

# Introduction

It is a tremendous pleasure to offer life narrative of the seven men of Swatantra—the men who fought against the British for political freedom and then against the Indian state for economic freedom. C Rajgopalachari, Minoo Masani, N G Ranga, B R Shenoy, Piloo Mody, Khasa Subba Rau, and A D Shroff stood courageously against the socialist orthodoxy of post-independence India. Not only did they challenge the state in their own field of work, whether academia, journalism, or business, they launched India's first truly ideological opposition political party, the Swatantra Party. A D Shroff formed the Forum of Free Enterprise, India's first free-market think tank. Khasa Subba Rau ran *Swarajya* and *Swatantra* when most of the press was reluctant to take on the ruling party. These men dedicated their lives to protect the freedom and dignity of the individual.

Students of Indian economics or political science would hardly learn or even hear about the unique struggle these men fought that kept India from falling completely into the abyss of collectivization and communism. It was their courage to stand against the popularity and charisma of Pandit Nehru that, as Khasa put it, "saved individual life from the soul-crushing oppression of the Leviathan State disguised in Socialist raiment." Even in these heady days of liberalization, these men are at the very fringe of public memory. For any revival of liberalism in India, it is critical to bring the freedom fighters, not of the British India, but of post-independence India into public discourse. The volume establishes that liberal principles have deep roots in the Indian soil. And to stand up for these ideas against all odds is also part of the Indian tradition.

No politician of stature was willing to oppose Nehru's march towards socialism; Rajaji at the age of 81 took up the challenge and formed the Swatantra Party in 1959. Rajaji coined Permit-License-Quota-Raj, the ubiquitous phrase since used to describe the Indian central planning. He understood the unintended consequences of economic restrictions. During 1938-1942, in the wake of the War, severe controls were put on the movement of food grains, and the rice was rationed at about 30 grams per person per day. It was typical for wedding invitations to carry an insertion, "Please bring your ration card with you." These controls were in place in 1952, when Rajaji became Chief Minister of the Madras State. Without any notice or discussion, he announced at night over the All India Radio that food rationing and restrictions were abolished with immediate effect. Dire predictions of scarcity and starvation were made, but Rajaji stood by his decision. He understood the laws of supply and demand. The supply of food grains actually increased and the prices fell! If the current ministers were as clever, they would abolish all restraints on the movement of agricultural goods and create a common market in India.

N G Ranga led anti-zamindari struggles and established training schools for activists, but when Nehru proposed ceiling on land holdings, prohibition on the storage of grains, and collectivisation of agriculture as a solution, he became the founding president of the Swatantra Party. The difference was not of the end—to help small farmers, but of the means—freedom versus force. Professor Shenoy's 1954 *Note of Dissent* on the Second Five Year Plan must be seen as the beginning of the Second Freedom Struggle in India. It provided the intellectual foundation for the struggle that has led to today's policies of liberalisation.

The selection of these glorious seven was, unfortunately and painfully, not as difficult, as there are a few contenders. I have left out the contenders who are still fighting the battle. These seven also help trace the evolution of Indian liberalism as they come from varied background, practiced different professions, and traveled all the way from Marxism, to the mixed economy, to Gandhism, and to liberalism. The celebrated diversity of India is well reflected in the personalities, lives, and the paths taken in search for the truth by these seven profiles in courage. The authors of the profiles also reflect the same diversity—accountant, academic, politician, journalist, entrepreneur. I chose them because they have either worked very closely or have known the subjects intimately, which would enable them go beyond the standard biographical or intellectual account, and infuse the narrative with personal observations, memories, and anecdotes that would bring the whole human drama alive. The varied background of the authors has effected different style, tone, and structure for each chapter. I have maintained the individuality of each chapter, despite a strong impulse for linearity.

Each of the seven authors—R K Amin, Mahesh P Bhatt, G Narayanaswamy, S V Raju, K Purna Chandra Rao, P Vaman Rao, and Mino Shroff—have painted an engaging canvas, by digging into memories painful and pleasant. T H Chowdary, D V Venkatagiri, M R Pai, and R K Amin helped identify and persuade the authors. Tapan Ghosh worked hard for the necessary linearity. The dedicated team of Bhuvana Anand, Yazad Jal, Sujatha Muthayya, and Manali Shah at the Centre made it possible to bring out the volume on time. Long hours put in by Tessy Joseph and her team at Macro Graphics cannot be wholly acknowledged by the money payment. And all the payments were made by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust. The support and encouragement of H D Malesra, Sudhir Rao, and Vartika Jaini of the Trust has indeed been invaluable. Despite the ambitious nature of the project and lengthening gestation, they stood with us.

I now invite you to join these courageous men—the men of Swatantra—to walk the path they have forged, to continue the Second Freedom Struggle.

**Parth J Shah**  
December 2001