

# T Thomas: epitome of a professional manager who led HUL in tough times

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**T** Thomas, or TT as he was addressed, was the epitome of a professional manager. He was acknowledged as such not only among the dwindling number of multinationals in India of that time but across all private sector enterprises in India.

As chairman of Hindustan Lever Ltd (now Hindustan Unilever Ltd), TT significantly reinforced the legacy of his predecessors, Vasant Rajadhyaksha and Prakash Tandon, as the uncompromising custodian of values, probity, rectitude and superior business performance. All of these are what Hindustan Unilever continues to strongly and reassuringly uphold.

During his years as chairman of Hindustan Lever (1973-1980), at that time India's largest multinational company, the political and social environment in which foreign businesses had to operate were challenging, to put it mildly. The years of Emergency were even more so. TT's relentless efforts helped in persuading the then political leadership and significant groups in the bureaucracy regarding the legitimate role India's private companies, commerce and industry played in the nation's economic growth and development.

This acknowledgement and appreciation of the role, particularly that of a multinational such as Hindustan Lever, was a game changer in a way, and indeed crucial in sustaining the growth and diversification of the company.

Communication and dialogue between the state and industry have significantly advanced since those years.

TT's leadership was marked by analytical rigour, drive for sustained high performance and uncompromising demand for honesty. Achieving targets, delivering results consistently and developing one's subordinates were the measures of an individual's competence and potential. These qualities of TT were well balanced by his personal dedication to work and his record of developing talent, which remain a continuum in Hindustan Lever's performance and HR record.

TT's outstanding performance in India was recognized by his appointment as executive director (1979-1988) on



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the Board of Unilever PLC&NV, a first for anyone from outside Europe.

As I cast my mind back to the times, I was fortunate to be at Hindustan Lever at the time. My move from a career in R&D to manufacturing and people management and then into general management owes much to TT and Vasant Rajadhyaksha.

In course of time TT, I and our families became friends. One of the high point of those times was our first meeting with Mother Teresa in 1974, and the subsequent establishment by HLL in 1976-1977 of Ashadan, a home for the sick and abandoned. It was declared open on 8 January 1977 by Mother Teresa. This was a significant high point in TT's lifetime.

Mother Teresa's prayers and blessings had a significant and positive impact on Hindustan Lever and its employees, which continues even now as I put down these words.

We all are, indeed, exceptionally fortunate to have received the blessings of Mother Teresa, a saint in our lifetime.

TT remained very active after moving on from Unilever. He gave expression to his lifelong passion for entrepreneurship, advising, encouraging, as well as supporting budding innovators. He fulfilled his goals in more than full measure. TT also expanded his charitable pursuits with commitment as he had to all matters throughout his life.

We celebrate TT and bid farewell to his life and times, lived in full and joyously.

RIP.

*Ashok Ganguly is former chairman, Hindustan Unilever.*

## OBITUARY

the highest in 2017 in the past five years. Films in 29 other Indian languages, while accounting for 75% of the total films released, together contributed only 50% to the annual domestic box office earnings. Screen count, an age-old challenge for the Indian film industry increased marginally- from 9,481 in 2016 to 9,530 in 2017.

355 million or 58 % of the population, having grown by 110 million over the past three years. The rural reader base (52%) is higher than urban (48%). The print media is estimated to grow at an overall compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of approximately 7% till 2020 with vernacular publications at 8%-9% and English at slightly slower rates.



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