

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCIENCE I
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LIBERALISM

Liberalism is the dominant ideology of the present-day Western world. The history of England, Western Europe and America for the last 300 years is closely associated with the evolution and development of liberal thought. Liberalism was the product of the climate of opinion that emerged at the time of the Renaissance¹ and Reformation in Europe. As an ideology and a way of life, 'it reflected the economic, social and political aspirations of the rising middle class which later on became the capitalist class'. In the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, when the feudal system was cracking up, a new political system was taking its place. The establishment of the absolute nation-states in England and Europe gave birth to a kind of political system in which the authority of the king was absolute. The beginning of liberalism was a protest against the hierarchical and privileged authority and monarchy - a protest which involved every aspect of life. The main slogan of the protest was freedom - freedom from every authority which is capable of acting capriciously² and arbitrarily along with freedom of the individual to develop all of his potentialities as a human being endowed with reason. To achieve the liberty of the individual and to challenge the authority of the state, liberalism demanded liberty in every field of life: intellectual, social, religious, cultural, political and economic etc.

WHAT IS LIBERALISM?

Liberalism as a political and moral philosophy which is centred on two main principles - these are individualism and liberty. Firstly, liberalism places the individual at the heart of society and argues that the highest value social order is one that is built around the individual. Secondly, the purpose of society is to allow individuals to reach their full potential if they want to, and that the best way to do this is to give the individual as much liberty as possible. These two key principles are the foundations upon which the various elements of liberalism spring forth.

Liberalism is too dynamic and flexible a concept to be contained in a precise definition. Right from its inception, it has been continuously changing, adding something and discarding the other.

¹ The Renaissance was a period in European history marking the transition from the Middle Ages to Modernity

² capriciously: changing according to no discernible rules; unpredictable

By definition, a liberal is a man who believes in liberty, but because different men at different times have meant different things by liberty, "Liberalism" is correspondingly ambiguous. Explaining the difficulty of defining liberalism, **Hacker**, Writes, "Liberalism has become so common a term in vocabulary of politics that it is a brave man who will try to give it precise definition. It is a view of the individual, of the state, and of the relations between them." Laski Writes, What, then, is the liberalism we have here to discuss? "It is not easy to describe, much less to define, for it is hardly less a habit of mind than a body of doctrine." In the same fashion **Sartori** writes that a liberalism is "a concept so amorphous and changeable as to be left readily at the mercy of arbitrary stipulations." "Liberalism" is not a static creed or dogma, for dogmatism provides its own restraints. It is rather a tentative attitude towards social problems which stresses the role of reason and human ingenuity. On the basis of its changing tendencies, it has been called **negative and positive liberalism**. Sometimes it is associated with individualism, and at others with democracy or social democracy.

PRINCIPLES OF LIBERALISM

SOCIAL

1. liberalism is opposed to all artificial pressure as well as regulations on individual freedom
2. It believes that the traditions and institutions being outdated will have no relevance in the prosperity and development.

ECONOMICAL

1. In economic sphere liberalism supports free trade and production.
2. It vigorously oppose any restriction on imports and exports

POLITICAL

1. Liberalism has advocated the total restriction of state interference in the freedom of man
2. It is voice in favour of equality before law
3. It advocates freedom of thought and expression
4. It stands for secularism

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