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INTRODUCTION

“You, Too Can Be an Economist”

ON THE THIRD FLOOR of a building nestled at the intersection of Vallabhbai and Vithalbhai Patel roads, in the bustling Girgaum locality of Mumbai (formerly Bombay), the Ranchoddas Lotvala Library provides students with an inner-city space for quiet reading. Signs on the building’s facade indicate that it is home to multiple small businesses. None of them carries any suggestion of the library’s existence (see Figure I). It receives few visitors. Inside, a few dusty shelves hold dated books, their pages yellowing. Occasionally, students visit the reading room to study for exams. The librarian complains that funding has dried up.¹ Handsome profits from the flour mill on nearby Duncan Road, once the library’s financial lifeline, no longer sustain it. For decades, nobody has opened the wooden bookshelf onto which the words “Libertarian Co-Op Bookstore” are painted. Dust and decay have set into a space once characterized by intellectual discovery and debate.

The library and its books are the barely visible remnants of a forgotten history of apostasy and evangelism. In a dramatic turn, Bombay’s leading patron of socialism, Ranchoddas Lotvala, and his accomplished sportswoman and radio host daughter, Kusum Lotvala, abandoned their earlier activities. Instead, as the Cold War intensified during the 1950s, they dedicated themselves to convincing compatriots of the dangers of statism.² They sought to prepare Indians, newly freed from British rule, to live in “an economic age” by offering them the tools to do so. “You, Too Can Be an Economist” began one appeal to join their Libertarian Social Institute.³ During the course of the 1950s, the

1. Telephone conversation with Mr. Govind Keluskar, February 15, 2021.

2. Prakash Karat, “A Publishing History of the *Communist Manifesto*,” in *Essays on the Communist Manifesto*, ed. Prakash Karat (New Delhi: Leftword Press, 1999), 131–40, 131.

3. B.S. Sanyal, ed., *Supplement of the Research Department of the R. L. Foundation* (July 1, 1957).



FIGURE I. An Unexceptional Façade (Ganesh Raghuveer).

Lotvalas' institute agitated for what its founders called "free economy," which at that point was more of an aspiration toward an economy free from domination by any one social group or the state rather than anything concrete. Their *Indian Libertarian* magazine occupied the central node in a connected cluster of broadly anticommunist English-language journals and associations across urban India, in which free economy developed and spread. Several of these were operated by fellow lapsed Marxists and publicists now working to shape public opinion in a gentler fashion.

As it spread, free economy took on multiple meanings. In a negative sense, it signified opposition to the incursions being made into economic life by the Indian state as the then-dominant Indian National Congress party launched a program of centrally directed economic planning aimed at creating a "socialistic pattern of society." But free economy also became associated with positive imaginaries and ideas in practice. It could mean a self-employed economy of peasants, a country of small-businesspeople embedded in a free trading international order, or a kinship-based cooperative enterprise and educational town. These ideas came primarily from South and West India. These regions

had histories of long-distance waterborne trade and were designed to be spaces of landowning cultivation in the colonial era.⁴

Kinship groups from these regions often united by occupation—classified by the more specific *jati* rather than the fourfold ritual caste order of *varna*—began to move away from or had moved away from agriculture and trading toward capital accumulation of different forms.⁵ The state stood in the way of their activities.⁶ These groups did not seek to disrupt the social order to unleash the power of free markets.⁷ Rather, they sought “ordered progress,” which, in the economic arena, would be directed by themselves. They hoped for a state that would either facilitate or remain aloof from economic processes, not conduct or regulate them.

The promise of free economy brought diverse agrarian and commercial constituencies together under the banner of the Swatantra (“Freedom”) Party, founded in 1959. Its key figures had walked alongside Mahatma Gandhi in the anticolonial nationalist movement. With freedom from the British Raj having been achieved in 1947, Swatantra’s leaders directed their animus against what they dubbed the “permit-and-license *raj*.” In their eyes, this was an oligarchic coalition of big businessmen, Congress politicians, and corrupt bureaucrats who wielded their power by forcing Indians to navigate a thicket of regulations in their economic lives. The Gandhian legacy exerted other pulls as well; it

4. David Washbrook, “Towards a History of the Present: Southern Perspectives on Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*, eds. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 332–57.

5. The four *varnas* of the caste order are Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Those outside the four *varna* order were historically considered “untouchable.” These latter communities are known as Dalit. In this book, I use caste and community interchangeably to mean *jati*. See Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8–10.

6. Debate on to what extent landed communities transitioned to “agrarian capitalism” in the Marxist sense and whether this transition merely accelerated or changed qualitatively between the colonial and postcolonial period has been extensive. See Utsa Patnaik, ed., *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The “Mode of Production” Debate in India* (Bombay: Sameeksha Trust, 1990). Characterizing these changes is not so important to the concerns of this study. Rather, what is important is their connection to changing forms of political-economic ideation and mobilization.

7. In this way, they differ from the conservatives in Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

predisposed Swatantra's leaders against the religious sectarianism of some contemporaries and toward patriarchy.

The Swatantra Party offered a strategy to pursue influence outside the one-party dominant system that characterized India's Westminster-style parliamentary democracy. In this system, theorized by the erstwhile Lotvala Library visitor and eminent political scientist Rajni Kothari, Congress was a *party of consensus* within which intraparty groups across the ideological spectrum vied for influence to make the party's agenda.⁸ Outside, *parties of pressure* sought to "pressurize, criticize, censure and influence it," both by persuading the subgroups inside the *party of consensus* and by posing an outside threat to displace it from power by coming together in the event of inadequate performance.⁹

Unsatisfied with this system, Swatantra's founder, C. Rajagopalachari, contended that "government by the majority without an effective opposition is like driving a donkey on whose back you put the load in one bundle."¹⁰ An effective opposition party could "steady movement by putting a fairly equal load into each pannier" and "furnish the healthy opportunity for beneficent osmosis."¹¹ Swatantra sought to bring balance to Indian democracy by offering a counterweight to the Congress. The party sought to bring ideological conservatism into a political discourse dominated by various forms of progressive thought. Simply accommodating diversity within the dominant party, by contrast, was "meaningless dilution," according to Rajagopalachari. This book explores Swatantra's project of opposition politics—or making effective opposition a reality—a process that involved imagination, communication, and mobilization of various kinds.

In the first instance, opposition politics meant presenting a conservative alternative to the Congress as salutary for the health of a postcolonial democracy

8. Rajni Kothari's studies of Indian democracy defined over a generation of scholarship in the field. He is best known for the idea of the Congress Party as a system rather than a party accommodating factionalism within its units. See Paval Tomar, "Rajni Kothari," *Social Scientist* 43, no. 3–4 (2015): 119–121. Kothari mentions first learning of "global movements, especially the communist, anarchist and other such offshoots of Left leanings" in Lotvala's library. See Kothari, *Memoirs: Uneasy Is the Life of the Mind* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2002), 23. I am indebted to Professor A. R. Venkatachalapathy for this reference.

9. The classic statement is in Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 12 (1964): 1161–73.

10. C. Rajagopalachari, "Our Democracy," *Swarajya*, August 17, 1957.

11. C. Rajagopalachari, "Wanted: Real Two-Party System," *Swarajya*, December 31, 1960.

with progressive ideals. Swatantra’s leadership cast their version of economic conservatism—free economy—as the economic equivalent of independence from British rule itself. “Swatantra” was the word used for political independence, with connotations of a more abstract freedom. Leaders emphasized the continuity between their project and the anticolonial nationalist movement for swatantra. At times they used the liberal idioms of early nationalist discourse to signal their affinity to that movement.¹² They also brought decentralization and antistatism—albeit not anarchism—from Gandhian anti-imperial thought to the debate on economic development in postcolonial politics, even though the spirit of the times tended toward its opposite. They appropriated tenets of classical liberalism and constructed an appeal as an alternative to the dominant Congress. Like conservatives in the Western world, they caricatured their opponents as headed down the road to communist totalitarianism with its statist policies.¹³ Like American rural cooperativists with whom they exchanged ideas, they also mobilized the image of the smallholding peasant proprietor to legitimate the existence of much larger rural landholding practices.¹⁴ They thus covertly rendered acceptable the profound hereditary exploitation of lower-caste labor embedded in traditional agrarian practices and turned a blind eye toward major inequalities. This constructed

12. This must be understood in the context of imperial liberalism’s profound role in informing colonial governance in India rather than as evidence of a liberal sensibility. See Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

13. Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 335. The standard definition of classical liberalism draws from John Stuart Mill’s formulation as an individualist philosophy that assigns paramount importance to liberty and rationality and is underpinned by the understanding that these two concepts are interlocked with a notion of progress. See Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 147–67. On the appropriation of its tenets by conservatives in the twentieth century, see Roger Scruton, *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* (New York: All Points, 2018), 103–26.

14. Their interlocutors, rural cooperativists, drew on a long tradition of invoking the symbol of the fabled yeoman farmer. Consider, for example, its invocation by the slaveholder in Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and by populists in the nineteenth-century southern United States. See Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–90* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

self-image also allowed economic conservatives to join with feudal landholders to build a viable political coalition.

Next, opposition politics meant bringing economic affairs into the domain of public consciousness and debate and mobilizing people around these issues rather than concerns of caste or religion.¹⁵ Consistent with the “pedagogical politics” of both the Indian state and other parts of the decolonizing world, Swatantra’s leaders spoke and behaved like teachers to the masses.¹⁶ They presented themselves as peer educators and addressed audiences in a didactic fashion.¹⁷ They sought to teach Indians how to participate meaningfully in the new republic through such forms of address, not unlike their Congress counterparts.

Swatantra produced a wide range of printed and visual literature that sought to teach Indians to contest the dominant economic imaginary and register their democratic choice to vote for opposition. It imagined a “middle-class” economic citizen as its ideal voter. The party pursued popular mobilization activities like Anti-Inflation and Anti-Excess Taxation days and small-town protest marches against legislation to amend the right to property. It managed to court a select group of correspondents who wrote in with letters and petitions. These interlocutors hailed mainly from upper-caste professional backgrounds. They engaged with the Swatantra Party’s materials and began to look at it as a vehicle for making claims on the state.

Third, opposition politics meant using the institutions of India’s tripartite system of government to check the power of the ruling party. After Swatantra members got elected to parliament, they brought their perspective to parliamentary debates. At times, they provided lengthy critiques of economic policy that would be reproduced in newspapers the following day. Swatantra members introduced the first successful no-confidence motion to Indian parliament by collaborating with opposition parties. They chaired committees of

15. C. Rajagopalachari, letter draft, May 21, 1967, Installment VI–XI, C. Rajagopalachari Papers (CRP), Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, India (hereafter NMML).

16. Madhav Khosla, *India’s Founding Moment: The Constitution of a Most Surprising Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 25; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture,” in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 45–68.

17. Nikhil Menon, *Planning Democracy: Modern India’s Quest for Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Post-colonial Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

inquiry into abuses of power by the Congress. Outside the legislature, Swatantra leaders lobbied the court system to defend the right to property, helping to win two major Supreme Court cases that defined the era. Most subversively, Swatantra entered cross-party coalitions against the Congress, helping to unseat incumbents from power in multiple states.

One-party dominance no longer seemed a foregone conclusion for a brief period after the 1967 general elections.¹⁸ Congress lost power in seven out of sixteen states. Its majority decreased from 361 to 283 in the 523-seat Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament. Swatantra became the largest opposition party, with forty-four seats. It won more than a tenth of the seats in the legislative assembly elections of three Indian states, clearing the threshold to be recognized as the official opposition party. As Kothari himself noted, while this was far from evidence of a new party system, it did signify the birth of “a new active phase” of Indian politics. Swatantra’s rise was making politics “more ideologically oriented.”¹⁹

Swatantra did not always win more seats than the other opposition parties. Nor did it bring about the end of one-party dominance. The party disintegrated in the early 1970s after the Congress split and its conservative faction captured much of Swatantra’s support. Sharp and quick as the decline was, its founders themselves would not have been surprised. Responding to a devastating assessment of the party’s prospects by the American political scientist Howard Erdman in 1964, Rajagopalachari had written to the party’s general secretary, “Historical parties rest on the firm foundations of inherited mass support. A new party like ours must stand or fall on the strength of our principles and our promises, and the present appeal of such principles and pledges to the masses of the country who have to vote.”²⁰

Swatantra’s significance lies in its aspiration to end the one-party dominant system by bringing balance and stability to the political system through opposition. Its leaders considered democracy to be an end in itself. By contrast, the Communist Party of India saw democracy as a step on the way to the dictatorship of the proletariat. And unlike the Hindu sectarian Bharatiya

18. On these aspirations and the more sobering realities, the best account is Francine Frankel, *India’s Political Economy, 1947–2004* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

19. Rajni Kothari, “The Political Change of 1967,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 3/5 (1971): 231–50; Rajni Kothari, “Developing Political Pattern,” *Seminar* (June 1962).

20. C. Rajagopalachari to Minoo Masani, February 27, 1964, Subject File 42, Installment VI–XI, CRP, NMML.

Jana Sangh party, forerunner of today's dominant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Swatantra did not seek to disenfranchise or subordinate the minority Muslim population. The fact that its ranks swelled with right-wing ex-Congress members suggests a conscious choice of a new strategy for political influence. This study examines the various ways in which Swatantra strove to bring opposition consciousness to a young democratic society around issues of political economy. It is far less concerned with Swatantra's electoral performance.

The history of free economy and opposition politics is a history of India in the two decades after it won independence from British rule. It is part of the mid-twentieth century decolonization of Asia and Africa, which was the heyday of schemes of economic modernization and development.²¹ A powerful Center, or central government, sought to assert itself over India's regions in the country's federal system during this period. It retained emergency powers from the colonial era and reworked wartime laws to handle the violence and migration accompanying the partition of British India into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, thwart regional insurgencies, and suppress dissent.²²

After having stabilized the country by about 1950, the Indian state pursued two elitist antipolitical strategies to maintain the integrity of the nation and usher in a new era of modernity. The first was a cultural anti-politics of unity in diversity. Whereas in private, individual communities could pursue their

21. Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Picador, 2007); Els Bogaerts and Remco Raben, eds., *Beyond Empire and Nation: The Decolonization of African and Asian Societies, 1930s–1970s* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012); Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Corinna Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

22. Sunil Purushotham, *From Raj to Republic: Sovereignty, Violence and Democracy in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021); Taylor Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010); William Gould, Taylor Sherman, and Sarah Ansari, eds., *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Rohit De, "Between Midnight and Republic: Theory and practice of India's Dominion status," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 17, no. 4 (2019): 1213–34; Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Rotem Geva, *Delhi Reborn: Partition and Nation Building in India's Capital* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022); Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori, eds., *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial*.

own practices and exclude others, in the public realm the state sought to make diverse communities symbols of the nation that everyone could embrace. As Thomas Blom Hansen describes it, the state sought to “disentangle community practices from their localized or historical context and reinstate them as national monuments, tales and legends in children’s books, historical narratives in schoolbooks—as a national-modern aesthetic.”²³ The second anti-politics was an expert-directed, technocratic project to develop India along rational, ordered lines. Activities under this broad umbrella included the creation of new institutions to train scientists and bring India into the atomic age, the design of planned cities like Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh, and the expansion of the remit of bureaucratic authority to control resource distribution.²⁴

Perhaps the biggest of these activities was the project of economic development. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his closest associates of the Congress sought to transform a chiefly agrarian economy and extractive state into a planned, developmental state. Armed with one of the world’s foremost statistical data-gathering infrastructures, India pursued heavy industry-led import-substituting industrialization. This took place under a mixed economy framework of private and public sector industries and directed along technocratic lines.²⁵ As in the case of cultural anti-politics, the state undertook a huge effort to publicize and popularize planning and encourage Indians to buy into it as part of their citizenly duty.²⁶ The logic ran that by saving and participating in five-year-plan projects, Indians could shed their poverty and raise their country to the ranks of the world’s economically powerful nations.

Both these projects of anti-politics broadly succeeded during the Nehruvian era. The developmental project has most influentially been interpreted by social scientists as part of the passive revolution of capital.²⁷ This interpretation

23. Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 53; Roy, *Beyond Belief*.

24. Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997); Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh’s Le Corbusier: The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Jahnvi Phalkey, *Atomic State: Big Science in Twentieth Century India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2013); Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

25. Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

26. Menon, *Planning Democracy*.

27. Another hypothesis, advanced by sociologist Vivek Chibber, is that the bourgeoisie actively organized to thwart the progress of the developmental state and perpetuate their

suggests that the weakness of the Indian bourgeoisie led to a collaboration with rural landowners and the bureaucracy to bring about economic transformation without violent political revolution.²⁸ Class conflict could be contained while the state, imbued with progressive ideals, pursued rational economic management by central planning. However, the prerequisites for such management, like land reform, went unmet thanks to the exodus of left parties from this coalition. Subsequently, the progressive Congress top brass led by Nehru was forced to contend with a conservative agrarian support base that stopped the revolution dead in its tracks by the mid-1960s.²⁹

Left opaque by this account—and until very recently by historical treatments as well—are the actual changes that took place during this period in the state, society, and economy, and their relationship to each other. This book illuminates aspects of these important but underappreciated dimensions of life in Nehruvian India, the period formally associated with his tenure as prime minister (1947–64) but more loosely spanning until the end of the 1960s. The

dominance along existing lines of economic activity. See Chibber, *Locked in Place: State-Building and Late Industrialization in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Nasir Tyabji argues that India's big business firms clung to their activities as "merchant capitalists" or "usury capitalists" by privileging speculation over investment and resisted the state's project of social engineering to submit to the logic of industrial capitalism. See Tyabji, *Forging Capital in Nehru's India: Neocolonialism and the State, 1940–70* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015). Against this hypothesis, historians have argued that the state refused to provide the investment climate and resources required for business. See David Lockwood, *The Indian Bourgeoisie: A Political History of the Capitalist Class* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); Medha Kudaisya, "The Promise of Partnership: Indian Business, The State, and the Bombay Plan of 1944," *Business History Review* 88, no. 1 (2014): 97–131.

28. Frankel, *India's Political Economy*. Pranab Bardhan gave the most sophisticated articulation of the dominant class coalition framework in *The Political Economy of Development in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), while Partha Chatterjee first used "passive revolution" in the Indian context to describe the form in which nationalism became situated in state ideology in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 132.

29. Sudipta Kaviraj's classic essay, "Critique of the Passive Revolution," *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 45/47 (1988): 2429–44, and Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) expanded on this notion. Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph wrote of the primacy of the state over labor and capital and the weakness of either left-wing or right-wing politics at the national level. See Rudolph and Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.

Indian state remade its relationship to the economy during this period. It erected a highly regulated framework for economic activity managed by an expanding army of bureaucrats.³⁰ New businesses required permits to pursue their activities under this framework. The Government of India levied and collected new taxes, managed commodity prices, and tightly controlled the supply of import licenses and foreign exchange. The face of the new state was the increasingly numerous and powerful government employee.

These new faces of the state encountered new civilians in spaces growing with people. As India's population rose and the country made strides in public health, villages became towns. Towns became cities. Cities became metropolises. People moved increasingly between these spaces and felt the dislocations of leaving home. Millions of Indians became the first in their families to enjoy literacy, as the state took responsibility for increased educational investment. Others were the first college graduates in their household. These new professional classes concentrated in the cities and took advantage of opportunities in a growing economy. Meanwhile, in the towns and smaller cities, agrarian landowners adapted to the gradual industrialization of the country by embracing new activities like agroindustry and real estate.

Both the new urban professionals and commercial groups broadly began to feel the pinch of the state and the power of the bureaucrat. That might be through rising prices brought on by deficit financing of the five-year plans, as the professionals experienced. Or it might be through a rising tax burden, which the businessmen of Bombay never missed an opportunity to lament. Or it might be in having to contend with legislation seeking to impose ceilings on landholdings, as the Patidar community of Gujarat nearly experienced.

Frustration with these aspects of everyday life came to feature in daily conversations, debates in associations, and the pages of newspapers and magazines.

30. Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 226. Recent scholarship encourages interrogation of the diverse ways in which the state carries out “intervention,” operating through both private and public intermediaries. See, for example, Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Nicholas Barreyre and Claire Lemerrier, “The Unexceptional State: Rethinking the State in the Nineteenth Century (France, United States),” *American Historical Review* 126, no. 2 (2021): 481–503. Where appropriate, the book points to such entanglements between public and private. However, it is more concerned with the state's entry into domains previously left untouched and with my protagonists' rhetorical adoption of a binary between state and nonstate corresponding to public and private.

India's vibrant print culture, which had played a crucial role in the anticolonial nationalist movement, took on a range of new causes in the aftermath of the nationalist movement. Newspapers and magazines in both English and regional languages grew steadily. They provided a threshing ground for ideas about economy and society. Politicians and publicists who managed to inter-mediate between regional and national publics developed and disseminated their ideas in these spaces and strung together new and unlikely alliances.

This book also brings a situated or “emplaced” perspective, of “local social formations and patterns of accumulation” rather than “global flows of ideas and capital,” to the study of neoliberalism.³¹ It demonstrates how a set of actors located far away from the purported origins of neoliberal thought, operating in a specific sociocultural context, came to their own common-sense understandings about political economy to pursue their politics. In the process, they selectively encountered and interpreted transnational currents of neoliberal thought as appropriate for them. This situated approach also focuses on the creation of *economic consciousness* via informal cultures of economic argumentation in the public sphere rather than the formulation of *economic theory* and its (assumed) outward diffusion into policy and popular thinking.³² Caste practices, everyday work, and regional political economy—that is, the experience of economic and social life—shaped the emergence of this consciousness.³³ Communication took place in voluntary associations, through exchanges fostered in longstanding social networks, and in a once substantial but now forgotten connected cluster of periodicals. It occurred in metropolitan cities and *mofussil* areas—spaces in between urban centers and rural areas, like riverside and railway towns—alike.³⁴

31. James Vernon, “Heathrow and the Making of Neoliberal Britain,” *Past and Present* 252, no. 1 (2021): 213–47.

32. I am borrowing from a parallel distinction drawn between political theory and the history of political consciousness made in Eric Nelson, “What Kind of a Book Is *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*?” *The New England Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (2018): 147–71. Ben Jackson points out the importance and possibilities of this distinct focus in relation to Offner’s work in “Putting Neoliberalism in its Place,” *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 3 (2022): 982–95.

33. My thinking here is guided by the way in which remembered pasts and a turn to industry shape the self-identification of the Tamil-speaking Gounder community in Sharad Chari, *Fraternal Capital: Peasant-Workers, Self-Made Men, and Globalization in Provincial India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

34. In colonial parlance, *mofussil* meant “the provinces—the country stations and districts, as contra-distinguished from ‘the Presidency;’ or relatively rural localities of district as

Neoliberal discourse came to India as part of the Cold War battle of ideas between communism, socialism, and capitalism.³⁵ Its South Asian history complicates our picture of India in the nonaligned era, when the country deliberately abstained from aligning itself with the United States or the Soviet Bloc.³⁶ Despite India’s own position of neutrality, the Cold War was also a battle of hearts and minds fought inside the nonaligned world by local actors. Indians used global events and idioms to frame domestic concerns in the rhetoric of the Cold War.³⁷ Free economy developed within anticommunist networks inside India and in connection with, although independently of, transnational anticommunist and free market groups abroad. This aligned print culture flourished underneath the surface of India’s formal nonalignment and alongside more popular left-leaning literature. It stood one step removed from official superpower propaganda efforts.³⁸

contra-distinguished from the sudder or chief station, which is the residence of the district authorities.” See Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 570. It is a relational term; mofussil connotes a space of a smaller agglomeration of people from the perspective of a larger one. In this case, following Tariq Omar Ali, I use it to connote the spaces between the hinterland and urban areas, which began to become politically active from the early decades of the twentieth century. See Tariq Omar Ali, *A Local History of Global Capital: Jute and Peasant Life in the Bengal Delta* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). Chapter 3 discusses mofussil economic life and ideas in greater detail.

35. It is revealing that in a recent handbook on the history of neoliberalism—see Simon Springer, Kean Birch, and Julie MacLeavy, eds., *The Handbook of Neoliberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2016)—not a single chapter covers the Cold War.

36. Recent work has shown how superpower competition played out in the politics of economic aid to India and compromised development aid imperatives. It has unearthed how powerful domestic bureaucrats developed ideological affinities for specific donor countries. See David Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

37. Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018); on the importance of nonalignment to studies of India in the Cold War, see David Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, eds. Malone, Mohan, and Raghavan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 23–43. On the aim of nonalignment to keep India aloof of superpower conflict, see Andrew Kennedy, “Nehru’s Foreign Policy,” in *ibid.*, 127–40, 133–35.

38. On formal propaganda efforts, see Paul McGarr, “‘Quiet Americans in India’: The CIA and the Politics of Intelligence in Cold War South Asia,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 5 (November 2014), 1046–82.

This situated history raises questions about the relationship between neoliberalism and democracy, and indeed about the nature of democratic projects themselves. The free economy political project of the Indian interlocutors of neoliberals actually went hand in hand with a particular historically contingent idea of democracy.³⁹ Recovering this history revises the scholarly understanding of neoliberalism as antidemocratic. Swatantra's leaders conceived of democracy as a stabilizing institution more than an egalitarian or emancipatory one. In that way, they paralleled anticommunist actors in other parts of the world. However, they operated far more independently of the United States than these counterparts.⁴⁰ They reckoned that a two-party system could prevent a democracy from veering toward authoritarianism by producing a moderation in political outcomes and keeping the electorate safe from false promises of socialism. Although it regarded the Communist Party with contempt, Swatantra's primary concern was with the far more influential Congress.⁴¹ The key constituency of the Swatantra idea of democracy was a loosely defined "middle-class" economic citizen suffering from red tape, inflation, and taxes.⁴² Such a citizen might be an urban professional, a peasant proprietor, or

39. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015); Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of the Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Aldo Madariaga, *Neoliberal Resilience: Lessons in Democracy and Development from Latin America and Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020). This book follows John Dunn's insight that democracy can take on a staggering variety of forms and "does not specify any clear and definite structure of rule" and Ricardo López-Pedrerros' call to "historicize democracy not as a gift from the West to the rest of the world but as a worldwide question over which different historical actors engaged in hard-fought battles over its meanings, practices, subjectivities, and institutions." John Dunn, *Democracy: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005), 123. See Ricardo López-Pedrerros, *Makers of Democracy: A Transnational History of the Middle Classes in Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 18.

40. Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jennifer Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019). However, this understanding of democracy came from Indians themselves rather than part of concerted U.S. foreign policy efforts.

41. The central government unseated the world's first democratically elected communist government of the state of Kerala in 1959 using its emergency powers. On this episode, see Guha, *India after Gandhi*, 281–300.

42. See López-Pedrerros, *Makers of Democracy*, for discussion of a contemporaneous parallel phenomenon in Colombia, albeit one that achieved much more success.

a small business owner. This figure was threatened by the bureaucrat, the Congress politician, and the big businessman.

Although incompletely articulated, this middle-class citizen was always a man in Swatantra's propaganda literature. Swatantra had a gendered idea of democracy. While women appear in the pages that follow as important organizers and institution builders, this is always in a subservient capacity to men.⁴³ Their involvement in public life chiefly consists of service, and their prominence often owes to influential male spouses. To the extent Swatantra's politicians made appeals to the female electorate, it was in their capacity as householders and homemakers.⁴⁴ Swatantra's few female members analogized the polity to the family and the household in their rhetoric. Women were invited to participate in anti-inflation marches through appeals to their roles as food purchasers. The enfranchisement of women did not imply their political emancipation but rather the extension of their private subordination to their public political participation for Swatantra's leadership. The party was not among those with an outspoken feminist contingent, although this was not particularly unconventional for the time.⁴⁵

Unequal gender relations underpin the institution of the family, which exists and continues across generations thanks to various kinds of unpaid labor. However, the family itself features explicitly in the discourse of this book's protagonists only on occasion.⁴⁶ Family reproduces social stratification through practices of caste endogamy. It forms the unit for certain kinds of political and economic activity, not least in the cases of the Lotvala's flour mill and their Libertarian Social Institute. And at times, it provides a powerful analogy for conveying ideas of duty. Politicians like Rajagopalachari opposed the changes proposed to Hindu personal law that sought to give women power to inherit

43. See especially chapters 2 and 5.

44. Margaret Power and Paola Bacchetta, eds., *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5–7.

45. Anjali Bharadwaj-Datta, Udit Sen, and Mytheli Sreenivas, “Introduction: A Country of Her Making,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2021): 218–27; Nirmala Banerjee, “Whatever Happened to the Dreams of Modernity? The Nehruvian Era and Woman's Position,” in *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 7 (1998): WS2–WS7.

46. By contrast, see the commercial protagonists of Ritu Birla, *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), and Eleanor Newbiggin, *The Hindu Family and the Emergence of Modern India: Law, Citizenship, and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). The protagonists here are diverse enough that they include votaries of both the nuclear and the undivided joint family.

property, considering such reform an attack on the gender hierarchy of the family. Reading between the lines, it appears that the patriarchal family would provide the social stability for free economy as opposed to the welfarist or developmental state. Unlike in the history of American postwar conservatism and neoliberalism, the political coalition behind free economy did not generally include individualists standing alongside its “family men.”⁴⁷

The three parts of this book cover the origins of free economy and opposition politics, the regionally situated ideas and practices of Swatantra’s key leaders, and the presentation and publicity of free economy as a political platform across diverse forums. They do not offer a party history of Swatantra, which multiple political scientists have successfully attempted.⁴⁸ Part I shows how the discourse of free economy emerged and developed in response to changes in the Indian economy and society, before the birth of the Swatantra Party. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the aims, achievements, and failures of economic policy during the first two decades of independence. It highlights the underlying dynamics that produced discontent with India’s development model and offers glimpses of these discourses of discontent. Moving from an all-India perspective to the west-coast city of Bombay, India’s commercial capital, chapter 2 shows how the millowner and political patron Lotvala and his family fashioned an Indian libertarianism professing free economy through their Libertarian Social Institute. Contact with neoliberal publicists and agrarian decentralists in the Western world played some role in the development of this set of ideas, but the key process of articulation and diffusion occurred in a connected cluster of periodicals and voluntary associations spread across urban India. It was in this intellectual environment that the seeds of the idea of an opposition party to the Congress first germinated during the mid-1950s.

Part II excavates constitutive visions and practices of economic conservatism from southern and western India through a study of four founding leaders of the Swatantra Party. Caste, locality, and region helped shape the economic common sense these politicians developed out of their life’s activities. Chapter 3 peels back the diverse layers of influences that led to the emergence of the

47. Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2017); Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*.

48. Interested readers may turn to Howard Erdman’s classic book, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), and Vasanti Pratapchandra Rasam’s *The Swatantra Party: A Political Biography* (Nagpur: Dattsons, 1997), which brings the discussion up to the decline and death of Swatantra.

Tamil Brahmin politician C. Rajagopalachari as an economic commentator who went on to demand the creation of a Swatantra Party to free India from “permit-and-license raj.” It probes the symbiotic relationship between regional and national print publics and the intersection between a localized economic sensibility and neoliberal language. Chapter 4 complements Rajagopalachari’s essentially negative view of free economy with three alternative economies of varying levels of concreteness coming from the Kammas of Andhra Pradesh, the Patidars of Gujarat (see Map II), and the Parsis of Bombay. It identifies distinct conceptions of the relationship between the scales of community, nation, and world economy in the practices of these communities and the writings of its Swatantra leaders. This scalar analysis reveals that their antistatism concerned centralized government power and bureaucratic regulation of economic activity; it was not a wholesale rejection of the state as a force in economic life.

Part III shows how the Swatantra Party constructed an ideological platform from the ideas examined in part II as it rewrote free economy for popular consumption and attempted to provide useful opposition to the Congress in Indian democracy. Chapter 5 reconstructs Swatantra’s attempt to communicate its project of antistatist political mobilization through the construction of a “middle-class” citizen, and it surveys some of the responses these efforts courted. Chapter 6 highlights how the Swatantra Party pursued its ideal of democratic balance in office: by organizing coalitions, using parliamentary procedure to improve legislative accountability, and lobbying the judiciary to check the power of the Congress. With this discussion in mind, it assesses the recent revival of interest in the Swatantra Party and offers conclusions to the study.

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