



The Swatantra Party
Commemorating the 50th year

August 1, 2009



**COMMEMORATING
THE 50th YEAR
OF THE FOUNDING OF
THE SWATANTRA PARTY**

**Report of a Meeting held in Mumbai
on 1 August 2009
to mark the occasion**



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Swatantra Party, Maharashtra

The last national convention of the Swatantra Party was held in New Delhi on August 4, 1974. To protest the rigging of the Convention, 53 genuine delegates, led by Minoo Masani, after voting against the resolution which virtually killed the Party, announced at a press conference that even if the party at the national level had ceased they would continue to function as the Swatantra Party in the states of Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

In 1977 these protesting units responded to Jayaprakash Narayan's call to all democratic parties in the opposition to form a single party – The Janata Party. All but one merged with the Janata Party – the one exception being the Swatantra Party, Maharashtra whose members were skeptical about the durability of the Janata Party. So we decided to meet JP's call half way and announced that while we would not merge with the Janata Party, we would not contest the 1977 Lok Sabha elections but would permit our members to stand as candidates of the Janata Party if nominated. When the Janata Party broke up in 1979, the Swatantra Party Maharashtra was not affected. Thereafter our attempts to revive and involve ourselves in electoral politics were stymied by an amendment to the election law in 1989 that required us to swear allegiance to socialism. The brief history of the Swatantra party in this Report gives the details.

The Swatantra Party, Maharashtra records its grateful thanks to the Indian Liberal Group, *Freedom First* and Indian Secular Society for their support in enabling this commemorative function on August 1 to happen. We are equally grateful to all those who responded to our invitation and participated in this function making it a memorable event.

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Preface

The Indian National Congress, to whom the departing British handed over power on 15 August, 1947 ruled the Central and all state governments by its sweeping victories in the first two general elections in 1952 and 1957. The majority of the parties in the opposition which were elected in small numbers were however also, like the Indian National Congress, socialists including communists.

Into such a political atmosphere was born the Swatantra Party on August 1, 1959. Outstanding men led by C. Rajagopalachari vowed to stem the growing steamroller of Nehruvian socialism (which many considered a euphemism for communism) and the system of one party dominance it had fathered.

In less than three years after its birth, the Swatantra Party gave a creditable account of itself in the third general elections in 1962 securing national recognition from the Election Commission. Five years later in the 1967 elections to the 4th Lok Sabha, the Swatantra party emerged as the largest party in the opposition with 44 seats.

For the first time after freedom, Indian voters had the choice of voting for a party that offered policies that rejected socialism. The Swatantra Party emphasised the primacy of the individual vis-à-vis the state and promoted an economic policy, which was bitterly opposed by the ruling party but is today official policy. Yet, by 1974 the Swatantra Party ceased to exist nationally.

To commemorate this unique chapter in India's political history, *Freedom First*, Indian Liberal Group, Indian Secular Society joined hands with the Swatantra Party, Maharashtra (the sole surviving unit of the Party) in organising a programme to mark the Swatantra Party's 50th anniversary on August 1, 2009. This is a report of that meeting.

I

Reminiscences

Swatantra Party – A Brief History

S. V. Raju

There were a number of political parties that were born after independence and disappeared. The Swatantra Party was one of them. While many of them disappeared without a trace, the Swatantra Party has not – at least not yet. Why? Because it was the original “Party with a Difference.” We, its members, even claim “Victory in Defeat”¹.

In the last three or four years, the Swatantra Party has been in the news bobbing up every now and then thanks to journalists, political commentators, even some economic analysts who recall that today’s economic reforms were yesterday’s Swatantra prescriptions – well, almost! It has also been in the news because of a major change in the election law with the inclusion in 1989 of Section 29(A) of the Representation of the People’s Act. This change compelled political parties to swear allegiance to socialism if they wish to be recognized by the Election Commission of India as a political party. This change was challenged by my friend and colleague, the late L. R. Sampat, then General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, Maharashtra, and me in the Mumbai High Court through a writ petition on January 20, 1996. Though admitted the writ petition, thirteen years on, is yet to be heard. A comatose Swatantra Party, Maharashtra is breathing on this life support system – the writ petition.

¹ The title of a book written by the then president of the Delhi Unit of the Swatantra Party the late Col. H. R. Pasricha and published by the Rajaji Foundation.

Some of us felt that this commemorative meeting may perhaps be the last opportunity we, the surviving members of this Party had, to talk about a Party that was, and which if it had lived on would have come of age and, who knows, the politics of this country might have turned out differently – and for the better; for who better to steer economic reforms than a Party that *believed* in it and advocated it 50 years ago. Had our policy been accepted as official policy in 1960 it would have given our country a head start and history would have recorded an Indian miracle many years before the Asian one or for that matter before the Communist China embraced Capitalist economies.

Even in the nineteen sixties when the Party was riding high we prided ourselves on being ahead of our time. We began running so fast that while at the beginning of the run there were many people with us, as the run progressed we found that we had left most of them far behind. Too late we realized the truth that there is no particular merit in behind ahead of one's time. We had to keep pace with time.

In this brief history, I propose focusing on four questions:

1. What led to the formation of the Swatantra Party in 1959?
2. What were its principles and policies based on?
3. What led to its rapid rise and its equally rapid crash?
4. Would I, in the present context, recommend its revival or be content with it serving as a role model? If so of what kind.

1. What led to the Foundation of the Swatantra Party in 1959?

The story actually begins in the mid nineteen-fifties.

The Indian National Congress that led the freedom struggle was rightly considered an umbrella Party accommodating all shades of political opinion – from Gandhi to Marx. The leadership was

dominated by the quartet; Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and C. Rajagopalachari. Other than Nehru none of the other three had socialist inclinations and perhaps viewed Nehru's fascination for socialism as a foible that would disappear when he had to grapple with the realities of governance. But Gandhiji was assassinated in January 1948, and three years later in December 1950 Sardar Patel died. Neither the moderating influence of Gandhiji nor the restraining hand of Sardar Patel was there to prevent Pandit Nehru from a dogmatic indulgence in his 'foible'- socialism.

Rajaji, the fourth member of this quartet was the fire fighter and peacemaker who was once described by Gandhi as his conscience-keeper. He spent the first seven years after freedom as Governor of West Bengal (in the post partition years 1947/48), two years as Governor General of India and two years as Union Home Minister stepping in to take Sardar Patel's place and two more years as Chief Minister of the old Madras State, conscripted by Kamaraj Nadar, the then strongman of the Congress in Tamil Nadu to contain the growing influence of the communists in that state. The job done, Kamaraj maneuvered to ease out Rajaji whose active involvement in Congress politics ended in 1954. He was then 74.

A year later in 1955 the Avadi session of the Indian National Congress (Avadi is 20 kms. from Chennai) resolved that the objective of the Congress was to usher in a socialistic pattern of society for the country. This public proclamation and the steps that followed were unacceptable to Rajaji who decided to leave the Congress. He realized that Nehru's socialism was more than a foible. He was serious!

Around this time Minoos Masani who too started having doubts about the democratic content of Nehru's socialism, shared with Rajaji his misgivings about the direction in which the Congress was taking the country. Though Rajaji agreed that this was indeed cause for concern, he was not supportive of moves to form a new party to oppose the socialist Congress. He was clear he had had enough of party politics reinforced by the fact that he was nearing 80.

Then, a year later in January 1959, came the Congress Party's Nagpur resolution on Cooperative Farming, a euphemism for Collective Farming.

An already restless industry and trade, harried by the emerging permit licence raj spawned by the state occupying the commanding heights of the economy, was now joined by a restless peasantry (*Kisan* as Prof. Ranga invariably referred to them) who feared losing their lands to the State.

Rajaji was now truly alarmed. He was not going to allow the Indian farmer to be chained and herded into collectives or communes like his Soviet counterpart, if he could help it. He was convinced that if Nehru was not stopped India would go the communist way. He informed Masani who by now was an independent member of the Lok Sabha, that a new party clearly opposed to socialism and arrest the one-party dominance had indeed now become a necessity.

Without Rajaji there never could have been a Swatantra Party. It was only when the freedom of the farmer was under threat did Rajaji literally spring to action. And he found support from the All India Agriculturists Federation led by Sardar Lal Singh in the north and K. B. Jinaraja Hegde in the south. Even though businessmen, industrialists and traders were already beginning to find how difficult life could be in a state-controlled dispensation, no serious thought was given to forming a political party other than for instance the founding of the Forum of Free Enterprise to educate the public on the advantages of private enterprise. Even this required great courage on the part of its founder A. D. Shroff, who not surprisingly, played a key role in helping the new party with the financial support it needed from trade and industry. He was also a member of the Party's General Council.

At the same time Rajaji had the advantage of a Minoo Masani in the Lok Sabha. Masani was elected as an independent in the 2nd General elections of 1957. The 2nd Lok Sabha had 42 independents. These independents formed themselves into an

independent parliamentary group and nominated him as its Secretary. Some of these independents joined the Swatantra Party soon after its formation.

So things fell into place - A rare combination of circumstances and the availability of qualified, experienced men of known integrity to manage the Party under the leadership of Rajaji. It should be mentioned that apart from being a member of the General Council and the National Executive, Rajaji never held office in the Party.

2. What were the policies of the Swatantra Party based on?

It stands to reason that the Swatantra Party was challenging socialism. But which shade of socialism? The Party was opposing socialism of the communist kind. The kind on which Nehruvian socialism was patterned, not democratic socialism to which Masani once subscribed; the kind to which JP belonged. This fact is important to understand the Party's belief in social justice even while emphasising the centrality of the human being and rejecting the collective.

It was therefore not surprising that Rajaji invited Jayaprakash Narayan to be the president of the new party. JP declined on the ground that he had embraced Sarvodaya and believed in a partyless democracy. Minoo Masani approached Ganga Saran Singh then Chairman of the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and offered that if the PSP would drop the socialist label, he would be prepared to get the Swatantra Party to accept social justice in the programme of the new party. Gangababu and his colleagues declined the offer.

There is a background to these overtures to the democratic socialists: The Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (the ICCF) was founded in 1952 comprising democratic socialists like JP and Asoka Mehta, Liberals like Masani and other non-party intellectuals like Tarkeertha Laxmanshastri Joshi, A. D. Gorwala and V. B. Karnik, a trade unionist (who was also Honorary Secretary of the ICCF and *Freedom First* editor for over a decade).

In February 1957 the ICCF published a Working Paper en-

titled “The Democratic Alternative” which was the basis of discussion at a Seminar held by the ICCF in Patna. In the introduction to this working paper the author Miss M. A. Devaki (Mrs. Devaki Jain) revealed that the purpose of the paper was to “find common areas of agreement between two schools of thought – the Gandhians and the anti-State Socialists or liberal minded socialists.”

The immediate provocation for this working paper was a statement made by Prime Minister Nehru at a press conference in Calcutta (and reported in the *Hindustan Times* of October 22, 1956). He said that some friends whose opinions he valued had criticized the tendency in India to move towards State Capitalism, through State ownership of industries. “While that is true to some extent, there is no other way,” he was reported to have said.

Thus it was that not only did Rajaji and Masani begin worrying about the drift of Indian democracy towards one party rule with a pronounced tilt in favour of the communist economic model, but also Gandhians, democratic socialists and a number of Congressmen themselves who dared not question Nehru. Until Swatantra came on the scene criticising socialism was unthinkable.

In this connection, it would also be useful to refer to the personal predilections of the top three in the Party: Rajaji the Founder was a liberal insofar as issues relating to the economy were concerned but conservative on many social and societal issues; Prof. N. G. Ranga, the President between 1959 and 1968 preferred to describe himself as a Gandhian socialist; Minoos Masani, the General Secretary between 1959 and 1967 and President from 1968 to 1971 was a democratic socialist turned Liberal, considerably influenced by Gandhian thinking.

Their varied backgrounds and that of many others who joined the party and were present at the preparatory convention of the Party on August 1, 1959, were reflected in the basic document adopted at the Convention: “The 21 Principles of the Swatantra Party”. Not only were these differences not swept under the carpet but were

openly acknowledged leading to a unique innovation in party politics spelt out in the 21st Principle.

I would venture to suggest that, in a manner of speaking, the Swatantra Party became the umbrella party that the Congress used to be with this difference: While the Congress emphasized the collective and the primacy of the State, Swatantra stood for the primacy of the individual vis a vis the State.

Thus the Swatantra Party basing itself on the premise that man is the measure of all things offered customized solutions to the situation prevailing 40 years ago – the era of one party dominance at the centre and in most of the states of the Indian Union.

3. What led to its rapid rise and its equally rapid crash?

First the Rapid Rise ...

This involves an enquiry into the party strategy that enabled it emerge as the second biggest Party in the country after the 3rd General Elections in 1962 (though still well behind behind the ruling Congress). The party won 207 (of around 1000 seats contested in the state assemblies as against 153 won by the CPI, 149 by the PSP and 115 by the Jan Sangh. Of the 192 seats contested for the Lok Sabha the party won 22, securing a little over 8.5% of the votes polled.

Five years later the Party's performance in the 1967 General Elections was even more impressive. Of the 175 candidates to Parliament, 44 were elected. Securing almost 9.6% of the votes poll the Swatantra Party emerged as the single largest party in the opposition in the Lok Sabha. Of the 973 candidates who contested in the state assemblies elections 256 were elected.

Though Rajaji and Masani publicly expressed their disappointment at not being declared as the official opposition in the Lok Sabha (short by 7 seats) and not getting 100 seats, it was by no

means a mean achievement.

A number of reasons can be advanced for this rapid growth. Among them:

- The novelty of a party that refused to subscribe to socialism of the Nehruvian kind.
- The national leadership consisted of outstanding public personalities with impeccable credentials, each on of them distinguished in their own fields of activity. In fact, by current reckoning offering not one but a number of potential prime ministers!
- In the 1960s there were a number of state level parties, some of them led by former princes who had a strong following in their former princedoms. Two of them were the Bihar Rajya Janata Party in south Bihar, and the Ganatantra Parishad in Orissa. Both merged into the Swatantra Party. In both states the Swatantra Party emerged as the official opposition in 1967. In Rajasthan Maharawal Laxman Singh of Dungarpur was among the first to join the party leading to a few more princes joining, the most prominent among them being Maharani Gayatri Devi. In Gujarat Bhailalbhai Patel a trusted lieutenant of Sardar Patel was able weave a formidable coalition of the patidars (the Patels) and the Kashtriyas (Rajputs) with a number of princes of smaller principalities in Saurashtra coming in. In Tamil Nadu two parties one the CRC (Congress Reforms Committee – a breakaway group from the Kamaraj Nadar-led Indian National Congress and the Tamil Nadu Toilers Party led by Saw Ganesan provided Rajaji both organizational sinews and leadership to develop the Party in the State. In Mysore (now Karnataka) the party received considerable impetus from Coorg (now known as Kodugu) with the planters led by N. K. Ganapaiah providing the muscle. In Andhra Prof. Ranga's charisma was responsible for the party's creditable performance.
- In other words the founding members were able to form a coa-

lition of Interests ranging from landowners and tenant farmers whose lands the government was trying to usurp; the difficulties of traders and manufacturers small and big trying to do business but stymied by the unholy trinity of the corrupt politician, the corrupt bureaucrat and the corrupt businessman; the apprehensions of the growing clout of the communist party of India over the ruling party; and continuing high levels of poverty and illiteracy even after 20 years of freedom.

- For the first time India's voters were offered a choice not between parties of the same kind but one that was radically different – one that offered less government interference in the lives of citizens and a much larger role for them in the country's governance.²
- There was an all-out effort to reduce to the minimum the splitting of the vote, through electoral adjustments. One of the main reasons for Congress winning overall majorities in all elections despite receiving far less than 50% of the votes was due to multi-cornered contests. The Swatantra Party entered into electoral adjustments particularly with the Jan Sangh (the present BJP) and with state parties like the DMK in Tamil Nadu. This did not involve an alliance or campaigning on a common platform. Parties in the opposition benefitted from such adjustments as proved by the results of the 1967 elections.

... and the Equally Rapid Crash ?

It was indeed a *crash* not a fall.

A principal reason for the Swatantra Party's early successes was the tremendous rapport between Rajaji and Minoo Masani. Nine times out of ten their interpretation of events coincided and the policies and strategies they fashioned, generally found support in the high-

² In fact on reflection, the amendment of the Representation of the People's Act referred to earlier in this narration, is designed to restore the status quo ante when all parties professed socialism!

est organs of the party.

The Congress split in 1969. The split was engineered by Mrs. Indira Gandhi determined to wrest control of the Indian National Congress from the older leaders known as the syndicate. There were now two Congress factions: the Congress (I) or the Indira Congress and the Congress (O) or the Organisation Congress led by Kamaraj Nadar. Following the split in the Congress, and to consolidate her hold on the party Mrs. Gandhi had parliament dissolved and called for elections a year ahead of schedule. The General Elections to the Fifth Lok Sabha were held in 1971.

The Congress split changed power equations not only within the Congress but in many other parties including the Swatantra Party. Rajaji and Kamaraj were political opponents particularly after 1954. As mentioned earlier, having invited Rajaji to be the Chief Minister of the then composite state of Madras to deal with a communist threat to capture power in the State, Kamaraj maneuvered to have Rajaji removed once the purpose was served. The Congress split, suddenly found Rajaji and Kamaraj on the same side of the fence. The Congress (O) was determined to prove that it was the real Indian National Congress by dethroning Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the 1971 elections. Rajaji no longer had any issue with the Congress (O). He too wanted to defeat Mrs. Gandhi at the polls. Rajaji easily accepted Kamaraj's assurance that one final assault on the Indira Congress would mark the eclipse of the Indira Congress. What was needed was an alliance of all parties in the opposition. This united front of parties came to be known as the "Grand Alliance". A coalition of opposition parties across the political spectrum, barring the communists who preferred to ally with Mrs. Gandhi.

The Swatantra Party's National Executive shared Rajaji's optimism that such an alliance would be able to defeat the Indira Congress provided such a national alliance was programmatic i.e. based on an agreed common minimum programme. Minoos Masani and Narayan Dandekar were authorized to negotiate such a programme

on behalf of the Party and also seat adjustments based on the Party's performance in the 1967 elections.

The negotiations got under way, and though it was tough going – hammering out a common programme – progress was being made. Suddenly some leaders of the other negotiating parties including Atal Behari Vajpayee (Jan Sangh), Ram Subhag Singh (Congress O), George Fernandes and Madhu Limaye (Samyukta Socialist Party also known as Lohia Socialists) sprang a surprise by saying that there was no need to work out an agreed programme; all that was needed was a one line slogan: *Indira Hatao* (Remove Indira). Both Masani and Dandeker were quite upset. They were unable to convince the Congress (O) not to abandon the common minimum programme that was being worked out. They argued that an alliance based on a negative demand of *Indira Hatao* without a common programme would not find favour with the voters.

Masani took the next flight to Madras to report to Rajaji and get him to reiterate the National Executive's acceptance of a programme-based alliance. But Kamaraj Nadar³ got to Rajaji before Masani did and persuaded him not to insist on a common minimum programme but to support the one-point formula of *Indira Hatao*. Rajaji was taken in by Kamaraj's assurance and rejected Masani's suggestion that in the light of the new situation the Swatantra Party should go it alone and do the best it could. Masani refused to be part of the negotiating team and returned to Mumbai. He had already issued a statement in Delhi before leaving for Chennai that the Grand Alliance had handed over victory to Mrs. Gandhi on a silver platter. Rajaji then asked Narayan Dandeker and Dr. R. C. Cooper, then the Party's General Secretary to convey the party's acceptance and to negotiate seat adjustments. The Party got a raw deal because it was allotted a mere 59 seats (as against 175 it contested in 1967). Both Dandeker and Cooper reported to the Party's Central Parliamentary

³ Kamaraj Nadar dropped the 'Nadar', a caste suffix and was better known as K. Kamaraj.

Board the extent to which the other partners of the 'Grand Alliance' had ridiculed and humiliated the Swatantra Party in the distribution of seats.⁴

As Mino Masani had correctly predicted Mrs. Indira Gandhi swept the polls even if the votes the Indira Congress polled were less than 45% securing 70% of the seats (contested 441 seats won 352). The Grand Alliance suffered an ignominious defeat and the Swatantra Party's strength went down from 44 to 8 with 3.1% of the votes polled, down from 9% in 1967.

Soon after the results were announced Masani resigned from the presidentship of the Swatantra Party taking responsibility for the Party's defeat. He also lost his election from Rajkot. More than the defeat, his own and the Party's, Masani felt let down by Rajaji and what he considered as Rajaji abandoning the party's mission to be a "party with a difference". The deep bond between the two men which enabled the Swatantra Party to become an important player on the national political scene, snapped. Publicly and privately, Rajaji sought to persuade Masani to withdraw his resignation. Masani refused to oblige. In a desperate bid to persuade Masani to carry on as Party president Rajaji wrote even to me: "Dear Raju, nothing would please me more than if Masani could change his mind and agree to be President again at least for one year." Dutifully I showed the letter to Masani and, on behalf of Rajaji, tried to persuade him to heed his request to continue as president for one more year. What I got was a typical Masani riposte "what's going to happen after one year? Nothing."

Prof. N. G. Ranga, Swatantra Party's president for almost

⁴ There is another take to this. The rise of the Swatantra Party alarmed not only the Congress, but also the Jan Sangh as it feared its support base being eroded. The Lohia Socialists were ofcourse delighted that the Swatantra Party was being 'cut down to size'. In a manner of speaking, they were one with Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress (O) in wanting the destruction of the Swatantra Party.

ten years, was also defeated in the election. He chose to defect to the Congress on the ground that he was obeying the people's mandate! Mr. Masani announced his retirement from active party politics. With both his lieutenants gone, and deeply traumatized by the resounding defeat suffered by Swatantra, Rajaji went into a shell.⁵ The Swatantra Party did not survive Rajaji too long. Small men who took charge of the Party lacked the vision of the party's mission. The Swatantra Party had to be 'A Party with a Difference' or not at all.

All through the Swatantra years – from 23 June 1959, when he publicly announced the formation of the Swatantra Party to 26 June 1972 when he addressed the Party's General Council for the last time, Rajaji was the Swatantra Party's mentor constantly reminding members that power was not the end but only the means to an end – the welfare and wellbeing of the Indian people. The means had to be ethical as much as the goal. Sadly, and ironically, he ignored this code just once when he allowed Kamaraj to persuade him to take a stand that was expedient and not in accordance with his own prescription. It was a gamble that he was prepared to take at his age. He was 93. A momentary lapse which ultimately led to the collapse of the Swatantra Party.

What happened thereafter to Swatantra which saw three presidents between 1972 and 1974, does not really matter. The Swatantra Party died with Rajaji on Christmas Day December 25, 1972. Ironically it ended where it all began – Madras. The Party's Founder and the two other founding members are equally responsible for the end of an outstanding experiment in principled politics.

In this context I wish to take this opportunity to confess that I was unfair in blaming Piloo Mody and his two colleagues for dissolving the Party, for the simple reason that there was no Party to dissolve! In retrospect I feel that all that happened after Rajaji died were of no consequence. On the other hand the seventh and

⁵ In what was to be his last comment in his popular "Dear Reader" column in *Swarajya*, Rajaji wrote, "Prayers alone will save this country".

last national convention of the Party held in Delhi in 1974 in Sapru House⁶ proved that the Party had indeed lost its *raison d'être* when the then office bearers ensured a contrived majority made up of bogus delegates to authorize the then president to snuff out the Party at will.

Be that as it may what Rajaji achieved in the last decade of his life was without parallel. At the age of 80 when most men retire, he embarked on the Himalayan task of building a political movement to revolutionize Indian politics and put it on the path of *Dharma* – a feat that will be very difficult, if not impossible, to replicate.

History will however record that for a brief period of 14 years Indian democracy saw the green shoots of a credible democratic alternative emerging. The soil as we the survivors recall was to our disappointment, not yet ready. It would be another 19 years before another man from the south, this time from Andhra Pradesh and a Congressman to boot, would prove that Rajaji had been right yet again.

This brings me to the last question:

4. Would I, in the present context, recommend its revival or be content with it serving as a role model? If so what kind of a role model in the current context.

The answer to the first is an emphatic 'No'. My late friend Laxmidas Sampat and I filed the writ petition to seek judicial intervention. But before I proceed further I must record that the credit for this initiative of filing the writ petition goes entirely to Mr. Sharad Joshi. He drafted the petition along with then advocate Mr. Sharad Bobde now Justice Sharad Bobde of the Mumbai High Court. It is so well drafted that I am told that the judiciary finds it a hot potato

⁶ Sapru House was named after an illustrious Liberal, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Ironically, this was the venue when Liberalism's great political experiment in India was officially ended.

to handle. The petition did come up for hearing before a division bench a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, the bench included Justice Sharad Bobde and he rightly asked to be excused.

Now Sampat and I filed the petition as we felt that the amendment to the Representation of the People Act was bad in law. It is one thing to demand allegiance to the concept of social justice and quite something else to demand allegiance to socialism. With due respect to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, I would like to say that his remark that social justice and socialism are the same is uncalled for.

Setting Traditions in Party Politics

Can The Swatantra Party serve as a role model. Yes, it can. But it is a tough model to follow. Here are some benchmarks that Rajaji and the national leadership of the Party had set for the Party.

The Swatantra Party:

- Will seek power by educating the people. “We should not chase power, power should chase us.” Rajaji kept repeating this at numerous of the National Executive and at Party workers meetings.
- Will not seek to run trade unions as fronts nor interfere in student unions. Why? Because trade unions are created to look after the workers’ interests and should not be exploited by political parties; and students have to first complete their studies before getting involved in politics.
- Will not permit the Party’s elected legislators in parliament and in state assemblies and councils to stage walk-outs. Through its 15 years of existence, only once did the Party’s MPs stage a walkout in the Lok Sabha and that was when a patently unfair ruling was given by the Speaker when the debate on the 17th Amendment to the Constitution which sought to take away

the property rights of the farmer was being discussed.

On one occasion when the Party's legislators walked out of the Andhra Legislative Assembly, and reports of Swatantra legislators demonstrating outside the Assembly were reported in the press, the Central Parliamentary Board took a serious view of this report. The leader of the group who was also a member of the National Executive, was admonished and told not to do it again. In fact the following decision was recorded: When the Assembly is in session, all Swatantra legislators should be inside the Assembly and not outside. They have not been elected to stand outside and protest. They have been elected to be in the House and record their opposition if that is the party's position on the issue under discussion.

- Does not believe in opposing for opposition's sake. There are times when the party may have to support a government proposal if it was in the national interest even if it meant breaking ranks with other parties in the opposition.

On one occasion the Congress Party led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi sought the support of the opposition parties to devalue the rupee. The economy was in dire straits and the rupee being overvalued foreign trade was taking a massive beating. The Party decided to support the Congress even though the other parties in the opposition opposed devaluation and were furious with us, but we stood our ground.

This also happened on several occasions between 1962 and 1971 when the Party declined to participate in no-confidence motions. The Party made it clear that no-confidence motions were serious parliamentary weapons to be used sparingly and not trivialized. Masani would often justify this stand by saying "You cannot replace something with nothing; you must replace it with something better.

- Innovated perhaps the most path-breaking principle to provide inner party democracy and provide space for its members from being held down by the dead hand of uniformity. This is what made the Swatantra Party a *Party with a difference*. This came to be known as the 21st principle which recognised the fact that members of the Party need not agree on everything and demanding unanimity could be undemocratic. The 21st principle said that on all issues falling outside the scope of the preceding 20 principles, party members were free to act according to their conscience - be it prohibition, birth control, consumption of tobacco or the question of the national language; and this freedom extended to the party's legislators and members of parliament. The party whip would be used only to ensure attendance and attention to legislative duties and to issues relating to the economy and foreign policy and not be so oppressive that the party's legislators became mere voting machines. This innovative approach was then criticized even by the press as being 'escapist'!

These were in brief some of the guidelines to be followed by members. It wasn't meant to be just another political party. It was a party that would one day be called on by the electorate to rule and it should therefore possess credentials of the highest order.

Clearly Rajaji had fashioned an instrument and was fine tuning it all the time. His intention was to change the face of party politics in India. He never held office in the Swatantra Party. Though he was a member of the National Executive, and of the General Council, he was not even a life member. He was an annual Rs.10/- dues paying member. Though the National Executive of the Swatantra Party was literally a Who's Who of well known and highly qualified personalities the lessons he gave them could well become a manual of ethics and etiquette for politicians of all political parties.

I met Rajaji for the last time on June 24, 1972. Recording this meeting in an article in *Freedom First* (February 1973). Entitled

“‘Carry On’said Rajaji” I wrote:

“Soon after the meeting of the (General) Council and before leaving Madras, I called on him once again. He blessed me and said that I should not be disheartened by the present fortunes of the Party. ”Carry on” he said “and keep the ‘old guard’ of the party together”, as he feared “they all want to quietly fade away”.

Rajaji passed away six months later on December 25, 1972. He was 94.

*

N. K. Somani
Swatantra Member of the 4th Lok Sabha

Mr. N. K. Somani has been quite ill having undergone recently surgery for throat cancer. Mr. Viren Shah, his fellow member in the 4th Lok Sabha pointing this out observed: “It is very brave of him to be with us today because he did not want to miss this function.” When Mr. N. K. Somani began to speak he was given a thunderous ovation by the gathering. It took him tremendous effort not only to come to the meeting but also to speak. He said:

I am still very nostalgic about the Swatantra Party whenever I walk up or cross the corner building at Kala Ghoda to the first floor (where the Party had its Central Office) and instantly Minoo Masani and Piloo Mody flash through my mind.

I go back to 1967 when the results of the Rajasthan Assembly were declared. We had all assembled in the Durbar Hall in the Raj Bhavan and Mr. Yashwantrao Chavan was deputed (he was the Home Minister) to look at the situation. All the MLAs, both Swatantra and Jan Sangh, congregated in the Durbar Hall. In those times, there was an understanding between the two parties that they will fight the election in consort. After a head count was taken Mr. Chavan found to his horror, that of the MLAs that were present there a majority were from our two parties and therefore by right,

Swatantra and Jan Sangh should have formed a government in Rajasthan at that time. Unfortunately, the law did not then exist that a crossing of the floor at that time would disqualify an MLA or an MP. I asked Yashwantrao (in Marathi) “*Atta kay?*” (Now what?). He replied “*Pahoo ya*” (*we’ll see*). When he said this, I got suspicious that now the scene would get blurred. And this is exactly what happened in Rajasthan. My suspicions were proved right when some MLAs were purchased and the Congress was able to form a government there.

Now the scene shifts to New Delhi where all of us congregated after that. Ours was the largest single party in the opposition in the Lok Sabha with a strength of 44. Virenbhai used to always go across and sit with the Treasury Bench because he was very friendly with them and I would be sitting with Pилоo Mody and he would sign a chit as ‘PM’ in his own right as Pилоo Mody and send it to Indira Gandhi who would send back signed again as ‘PM’ by virtue of her office. It was such an excellent atmosphere and this was the best part of my life, the formative part in my liberal experience.

D. N. Patodia was one of us three young people – the third being Tapuriah. Even on the first day Patodia was given the chance of speaking on the vote of no-confidence moved by Minoо Masani. And Patodia made such an excellent impression on day one. Imagine a new member moving against the might of the government a vote of no-confidence against what had happened in Rajasthan. Virenbhai used to be there with Dinesh Singh and Congress members and they were all struck when they saw the performance and preparedness; the way we delivered our speeches showed the average brilliance of the Swatantra Party. They were really afraid and took down notes of what we had to say.

When the Congress was split in 1971, the Congress (O) crossed the floor and came across to sit in the opposition. Unfortunately or whatever, there was a 50-50 split – 50% on the opposition side and 50% on the Congress side. This was the occasion for the

privy purse abolition and bank nationalization. Again, amongst others, while searching for potential MPs who could be purchased, the Congress Party wheeler-dealer, Raghuramaiah had set up his office at Ashoka Hotel in a permanent suite there. Among others, he called me also to find out how purchasable I was – it was a one-to-one meeting.

None of you will realise the value of the industrial license in those days. We do remember, Virenbhai would remember, it was a virtual hell to try and get an industrial license or even a modification of your existing license and it took one's might and patience and several other slippery passages to try and get what you wanted. So the first thing Raghuramaiah asked me was whether I was willing to look at crossing the floor to the Congress Party in return for either an industrial license of my choice or a ministership of my choice. When I came back, I shared this with Piloo Mody and we had a hearty laugh in the evening and the matter naturally ended there. I am mentioning the extent to which the Congress Party went to try and get one vote so that these two bills may be passed. Unfortunately, one Swatantra Party member from Karnataka was purchased, I forget his name, and he became a minister later on. Thus, Indira Gandhi was able to pass the two historic bills with a majority of one in the House in those historic times.

Now when the elections were called prematurely in 1971 or early 1972, some of us certainly would have won because of the work we had done not only in the Parliament, but in the constituency. But a hoard of *goondas* was left in each such constituency; many of my workers were beaten, two or three of them were killed, several jeeps were burnt; when I called for a battalion of BSF from the Central Government, they came, but they were under the orders of the local Superintendent of Police. So these BSF men would not bat an eyelid and they played just a decorative function doing absolutely nothing at all. This was the scenario in which I was forced to end my membership of the Lok Sabha. I saw in the queue of voters children aged 8 or 9 openly voting for the Congress Party, but nobody to take our objections or register this kind of malafide action.

This is the history or let us say the start of the dissolution of the Swatantra Party because 1971 was the beginning of all kinds of dirty practices in politics. Any kind of dirty politics and you can trace it to 1971-72 elections. So, many of us who had lost the elections, went dejectedly to Rajaji in Madras and Rajaji, consoling us, said you have laid the foundation of a liberal environment in India, I can see as clearly as my hand that some day in future, the government by itself or through the US and the World Bank will take all our principles and put them into policy. And we all know what happened since 1991 in the country. So this was the parting message of Rajaji to all, of us which gave us a lot of courage.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your indulgence to a sick person.

*

Viren Shah

Swatantra Member of the 4th Lok Sabha

Some of you may be surprised that born and brought up in the Congress culture of the 1940s I started my active political work with the Communist Party of India as a student in 1942. Their head office was then at Sandhurst Road in a building named Raj Bhavan. So, when I went to Raj Bhavan in Kolkata (as governor of West Bengal), I reminded Jyotibabu (Jyoti Basu then Chief Minister) that from Mumbai Raj Bhavan at Sandhurst Road I had travelled to Kolkata's Raj Bhavan here. At that time, it was social justice that attracted younger people, but of course, one got into the Quit India struggle mood. Till 1966, I still had a very strong feeling for the Socialist Party, great respect for Jayprakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan who had just retired from active politics, Ram Manohar Lohia, but also my friends in the PSP, Nath Pai in particular.

However the difference that I found was that what Rajaji had said about state capitalism and the license-permit-quota raj was coming true. He could see at that time that this could lead to the suppression and more so, to a decline in the moral character of the people. Even he could not visualize the extent to which morality was

to go down in every sphere. As Mr. Sharad Joshi mentioned every commodity is purchaseable. There are people who purchase MPs before election or after, or purchase a sales tax or whatever inspector comes to you. This was not there earlier. My own experience of 1950s industry or even 1960s, never made me think this could happen. But this is what Rajaji's point was, that once you acquire this power and give it to politicians they keep the civil services under control by misusing the power to transfer in such a way that it led as Mr. Somani, mentioned after 1971 to bringing down the country.

I remember, I had written a commentary on Gorbachev's perestroika in 1991, when Dr. Manmohan Singh met me, he said, 'we, have taken some of the points you had made in your commentary for India, within restrictions of course. A couple of years later, for political reasons, the then Prime Minister, prevented him from going further. From then onwards, till today, the language that the ruling party speaks is a language, in a sense, of Rajaji and the Swatantra Party's philosophy without the moral aspect of the basis that Rajaji emphasized.

Regarding the point that Sharad Joshi mentioned about the lack of courage: In 1966, after I had spent a month in the Soviet Union and was actively working with the Swatantra Party, I wrote a letter to a group of selected 100 top industrialists and businessmen in the country and most of them replied – from J. R. D. Tata to G. D. Birla and several others. I had asked that if this is the challenge that is coming up, (the then Industries Minister, Mr. Manubhai Shah, at a function mentioned that if this is their point of view why then do they not contest elections and put it before the people). And I took it up. Manubhai was very angry with me thereafter, but that made no difference. The replies were extraordinary and those were pre-emergency days, those were not the days of fear - that came in later. In 1977, ten years later, I wrote to some of them again reminding them of what I had written to them. One of them met me in Mumbai, and asked me why I was doing this, confessing 'we can't give you our opinions in writing on these things and we will not

tell you on the telephone either. You are doing great work, but keep us out this' This was the fear complex in those days. What happened in 1975 after Emergency, I will just give two instances. After the Emergency was declared, we had a meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and were invited to dinner at Mr. B. M. Birla's home. He was of course very affectionate and kind to me. There was a group of people chatting and somebody commented that things were very good then (the days of the emergency) and without Indira Gandhi what would the country do? I replied supposing she suddenly drops dead of a heart attack, will the country go down? On hearing this, most people in the group moved away as they didn't even want to be seen hearing this.

I was in the World Bank in Washington D.C. with some of our people, Dr. Manmohan Singh was also there, and there was another person who I will not name, who said that the Emergency is a great thing, without that the country would go down and without Indira Gandhi the country can't be saved. Here too, I repeated the same thought which was met with complete silence. After I was arrested, those who were very close to me moved away, they would not be seen even with my wife. The exceptions were persons like Mino Masani, and A. G. Noorani. We were witnessing the fear complex that Rajaji spoke about. That is what I wish to emphasise – a point that Rajaji had made – if we have real democracy, we should not be afraid to express our point of view.

The point is that we have to think clearly and be able to raise our voice. Thanks to the RTI Act, it is now possible to do so without fear. This has been made possible because of some courageous individuals whose organized movement resulted in the RTI Act. Indeed individuals have tremendous capacity to move things, but in small things they say what can I do alone? You can do a lot. If we can make it possible for people to have confidence in themselves, to rise whether it is a local or a municipal or a state problem on issues concerning not only us, but others, I am sure we can do much better.

*

D. N. Patodia

Swatantra Member of the Fourth Lok Sabha

Due to indifferent health Mr.D.N.Patodia, a resident of Gurgaon, was unable to participate in the meeting he sent his greetings and wrote inter alia:

I am delighted that the 50th Anniversary of the Swatantra Party will be observed on 1 August 2009. Founded on the laudable principles of democracy and secularism, advocating freedom and protecting the right of dissent, it has always been a Party with a Difference.

I joined Swatantra Party in 1966 and had the privilege of being elected to the Lok Sabha in 1967 as a member of the brigade of 44 highly dedicated and supremely talented members inspired by the wisdom and the stature of C. Rajagopalchari, Minoo Masani and others. It was a profound experience to witness the Party stalwarts performing in Parliament: Ranga thundering for agrarian reforms and for the rights of the farmer; Masani demolishing the pretence of socialism and championing the cause of liberty and freedom; and Dandeker presenting an alternate model of economic growth with emphasis on free enterprise and competition. Together, these presentations invariably made an effective impact even on the treasury benches.

The course of events, thereafter, has now clearly demonstrated that the very same ideologies so forcefully advocated earlier have now become the principle vehicle of growth for the ruling party, a total vindication of the philosophies enunciated by the Swatantra Party 40 years ago.

For me, my experience in the Lok Sabha was a period of great learning and education under the towering leadership of Minoo Masani and others. On this happy occasion I offer my salutations to all my colleagues and associates who relentlessly fought for these great values.

*

Rajmata Gayatri Devi

We had invited Rajmata Gayatri Devi to participate in the commemorative function not aware that she was ill and in a hospital in Jaipur. We were deeply saddened to read in the newspapers of July 30 that she passed away on July 29, 2009. We began the proceedings of the August 1 meeting by observing a minute's silence in honour of her memory and reproduce below her first speech, as a Swatantra Party member delivered at a public meeting in Jaipur on April 14, 1961.⁷

Why I Joined the Swatantra Party

“People are always asking me why I have joined the Swatantra Party. I would like to assure you that it was after a lot of thought that I have decided to join this Party. It is impossible for me to see what is happening in this country and especially in Jaipur to remain silent. People feel dissatisfied and they feel the situation is hopeless. But what is the use of talking? One must try hard to remove the cause of dissatisfaction.

“Two years ago when I returned from Europe, I was extremely upset to see the old historic city of Jaipur was being destroyed. I spoke to the Chairman of the Municipality and also to the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, about this, because to my mind, it was ridiculous to break the old walls of Jaipur city and put up a bazaar in its place. There is ample room for markets in the new residential areas of the city. Jaipur city is an example of Indian culture and architecture and on all accounts it is our duty to preserve it. When my effort to do so was futile, I turned to our Prime Minister Shri Nehruji for help. My appeal to him was not in vain and the destruction of Jaipur was stopped. For this I shall remain grateful to him.

“The whole country is dissatisfied, every class of person whether he be an industrialist or a tradesman, an agriculturist or a labourer, a government employee or a craftsman - the people are unhappy.

⁷ Swatantra Newsletter No.17 of April 1961

“People are being crushed under a burden of taxes. The articles of daily necessities have become extremely expensive. The price of cloth and food is rising steadily. Education, medical attention and justice are not only expensive but out of reach of most people.

“With the introduction of cooperative fanning, the agriculturist stands to lose his land. There are efforts to nationalise big factories and mills when the Government has not the means to run them. Corruption is on the rise. The veteran and revered leader Rajaji tried several times to point out the right road to the Congress. But when they would not listen to his Counsel he formed a new party which is the Swatantra Party. People all over the country welcome it because they saw in it new hope and enthusiasm. I too saw in it all the good qualities which were once those of the Congress Party. That is why I joined the Party. Why is all this controversy over Maharajas and Jagirdars? It is something incomprehensible. The Indian Princes always maintained the arts and cultures of India in their States. They have fought many a battle for this country and have sacrificed so much for India. After the Independence of this country, when the New India was being built, the Rajas put forward a glorious example. The way they sacrificed their territories for the sake of the country will go down in the history of our country. In the name of land reforms, the jagirdars were asked to leave their jagirs which they did. But too soon their sacrifices were forgotten. Today they are called reactionaries. All the promises that were given them are being gradually broken. This reflects badly on us in foreign countries because people from outside think that if the government can break this agreement to its own people why should it honour its agreements with foreign countries; and what about the jagirdars who joined the Congress? Are they not reactionaries? Are only those who joined the other parties reactionaries? We have joined the Swatantra Party as ordinary citizens of India. Our Constitution gives us the right to join whichever party we prefer. The Swatantra Party respects the right of every citizen to be able to choose his own party and that is why it is becoming more popular every day.

“I should like to assure you that if I can serve you in any way, I shall be happy. My husband and his forefathers have served

you and this country for hundreds of years. I too wish to keep their example before me and do the same. You will, I am sure, help me in this. Your relationship and mine is an old one and one that will never be broken.

“My dear sisters who are sitting here today, I should like to say to them that this work I have undertaken upon myself can never be fulfilled unless they help me. With their help I shall have more strength to work. This step which I have taken is in the tradition of Rajasthani women and now I believe you will follow me.”

*

Babu Joseph
(Member, Swatantra Party)

I was a member of the General Council and of the last National Executive of the Swatantra Party. I am becoming nostalgic. We are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Swatantra Party, I am celebrating the 50th year of my political activity. In 1959, I joined as a student leader in the Indian National Congress and I continued in that capacity until 1959 when we staged the liberation struggle against the first elected communist ministry in Kerala. Once it was thrown out, our Youth Congress leaders started adopting statist socialist policies to counter the Maoist influence Kerala. I disagreed with them and I was in the political wilderness for some time. In 1963, somebody gave me a copy of *Swarajya* edited by Pothan Joseph whose lead articles were written by none other than Rajagopalachari. I found common cause with Rajaji and straight away joined the Swatantra Party.

I would like to say emphatically that Rajagopalachari along with Minoo Masani were the two great stalwarts that India has ever seen. I pay my respectable tributes to *pujya* Rajaji and Minoo Masani. They were the most civilizing influence in my life. In 1972, Indian Liberal Group, sent me abroad and I went to Germany in the hey-days of the Cold War and I wrote an essay (on the basis of which the selection was made) internal and external menaces to democratic countries of the World.

Regarding the future, I would like to give one reason why Swatantra had not succeeded - we did not have very many people who were convinced about liberal ideas. So if we want to think of a liberal political party what we have to do is take up the pledge to educate a hundred or thousand people at the grassroots level about the ideas of limited government, free market, etc. We need to have a cadre otherwise what happens is that when leaders cross to other political parties, then the entire thing goes. So for the Swatantra Party that was the only possible thing. We had 50 or 60 leaders of national stature to form the party, but when these leaders started crossing the floor or something happened, then the Party went. What we need to do is in various places we should have hundreds or thousands young men are committed liberals, only then can we think of having a national or state level party.

One more thing about 'secularism' I beg to differ with the various views expressed here (see V. K. Sinha's presentation on page 35). I would like to quote one sentence from Rajaji's article in *Swarajya*: "religion tries to spiritualize politics and governance; again in the *Freedom First* of July 1988, Masani says "there are some silly people who talk of India as a secular state, they talk of secularism when they don't even know the meaning of the word. If you look up the Oxford Dictionary, secularism means anti-religious. We don't want to be anti-religious, we want to be religious. India is not anti-religious, we are religious people." I subscribe to this view of secularism.

*

Dharmendra R. Nagda
(Member, Swatantra Party)

Free enterprise is alive today not only in India, also in China. May be out of compulsion, not out of conviction, but the fact that the economic philosophy of the Swatantra Party is being followed for the greater benefit of mankind, even in a big country like China, gives me lot of satisfaction. Talking about infrastructure, I recall, years ago, at a meeting of our Bombay unit somebody, if I am not

mistaken it was Sharayu Daftary who made the point about roads and infrastructure. Today, it's a matter of great satisfaction for me that the Congress has adopted this to take the country forward; again, the Swatantra philosophy has prevailed, I should say: Who says that the Party is dead. As we Hindus believe, the body is no more but the soul survives. Long live the Swatantra Party!

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Mahendra Oza
(Member Swatantra Party)

I am happy to see all our friends from the Swatantra.Party gathered here today. My friend Dharmendra says that Swatantra philosophy can never die and it came true through the other party. But I would like to inform this meeting that we the Swatantra group from Matunga (a suburb of Mumbai) were the only group recognized as such when the Janata Party was being formed. We of the Swatantra Party had our quota of representation in the unit formed in our area and we kept our flag flying, In fact even today we are identified as Swatantries. Wherever we go or to whichever party we go, we carry with us our Swatantra policies and principles. That way we have kept our party, alive in spirit, and that is how we play our role.

II

Presentations

The Secular Aspects of a Credible National Alternative

Prof. V. K. Sinha

It was evident even before India attained independence that free India would have to be both democratic and secular. Certainly, there was a consensus in the leading political party, the Indian National Congress, that led the freedom struggle, that free India would adopt a democratic Constitution and, that in contrast to Pakistan, India would be a secular state.

Post-independence period saw the adoption of a new Constitution that was largely secular, liberal and democratic. However, there was no clear focus on either strengthening democracy or deepening secular principles. We also need to remember that the Constitution was heavily loaded in favour of centralization.

I would like here to emphasize that just adopting the framework of the democratic Constitution did not mean that we had established democracy. It also meant that we had to continuously take steps to strengthen democracy. Democracy is a dynamic process – we just don't become democratic by adopting merely a formal system of elections.. This also applies to secularism. Though we did not use the term 'secular', it was taken for granted that by not favouring any particular religion, we had become secular, which we

were not. So we, that is the political and social leadership, did not very much care to further strengthen democracy or to further deepen the understanding of secularism.

To my mind, one of the first challenges which came to alert us to make our democracy more democratic was the rise of the Swatantra Party. I was not a party member, I am not a party animal (as they call it). I have always been a non-party person, but to me the Swatantra Party represented the first organized challenge to the rise of a powerful state and, as a liberal I believed that a powerful state is antithetical to the liberal philosophy and to liberal principles. The fact that we had the permit-licence-quota-raj system meant a state which was authoritarian, arbitrary and, most importantly, a state which was corrupt. All these contributed to the weakening of democracy and not strengthening it.

Similarly, we went wrong in our focus on secularism. We adopted what we thought was a special Indian contribution to secularism and that is *sarva dharma samabhava* – equal respect for all religions. Any student of religions would tell you that this is totally a fallacious position to take. We give equal respect to all persons; it does not mean we give equal respect to the opinions they hold. Similarly, religions are not all equally deserving of respect. Persons holding a religion – yes, but does it mean I have to respect their religious views, even if they are obnoxious, even if they flout the norms of human rights? So, the adoption of *sarva dharma samabhava*, in a way, inhibited the growth of secularism in this country.

For example, we did not want to touch Muslim Personal Law, because it was sanctified by the *Shariat*. Any person would tell you that a law which demeans women, as in the *Shariat* which gives unequal status to women, is not a law which should be allowed to exist in a democratic society. Even if Hindu laws have been reformed, in practice, we still do not give equal accord to women. In such a situation can we claim to be democratic? So I think we need now to perhaps explore the Jeffersonian view of secularism

which insists on a wall of separation between religion and politics. If we want to democratize the society, it means that we want to have more and more human rights taken into statute books.

If we believe in equality between men and women, then we have to have personal laws that are universal, just and fair. If any particular law comes in the way because it is justified in the name of religion, that law has to go. The more human rights are translated into statutory rights, the more we are going to confront mullahs and pundits who will say no, you can't do this because it stands in the way of religion. As a liberal and democrat, we will have to say – please confine your religion to your homes. In other words, what I am pleading here is that we need to put religion in its place, we need to clarify that we are not against religion *per se*, we are against religion taking political positions. We are not advocating atheism, but we are advocating that religious beliefs should be confined to ones personal homes, to one's personal social life and not come in the way of making human rights more real for the people.

One point which is very commonly argued in this country is this whole philosophy of identity politics, the whole question of majority/minority syndrome and the fact that we have Minority Commissions to protect the interest of the minority. I take a radical position here – my plea is that in a democracy there cannot be such a thing as a permanent majority or a permanent minority. That is undemocratic. It is true sociologically we have the majority Hindus and minority Muslims but they are sociological realities. Please do not translate these sociological realities into political counters, as bargaining counters in the field of politics. The moment you do that, you are creating a society in which groups have rights, but not individuals. What I would like to argue is (some people may not agree with it) that this notion that groups have rights is false. It is the individuals who have rights, it is the person who has a right. Accepting any claim of a group to have rights which the individuals don't have, or a minority to claim that it has rights which a majority does not have, will lead us into dangerous waters which can only

lead to fascism.

I would like you to question this whole concept of majority-minority. I find that even some liberals have begun to advocate what they call the rights of minorities. Rights belong to individuals and not to groups. The moment we say that we subsume the individual into the group, that is not, liberally speaking, sound. It is surprising that there are some intellectuals in this country who say that secularism is an outdated western notion, and we should go back to our Indian tradition – persons like Ashish Nandy, T. N. Madan, who speak of *Sanatana dharm*. *Dharma* is meant for the common man, we are always tolerant and so on. My answer is do not try to identify and isolate one string from our tradition and say that that is good, as if that particular tradition can be split into various strands; it cannot. Our tradition also is one which demeans women, our tradition is also one which does have any place for the individual identity, you are just a relation – you are a son, or a father or a husband, etc., but you are not an individual.

So are we going to make use of that tradition to develop a secular society or a democratic society? I would plead that let us base our demands, our needs on simple principles of reason. People can think together and achieve things on the basis of rationality. It is not a very difficult task, though it is not a very common one.

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Sharad Joshi

I came here to remember what a glorious experiment the Swatantra Party was. I make it a point every time I get an occasion to mention that the Swatantra Bharat Party of which I have the privilege of being the National President is actually a successor to Rajaji's Swatantra Party. Last time, we had the birth anniversary of Rajaji, I made it a point to mention to the Prime Minister, that Rajaji was the original founder of my party. The Prime Minister and Mr. L. K. Advani both called me later asking me to explain to them the kind of connection my party had with Rajagopalachari.

You heard a long and crisp history of the Swatantra Party from Raju. After Piloo Mody dissolved the Swatantra Party, Maharashtra is the only unit that continued and S. V. Raju still keeps it alive and it is that unit from where we have taken cinders for lighting our torch.

I would like to start with the secularist argument and point out that the manifesto of the Swatantra Bharat Party makes it very clear that secularism, after independence, had to be interpreted in a different way. Before independence, secularism was understood in a special context – those who ask for the division of the country and those who stood for the Gandhian model for India, and therefore, there was some sense in talking about secularism. Even at that time, nobody used the dictionary meaning of the word “secular” which is, skeptical of all religious dogma; even today I don’t think there are many Indians who would accept that. We still believe in *sarva dharma samabhava*.

What has happened after independence is that we accepted democracy, but along with that we accepted a particular model of elections. That’s very relevant because the old Swatantra Party was very keen on having proportional representation which is our stand even today. We accepted the system of first past the post and I would argue that it is this system which has resulted in a new brand of thought which I call minorityism and which passes for secularism in India today. If you are BJP or Shiv Sena, to take up some of the more notorious units, then you are of course communal. But if you are asking for reservations on the basis of caste or on the basis of religious, you can still be secular, if you are not pro-Hindu. This is a very peculiar situation.

The present system of election has produced a situation where clever politicians find it possible to put two or three minorities together to get a sufficient percentage of votes that is required for being first past the post. That is why minorityism has become the brand of the day. For example, Mulayam Singh will not agree he

is non-secular. He talks of opposing all communal forces, but he is one of the most communal politicians in the country today. The same thing can be said about Mayawati and Laloo Prasad. Secularism has come to mean those people who would like to appease the various groups of minorities in order to get votes. I think this has resulted in considerable corruption and mischief in Indian politics.

We treated the 2009 elections as an opportunity to put forth our tenets and programmes. We concentrated on two specific problems that India faced – the first was the global financial crisis or the global recession and the second was international terrorism. As regards terrorism, I said that it would be incorrect to say that after the fall of USSR, the world had become unipolar. There is still a second super power and that is the combination of fundamentalist terrorists and the old communists. The commonality between them is that both of them believe in dogma, hero worship and in some kind of a holy scripture. And both of them want to dominate the world – communists who tried to do it through open warfare, now find it would be much more efficient to do it through terrorism. That's where they are coming together. There are therefore two centres in global politics today, and not one.

As regards the global financial crisis, there are two ways of looking at it. One is the minorities' view which has adopted the expression of "inclusive growth". This was not there before the election results came out. Till then, we were talking only of two points, now there is a third point – whether we go for "inclusive growth" or the word "entrepreneurial growth" where the entrepreneurship, innovation, inventiveness and the capacity to bear risk plays the role of an engine. That basically is the difference and we still have not decided. Today, politically, inclusiveness has become very plain, the important thing is we will see in the few years to come whether inclusiveness can be economically viable. Politically it will win every time. I have said often that communists have a very consistent economic philosophy and economic programme. They advocate programmes which create poverty and the poor vote for them. That

basically is the communist effort. In the old days, we used to talk of socialism, communism, etc., now those expressions have become old. Now it is neither welfarism, but inclusiveness which is politically extremely paying, and while planning for the future, we will have to take that into account.

Second question that comes before me is – and I am surprised that a person like venerable Rajaji decided to form a separate independent political party in order to advocate a certain outlook on economics, religion and politics. The history of Indian society shows that people who tried to form independent churches, independent cults have never succeeded. Those who formed independent Arya Samaj or those who formed independent schools in Hindu religion were not able to make a mark. A person like Gandhi who took pride in calling himself a *sanathani* Hindu and then advocated a large number of reforms, they could bring about some results. And, I am saying this on this basis: I have known Dr. Manmohan Singh for many years and I have openly even in the Rajya Sabha credited him for many major achievements. There are very few people who have achieved two revolutions in a life time and Manmohan Singh has done that. In 1991, he debunked Nehru's economics and later on with the US Nuclear Treaty, he has debunked Nehru's neutralism and both under the Congress flag. Recently, I wrote a letter to him saying that socialism has come in many countries through revolution and liberalism has come through Gorbachev or Mrs. Thatcher who concealed their real opinions till they came to power. Well you have never hidden the fact that you are a liberal, and at the same time, you have seen to it that it is politically viable. A sentence which was often used in the context of the old Swatantra Party and which I use quite often is what we preach is politically impossible, but will keep the flag flying till what is politically impossible becomes economically inevitable – that has been our kind of approach. But, Dr. Manmohan Singh has accepted a certain compromise. He has achieved much more even by temporarily compromising with the Left; he has taken many more steps in the direction of liberalism than any of us have been able to achieve.

Capt. G. R. Gopinath

Respected senior elder statesmen of the Swatantra Party and friends. I will just give a brief background as to why I did what I did though I am more interested in the future

I was in Mumbai that night (26/11) when the terrorists attacked. Hearing of the attack and confined in the hotel, I asked myself whether we were becoming a failed state or have failed as citizens? I have also served in the Indian Army for 8 years, so this hit me a little more, when I saw my friends getting killed. I left the Army with Rs.6,000 in my pocket, went back to my village and took to farming. Like most farmers I got into debt and also got out of debt. I became a well-known silk farmer and the BJP invited me to become President of the local BJP. In 2004 I contested the elections to the Karnataka Assembly on the BJP ticket and lost. Disillusioned with their policies I resigned from the BJP. Soon thereafter I set up Deccan Helicopters of which I am now Chairman. It is the largest helicopter company in the country. With hardly any money, I set up Air Deccan which became the largest airline in the country with a crazy market capacity of USD1.1 billion. Then I merged this airline with Vijay Mallaya's airline and I was in the midst of launching my next venture Deccan Logistics to build an air cargo logistics for this country. I was in the midst of raising funds, getting licenses from the government and it was not at all the right time to think of contesting the election, because you have to have courage to contest an election which would involve criticism of the ruling party or whichever party which may come to power. I contested against Mr. Ananth Kumar of the BJP who was earlier Civil Aviation Minister and was hoping to become a minister again.

When I asked people to endorse me, some like Kiran Mazumdar, the great corporate chieftain from Bangalore, endorsed me publicly, but others shied away because they felt if I lost (they were certain I would), it would come in the way of their procuring licenses. One of the biggest problems is that such people have the ability to form their own industry groups, but are not prepared to

take up civic issues. The Chief Minister, Yediyurappa asked me not to fight against Ananth Kumar who was very important for the BJP, he said. In fact he asked me to contest on the BJP ticket from some other constituency in Bangalore. After the terrorist attack in Mumbai, the next morning I went back Bangalore and got busy with my business for the new venture but I had decided to contest as an independent.

Albert Camus said: “A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers.... This heart within me I feel, and I judge that it exists. ... “ perhaps we can now also say he watches TV. This is true for most of us and I realized that probably we are more to blame than the politicians because we are so much in our own cocoon, the cocoon that we have made for ourselves – the cocoon of comfort. After some days, one morning I woke up and saw the report on the attack on the Mangalore Church and there were no police to be seen because they do not discharge their duties as prescribed by the constitution and the police manual; instead a policeman wants to find out who is the Chief Minister and what community or caste he is from. Many churches were burnt in Karnataka and the police were not to be seen anywhere as they were waiting for instructions – the BJP Government is in power and they were not sure if the Chief Minister wanted firm or a weak action. Again I am not pointing finger at anyone. The villagers and the lumpen elements are better than us, because anything is better than indifference. Our blood boils when such incidents occur, but most of us are lotus eaters, we go back to our work, so I also went back to my business.

The third incident which shook me was when TV showed live what happened in Mangalore where they tore the clothes of women, pulled them by their hair and beat them up in public and everybody watched. I could not believe that it was a true ; I thought it was probably a movie. I was furious and when one of my colleagues saw the rage I was in, said that if I was so upset I should contest the elections. It was then that I decided to stand for elections. The next question was how do I contest, a party candidate

or as an independent? I did not want to go with the BJP or the Congress. Someone has said that a politician without a party is like a snail without a shell and I knew that to win as an independent, was almost impossible. Yet I was aware of the fact that in political parties there is no inner party democracy and that is one of the reasons why most of us do not join any party. There is a high command in every party and there is a coterie. In fact, I even mentioned to Dr. Manmohan Singh publicly (I admire him, he is decent, capable, honest) regarding moral issues, involving means to ends. Is it okay to be corrupt to win in an election so that when the person wins he can clean up the system. Is that what is making Manmohan Singh not stand up in his party and protest against giving a ticket, say, to Pappu Yadav? Is that it is allowed so that the party can get majority, then how can it lead a clean life? Can we compromise on these kind of issues.

All these things were troubling me because you can't get into a party and reform it, because you yourself become a part of the Party. That's how I contested as an independent, and I lost – I got about 70,000 votes – but I got more publicity than all the other candidates put together!. The question that came to me each time which has a bearing on the future is that only 40% of the people voted in Bangalore. I think our biggest problem today is not China, but ourselves, our indifference. We have a huge issue here as to how to get this 60% of the people politically engaged to cast their vote – that is the big challenge.

I want to open this debate with the proposition that the Swatantra Party should be revived without, I feel, getting into the semantics of the word “socialism”, because nobody will prevent you from wanting to do what you want to do. In fact, last week when some people came to invite me to Hubli, out of the five people who met me, two of them said that their my fathers contested as Swatantra Party candidates. Even today, when we speak of the Party, there is great love for the party, they look up to this party. The single thing that concerns me now is how to breathe life back into the party, so

that at one stroke you have a national presence, and then take it forward. I heard that it is not possible because of the court case, so I just want you to discuss why we should not revive it, because if you are not reviving it, then while it is nice to come and reminisce about the past we should be concerned on how to take that past and use it for the future.

III

Discussion

R. V. Krishnan

It actually surprises me that in this 50th anniversary of this wonderful party all that is being said still persists. Nothing has changed. What has perhaps changed is the problems have enlarged and have become systemic and even the fear that Mr. Viren Shah mentioned is still present. So what is the solution. I think an august gathering of this kind must discuss solutions hypothetically. If it was possible to research solutions, if it was possible to analyze the current problems and professionally research them, and arrive at solutions you will see that solutions are still possible and if these solutions can be implemented we will be a changed country. Edmund Burke said and I quote “All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

The Professionals Party of India and I invite all of you to please google Professionals Party of India and see that we stand for values identical to yours, solutions identical to those made by the Swatantra Party. Everything is so similar, it is uncanny.

Dr. Louis D’Silva

As Capt. Gopinath posed the problem how do we bring the 60% who do not vote to the polling booth. There is a way out and that is firstly, by demanding that voting be made compulsory. Secondly, in a book I wrote entitled “Participatory Democracy and People Power”, sub-titled “India’s Quest for Her Soul” I suggested that where no candidate gets 51% of the votes, there should be a run-off poll

in which the first two candidates who got the highest number of votes participate and one of the two is bound to get more than 50% and is therefore declared elected. In such a system, we will have legislatures that mirror public opinion and every single candidate elected to the state assembly or the parliament will be backed by a majority of votes.

The third major problem that we suffer from is corruption. Nobody talks about how to eradicate corruption. The Congress Manifesto for instance does not have even a few words suggesting what measures they will take to eradicate or reduce corruption.

Our former highly respected President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam described rightly described as the people's President suggested and even set up a President's Commission against Corruption. This is what the people of India must demand, just as they must demand compulsory voting followed by a run-off election if they want to solve major problems.

Why are the people of India not demanding an independent commission against corruption when the tax payers money is already being wasted on so many commissions and committees. Let the Government of India constitute an independent commission against corruption. As it was mentioned earlier that the Swatantra Party was the first party with a difference, let it be the first party to demand the constitution of an independent commission against corruption.

Meera Sanyal

The point that I would like to make is that the brief history of the Swatantra Party narrated clearly points out that though the Swatantra Party had come before its time, the time has come now for its ideals and ideas. In essence the issues that were raised and debated during the 2009 elections were very much a revival of the spirit of Swatantra, its values and principles. Even though Capt. Gopinath, Mallika, I and other independents like us lost, I think 2009

could well prove to be a turning point. Many independents and independent parties like the PPI entered the political arena for the first time having the same sense that we have all been talking about here that things have gone really too far, that this country deserves better, our people deserve better and that we ourselves need to take some action and that we are accountable.

As I look back at my election campaign, the thing that strikes me most is the messages of support that I got from across the country and every message that I read, indicated that so many people are thinking as we have been thinking. Our meeting today is actually tapping into a common vein that runs across the country that it is time for a change.

It is clear that there is this space for a political party to lead this change and the ideals of the Swatantra Party expressed in its “21 Principles” stand as robust today as they did many years ago and perhaps more so. The nation is in a different space, there is a group of people whether you call them the bourgeoisie or the educated intellectuals who are interested. At that last meeting (held by the ICCF on May 30), there was a very interesting man from Nashik, Dr. Girdhar Patil, who said you will always fail in the cities, but there is space for this kind of thing in the villages, in rural India. So the real question is, can we, today or in the coming weeks and months, formulate a path forward that we are able to create that alternative for this country.

Jamsheed Kanga

The feeling that I am getting here listening to people, is, as if, when you are walking down Marine Drive in the morning, seeing groups of old people sitting down together and reminiscing about what glorious things happened in the past. I feel as if we are a group of old men who are just sitting together and discussing what happened in the past. I feel that we should be discussing is what we should be doing in the future. We have today a number of parties which are, somehow or the other, locked into a kind of a situation

where they cannot move out of things like allowing criminals to represent them in parliament to encourage or at least tolerate politicians including ministers who are known to be corrupt. The Prime Minister cannot act against some of his own colleagues who are publicly exposed as corrupt people.

Now there are a lot of young people who are asking this question what should we do? There are issues like allowing criminals to stand for election because the electoral law has a flaw. A simple thing like making a change in the Representation of People Act whereby a person against whom an FIR is filed, which means the court has decided that the person has a *prima facie* criminal case against him, to be disallowed is not taken up by the political parties. When you talk to some of the senior politicians they say – if we stop giving tickets to criminals who are electable, other parties will give it to their criminals who are electable and we will get defeated. So, it's a question of competition between the two. Can we not convert the Swatantra Party into an organization which will stand up for these various issues and at least give a platform to those who want to pursue these matters. Somebody talked about the need for a commission for corruption. Now these are talking points which we take up, people write letters in the newspapers, but there is no organization, an all-India organization which will take up these issues.

When the Swatantra Party started 50 years ago, very few people believed that they would be able to achieve anything, so powerful was the influence of Nehru and the Congress Party that they thought these are some delinquents who are talking about certain things which will never come about, but lo and behold we find that all these things have happened. So if we can convert the Swatantra Party into an organization where honest, sincere lovers of the country want to bring about change and who do not know where to turn to in order to make an impact in politics can go to, I think the Swatantra Party can reinvent itself into a new Swatantra Party which will help change India in the direction in which all of us want it to go. May

be, 50 years later, we may find that all these things happened and we again come together and say now what shall we do. But at least let us try and do something now and not just bemoan the fact that things are not getting done.

Sharu Rangnekar

Political parties are formed and collapse depending on the following five factors:

- *Mantra* for the party
- Degree of cohesion in the party
- Degree of interaction among the members
- Success achieved by the party
- Leadership of the party

All these five factors are interdependent. Where people feel strongly about the *Mantra*, the degree of cohesion is very high. A high degree of cohesion leads to a high degree of interaction. All these five factors together contribute to the result i.e. success or failure in elections.

Mantra for the party : To capture the imagination of people in democratic set up, the party must proclaim a *Mantra*. The *Mantra* can be changed periodically if required but its appeal to people is very important for the success of party.

Shiv Sena started with the *Mantra* of “*Marathi Manus*”. It occasionally tried to stress other *Mantras* like “Hindustava and Indian Culture” but it has to come back to the original *Mantra* – particularly with the danger looming large that the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena is likely to hijack this *Mantra*. With its earlier successes, Shiv Sena started to creep in other states to create a national party – but then the *Mantra* of “*Marathi Manus*” became a liability and so it had to abandon those efforts.

Bharatiya Janata Party won large following on the *Mantra*

of “Hindutava”. Trying to dilute it or make it “inclusive”, it has lost some original supporters without getting many new supporters. So it has come back to emphasise on “Hindutava”.

The Congress party began its rise with Mahatma Gandhi’s *Mantra* of “Civil Disobedience”. Thereafter they changed the *Mantra* to “Democratic Socialism”, “Garibi Hatao” etc., to capture the mood of the masses at that time. Right now their *Mantra* is “*Aam Janata*”.

The Swatantra party started with the *Mantra* of free enterprise. The *Mantra* attracted only certain sections of the Indian economy and some intellectuals believing in the free enterprise system. This was never a large mass. In 1991, the ruling Congress party hijacked strategy of economic development through Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (three pillars of free enterprise) and consequently, Swatantra Party found that while its *Mantra* succeeded, the party perished!

Cohesion in the Party: Every party is always a coalition of groups which are devoted to different specific goals. They are ready to subscribe to a common *Mantra*. Several such groups were formed in the last election hoping the individuals elected on their pet platforms would eventually merge into a broad based party. However, such groups had no success and perished eventually.

Cohesion is a very important aspect for the stability of a political party. When cohesion deteriorates the party splinters into a smaller group as can be seen by the break up of Congress and Janata Parties in the 1970’s and 1980’s onwards.

Interaction Among Members: Cohesion is helped considerably when the members interact repeatedly. This is the reason why all political parties have processions and demonstrations (whether they are in power or in opposition) so that there is a stirring up which keeps the member actively involved with the party. If the party has no such activities, the party becomes numb, inactive and stagnates to extinction.

Success Achieved by a Party : In a democratic process the success of the party is measured by the election results. When the party wins at elections it gains adherents its *Mantra* increases cohesion and interaction among the members through the utilization of political power.

However, since the political party is really a coalition of various groups or sub-parties, some sub-parties gain while some lose. This can lead to tensions, blaming each other for failures. These groups cluster around leaders of the sub-parties. If the success is high the number of people desiring to share the fruits of power are numerous and it is not possible to satisfy all of them. Dissident groups are formed which can eventually lead to the break up of the party.

Thus it is paradoxical that very large success or failure are both responsible for breaking up political parties.

The Role of Leaders : The various sub-groups in a party project leaders based on affinities like caste, community, language, state, religion etc. The influence of these leaders on their followers is a key factor in the stability of a party. The leader has to play two roles:

- Leading the Followers
- Following the Followers

Leading the Followers: Since the followers belong to various sub-groups they are not unanimous on any plan of action to get general acceptance. The personality of the leader plays an important role if he can influence the followers to consider group goals more important than the sub-group goals and make them supersede the sub-group goals by the group goals. Then he is able to increase cohesion and make the party more stable.

However, sometimes it is necessary to follow the followers if a particular sub-group considers its own goals paramount. Then the leader has to give at least lip support to the goals of such groups and appear to follow the followers.

Even Gandhiji supported the Khilafat movement which did not appeal to most of the intellectuals, to influence the Muslim subgroup in the Congress party. The ruling parties supporting reservations on the platform – (while the leaders voice their opposition privately) is another example of leaders following the followers. Thus there was a difference between Gandhiji's support to the uplifting of harijans compared to that of the present and past Congressmen.

I remember a case of an old lady who was a disciple of Gandhiji. Once she asked Gandhiji on his birthday, "Bapuji, I want to give you a present. What present should I give you?" Gandhiji knew she was very orthodox. In her house, in her kitchen nobody could enter except herself, her daughter-in-law or a brahmin. Gandhiji said, "You really want to give me a present? Keep a harijan cook." She said, "Bapuji, in *our* house how can we have a harijan cook? We have all kinds of rituals and even the men of the house cannot enter the kitchen." Gandhiji said, "This is what I want you to do. If you don't want to do it, please do one thing. Don't ask me again, what I want for my birthday." The lady could not sleep for three days. On the fourth day, she went and hired a harijan cook. Everybody asked, "How can you have a Harijan cook - when you are having so much orthodoxy?" She said, "You know, I still don't like it. But if Bapuji says something, there must be something in it that I don't understand." This is the charisma through which the leader leads the followers.

This aspect of leaders insisting on leading the followers can involve in loss of followers. In case of several issues Gandhiji was insisting on his principles even to the risk of loss of followers. His guiding motto was "*Ekla Chalo Re*" (walk alone if necessary). On 15th Aug 1947 there was one person who was away from all celebrations, on a mourning fast – he was Gandhiji.

Thus leaders have to play a tight rope walk between leading the followers and following the followers. He can keep the party stable and growing if he can achieve this delicate balance.

Conclusion: Thus, rise and fall of political parties depends on their finding (and if necessary changing) the *mantra* that will enthrone their followers. The cohesion achieved in spite of differences is another requirement of a political party in a democracy. This cohesion is helped by frequent interaction between the members. If this interaction reduces, the party becomes unstable and ultimately perishes. Success in election is a periodic measure. A large success as well as large failure can be a disaster. The ability of the leader to lead the followers as well as follow them selectively is a key factor in the rise and fall of political parties.

Awadhesh Kumar Singh

I was in the Indian Postal Service and took voluntary retirement in 2005. In 2008, a new party, Jago Party was formed and currently, I am its Vice President and looking after the psychological aspect. The Jago Party's policies are almost exactly what Swatantra Party stood for. We also believe in free market economy, minimal government role - government should have only defense, security, justice and so on and the major economic activities should be left to the private enterprise; we are against reservation. I find that a lot of this kind of liberal thinking is taking place all over the country and new parties have come up – Jago Party, PPI, Loksatta Party, Sharad Joshi's Swatantra Bharat Party – so I propose that with so many similar minded people here, why can't we form some kind of a broad alliance, let's call it the Swatantra Alliance and then all such like-minded parties can be a part of this alliance, including the Swatantra Party, if possible and then we can chalk out a future strategy. I find that a lot of people who want to do something for this country in line with liberal thinking, do not have a public platform where they can come together and do something. This is a good time when we can think over this and form an alliance.

Fr. Benny Aguiar

I think the Swatantra Party if it has to come about must take a stand on modern issues that are affecting not only India but

the world today. Such issues like globalization. We can't accept the fact that there is a depression, a meltdown in the economy and that India too is, in some way, affected by this depression and meltdown. Can the Swatantra Party with its liberal opinion of free enterprise answer the problems which globalization is now producing. Free enterprise alone by itself does not take the country forward. We have to take an ethical stand as Pope Benedict XVI has said, looking at not only our own private enterprise or industries, but the good of society as a whole, the world as a whole. Problems like the environment, green revolution and so on. I am not quite sure how far the Swatantra Party is taking all these things into account.

Abhijith Nayak

I am from Youth for Equality. We are the group of students who stood up against the 27% reservations that Arjun Singh put up. We rose up with the same speed as Swatantra Party and fell like them perhaps faster I suppose. We fought the battle legally, we were out on the streets protesting, we blocked the roads, we tried hard but ultimately there was no support from the older generation. I suppose that was what we lacked. We lacked experience and we did not have many resources at that time also. Politically we had no support, industry did not support us, even our parents did not support us. So ultimately, we had to end the agitation. The movement did not end, the spirit or fire did not end, but as we all were students, we funded it out of our pocket money but when our pocket money was exhausted we had to put down our fire.

Now if we get something like the Swatantra Party which can give us some direction not only in opposing reservation, but everything, every common issue right from terrorism to nationalism, secularism, I think we can go a big way forward. One positive thing I will put forward is that if we try to capitalize the power of the youth, the crowd in colleges is tremendous and if the Swatantra Party goes ahead to do it, no one can stop them. The youth today are looking for a political party which can give them direction.

We have contested the BMC elections. At that time, this

issue was hot and perhaps many don't know that we got around 1200 votes in Sion Ward No.167. That was with 50 volunteers. We went door-to-door, campaigned and garnered this number of votes with only around Rs.60,000 spent and which we received as donation. Whereas the other political parties, the winning political party, the Congress got around 3000 votes we received 1200 votes only in the name of opposing caste-based reservations. We managed to get that many votes with limited resources. We got down people to vote. We also thought of putting up candidates in the Lok Sabha elections, but that is something which needs a lot of monetary support than any other kind of support and so we backed off. Elections are something which need to be sponsored or supported by a big political party. That is the reason many young aspiring people wanting to get into politics and wanting to affect the way this country progresses, are not able to go ahead. It is only because there is no political party in which we can have our say. If the Swatantra Party becomes the political party of the common man where each and every individual has a say, I think, there is a huge support ahead.

Aspi Mistry

Most of my working career has been with various NGOs, though at times I was a software developer also for NGOs. For the last many years I am struggling to set up a Buddhist Resource Centre in Mumbai which gives me the opportunity to work with a lot of young people, which is my second point.

My first point is to address the question that you asked – are we looking at a credible national alternative or are we looking at a balancing entity between two major parties. I don't think it's this or that, it's only if you have a credible national alternative, where you are very clear about your principles and your programmes, then even if you are few in number, you can get the opportunity, sometimes, if you are lucky, to play that balancing force without losing yourself completely and being ground in the murky politics of either of those parties.

The second point was, in fact, a sort of a synthesis of what

Mr. Kanga said and what Abhijith just said. It's no use self-flagellating ourselves saying we are old because I have suddenly realized that I am going to turn 60 in September, but I have two young boys who do not have the same sort of political energy which I had at their age. I find this a common factor in all the young people I work with or whom I come into contact with and if one sits to analyze this, we realize that it is the media and the educational system that have succeeded in politically devaluing all discourse and if you ask a young person what is democracy, the most likely answer you are going to get is, it is the rule of the majority. Are you surprised then that it is majoritarianism in this country which passes off as democracy?

So we need to educate youngsters and you cannot just say let's have a political or a party manifesto, I mean, I could just wave this around and say this is the manifesto – the principles of the Swatantra Party. Those are easy to form, but how many youngsters would understand the terms used in this manifesto, how many would understand how to apply these principles in the little group that they form when they, like Abhijith, have a small group working for some cause. For example, rule of the majority, if I don't like a person, so why don't we all as a majority decide to cut off his head. Would that be democracy? Beyond this, they know intuitively this is wrong. If you ask a young person, he will say, of course, this is stupid, this is not democracy. Then what's the answer? No answer. Concepts like rule of law, human rights are lost completely. We cannot just have a national body, a political party. Parties like the Shiv Sena, MNS, have student wings, student unions, women wings, etc. It is through these smaller groups, voluntary groups, NGOs where youngsters are not apathetic about the causes they are taking up, but they do not see the connect between what they are doing, the processes they should be using within that group, they should be democratic first. If within a group of 15 youngsters, you have one fellow who can speak well and is a bit of a *dada* and who has read a little bit more, leading the whole group, even if the cause they are working for is something very good, there is no education in de-

mocracy there. So those of us who are teachers, professors or like me, involved in working with youth, have to constantly instill ideas which are contained in these principles, because these ideas themselves are not understood and sometimes are seen as contradictory or vague. If we are looking at a credible alternative, we need not only to look at the top, but to look at the grassroots level, I mean educated young people who are already in various organizations and we have to rope these groups into the fabric of whatever we are trying to do.

Naozer Aga

I had the proud privilege of working with Mr. Minoo Masani as the General Secretary of the Indian Liberal Group when Mr. Masani was the President. I just want to make a small point that there is a common refrain among the citizens that every odd day we are getting a new political party. In this group here, I have already counted three. So, I don't know whether it is really advisable to form another party or probably just concentrate on the existing framework which we already have. All the parties have a similar philosophy as the Swatantra Party. Mr. Sharad Joshi's Swatantra Bharat Party is actually an offshoot of the Swatantra Party where Mr. Masani had played an important role. So, may be it would be better to get all the existing like-minded parties together and we can probably help to bring that about, and keep that as the nucleus for further progress.

Manjeet Kripalani

I was Meera Sanyal's press secretary in her election campaign. Just to pick up people's points – I think it's all very well to talk about young people and older people. This is a very different world from when the Swatantra Party started. This is a world in India, where the heroes are no longer politicians, they are all businessmen. And the truth is actually that business works only for self, it is not really working that much for the community, with some exceptions. Business has to be roped into the political process. They dominate it, control it in some ways, but they don't participate in it.

So I think we have to get business leaders on board, because they are the ones who will be an influence for the younger generation, and they have the money. The problem here is that business has become so eager to just slip under the wire, that even young people are no longer allowed to express themselves in ways apart from vocational ways. You need to get a job, that's why your parents won't support you. I think that businesses need to be roped in and we should really make an effort to do that.

Vishal Singh

I have two points – the first is the fixation on young people is not right. We should not think in terms of young and old, a person who is right is right, a person who is capable is capable; may be the older person is more experienced.

My second point is concerning the Swatantra Party's Statement of Principles. It says Swatantra Party believes in social justice. We talk of individual rights and individual duties, how can there be something called social justice? Is it not that social justice has actually destroyed India? That's a question which I want to ask.

Abhijith Nayak

I would like to say that it is not social justice that has destroyed India, it is the way social justice is implemented. If you say social justice in the form of reservations is implemented on the basis of caste, then I would say it is wrong. But if it is implemented in the manner of providing some incentives like a waiver of a fee, then it would add to an individual's value. I would also like to add that we were not against reservations, we were against reservations on the basis of caste. We said that reservations should be there for the economically under-privileged person and not on the basis of caste.

Rajesh Singh

I am an industrialist in Patna. My industry is based on

agriculture. Sowing is the most important part in the whole process of agriculture. What has really happened in the 50 years ago is not wasted at all; the seed was sown, now it is up to us as to how we take it from here. All the efforts individually all of you have made, we may not be able to come back to the Swatantra Party and right under that umbrella, but I guess we can carry on from now.

The 21 Principles that the Swatantra Party are enough to cover all our requirements. I think we should just look at that and take it ahead from here, it will work well.

Manuwant Choudhary

I would like to congratulate the Swatantra Party for completing 50 years and I am very glad that it still exists in Maharashtra. My association with Swatantra Party actually is from my family; my uncle was an MLA of the party, my grandfather contested the 1957 elections as an independent against the then Union Railway Minister, Satnarayan Sinha and Jawaharlal Nehru had come to campaign door-to-door against my grandfather. That was basically to introduce the party, the party did not really exist in 1957. There was a mood in the country that the Congress regime and the Communists in the country must be challenged. Of course, when I was born, the party was dead.

My association with the Swatantra Party comes much later. It comes with the reading of parliament speeches of Swatantra leaders and I wondered why we do not have parliamentarians of such stature any more. This was in the 1980s while I was still in school. This is when I read an interview of Mr. Masani and there was a paragraph in that interview which caught my attention where he talks about his being in the opposition all his life – against the British, against Nehru, against Indira, even against the Janata regime. Then he says I haven't an alternative. I came to Bombay and studied at St. Xavier's. I got the opportunity to meet Mr. Masani, I think it was 1990, and I had no idea how old he would be and whether he would agree to see me. I was doing a project on the economic policies of Jawaharlal

Nehru. I had no contact with the Swatantra Party. I did not know whether it existed, so I looked up the directory and I called up Mr. Masani, and I did not know the person at the other end and I said is that Mr. Masani? He said yes, so I introduced myself as a student of St. Xavier's and that I would like to see him, and he said what is the issue and I said the economic policies of Jawaharlal Nehru. He said one word "disastrous" and said come and see me tomorrow. So I met Mr. Masani and I met him several times thereafter, but that one hour that I spoke with him it was an education.

I have been telling Mr. Raju all along that there is this potential to revive Swatantra Party. I do not believe that when Rajaji and Masani started the Party, they had any idea of how big it would become or why a Gayatri Devi would be attracted to joining an opposition party. So I think the potential is there, where we are lacking is the courage that Rajaji and Masani showed. Once we set up the platform, people would come and if they get to read the 21 Principles of the Party and *Why Swatantra* by Rajaji himself, that should be the starting point.

We don't want a new party, there are enough new parties. We can have a membership drive, the court case can continue and then we can have a strategy on how we contest the next elections five years from now. I welcome the statements by Capt. Gopinath and Meera Sanyal and other political parties who want to form an umbrella alliance. Mr. Raju himself said that Swatantra was not averse to alliances. So obviously we have to look at the smaller parties, in fact, Swatantra happened because the smaller parties existed, even before the party was formed. Clearly these are the smaller parties who are going to really add up. I think this is a great occasion to start this process, how we do it and whether we can do it in a big way I don't know, but I think we should take one small step at a time, because everybody knows that this country is going through a terrible phase.

I myself come from a state that is hard to describe as a state. I spent five years as a television journalist, driving on one of the

worst roads in the world, but I can tell you that it is possible to change even Bihar and it has changed. The media has made it possible; you may criticize the media, but we have made it possible. We have educated the voters not to vote for criminals. This time not a single criminal won from Bihar. Even the criminal candidates who were fielded by Nitish Kumar lost. So we do not need laws for that, we need a party as an example, as an alternative like the Swatantra Party which does not field candidates with criminal records, but you don't need a law for that, you have to set that example, and educate the voters. I have covered Sivan, this used to be the constituency of Mohammed Shahabuddin and I used to be the only journalist who used to go there. Shahabuddin was a mafia gangster, a terrorist and there was only the RJD's flag in the entire district. Even the BJP and other parties, Janata Dal could not put up a single flag. Shahabuddin belonged to Laloo Yadav's party, but the posters in Sivan did not have a Laloo-Rabri photo, it was just Shahabuddin. So, through the media and through police action, we managed to create a situation where today this man is in prison. The reason being there was a clash and there was an encounter where for eight hours, a Member of Parliament fought the police in a gun battle and we covered it live on television that how can an MP fight the Indian Police of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh jointly for eight hours and go back and sit in parliament. So, one has to use these occasions. When a 26/11 happens, do we have the structures to protect? We do not, as of now. We cannot call up anybody. I think we have to have the structures, we have to have the education, so when the situation demands, we will rise to it.

Farrokh Mehta

I want to make a miscellany of points. One of the things that Mr. Kanga raised is the need for an organization. I think nothing can succeed without organization. That's a very critical part. We may have visions, dreams, etc., but only an organization will make it possible, nothing else.

Second point what we need to dwell on is what Mr.

Rangnekar said that you need leaders, you need followers, and you need leaders who know when to follow when required. I take great pride that my first job was made possible by a committee at Tatas which was chaired by Minoo Masani when Mr. Masani stepped down from Tatas, he asked me to temporarily help out and take his workload.

I think if we want anything to happen, these two things are very essential – you have to have leaders, you have to have an organization. Very critical is a binding force which is values. When the Swatantra Party was being started and even when it was going through its bad times, when I talked to Masani, he said the only thing that can keep it alive, are its values. If the value system is absent, if it's just a political statement, then it will become a political party like any other. If you are looking for an organization that will develop values, then a value system is critical.

Finally, I would like to share an experience. After 26/11, luckily, the elections were fairly imminent. I was flabbergasted by the PM's enthusiasm, the commitment and hard-work that were being put in by the young people. I attended a few meetings and it was the youngsters who were the people who came forward to take on responsibility. Unless we have enough youngsters coming in, we will not succeed. And take it from me, the youngsters want things to happen, in fact, the youngsters should be initiating the new party, not you and I. If enough youngsters come in, with enough different views, that's fine. The binding force that came about was a major crisis – 26/11. When do we become a nation, when there is a war, then everybody says we are Indians, otherwise, I am this caste, I am that religion, I am from this region etc. Quite honestly, we need a crisis if we want something major to come about.

D. R. Pendse

I had the privilege of knowing Mr. Masani very well and developed great respect for his views and we had many occasions for exchanging views. Many years ago, there was a question of Tatas giving contribution to political parties. They (I was a part of that

organization then) decided to give half of the financial contribution to Congress Party and half to Swatantra Party. As for the other industrial groups, whether they were giving or not, or to whom they were giving, is not known. But, Tatas decided to give, within that permissible limit and also made it public as to what they gave.

The other point is that people have come round to accept the views advocated by the Swatantra Party ,and as Mr. Sharad Joshi mentioned these have been accepted by the most unlikely people. For example, in 1991, if you consider that as the beginning of liberalization and coming closer to the Swatantra Party's thinking on economic issues, the Congress Party manifesto had nothing to say about reforms. When Dr. Manmohan Singh was suddenly asked to become the Finance Minister and then he introduced reforms, he did not introduce them because they were in the Congress Party manifesto, they were not, He introduced reforms because our situation had become so bad, we were publicly humiliated and we had to go to the IMF which was the only organization willing to give loans to us and they had some conditions which we had to accept. That is the beginning of reforms. What he did, turned out to be so close to what Swatantra Party and others who thought similarly would have liked him to do for years and years together and which the Congress Party went on opposing and introduced the license-permit-raj instead.

I was one of those who voted for Meera Sanyal. I perhaps thought that she would not be able to win, but it didn't matter to me, but hearing her on TV, I was convinced that we needed more people like her to come into politics. She is the representative of the sort of opinion that we have not had enough of and we need a change. Even if people like her do not succeed this time, one day they will succeed. Individual-based politics and not government based politics is what we want. I think we are moving in that direction. Whether we revive the Swatantra Party or not is not so important as long as we revive the spirit and the views for which the Swatantra Party stood for.

R. N. Bhaskar

Just a couple of observations – we were talking about what is feasible and what is not feasible, what is desirable in terms of long-term goals. When you look at any political structure, the need for an organization is imperative, that is something I am not going to address, because I don't know how that's going to happen. But whoever decides to create an organization, there are two factors that could possibly create changes in any society looking for a leader. In any society, the underprivileged, especially in India, the number is far greater than the number of the privileged. There has to be a mechanism by which you can tap the numbers of the underprivileged so that they vote for you. The biggest requirement of the underprivileged is security. The mafia provides it with its muscle, the politician provides it through money and connections and the police. If anybody has to be a leader, he has to address that single factor called security – can you be relevant to the numbers of the underprivileged. How do you do it without money and without muscle is a big issue and I believe there is a way – if someone forms an organization, taps let's say some of the brightest and the most committed of young lawyers graduating from the National Law School, pick up an issue that you can fight, not the issue, but the person who has caused the issue.

One of the causes of crime is when the politician and the bureaucrat join hands. You have to break that nexus. For example, if a person has put up a house on the pavement, and thus blocked the way of the common citizenry, take up the issue but attack the individual, even when the issue is settled, pursue the individual as to how did he let it happen. Just do two or three instances and you will find that the bureaucrat will not support the politician that easily thereafter. That's one strategy that will go to weaken the nexus between the politician and the bureaucrat.

Secondly, in a city where the stakes are very high, this may lead to repercussions that are not very desirable. It may be essential to take up the fight for the underprivileged in marginal areas

getting people elected there, coming back again. You do that systematically, you have suddenly tapped the desire for security from people who desperately want it. The reason an Arun Gawli becomes powerful is because he provides security. The reason why Dawood Ibrahim became powerful is because he settled disputes for land builders as well as his own community. In a country where justice is almost impossible, if someone can play the role of at least addressing some of the marginal issues, you can convert it into a huge groundswell of goodwill and votes.

V. R. Agnihotri

We need to change some provisions of the Representation of the People's Act; voting should be made compulsory, postal ballot should also be allowed. Parties are mushrooming today. The party which does not get a minimum percentage of votes, say 5% of votes in the constituency should be debarred from contesting in the next elections. In the last elections, just 2.1% more votes has got Congress much more seats than what it got in the previous elections. But this is not a majority. There should be some reservation of seats for independents. It has become vote-bank politics. Until all these factors are changed, I don't think there is any solution for this. One speaker mentioned about criminals not being allowed to contest, e.g. Arun Gawli he contests and gets elected, whereas a person like Naval Tata who contested from South Bombay failed. Ultimately we should aim for a two party system like in the U.K. or in U.S.A. and not the multi-party system that we have in our country.

Nagesh Kini

Considering the across the board presence here today at the meet from apoliticals like Sharu Rangnekar, D.R Pendse, Fr. Aguiar, to Capt. Gopinath and, Meera Sanyal, to Sharad Joshi, Viren Shah and N. K. Somani including the bunch of dedicated and enthusiastic young participants the meeting points to a ray of hope. Why not keep the Swatantra flag flying by lending the Star selectively to such dedicated candidates. It will help perpetuate its memories rather

than let it fade. After all, the star is a Star and not the miniscule whistle that the MNS blamed for its defeat!

Roger Pereira

One has heard a lot of good points being raised – merging of political parties, we must get committed people, etc., but what is going to happen next after this meeting. The least we can do is start a think tank and get all these points used and create a kind of lobby with all these kinds of forces. For example, Abhijeet's point, none of us supported him. This think tank should then galvanize people, use the media, very effectively. As Manuwant said, the media plays a very important role and makes things work. Even if the party takes time to form, at least what we want done for the country can actually begin to happen.

S. V. Raju

(At the meeting S. V. Raju responded/intervened on several occasions. However for ease of reading, these responses/interventions have been put together in this concluding part of the report)

One of the unique features of the Swatantra Party was the manner in which it kept its doors open for men of integrity and substance (who were not members of the party) to contest as the party's candidates and where the person concerned preferred to stand as independent, the Party had no hesitation in permitting them to stand as independents and, make available to them the party symbol. For example, the late Prof. P. G. Mavlankar stood as an independent candidate on the Swatantra Symbol from the Gandhinagar parliamentary constituency in Gujarat. Another was Mr. K. M. Koushik an eminent lawyer who stood from the Chanda parliamentary constituency in Vidarbha, Maharashtra. Both were elected. Similar offers were made to Mr. Rajmohan Gandhi and Mr. Nani Palkhivala. Both preferred not to contest elections.

Had the party been alive today I am sure it would have

gladly welcomed Capt. Gopinath the entrepreneur who stood as an independent candidate to the Lok Sabha from the South Bangalore Constituency and Meera Sanyal the independent candidate from Mumbai South Constituency, to contest as Party candidates and if they were disinclined, to lend them the party symbol with no strings attached.

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The comment was made that instead sitting talking about the past like old men, we could usefully have discussed the future and what needs to be done. True. But then 40 years ago some of those present here must have been in their teens and a few others yet to be born! So we seized the opportunity provided on the occasion of the 50th anniversary to inform that there was a Party based on principles that not only existed but did remarkably even if it was for a short while and that in today's political environment it is still possible to visualize the emergence of such a political formation, ethically based. So this reminiscing was not without purpose.

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We had a meeting on May 30 this year in which both Meera Sanyal and Mr. Arun Bhatia (who is not present here today) participated. Mr. Bhatia said that individually we will be nowhere, but if we can get together, we can be a force to reckon with. It was this comment that resulted in our including in today's agenda a discussion on the possibility of a credible alternative perhaps modeled on Swatantra. A variation to this topic is to consider whether instead of talking about an alternative we could, considering ground realities, talk not so much about the an 'alternative' to the Congress or to the BJP but perhaps of a party that may not be numerically large but has just that strength to be a corrective to either and offer support on government formation - on our terms - thus influence policy in key areas as the economy and foreign affairs, even while lifting the level of parliamentary debates from their current deplorably low levels, to that which we witnessed when Swatantra was in Parliament between 1962 and 1971. Thus, even as we work on being a

credible national alternative in the long term, we can in the immediate foreseeable future perform a key role as a balancing force in the country's political economy.

There has been much talk about young and old. I was 26 when I joined the Swatantra Party and there were whole lot of people who were almost my age, many even less (some of them are present in this meeting today – only they are today 30 years older. So to say that Swatantra Party failed because of the absence of young people would perhaps be less than a half truth. The fact is that the Party did not have enough time for its roots to go deep enough. The period of its existence was all too brief. Had we carried on we may have survived and who knows instead of “commemorating” we would have been “celebrating” today. But this was not to be.

Many years ago, during the time Dandeker was the Acting General Secretary (Masani was the General Secretary, but he had his hands full as officiating leader of the opposition and as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee). Once when we were attending to Central Office work (he had just come back after the Swatantra Party had suffered a severe reverse in the elections to the Haryana Assembly, I could see he was visibly shaken) I heard him murmuring, more to himself, what's the use of running this party and that kind of thoughts. Suddenly with a smile on face he tells me 'Raju, perhaps it's just as well, because we are contributing to the democratic system; even if we are condemned to be permanently in the opposition so what. We are helping strengthening the democratic system. The Swatantra Party has never been afraid of being in the opposition, we are not afraid of losing votes, even losing security deposits lost, but we must continue putting up good people, and we are confident that in the long run we would have educated the voter enough to ensure that decent people entered our legislatures.'

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In fact there have been efforts by liberals to return to active, organized politics beginning with the nineties. There is the Swatantra Bharat Party founded by Sharad Joshi. We are fortunate

to have had him here and tell us about his party and his efforts in the 2009 general elections. As a member of the Rajya Sabha he is the sole spokesman for the liberal point of view. Not many are aware that he moved a private member's bill in the Rajya Sabha to do away with the obnoxious Section 29 of the Representation of the People Act. That it was lost is not surprising given the party position in that House. But the fact is it has gone into the record of proceedings of the Rajya Sabha that this provision was challenged. We liberals owe him a debt of gratitude.

Then there is Mr. Krishnan of the PPI and Awadesh Prasad Singh of the Jago Party both of whom affirmed that they are one with the principles of the Swatantra Party and welcome cooperation with other like-minded persons and groups.

We have Mr. Sanjeev Sabhlok who is not here in person but in spirit. Representatives of the organisation he has founded Freedom Team India(FTI) are here. Sanjeev Sabhlok is an IAS officer who took premature retirement and migrated to Australia. Some years ago, he came to India, tried to set up a liberal party, was not quite successful, but is determined to see that his mother country gets a better deal and continues his efforts from Australia. More importantly he is not trying for instant results. His is a long-term perspective. He is set on building a team of 1,500 candidates all over the country, capable of offering good governance, to contest the elections maybe in the next general elections or the one thereafter. He needs to be supported.

And then there is Meera Sanyal and Capain Gopinath who despite their corporate responsibilities have plunged into politics and are determined to contribute their skills in organizing the kind of political formation that will focus on good governance and in battling corruption. So there are lots of good people wanting to do lots of good work.

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The point has been raised 'What next after this meeting?'

Of the 70 plus people gathered here the large majority are agreed on the need for a credible national alternative. While some suggest the revival of the Swatantra Party some others prefer the creation of a new party based on the principles of the Swatantra Party. Both views accept the fact that rather than challenge the election law which mandates allegiance to socialism, this should not come in the way of a party that shuns the collective and champions the individual. In other words accept the law as required but interpret socialism in the current context. A third view is that the Swatantra Party Maharashtra as it exists now should take the initiative of convening a meeting of smaller parties some of whom are gathered here and work towards a federation of parties or some sort of alliance. A fourth suggestion that was made was that there are too many parties already and what is needed is a non-party organization which will act as a pressure group to compel the existing parties particularly the ruling party towards policies that lead to good governance and fighting corruption. All these 'alternatives' are worth considering.

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The purpose of this meeting was indeed to reminisce and recall memories of an organization that for an altogether brief period in this country's polity provided the credible national alternative that the country requires. The Swatantra Party's successes though short lived prove that such an effort is possible. It has left behind a number of do's and don'ts. It has also left behind what current terminology would describe as 'templates'. From these one could pick out the right recipes and avoid the wrong turns it took which led to its demise.

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In the last 45 years along with a few friends I did make an attempt to revive the Swatantra Party organizationally. It is this attempt that brought my colleagues and me to face the stone wall of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act.

While waiting to be heard by the court, we decided that we would at least try and keep alive and, promote the values that

the Party stood for through the Indian Liberal Group (ILG), which was also founded by Minoos Masani. Among other reasons the ILG was founded way back in 1965 was for the benefit of those who were Liberals at heart but preferred not to get into politics even if it was the Swatantra Party. While the ILG managed to keep the liberal dialogue alive, organizationally it has not been as successful for reasons we won't go into at this time.

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In the last few years I was the object of ridicule in some quarters that by continuing to talk about the Swatantra Party I was "flogging a dead horse". It was therefore a matter of satisfaction when the response to our invitation to this meet sent to around 150 persons elicited an unbelievably good response as can be gauged by the presence in this conference hall of over 70 participants. Equally encouraging, to me personally was the demand from almost a majority of those present that we should seriously consider the revival of the Swatantra Party. I think I can, in good conscience, have the satisfaction that my perseverance is paying off.

With so many prepared to take on the baton, I have decided to take a back seat but will always make myself available to you, if asked, for advice and counsel in any activity that promotes liberal values.

IV

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