



Architects of Tomorrow

Celebrating 25 Visionaries
of Modern India



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“If there is any one feature which distinguishes modern India, it is the growth of the spirit of democracy, which seeks to give equality of opportunity to all its citizens.”

- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958)





Photo by Bert Hardy/Picture Post/Getty Images



indianliberals.in is a digital archive of Indian Liberal works in English and regional languages.

The Indian liberal space with its long history, old defenders and emerging advocates is as diverse and wide-ranging as the liberal political spectrum. While the space includes thinkers and scholars with the conscious liberal tag, there are countless others whose writings could find resonance with some or all the core liberal values. Still, all of them offered a potentially different lens to look at the age-old questions on the role of the state, society, and markets in India.

However, the writings of these individuals and organisations are currently dispersed and/ or limited to the vernacular audience and run the risk of getting lost with the passage of time.

It is, therefore, important to preserve India's history with liberalism; to ensure that every Indian, today and tomorrow, is familiar with their own national champions of liberty; that their ideas are more widely known and accepted so that India can avoid repeating its mistakes and forge a more successful path going forward.

Contents



01

Shareefa
Hamid Ali



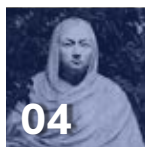
02

B R
Ambedkar



03

Abala
Bose



04

Rani Rashmoni
Das



05

Gopal Krishna
Gokhale



06

Anandibai
Joshee



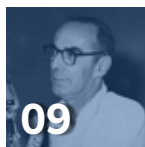
07

Sharad
Anantrao Joshi



08

Babytai
Kamble



09

Minoo
Masani



10

Pherozeshah
Mehta



11

Piloo
Mody



12

Dadabhai
Naoroji



13

Nani
Palkhivala



14

Jyotiba
Phule



15

C Rajagopalachari



16

Pandita
Ramabai



17

N G Ranga



18

Raja Ram
Mohan Roy



19

Rukhmabai



20

Mariadas
Ruthnaswamy



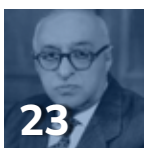
21

Fatima
Sheikh



22

B R Shenoy



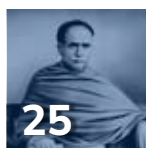
23

A D Shroff



24

Janaki
Ammal



25

Ishwar Chandra
Vidyasagar



INDIA

Shareefa Hamid Ali

(1883-1971)

Shareefa Hamid Ali, born in 1883, was an exceptional advocate of feminism and individual rights in India. Raised in a progressive Muslim family, she was instilled with liberal values by her father, Abbas J. Tyabji, a freedom fighter, and her mother, Ameena Tyabji. Ali, educated in multiple languages, attended the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1907, which ignited her passion for social justice and women's emancipation. As a mother of seven daughters, she fought against child marriages and campaigned for a minimum marriageable age of 18 for women. Her efforts resulted in the passage of the *Sarda Act* in 1929—India's first legislation for the minimum age of marriage. Ali's commitment to intersectional feminism was evident when she represented Muslim women on a women's sub-committee of the National Planning Committee in 1939. In 1947, she played a key role as one of the founding members of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, emphasizing principles of inclusivity and raising women's status regardless of nationality, race, language, or religion.

To Know More





B R Ambedkar

(1891–1956)

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, born in the Mhow Army Cantonment (present-day Madhya Pradesh), emerged as a prominent advocate for Dalit rights during India's Independence Movement. He founded the *Bahishkrit Hitakarani Sabha* in 1924, aimed at uplifting the oppressed classes through education, agitation, and organization. Ambedkar played significant roles in the Bombay Legislative Council and as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee during India's constitution-making process. Appointed as the first Law Minister of independent India in 1947, he passionately pushed for the passage of the Hindu Code Bill to reform personal laws. In 1956, he and 3,65,000 followers converted to Buddhism, embracing its principles of social justice. His reinterpretation of Buddhism, known as the Dalit Buddhist movement or *Navayana*, has impacted the pursuit of equality and social reform in India.

To Know More





Abala Bose

(1865 – 1951)

Abala Bose was an educationist, suffragist, and philanthropist during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in 1865, Abala was raised in a liberal household that encouraged reformist thinking. As an educationist, she made significant innovations to girls' education and brought the Montessori system to India during the early 20th century. She co-founded various schools and institutions, including the *Nari Shiksha Samiti*, in 1919, which aimed to empower women through education and financial support. Abala had a strong focus on widow upliftment and rehabilitation during the 1920s. She established several centers and organizations to equip widows with vocational skills and promote financial independence.

Furthermore, she was an early advocate of women's suffrage and gave Indian women the right to vote in 1921 in Madras. Lady Abala Bose's life exemplified dedication to gender equality and progressive reforms during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite her illustrious family background and marital status, she made an indelible mark on history as a trailblazing woman who contributed immensely to India's future.

To Know More





Rani Rashmoni Das

(1793 – 1861)

'Rani' Rashmoni Das, born in 1793, defied societal norms as a widow from a lower-caste community as she worked alongside upper-caste reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Her husband, Raj Chandra Das, from a wealthy family, supported her endeavors to bring social reform for women and lower-caste communities. Rani Rashmoni's legacy includes the renowned *Dakshineswar Kali Temple*, founded in the 1850s, and philanthropic contributions to the Imperial Library and Presidency University. She championed the fishing community's rights in the 1840s, defeating the East India Company's imposed tax on fishing boats through strategic negotiations. Fearlessly confronting powerful British aristocrats and influential Bengali entrepreneurs, she persuaded Dwarkanath Tagore to contribute to social rehabilitation. Rani Rashmoni's courage and liberal outlook left an indelible mark on women's empowerment in 19th-century Bengal.

To Know More





Gopal Krishna Gokhale

(1866 – 1915)

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was an Indian liberal political leader and a social reformer during the Indian Independence Movement. Graduating from Elphinstone College in 1884, he was among the first generation of Indians to receive a university education. He was greatly influenced by the social work of Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and was honored as the Protege Son or *Manas Putra* of Ranade. Besides being a senior leader of the Indian National Congress (INC), Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society. Through these platforms and various legislative bodies, he campaigned for Indian self-rule and social reforms. Gokhale was vital in mentoring Mahatma Gandhi during his formative years, helping him understand India and the challenges common people face. Gokhale's deposition before the Welby Commission on India's financial condition earned him accolades, and his speeches on the budget in the Central Legislative Council were notable for their thorough statistical analysis. He was instrumental in bringing about the Morley-Minto Reforms in India.

To Know More





Anandibai Joshee

(1865 – 1887)

Anandibai Joshee, M.D., achieved a historic milestone by becoming one of the first women to earn a medical degree from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania. She was born in 1865 and faced early challenges, married at nine and losing a child at 13. This incident fueled her determination to pursue medical education and improve healthcare for others. In 1879, her husband, Gopalrao Joshee, wrote a letter seeking support for his wife's education in the United States, despite facing condemnation from their community in India due to the prevailing gender norms. She completed her medical studies and returned to India to serve as the Physician-in-Charge of the female ward at the Albert Edward Hospital in Kolhapur. Her accomplishments garnered recognition from Queen Victoria, who sent a congratulatory note to the Medical College. Anandibai Joshee's legacy inspires and reminds us of the barriers she overcame to pave the way for other women in medicine.

To Know More





Sharad Anantrao Joshi

(1935-2015)

With an educational background in Economics, Sharad A Joshi began his career as a lecturer at Pune University before joining the Indian Postal Service, followed by a job at the United Nations headquarters in Switzerland. He resigned from his position at the UN after coming across the lives of European farmers and facing a pertinent question—why the hard-working Indian farmers remained mired in poverty? Joshi eventually founded the *Shetkari Sanghatana*, a non-political union of farmers formed to secure ‘freedom of access to markets and technology,’ which later emerged as one of the largest farm groups in India. He was also the founder of the largest organization of rural women, *Shetkari Mahila Aghadi*, celebrated for its work for women’s property rights.

In 2005, while serving as an MP in Rajya Sabha, Joshi tabled legislation demanding the deletion of the word socialism from the Representation of the People Act of the Constitution of India.

To Know More





Babytai Kamble

(1929–2012)

Baby Kamble, affectionately called Babytai Kamble, is best known as a Dalit activist and writer. She penned *Jina Amacha* (The Prisons We Broke), a vivid narration of her (as well as many other Dalit women's) lived experiences. Babytai belonged to the Mahar community, considered 'untouchable' within the established caste hierarchy in India. She was married to Kondiba Kamble when she was 13. The young couple soon opened a provision store for a steady income. Babytai, inspired by Ambedkar's advice on starting a business, began selling grapes. Her involvement in business and exposure to literature marked a crucial change in her life, as she understood the importance of literacy and earning. Kamble started writing her book soon after but decided to hide it from her family for nearly 20 years. She excelled in her roles as a teacher, a human rights activist, an entrepreneur, and a champion of women's rights. Babytai also wrote poems and articles about Dalit lives and ran an ashram for children from vulnerable communities.

To Know More





Minoo Masani

(1905–1998)

Minocher Rustom Masani was born on 20 November 1905 in Bombay. Young Masani was an admirer of the communist experiment. In 1934, the Bombay branch of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was set up under him. By 1938, however, Masani was growing disenchanted with Communism. Masani's combat against the increased influence of Communism became a feature of his public career in independent India. The Nagpur Resolution of Congress, which advocated cooperative farming, brought Rajaji and Masani together to form Swatantra Party in 1959. Being a fierce defender of free choice in a society governed by right-wing social conservatives and left-wing statist Economics, he was also a powerful supporter of personal liberty. He strongly advocated for the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, which legalized abortion in India.

To Know More





Pherozeshah Mehta

(1845-1915)

Sir Pherozeshah Mehta was a prominent Indian leader known for his liberal outlook and contributions to Indian politics. Mehta played a crucial role in founding the modern Bombay Municipal Corporation in 1873 and served it in a distinguished manner for nearly half a century. He founded the English newspaper, The Bombay Chronicle, which became an essential platform for expressing Indian public opinion towards the nationalist movement. Mehta had a notable record in the Indian National Congress, with a distinctive hand in its founding in 1885. He held an important and commanding position, presiding over the Calcutta Congress session in 1890. He was also elected twice as the President of the Reception Committee when the Congress sessions met in Bombay in 1889 and 1904. 1885 he co-founded the Bombay Presidency Association and served as its Secretary. He was made a C.I.E. in 1894 and knighted in 1904. In 1915, the University of Bombay conferred upon him the Doctor of Law honorary degree.

To Know More





Piloo Mody

(1926 –1983)

Piloo Mody was a prominent Indian architect and politician renowned for contributing to both fields. He was a founding member of the Swatantra Party and served as a Member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha (Godhra) and in the Rajya Sabha until he died in 1983. Mody's architectural brilliance was showcased in various projects, including the Engineering Construction Corporation headquarters in Chennai, which won international acclaim. He co-founded an architecture firm in 1953 and undertook significant projects, leaving a mark on India's urban landscape. In the political arena, Mody was an ardent advocate of liberalism and freedom, and he actively participated in the Swatantra Party, opposing the socialistic path. Piloo Mody's legacy is commemorated by the Piloo Mody College of Architecture in Cuttack, Odisha, and a Chess tournament named in his honor.

To Know More





Dadabhai Naoroji

(1845-1915)

Dadabhai Naoroji, the 'Grand Old Man of India,' was a prominent social reformer, politician, scholar, and trader. He became the first Indian-Asian to be a British Member of Parliament and co-founded the Indian National Congress. Naoroji's influential book, 'Poverty and Un-British Rule in India,' highlighted the concept of the 'Drain of Wealth' from India to Britain, creating awareness about the economic exploitation faced by India during British rule. His ideologies focused on global welfare and prosperity for all. He emphasized the need for Indian industries to grow and develop to contribute to Britain's prosperity and tax revenues. He mentored leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Mahatma Gandhi, and his influence extended far beyond his time. Naoroji's legacy includes the Dadabhai Naoroji Awards for India-United Kingdom relations and his significant literary works. His vision for India's economic and educational progress earned him the title of the 'Unofficial Ambassador of India.'

To Know More





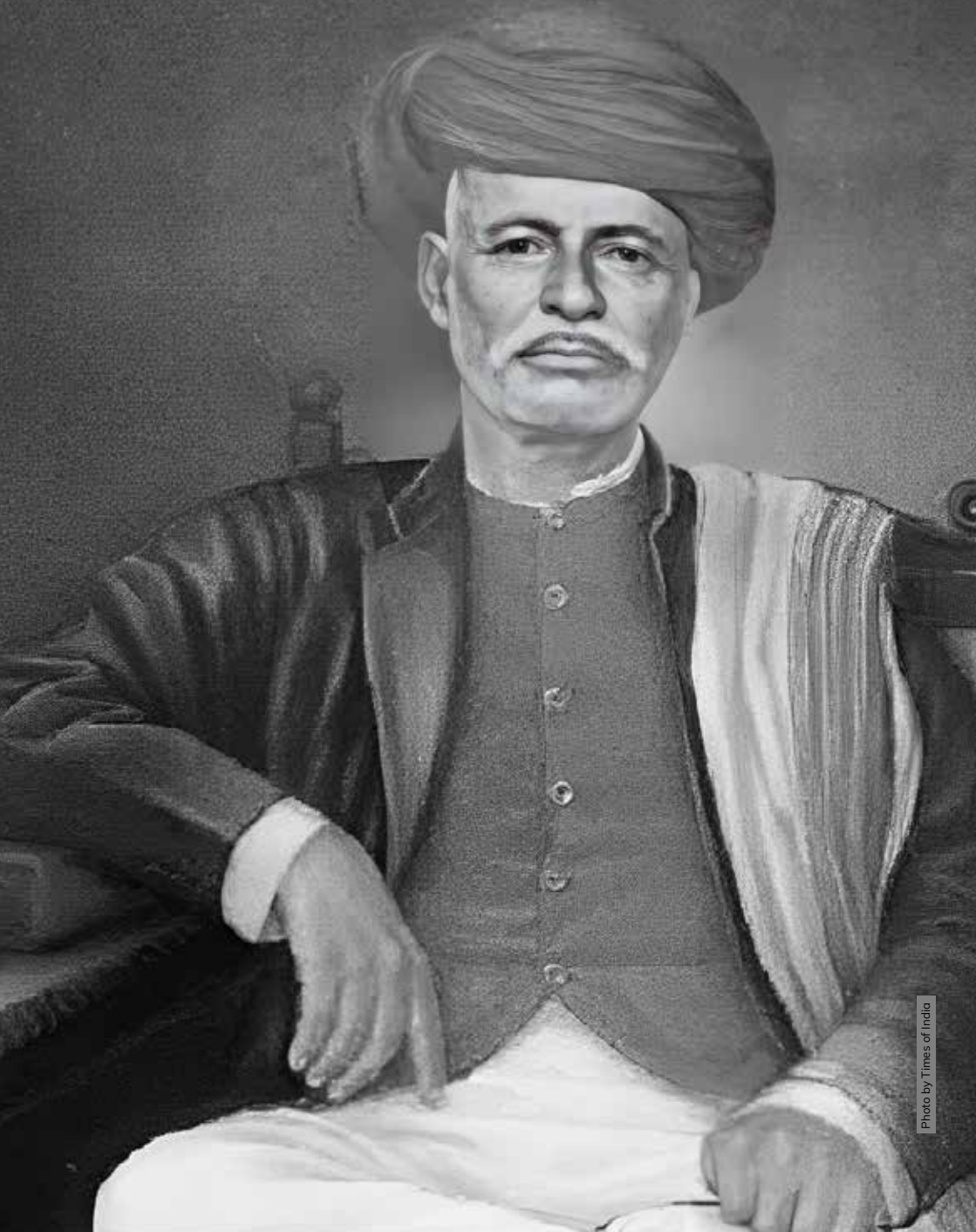
Nani Palkhivala

(1920-2002)

Nanabhoy (Nani) Ardeshir Palkhivala co-authored the influential 'The Law and Practice of Income Tax,' considered an authoritative tome on Indian Tax Law, which was used as the tax law draft guide by the IMF. Palkhivala's legacy in the history of Indian democracy lies in his contribution to the famous *Kesavananda Bharati vs The State of Kerala* case (1973). The case ensured that the legislature did not alter the basic structure of the Indian constitution. In the wake of the imposition of Emergency in 1975, he successfully argued against the government's application for reconsideration of the Kesavananda decision. Nani Palkhivala was also famous for his budget commentary, delivered annually from 1958 to 1994, following the budget presentation in parliament. To serve the cause of liberal democracy, Palkhivala founded the Jayaprakash Institute of Human Freedoms. The institution sought to strengthen the roots of Indian democracy and to carry the legacy of JP. For his immense contribution to the field, he received honorary doctorates from Princeton University, Rutgers University, Lawrence University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Annamalai University, Ambedkar Law University, and the University of Mumbai.

To Know More





Jyotiba Phule

(1827 – 1890)

Jyotiba Phule, or '*Mahatma Phule*,' was an Indian social reformer, writer, and equality advocate who strongly opposed the Hindu caste system, perpetuating discrimination against lower-caste individuals, including Shudras and Dalits. Phule believed in a new social order where no one would be subordinate to the upper-caste Brahmins. He was against child marriage and advocated for the right of widows to remarry, a stance that high-caste Hindus notably rejected. He established a home for widows, especially Brahmins, who had become pregnant, and set up an orphanage for their children. Phule and his wife adopted one of these children in a heartwarming gesture. As a champion of education, Phule established schools for girls and children of lower castes, breaking barriers and paving the way for social change. He co-founded the *Satyashodhak Samaj* in 1873, a reform society that aimed to unite and uplift lower-caste people and promote social equality. Phule's ideas were disseminated through books, essays, poems, and plays, with his most notable work being '*Gulamagiri*' (Slavery), which criticized India's caste system.

To Know More





C Rajagopalachari

(1879 - 1972)

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, also known as '*Rajaji*,' was born in 1878 in Tamil Nadu. He joined the Indian National Congress (INC) and participated in the 1906 session at Calcutta. In 1921, he became the party's General Secretary and led the group of 'No Changers' in the Congress Party against entry into the Imperial and the provincial legislative councils. In 1930, Rajagopalachari marched similarly at Vedaranyam and defied the salt laws. He was arrested for this, and later became the first Premier of the Madras Presidency in 1937 and implemented progressive policies like the Temple Entry Authorization Act and agrarian reforms. Post-independence, he served as India's last Governor-General and held various ministerial positions. In 1959 he co-founded the Swatantra Party, advocating liberal policies and opposing Soviet-style Socialism.

To Know More





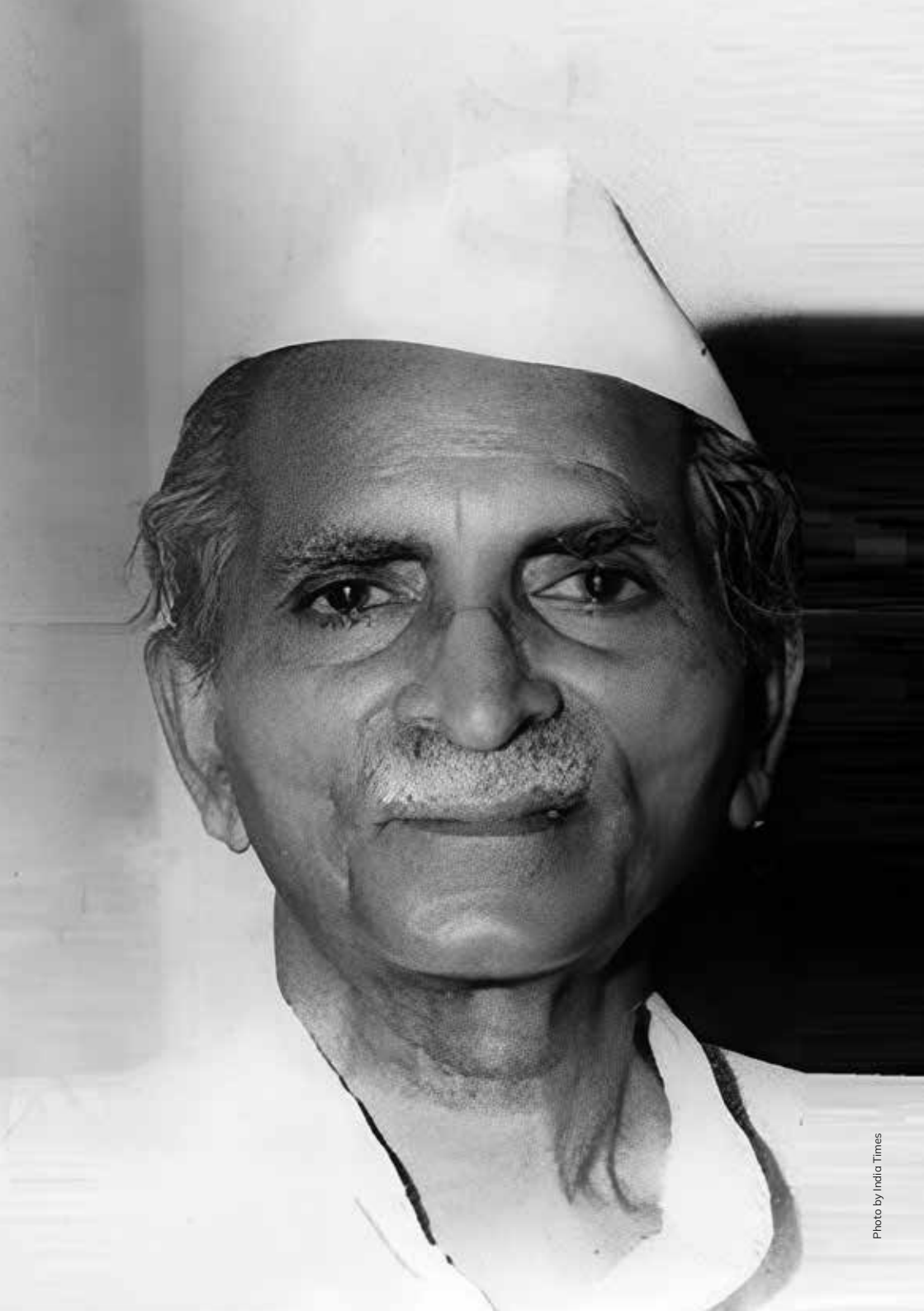
Pandita Ramabai

(1858 – 1922)

Ramabai Dongre was born into a high-caste Hindu family and embraced a life of learning and tradition. Bestowed with the titles '*Pandita*' and '*Saraswati*' for her knowledge, she joined the *Brahmo Samaj*, marrying a man from a lower caste who passed away in the same year, leaving her as a high-caste Hindu widow. During a visit to England in 1883 to pursue a medical degree, influenced by Nehemiah Goreh's writings, Ramabai converted to Christianity and became an Anglo-Catholic, advocating social reform and education. Returning to India, she founded the *Sharada Sadan*, an institute to educate Hindu widows, and later established the famous orphanage, *Mukti*. Ramabai experienced a second conversion, embracing evangelical Christianity and witnessing a Pentecostal-style revival at *Mukti*. Despite her poor health, her dedication to Bible translation and the cause of Indian women endured. She lost her daughter in 1921 and passed away herself the following year. Her legacy lives on through the transformative institutions she established and her unwavering commitment to education and social justice.

To Know More





N G Ranga

(1900-1995)

Nayakulu G. Ranga was an influential figure in India's independence movement and a prominent leader in the farmers' rights movement. After pursuing higher education in England, he returned to India and embarked on a teaching career before transitioning to politics. In 1930, he joined the All India Congress Committee and actively participated in the movement to abolish the *Zamindari* system. Ranga actively participated in various social and political initiatives, notably founding the All India Kisan Congress in 1935 to support farmers' rights. He also played a significant role in the Constituent Assembly, intervening on critical issues such as decentralizing power and creating an Andhra Province. Eventually, he formed his parties, including the *Krishikar Lok Party*, and later co-founded the Swatantra Party. As a staunch advocate of farmers' welfare, he opposed cooperative farming proposed by Nehru. In his historic speech opposing the 17th Amendment, Ranga demonstrated his commitment to the principles of the Swatantra Party. Eventually, he returned to the Congress party in 1972, leaving a lasting legacy as the 'Father of the Indian Kisan Movement'.

To Know More





Raja Ram Mohan Roy

(1772 – 1833)

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the ‘Maker of Modern India,’ pioneered Indian socio-religious reform. Born in Radhanagar, Bengal, he emerged as a prominent scholar and independent thinker. After exploring various regions, studying ancient scriptures, and working in the East India Company, Roy focused on initiating reforms. In 1814, he formed *Atmiya Sabha* to advocate for social and religious changes, including women’s rights, the abolition of *Sati*, and education for all. Raja Ram Mohan established a school based on English education, believing it superior to traditional Indian learning. In 1828, he founded the *Brahmo Samaj*, advocating against idol worship and curbing Christian influence on Hindu society. His efforts culminated in the abolition of the *Sati* system in 1829. In 1830, he traveled to the United Kingdom as an ambassador but passed away on September 27, 1833, in Stapleton due to Meningitis.

To Know More





Rukhmabai

(1864 – 1955)

Rukhmabai Raut was a pioneering woman who became one of the first female doctors to practice medicine in British India. Born in 1864, Raut's life took a significant turn when she was married off at a young age of 11. However, she courageously resisted the marriage and fought a legal battle, the *Dadaji Bhikaji vs. Rukhmabai* case, which attracted national attention. Eventually, Queen Victoria dissolved her marriage, and Raut pursued further medical studies in England. Her activism and influence played a pivotal role in enacting the Age of Consent Act in 1891, which ended child marriages. Raut dedicated 35 years of her life to serving as the Chief Medical Officer at a state hospital in Rajkot before retiring to Bombay. Her remarkable contributions to medicine and the cause of women's rights continue to inspire generations.

To Know More





Mariadas Ruthnaswamy

(1885–1977)

Mariadas Ruthnaswamy CIE, KCSG, was a prominent educationalist, statesman, and writer in Madras. Educated in Hyderabad and Cuddalore, he studied at Oxford and Cambridge, qualifying as a barrister in London. Ruthnaswamy's political career included being a Councillor for the Corporation of Madras, a member of the Madras Legislative Council, and President of the Council in 1925. He also served on the Madras Service Commission and was nominated as a member of the Central Legislative Assembly and later the Rajya Sabha. Ruthnaswamy was a strong advocate for the upliftment of backward classes and minorities. He joined the Swatantra Party and was a vocal advocate for education, railways, foreign policy, and university grants. Throughout his life, Ruthnaswamy received several honors, including the Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire, Knight Commander's Cross of the Order of St. Gregory the Great, and the Padma Bhushan for Literature and Education.

To Know More





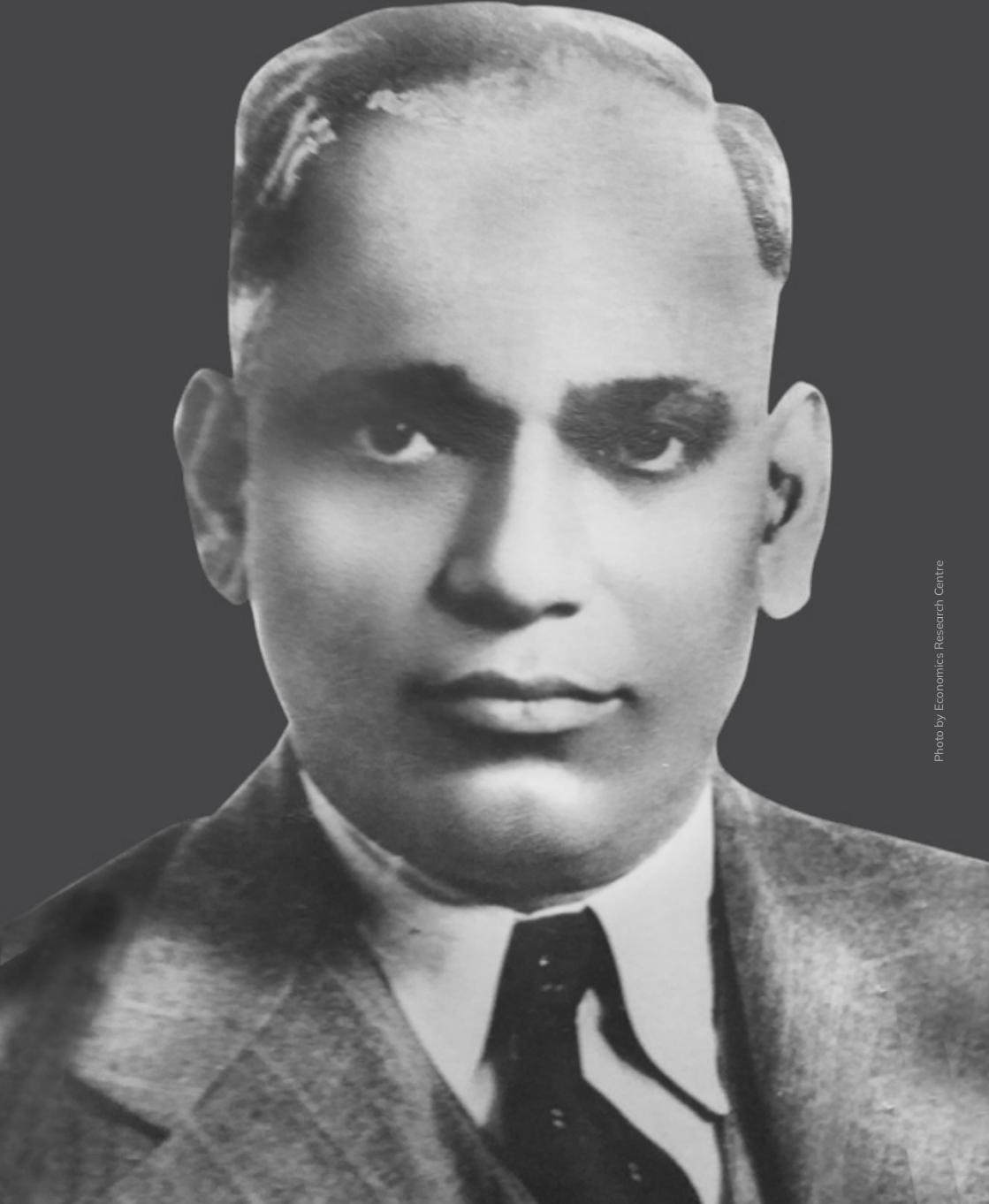
Fatima Sheikh

(1831 – 1900)

Fatima Sheikh, often overlooked in Indian history, was a remarkable 19th-century trailblazer in Maharashtra. Despite fierce opposition, as a teacher, anti-caste activist, and advocate for girls' education, she stood alongside Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule and established the country's first school for girls. She was enrolled in a training program by missionary Cynthia Farrar; Fatima and Savitribai bonded over their shared mission to educate the marginalized. In 1848, they opened the school at Fatima's home in Pune, facing hostility from conservative forces. They persevered, reaching out to families to persuade them to enroll their children, paving the way for more schools for Dalits and women. Despite threats and abandonment, Fatima and her brother remained steadfast allies to the Phules and their cause. Fatima Sheikh's courageous life is a testament to her pioneering spirit during an era of regressive attitudes toward women and marginalized communities.

To Know More





B R Shenoy

(1905–1978)

Professor Bellikoth Ragunath Shenoy was a classical liberal economist from Karnataka, India. After achieving first-class honors MA in Economics from Benaras Hindu University, he furthered his studies at the London School of Economics (LSE), where the ideas of Professor Friedrich Hayek influenced him. Two of his papers, “An Equation for the Price Level of New Investment Goods” (1931) and “Interdependence of Price Levels” (1933), were published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics, establishing him as a prominent Monetary Economist and the first Indian to be featured in a leading scholarly journal. Joining the Reserve Bank of India in 1945, he later served as the Far Eastern Representative of the IMF and held key positions at the World Bank. Prof Shenoy made significant contributions to Indian Economic Policy debates, championing Liberalism.

To Know More





A D Shroff

(1899 – 1965)

Ardeshir Darabshaw Shroff was an eminent industrialist, banker, and economist who played a pivotal role in shaping India's banking, insurance, and economic landscape. He was an early advocate of free enterprise and co-authored the Bombay Plan, proposing post-independence economic development strategies. In 1944, Shroff represented India as a non-official delegate at the United Nations Bretton Woods Conference. He founded the Investment Corporation of India and was chairman of the Bank of India and the New India Assurance Company. In 1956, Shroff co-founded the Forum of Free Enterprise to counter socialist tendencies in the Nehru government and promote education in Economics. He also played a role in establishing the Swatantra Party, India's only liberal political party. Later the A D Shroff Memorial Trust was established posthumously to carry on his vision.

To Know More





Janaki Ammal

(1897–1984)

Born in Kerala in 1897, Janaki Ammal moved to Madras (now Chennai) to obtain her Bachelors and Honors degrees at the Queen Mary's and Presidency College, respectively. In 1925, at the University of Michigan in the USA, where she did research on plant cytology (which focuses on the structure and function of cells), Janaki Ammal obtained a Master's degree. Her work as a geneticist took her to the Sugarcane Breeding Institute at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu from 1934 to 1939. These works were highly significant, as she is believed to be responsible for creating Sugarcane hybrids that yielded sweeter sugar. She then left for England and worked as Assistant Cytologist at the John Innes Horticultural Institution in London and as Cytologist at the Royal Horticultural Society at Wisley during 1945–51. To honor her work, the Royal Horticultural Society named a variety of Magnolia blossoms—the *Magnolia Kobus Janaki Ammal* after her. She was invited by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to reorganize the Botanical Survey of India in 1951, which explored the plant resources of the country and identified plant species with economic virtue.

To Know More





Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

(1820 - 1891)

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a prominent figure in Bengal Renaissance, was a philosopher, educator, writer, reformer, and philanthropist. Born in 1820 in Bengal Presidency, he excelled academically and earned the title 'Vidyasagar' for his knowledge and cleared law exams. Vidyasagar revolutionized the Bengali education system, introducing English and Bengali alongside Sanskrit. He supported women's education, established schools, and advocated widow remarriage through the Widow Remarriage Act 1856. A man of strong character, Vidyasagar challenged societal norms and oppressive British policies. He authored significant books, including 'Borno Porichoy,' reconstructing Bengali alphabets. Vidyasagar's compassionate nature was complemented by his unwavering resolve to bring positive change. Rabindranath Tagore aptly said, "One wonders how God, in the process of producing forty million Bengalis, produced a man!"

To Know More









About Centre for Civil Society

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 policy training.

We are India's leading liberal think tank, ranked 5th in India and 83rd in the world by the annual study conducted by 2021 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report released by the University of Pennsylvania.

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South Asia

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Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) is a German political foundation which promotes liberal values. It has offices in around 60 countries around the world. FNF New Delhi office serves as Regional Office of South Asia region. It has other offices in the region in Dhaka, Colombo and Islamabad and partners in Bhutan and Nepal who work with it on promoting liberal values. It works on four focal issues: good governance, rule of law and human rights, education, and free market economy.

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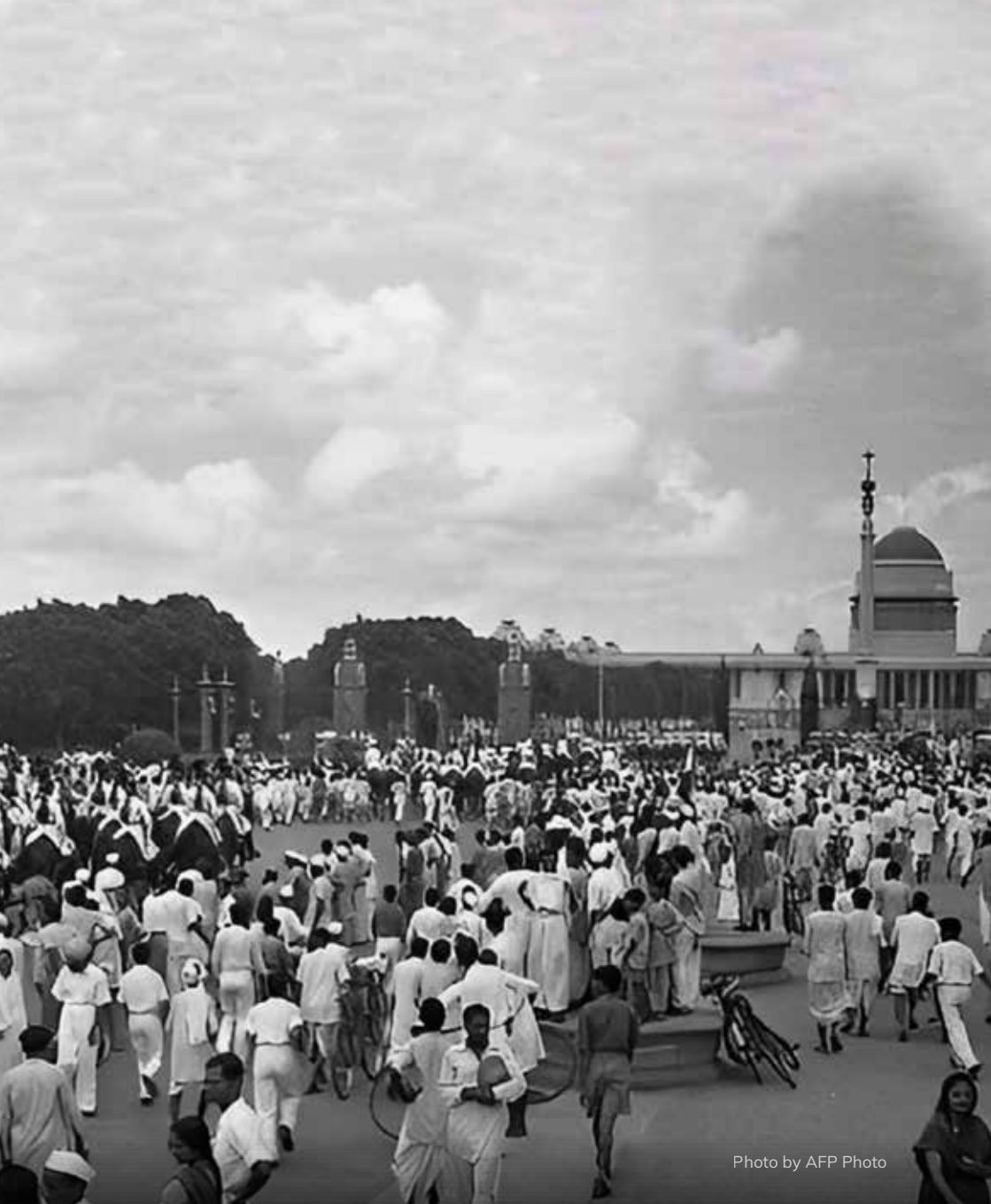


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