

For Immediate Release

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Swatantra Conference: Principles, People, Politics

New Delhi, 03 January 2018: Centre for Civil Society (CCS), India's leading think-tank advocating social change through public policy, in partnership with **Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi** conducted a conference on the theme '**Swatantra: Principles, People, Politics**' bringing together intellectuals, historians, and experts such as **Gurpreet Mahajan**, Professor, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU); **Ashok Acharya**, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi; **Vinay Sitapati**, Professor, Political Science, Ashoka University; **Vikramjit Banerjee**, Advocate General, State of Nagaland; **M N Panini**, Professor, Institute of Development Studies, University of Mysore; **Vidhu Verma**, Professor, Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; **Parth J Shah**, President, Centre for Civil Society; **Malvika Maheshwari**, Professor, Political Science, Ashoka University; **Gurcharan Das**, Public Intellectual, Author & Commentator; **Vasanthi Srinivasan**, Professor, Political Science, University of Hyderabad; **Seetha**, Senior Journalist and **R Jagannathan**, Editorial Director, Swarajya; to reflect upon the legacy of the erstwhile Swatantra party. The conference held today at the Auditorium at NMML, was jointly organised by **CCS, NMML and Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)**.

The day-long conference marked the launch of an exhibition of 27,000 papers from the defunct Swatantra Party offices in Mumbai. These papers have been procured by Centre for Civil Society as part of their Indian Liberals project, which is an effort to procure and digitize rare historic texts that highlight the rich Indian liberal tradition. These papers are being archived and hosted at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Spread across three panels, the conference presented a unique opportunity to explore the idea of liberty in politics, as well as examine the relevance of a truly liberal political party in today's India. Bringing to the fore, the singular contribution of Swatantra Party to Indian Politics, Dr. Ronald Meinardus, Regional Director South Asia, FNF, denoted the 21 points of the 1959 document, the most powerful political manifesto while regarding the Swatantra party progressively ahead of its time. Highlighting the critique of the welfare state by Swatantra Party, the conference grappled with larger debates about the limits to state intervention and the totalitarian impulses inherent in a centralised polity. Calling for anarchy to achieve minimum state interference, Parth J Shah, President, CCS, elucidated that 'Rajaji was the conscience keeper of Gandhi. A true political anarchist, Gandhi believed that no state is the best state of affairs'. Further elaborating on the challenges of building a liberal political party founded on first principles in modern Indian politics, Gurpreet Mahajan, Professor, Centre for Political Studies, JNU; debated that 'liberty has to include diversity and inequality, not the mere trumping of one over the other. If we want to take liberty seriously, we have to first recognise that there are constraints of social structure placed on individual liberty'. **Bringing together intellectuals, historians, and experts, the conference discussed how to revive a principles-based political praxis in an era of excitable speech, divisive campaigns, and sensationalism.**

About Centre for Civil Society: CCS advances social change through public policy. Our work in education, livelihood, and policy training promotes choice and accountability across private and public sectors. To translate policy into practice, we engage with policy and opinion leaders through research, pilot projects and advocacy. We are India's leading think tank, ranked 81 worldwide by the annual study conducted by the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Members of the press can contact Avinash at avinash@ccs.in / +91 9999882477 for details.

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