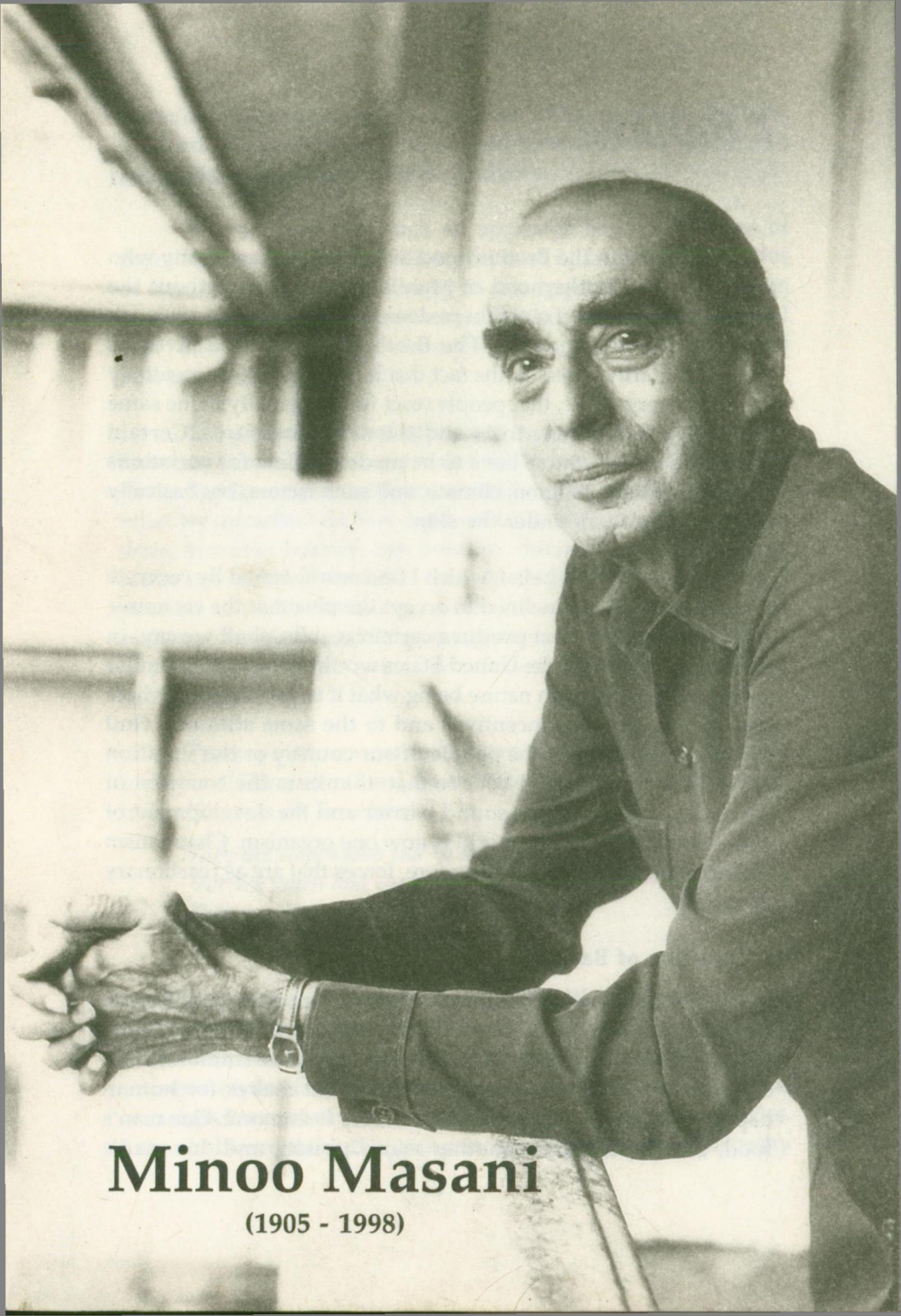




Minoo Masani

(1905 - 1998)

I Believe ...

Minoo Masani

I believe in the Brotherhood of Man. There are many who think that the Brotherhood of Man is meaningless without the Fatherhood of God. To me there does not appear to be any such essential interdependence, The Brotherhood of Man involves human solidarity based on the fact that human nature is essentially the same everywhere, that people react fundamentally in the same way to the same incentives and the same pressures. Certain modifications, of course have to be made to allow for variations in social heritage, religion, climate, and such factors, but basically we are all brothers under the skin.

Because of this belief, which I find corroborated by concrete experience, I am not inclined to accept the plea that the economic and social policies that produce certain results, shall we say, in Japan or Germany or the United States would not produce similar results in India. Human nature being what it is, people everywhere respond to the same incentives and to the same stimuli. I find nothing unique about the people of our country or the situation in which it finds itself. I believe that, thanks to the conquest of space the crashing of the sound barrier and the development of 'telecommunications, the world is now one organism. Chauvinism and xenophobia are today, therefore, forces that are as reactionary as racism.

A Question of Balance

The belief in Humanism leads to an acceptance of Ethics. I believe there is such a thing as good and evil. Of course, the idea of what is good or evil, what is moral or immoral, is a subjective one. My own belief is that what makes for human happiness is moral, what makes for misery is immoral. One man's food; of course, can be another man's poison, and one man's

pursuit of happiness may easily cause unhappiness to another. The test of action, therefore, should be the overall balance of happiness and unhappiness it produces.

It is obvious that such an approach to the problems of morality has little to do with traditional or conventional codes of morality. Would such liberty as this approach of mine given to each individual be exercised with maturity and restraint? I don't know. I only know that no other concept of morality appears to me to make any sense.

The philosophy that appeals to me is the Stoic philosophy. From my youth, I have responded to the logic of the *Meditations* of the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius. For instance, it is only what we ourselves do that can hurt us, nothing that anyone else does, however beastly, can possibly diminish one's dignity or make one shrink. I find that this philosophy helps in making it possible to tell the truth even when it is unpalatable and builds resistance to smears and lampooning as also a relative indifference to popularity, the pursuit of which is the bane of our national leadership.

From youth onwards, I have responded to Tagore's invitation "*Ekla chalo re*" and the sentiment of James Russell Lowell in his 'Stanzas on Freedom':

They are slaves who fear to speak

For the fallen and the weak;

They are doves who dare not be

In the right with two or three.

My mother tells me that, even as a little boy, I was always on the side of the underdog - the servant about to be dismissed or the woman selling fruit who was being beaten down by some member of the family inclined to bargain too hard. On such occasions I was always on the other side of the social barricades. I should like to think that this craving for justice and sympathy

for the underdog is still a major element in my beliefs. It no doubt accounted for my early acceptance of socialism as a result of being an avid reader of H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw.

The Gandhian Path

To this instinct for social justice my contact with Gandhiji and my arguments with him over the years helped to add an awareness that ends and means are interlinked and that the end does not justify the means even if the end is, in Lenin's words, "a society of the free and equal". Hence my book, "Socialism Reconsidered" (1944) and my renunciation of State Socialism and the acceptance of the Gandhian path to a better world.

Since 1954, I have been, at the instance of my good friend, Jayaprakash Narayan, Sampattidani No. 29 on the roll of the All India Sarva Seva Sangh, giving a small part of my income every year to enable the landless to be given a plough or a pair of cattle or some seed to cultivate the land made available as a result of Bhodan. This modest attempt at "Trusteeship" gives me considerable personal satisfaction, even though it also creates a certain amount of financial strain and embarrassment.

I believe in the essential goodness of people. Recently, in the course of a talk with Rajaji, I must have displayed a certain measure of faith in the bona fides and assurances of a certain group of hard-faced politicians. "You seem to believe in God," observed Rajaji dryly. In answer to my puzzled and inquiring look, he added: "You behave as if you do. Perhaps you call it Providence or righteousness."

Of all the values, I put Freedom first. I believe with Lord Acton that Liberty is the highest good and that other values, like peace, for example, must yield when freedom is involved. Here again, I reject, as Gandhiji did, the "peace of the graveyard". While war is bad, I believe that appeasement and submission to tyranny are even worse.

Heretics - Salt of the Earth

I have little love for the *status quo*. The world needs change. I believe the nonconformist conscience is one of our country's saddest shortages and that heretics are the salt of the earth. To those timid spirits who are afraid of radical change, I commend the words of G. B. Shaw in his play Major Barbara: "What do we do when we spend years of work and thought and thousand of pounds of solid cash on a new gun or an aerial battleship that turns out just a hair's breath wrong after all? Scrap it. Scrap it without wasting another hour or another pound on it. Well, you have made yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesn't fit the facts. Well, scrap it. Scrap it and get one that fits. That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions."

(Illustrated Weekly of India, November 16, 1969)

In the conflict between modernism on the one side and obscurantism, whether that of the nation, the caste or religion on the other, the Liberal is on the side of modernism and change. The Liberal is not against tradition. On the contrary, the Liberal respects what is good in the tradition of people and seeks to build and change on the basis of the tradition. In that sense, the Liberal is not an incendiary or disrupter but a constructive element of change.

Minoo Masani

An Open Letter to My Young Friends

Way back in 1959 when Rajaji and I founded the Swatantra Party and pleaded for a market economy for India it was considered politically foolhardy, if not downright foolish for us to go against the then prevailing dogma of socialism. Nevertheless we persisted because it was already apparent to some of us that the economic policies being followed by Pandit Nehru and his party based on the 'socialistic pattern of society' would lead the country to bankruptcy. Our worst fears came true for the 'socialistic pattern of society' did lead to economic disaster and moral degradation.

Over forty years later, Mr. Narasimha Rao as Congress Prime Minister admitted that the economy was in dire straits and 'hard decisions' had to be taken. Yet he and his party refuse to admit that the 'socialistic pattern of society' was responsible for the country being in "dire straits" - to such an extent that we had actually to pawn the country's gold with banks overseas to borrow money to run the Government of India.

This is hardly surprising considering the fact that they have been the biggest beneficiaries of what Rajaji so aptly described as '*The permit-licence-quota-raj*'. A cosy arrangement which enabled the ruling party and its variants in the opposition, in the name of 'socialism', to control the so-called 'commanding heights of the economy' and, thus hold the reins of both economic and political power in their hands.

If they have now taken the path of economic liberalisation it is only because there are no other options available to save the country from economic ruin not to speak of their own political survival.

If the economic reforms fail then the one opportunity the people of India have had in forty years to look forward to a better life and a fighting chance to reduce poverty and unemployment, will have been lost and it will be a long long time before another such opportunity presents itself.

Why do I lay so much stress on liberalisation? I do so because I believe that the business of government is to govern and not be in business. How true that Gujarati proverb: 'Where the king becomes a

trader, there his subjects become beggars'. The policy of involving itself in industry, trade and commerce has led to the state neglecting its primary responsibilities: The maintenance of law and order, the provision of drinking water facilities, primary health care, primary education, and a network of good roads and rail lines.

These ought to be the objectives of the new economic policy. And this is the essence of liberalisation. It will enable the government to live within its means as it will make it unnecessary for governments to maintain huge administrative overheads. It will eliminate the need for deficit financing which in turn will help keep prices at reasonable levels. A government committed to liberalisation will not, even while proclaiming its policy of freeing the economy, engage in the dubious and anti-market act of administering prices as it did recently in the case of petrol. Such acts make a mockery of economic reforms and can only hamper the process of liberalisation.

I am personally unhappy with the fact that the Indian voter today has to make his choice between unwilling liberalisers on the one hand and those who seek the people's support through appeals to religion or caste be it Ayodhya or Mandal. Had I been even ten years younger I would have taken an active role in educating people on the real meaning of liberalisation, why it is so important that the economic reforms succeed. I might even have taken the initiative to once again organise a movement to put pressure on the government to ensure that it honestly implemented the reforms.

Since my advanced years and consequent physical frailty prevent me from doing so I appeal to my younger friends and all those who have faith in the dignity of the individual, their right to live their lives with the minimum of state intervention, and who wish to see an India where people have a fair opportunity for self-fulfilment, to get together and organise a movement. If such a movement does not emerge soon I am afraid the reforms process will, in the not so distant future stutter to a stop and when that happens we will once again find ourselves at the bottom of the heap.

Surely, we do not want that to happen because the people of India deserve better.

Minoo Masani

in *Freedom First*, January 1994

The Quintessential Dissenter

M. R. Masani, (Minoo Masani as he was better known) was an author, politician and an eminent parliamentarian. He participated in the freedom movement and was a member of the Constituent Assembly.

• Author of *Our India*, an all-time bestseller and a prescribed textbook in schools even in pre-independence India (the book was withdrawn when he parted company with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the then Establishment), Minoo Masani was an alumnus of Bombay's Elphinstone College, the London School of Economics and Lincoln's Inn. He joined the Bombay Bar but soon gave up practice to participate in the freedom struggle. He courted imprisonment in 1932 and 1933. He joined Jayaprakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherally and others to form the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and became its Joint Secretary. He was elected to the Bombay Municipal Corporation soon thereafter and, in 1938, presided over the CSP conference in Lahore.

An admirer of the Soviet Union, he visited that country in the late 'twenties when he was a student at the LSE and later as Secretary of the CSP. The early 'thirties were the period of Stalin's purges of his rivals in the CPSU and the liquidation of millions of farmers who opposed his policy of forced collectivisation of farms. Horrified by Stalin's brutality Masani's disenchantment with Soviet communism led to his questioning the credentials of the Indian communists. He strenuously resisted communist attempts to infiltrate and capture the CSP. Unable to convince the majority of his colleagues in the CSP to support him he resigned along with Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Asoka Mehta. A year later the communists were expelled from the CSP. His disillusionment with Soviet communism led him to question marxist dogma and to a

rethinking of his socialist beliefs. The result was his well known essay 'Socialism Reconsidered'.

The freedom movement was gathering movement and when Gandhiji launched the 'Quit India Movement', Masani who was then an employee in the Tata organisation, resigned his job, volunteered himself as a *satyagrahi*, courted imprisonment and found himself with other Congress leaders in Nasik jail.

On his release from jail, Masani entered legislative politics via the Bombay Municipal Corporation (he was Mayor in 1943) and to membership of the Indian Legislative Assembly. Which was later converted into the Constituent Assembly. He played his role in the drafting of the Indian Constitution as a member of the Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee and Union-Powers Committee.

Following his renunciation of socialism it was only logical for Minoo Masani to start thinking of an alternative to socialism and an economic system for independent India. His was a middle-of-the-road recipe - a mixed economy in a free and open society. This was the theme of a series of lectures he delivered in 1947 to the Bombay University's School of Economics which were later published under the title "Plea for a Mixed Economy".

Nominated by the Government of India as representative on the UN Sub-Commission on Minorities, Masani invited prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's wrath when he refused to turn a blind eye to the persecution of minorities in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe and was sent off in 1948 as India's Ambassador to Brazil.

Those were the Cold War years when the Soviet Union sponsored front organisations to promote its interests worldwide. Several organisations were set up internationally to counter the Soviet challenge. One of these was the Congress for Cultural

Freedom based in Paris. In India, Masani alongwith Jayaprakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta and A. D. Gorwala took the initiative in establishing the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (ICCF) and affiliated it to the Congress in Paris. The ICCF was a non-party organisation of scholars, writers, artists and scientists to defend intellectual liberty, to cultivate a spirit of free enquiry and an appreciation of the arts.

Two years earlier he had founded, with the blessings and encouragement of the then deputy prime minister and home minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Democratic Research Service to educate public opinion on the dangers to India's national independence posed by communists who, acting under instructions from the Comintern in Moscow, were conducting a violent insurrectionary movement in Telengana in Andhra Pradesh.

His election to the Lok Sabha as an Independent from Ranchi in Bihar in 1957 signalled the beginning of his efforts to implement his thesis of a mixed economy and to combat the statist policies which went under the name of Nehruvian Socialism. In 1959, he joined C. Rajagopalachari to found the Swatantra Party which could broadly be described as a liberal-conservative party.

Masani was that rare combination - an intellectual with tremendous organising competence. During his tenure as general secretary, the Swatantra Party grew rapidly and in less than ten years emerged, in the 1967 general elections, as the single largest party in the opposition in the Lok Sabha with a strength of 44 members; leading a principled coalition government in Orissa; as the officially recognised opposition in the Rajasthan and Gujarat Assemblies; and with significant representation in the Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Legislative assemblies.

As the party's ideologue he was clear that the Swatantra Party should eschew non-parliamentary forms of protest like

satyagrahas, morchas, bandhs and walkouts in the legislatures. He was largely influential in ensuring that the party did not form fronts in the trade union and student movements. Perhaps it was his insistence on discipline and doing the right thing that led to the party's exit from electoral politics. In 1971 the so called 'Indira wave' swept all parties aside including the Swatantra Party. He accepted responsibility for the party's miserable performance (he himself failed to retain his seat in the Lok Sabha for a third term from Rajkot) and resigned from the presidentship of the party and from party politics.

His was an outstanding performance as member of the Lok Sabha between 1957 and 1971. He was chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament. As leader of the single largest party in the opposition he invariably opened the debate on the Finance Bill that follows the introduction of the Union Budget. Many of his speeches in parliament were later published under the title "Congress Misrule and Swatantra Alternative". Masani kept a close watch on the attendance of members of his group and their behaviour. He firmly believed that occupying the opposition benches did not mean opposing for the sake of opposition. On many an occasion he supported the ruling party but did not hesitate in going against all other groups in the house if a particular issue warranted such action. Two instances that come to mind are the 'liberation' of Goa when he opposed India's action on the ground that it was unnecessary and that the whole affair was an effort to ensure Krishna Menon's return to Parliament. The other was the abolition of Privy Purses when the Swatantra Party in Parliament was alone in opposing the move as it went against solemn assurances given by Sardar Patel and recorded in 'Instruments of Accession'. He would often quote this verse to encourage his colleagues to treat issues on their merit without being worried about being isolated or in a hopeless minority:

"They are slaves who dare not be

"In the right with two or three."

He took over the editorship of *Freedom First* which he had founded in 1952. As editor, he fought the censorship imposed during Mrs. Gandhi's 'Emergency' and sought the court's intervention against her censors in what came to be known as the *Freedom First* case. Though the court vindicated his stand he found that there were too many impediments to his exercising editorial freedom. He suspended publication which was resumed soon after the Emergency was withdrawn. *Freedom First*, now in its 47th year is a Liberal Quarterly.

In 1978, when the Janata Party was elected to power he was appointed Chairman of the Minorities Commission but soon resigned over differences on principles and approach.

Minoo Masani the socialist agitator in his 'twenties became the Liberal *par excellence* whose contribution to the Liberal movement was acknowledged when he was honoured as a patron of the Liberal International. He was a secularist (though he disliked the word preferring to call himself by the more cumbersome description 'Non-denominationalist') and an uncompromising champion of individual liberty. Starting out as a friend and supporter of Pandit Nehru he began to see in his later years the practical wisdom in Sardar Patel's policies.

Though he retired from politics he continued to be active in public life. In March 1968, he founded the Leslie Sawhny Programme of Training for Democracy to train young people in citizenship - to be conscious of their rights and their duties as citizens.

He founded the Society for the Right to Die with Dignity and enjoyed being in the centre of a minor storm when he campaigned for passive euthanasia for the terminally ill.

In 1985 he set up the Project for Economic Education in association with the Leslie Sawhny Programme and Prof. B. R. Shenoy's Economics Research Centre to educate public opinion

on issues relating to the economy in general and the economic reform programme that began in the 'eighties, in particular.

Masani's reputation as a man with a very high level of integrity in public life, was formidable. This quality by itself was enough to disqualify him from being a 'successful' politician where success is measured in terms of ministerial positions or other similar patronage wielding offices.

He concluded his two-volume autobiography (which he wrote in 1981) with the observation:

"Since our politicians are by and large beyond repair, if India is to be saved, it will have to be saved by the small man, particularly the middle class of the cities and the landed farmers of the countryside who are the backbone of the nation. These classes have suffered cruelly under the so called 'socialist pattern' that Nehru imposed on the country and which is still rampant, but their back is still not broken. It is to these that I would look to save this country."

He was happiest when surrounded by young people. Not surprisingly his first and last books were meant for the young. The first was *Our India* and the last was its sequel *We Indians*. If optimism exuded every page of *Our India*, *We Indians* was a confession of failure and a plea to the young to avoid the mistakes of his generation. In the concluding chapter in *We Indians* he wrote:

"We of my generation have made such a mess of our country's affairs that, in my opinion, we have no right to preach to young folks..."

He was indeed the quintessential dissenter.

S. V. Raju

Printed and published by S. V. Raju at Shubham Print & Web, 59, Dr. V. B. Gandhi Marg, Fort, Mumbai 400001, for Freedom First, 3rd floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, M. G. Road, Mumbai 400001.

Publications Authored by Mr. Minoo Masani

- 1939 *India's Constitution at Work.* (with C. Y. Chintamani)
Soviet Sidelights
- 1940 *Our India*, new edition (1953)
- 1944 *Socialism Reconsidered*
Your Food
- 1945 *Picture of a Plan*
- 1947 *A Plea for a Mixed Economy*
- 1950 *Our Growing Human Family*
Co-operative Farming, the Great Debate
- 1951 *Neutralism in India*
- 1954 *The Communist Party of India—a Short History*
- 1967 *Congress Misrule and Swatantra Alternative*
- 1969 *Too Much Politics, Too Little Citizenship*
- 1970 *Liberalism*
- 1975 *The Constitution, Twenty Years Later*
Is J.P. the Answer?
- 1977 *J.P.'s Mission Partly Accomplished*
- 1977 *Bliss was it in that Dawn ...*
- 1981 *Against the Tide*
- 1989 *We Indians*

Printed and published by S. V. Raju at Shubham Print & Web, 59, Dr. V. B. Gandhi Marg, Fort, Mumbai 400001, for *Freedom First*, 3rd floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, M. G. Road, Mumbai 400001.

Freedom First

Founder: Minoo Masani

OUR MISSION

Freedom First speaks for the silent majority - the majority that wants to be left in peace to pursue its goal of improving its quality of life, but has been suffering in silence, the indignities heaped on it by insensitive governments who have abrogated to themselves the right to decide what is good for the people. In the process, the whole country has been turned into a cesspool of corruption. Public morality and character have reached an all-time low.

Freedom First affirms that much of the unrest and ferment in our society is a direct result of excessive State intervention in the day-to-day lives of our people. While the people's initiative has been stifled, the economy is in shambles. The Journal believes that while India needs a strong government that ensures the rule of law what India does not need is a meddling government - the system so far that has led to impoverishment, insecurity and instability.

Freedom First therefore stands for minimum government and maximum freedom, tempered by a sense of individual responsibility, in which the people's genius has a fair opportunity to develop and grow.

Freedom First rejects any ideology, movement or policy that sets one group of citizens against another, be it based on class, caste, religion or envy.

We invite you to subscribe to *Freedom First*. Kindly complete the form below and return it to us with your subscription to

Freedom First

3rd floor, Army & Navy Building, 148, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Mumbai 400 001

Phone: (022) 2284 1340 ● email: freedom@vsnl.com

I wish to enter a subscription to *Freedom First* and enclose my cheque* in favour of ICCF. (Please type or write in block letters).

NAME : _____

ADDRESS : _____

PIN _____

* Subscriptions can also be sent by MO/DD. No postal orders please. For outstation cheques (within India), please add Rs.30 for bank charges.

For Subscribers in India

- ☐ 3 Years' Subscription : Rs.250
- ☐ 2 Years' Subscription : Rs.180
- ☐ Annual Subscription : Rs.100
- ☐ Single Copy : Rs.25

For Overseas Subscribers (By Second Class Airmail)

Annual
\$10
£7



INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP

The INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP (ILG) is an organisation founded in 1964, by the late Minoo Masani, author and parliamentarian, to promote the Liberal point of view on issues of the day, and to educate the public on the concept of Liberalism so that it is understood and accepted by the people, not merely as a method of economic engineering but also as a philosophy of governance that promotes a civil society.

The ILG seeks to emphasise the fact that a market economy by itself does not ensure an open society; that a free economy and a free society are two sides of the same coin; and that a free and liberal democratic society alone will ensure a satisfying standard of life for the people.

The ILG firmly supports the economic reforms process, even while being critical of erroneous policies and decisions which give liberalisation a bad name. The ILG perceives its role not in negative terms of opposing the opponents of liberalisation but a positive one of promoting a free market system and strengthening a free society.

The primary objective of the ILG is to defend the fundamental liberal belief in the right of individuals to personal liberty, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; the right of free association; the right to private property; the free choice of occupation; the right to information.

The INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP

- believes that the business of the State is government, not business.
- is opposed to any kind of monopoly.
- believes that technology is needed to promote human development and draws attention to the fact that the growth of Liberalism has been contemporaneous with the development of science and technology.
- affirms that active and participatory citizenship at all levels is essential for sustaining a liberal and democratic society.

For membership and other details, please write or email:

INDIAN LIBERAL GROUP

National Headquarters

1st Floor, Sassoon Building,
143, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Mumbai 400 001.

Phones : (0091 22) 2284 3416, (0091 22) 5639 6366

Telefax: (0091 22) 2284 3416

Email : freedom@vsnl.com, ilg@vsnl.net

Website : www.liberalsindia.com