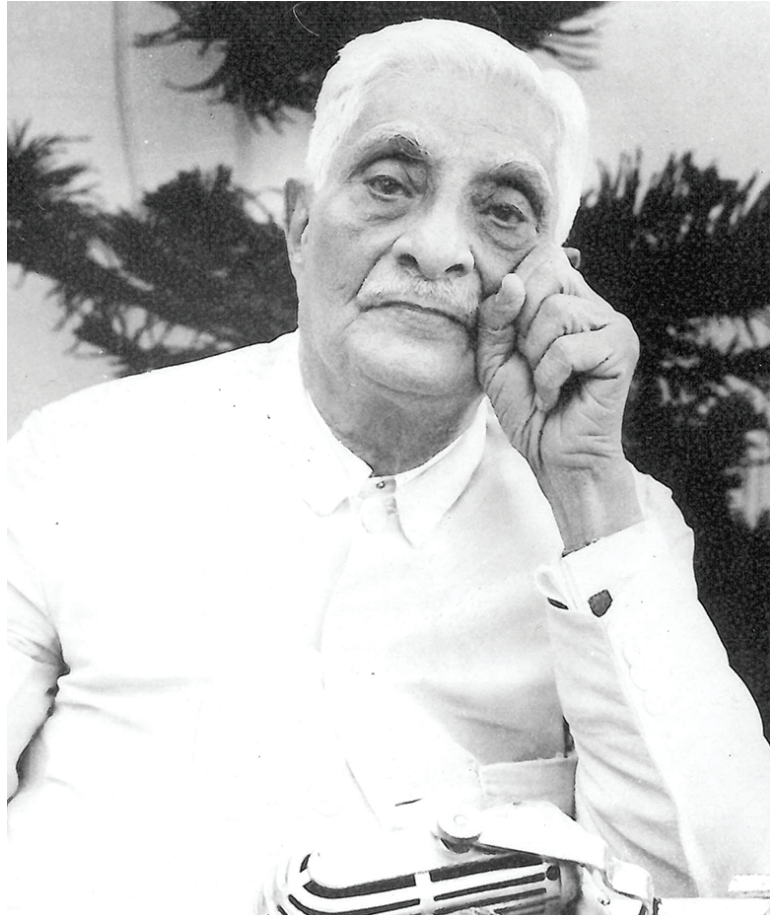




Pirojsha Burjorji Godrej's legacy interlaces with the story of the multinational conglomerate and its impact on Indian industry and society. While his brother, Ardeshir Godrej, laid the foundation by establishing Godrej & Boyce Mfg Co. Ltd, transforming a lock-making factory in Lalbaug into a household name, Pirojsha's passionate leadership took Godrej to new heights. Under his guidance, the family business evolved into an industrial powerhouse, marked by the introduction of innovative products and commitment to worker welfare.

In 1906, graduating from VJTI, a 24-year-old Pirojsha Godrej joined the business established by his brother. Ardeshir Godrej had initially trained to be a lawyer, but in practice, he detested the dishonesty required during his first court case. He turned to industry instead. He and Pirojsha made trustworthy locks, the first vegetarian soaps, the iconic steel almirahs and safes so reliable that even King George V and Queen Mary used them during their royal visit (Karanjia 2004).



Pirojsha's early leadership was an era of consolidation, but only as a prelude to the mighty expansion in the latter years. During his tenure, Godrej pioneered in many fields, introducing the first Indian typewriter, the first Indian refrigerator, the first Indian forklift and so on (Shukla 2011). As a leader, Pirojsha was pragmatic and concerned with quality and consumer satisfaction through the lowest possible pricing. B. K. Karanjia recalls an incident when, on noticing the fire-resistant compound within their safes was prone to leakage, Pirojsha recalled all safes against all advice and at a high cost to ensure their restoration to premium condition (Karanjia 1997, 72-72).

When Gandhi called on the citizens of Bombay to donate to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, Ardeshir Godrej eclipsed all other donations with a princely sum of Rs. 3 lakh. (CWMG 1966, 286) Similarly, when independent India called on Godrej & Boyce to manufacture the ballots for the first elections of independent India, to be held in 1951, Pirojsha did not shy away and took up the gauntlet admirably. The Bombay Chronicle reported that the factories at Godrej were making 15,000 ballot boxes a day. (Bombay Chronicle, 15 December 1951) Pirojsha would visit every afternoon to check on the progress, and under his supervision, the original order of 12.24 lakhs boxes exceeded by another 50,000 boxes, was successfully completed. (Jain 2019).

Godrej had flourished in the narrow lanes of Lalbaug, but Pirojsha's vision was too broad to stay confined within them. In 1943, he scouted and purchased land in Vikhroli in a public auction. (Karanjia 1997, 89) Under his sharp eye, this tranquil land of sleepy villages would transform into Pirojshanagar, an industrial township with manufacturing plants, subsidised housing for workers, dispensaries, a school and a welfare centre known as Pragati Kendra. It was more than a collection of buildings; it was a haven of productivity, a place for community and unparalleled growth bordered on one side by the largest privately owned Mangrove reserve in Mumbai. Although Pirojsha had acquired this area to incorporate into his township, he recognized the need to preserve the environment even during the relentless pursuit of development. Hence, he brought the mangroves under his protection. They are cared for even today by a foundation set up by his sons and named after his late wife, Soonabai (Das et al., 2021). The headquarters of the World Wildlife Fund - India found its home at the Pirojsha Godrej National Conservation Centre erected in honour of Pirojsha.

Pirojsha always sought the welfare of workers. He offered them modern, comfortable housing facilities and recreational spaces. Pirojsha also put into place a safety committee to ensure their wellbeing. (Karanjia 1997, 90) He established a Welfare Centre on 15th August 1955 with the sole aim of providing for the development of his workers. He named it Pragati Kendra, indicating progress and enabling space to address pertinent issues like adult education and family planning. (Pathare 2007) His care extended to the offspring of his workers, for whom he established the Udayachal School within the township to enable subsidies in education ("Our History").

One can scarcely question his devotion to the workers when the same returned twofold. At his son Burjor's wedding on 15th April 1941, the workers gifted him a casket engraved with the various Godrej products of the time, handcrafted with care as a memoir of their deep affection for him and the company (Karanjia 1997, 103).

Apart from a dedicated work ethic, Pirojsha also had several interests such as rowing and sailing. Legend has it that he would swim from Apollo Bunder to Gharapuri without tiring. He enjoyed Western and Indian classical music and read Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Charles Dickens. The latter had invoked sympathy for the differently privileged and a desire to create meaningful change for them (Karanjia 1997, 105).

Pirojsha passed away on 1st December 1972. It was a massive loss, not only for Godrej & Boyce, who had lost their mentor but for the entirety of the Indian industry and society, who had lost a titan and a compassionate philanthropist. Gita Piramal, writer and business historian, credits the early growth of Godrej to the joint ingenuity of Ardeshir and Pirojsha, the former a talented inventor and the latter a capable manager. (Piramal 1988) It is an odd little story of a lawyer and an engineer turning to commerce and dominating the industry, which made any failed prior ventures seem like merely stepping stones to their paths to glory. The Godrej name stands proud even today, the legacy carried forward by Pirojsha's children and the generation after them, with the names of Ardeshir and Pirojsha Godrej preserved for posterity.



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