting. Even as they douse one fire, another flares up. Managers look for cues to prevent fires from erupting in the first place. Leaders actually light new fires that spread warmth and cheer that did not exist before.

Administrators order; managers organise/reorganise but leaders delegate. That is how not only is their power the power of many; their ingenuity too is the combined ingenuity of many. In the making of Nano, Mr Ratan Tata did not devise any patents on his own but he inspired his colleagues to register 40 of them.

An administrator is one who worries of how many ways a thing will not work. A manager thinks of the best way of getting the thing done. A leader is one who thinks of doing what nobody else thinks of doing.

Administrators constrain, managers distribute, the power to accomplish a goal but leaders empower; they make the system greater than the sum of the parts. Administrations and managements are physical systems; leaders bring chemistry to such mechanical systems.

Administrators do whatever they did yesterday; managers maximise the next quarterly results; leaders create a new tomorrow, a kind of tomorrow that will not happen but for them.

We bemoan the fact we are producing few good leaders these days. Gone are the days of stalwarts like Nehru and Patel let alone Gandhi. As the late Dr Nayudamma used to often say, a society brings out the kind of greatness it values. India values God-men (and God-women); so it boasts of many of them.

India values cinema artists; it has them by the dozens, except that they come and go. Nowadays, India has begun to value money; so, it is producing many wealthy persons. Once the country starts valuing scientists, honest politicians and whatever, it will produce plenty of scientists, honest politicians and whatever.

Pure joy

We are too close to the event to appreciate the significance of Nano. At the moment the car was unveiled, millions of Indians – from every part of the country, North or South, West or East and without distinction of creed, caste and religion – stood a few inches taller. It hurt no one but exhilarated everyone. Likewise, millions of cognoscenti across the world watched with awe and new found respect what India could achieve.

After we gained Independence, we have had few such moments — perhaps the victory in Bangladesh, and maybe the first Pokharan explosion. They were, however, both mired in controversy but not this time. Unveiling the Nano was an occasion of pure joy without even a hint of jealousy. It was a historic moment, a turning point in Indian psyche — at any rate, it ought to be.

How do we commemorate this moment, the moment it was sheer joy to be an Indian? How do we honour the one man who dreamt big and yet built small? How do we acknowledge an achievement that cheered the entire nation (except for a few whose profession it is to be unhappy and to spread unhappy thoughts); who, for once, made people forget their differences, their regional prejudices, their caste/religion biases and united the nation in one moment of pure pride?

I suggest that Mr Ratan Tata be awarded a Bharat Ratna. If he has not earned it, who has? If the government wants to show it has confidence in India making a mark in a globalised world, what better token of that self assurance than to offer the highest nation's award to its most notable entrepreneur-cum-dreamer-cum-global adventurer-cum-inspirer?

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