

Political Science and the Principles of Liberalism

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Abstract: *Liberalism is one of the most influential ideologies in political science. Emerging in the 17th century as a response to absolutism, it emphasized individual freedom, equality, and rational decision-making. Unlike authoritarian or autocratic systems, liberalism advocates secularism, democracy, human rights, and international harmony. It regards the individual as central, with the state and society serving as instruments to ensure personal growth and collective welfare. By seeking a balance between liberty and equality, liberalism has shaped modern political thought and continues to play a vital role in the balanced development of nations.*

Keywords: Political Science, Liberalism, Individual Freedom, Equality, Democracy, Secularism, Political Ideologies

1. Introduction

In fact, the term ideology is not new; it has its roots in human thought. Since man is a social being, he is capable of reflecting rationally on any subject or issue. As a rational creature, man expresses his views on different matters, and such views can collectively be termed as an ideology. The thoughts of renowned personalities, or of their followers, are often identified with particular ideologies and become widely known by those names.

For instance, when we speak of the ideology of truth, non-violence, and moral development, it immediately reminds us of Mahatma Gandhi and his philosophy. Even in ancient times, diverse ideologies existed, but the relevance and utility of this term seem far more significant in the modern era.

The word ideology was first introduced by the French thinker Destutt de Tracy in the late 18th century. By this term, he referred to "truth without doubt," or in other words, "absolute truth."

In the modern age, numerous political ideologies have emerged—among the most notable are liberalism, socialism, communism, Marxism, authoritarianism, and Gandhism. Each of these holds immense significance; however, our discussion here focuses on liberalism, an ideology that brought remarkable transformation to the field of political science and sought to strike a balance between liberty and equality.

Introduction to Liberalism

Liberalism is recognized as a principle that treats every individual in society as equal and emphasizes granting everyone the right to live freely.

In fact, liberalism is not a single philosophical ideology but rather a combination of multiple ideas. Its scope and interpretation are very broad.

This ideology mainly emphasizes citizens' individual rights, gender equality, secularism, and democracy. Liberalism is a political philosophy that advocates individual freedom. It is often regarded as another form of individualism, but that is not entirely true. While individualism has been an integral

part of liberalism, both are not the same. From the very beginning, liberalism has been seen as an important political philosophy. It originated in the 17th century. Liberalism is a philosophical ideology that supports granting freedom in intellectual, social, and religious spheres.

The term liberalism is derived from the English word liberal, which simply means "freedom." Thus, when the government of a country grants complete freedom to all its citizens without selfish motives—ensuring no discrimination among individuals and granting equal liberty to all based on the principle of equality—it is called liberalism.

According to liberal ideology, every person should have the right to make decisions according to their own conscience, free from unjust interference. Its objective is to create a social, political, and economic environment in which individuals can live freely and sustain their lives with dignity.

Therefore, it is clear that liberal ideology is a collection of political, social, and economic principles that place special emphasis on freedom and equality.

- **John Locke** is regarded as the father of liberalism. The meaning of liberal ideology can also be understood through the following definitions:
- **John Locke** stated – "Liberalism is the ideology that considers the protection of individual liberty and property as the primary purpose of the state."
- **J. S. Mill** believed – "The foundation of liberalism is individual freedom, and the liberty of any person can only be limited when it interferes with the liberty of another."

Background and Causes of the Rise of Liberalism

1) Industrial Revolution and the Rise of the Capitalist Class-

By the end of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution had resulted in large-scale production of goods. With the rapid pace of economic growth, social and economic life became increasingly unregulated. The newly emerging classes in society were primarily driven by the desire to accumulate wealth. This class rejected all rules and restrictions that obstructed its pursuit of property and prosperity. Gradually, it became a powerful force in social life. Using its growing influence, it advocated for a way of living free from economic, political, social, and moral restraints. This desire to live independently and

freely in all spheres of life was a major factor in the rise of liberalism.

2) Renaissance-

The Renaissance placed the highest emphasis on human thought and personality. It highlighted the idea that truth could only be attained through the use of reason and intellect. By promoting individual freedom and the value of human rationality, the Renaissance laid an important foundation for the growth of liberalism.

3) Reformation-

The 16th-century Reformation also played a crucial role in the rise of liberal thought. Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin boldly challenged religious authoritarianism. They broke away from rigid traditions and inspired people to embrace spiritual freedom. They emphasized that no mediator was required between God and man; instead, an individual could reach God through personal effort and righteous deeds. In this way, the concept of religious freedom became a cornerstone in the development of liberalism.

4) Opposition to Absolute Monarchy-

Another significant factor in the emergence of liberalism was resistance to absolute monarchy. To restrict the unchecked power of authoritarian rulers, liberal ideas gradually developed. Liberalism thus emerged as a movement advocating freedom, equality, and limitations on despotic authority.

Basic Principles of Liberalism

Liberalism is often described as a vast ocean of ideas, into which various other ideologies flow just like rivers merge into the sea. In other words, liberalism is not based on a single philosophy but is the outcome of multiple ideas blended together. The essence of these combined ideas forms the core value principles of liberal thought. The major principles of liberalism are as follows:

1) Complete Faith in Human Reason

The foremost principle of liberalism is its belief in the importance of human intellect and reason. During the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly with the Renaissance, liberal thinkers began to rely on rationality and independent judgment. They rejected rigid orthodox traditions and instead placed reason at the center of decision-making. Liberalism encourages individuals to think independently and make decisions on the basis of their rational faculties.

2) Rejection of Blind Faith in History and Tradition

Liberalism upholds reason as the highest authority and refuses to accept any viewpoint, theory, or tradition that does not align with rational thought, regardless of its antiquity or historical significance. Liberals argue that as long as outdated and despotic traditions are not challenged, neither progress nor development is possible. This outlook led to significant political and social transformations, such as the reform of governance in 19th-century England.

3) Advocacy of Individual Freedom

From the beginning, liberalism has asserted that human beings are rational by nature and are born free. Freedom, according to liberalism, is both a natural and fundamental right. It implies the right to live, think, and act without undue interference from authority, enabling individuals

to make their own choices and contribute to political, social, and religious development.

4) The Individual as the End, Society and State as the Means

A central principle of liberal thought is that the individual is an end in himself, while society and the state are merely instruments to support his development. The highest priority is given to the material, spiritual, and creative growth of the individual, and the state and society exist to facilitate this noble goal.

5) Ideal of a Secular State

Liberalism emphasizes the concept of a secular state. According to this view, the state should not have any official religion. Instead, it must guarantee religious freedom to all its citizens, ensuring equality and impartiality. Thus, the secular state becomes one of the defining ideals of liberal philosophy.

6) Support for Democracy and Opposition to Despotism

Liberalism emerged as a reaction against absolutism and authoritarianism. It strongly opposes despotic forms of government and upholds democratic governance as the best system, as it respects individual rights and collective decision-making.

7) Promotion of International Harmony and World Peace

Liberalism does not endorse narrow nationalism or the absolute sovereignty of the state. Rather, it advocates for universal brotherhood, global harmony, and peaceful coexistence among nations. According to liberalism, every nation should strive for peaceful development and maintain friendly relations with others. The philosophy highlights the principle of world unity, making international cooperation and peace central to its values.

2. Conclusion

From all these points, it becomes clear that liberalism is an ideology whose primary objective is to ensure individual freedom, equality, social justice, rights, and democratic conduct, while establishing balance in society through holistic development. According to the liberal perspective, every individual should be granted the right to think, decide, and live freely.

This ideology is a progressive and evolving thought of the modern era, which places the highest importance on the individual, their rights, freedom, human rights, and social justice. Its core principle is that the development of any state or society is possible only when individuals are given opportunities to live freely, express their views, make decisions, and exercise leadership.

In conclusion, we may say that liberalism seeks to maintain an orderly, democratic, social, and political system in society. It also emphasizes the creation of a society or nation where harmony is established between freedom and equality, every individual receives opportunities for all-round development without hindrance, and steps are taken towards fostering international goodwill and the spirit of universal brotherhood.

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