

Paper : POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

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Liberalism

-Liberalism is the most important ideology of modern political theory. It emerged in the seventeenth century and continues to be the most widely followed ideology of the contemporary world.

-A number of influential ideas and forces of modern life like Limited State, Individual Autonomy, Globalization, Liberalization and Privatisation have sprouted from the soil of liberalism.

-The etymology of the word liberalism is from Liber that means liberty.

-The supporters of the Spanish Constitution in nineteenth century made the word popular by calling themselves as liberals.

-Liberalism chronologically had experienced **three major phases**.

-In its initial phase from the time of inception till the decade of the 1930 it was called as **Negative Liberalism**.

-The second phase termed as **Positive Liberalism** emerged after the Great Economic Depression and lasted up to 1970s.

-The third phase of Liberalism known as **Libertarianism** is what is being followed by major countries of the world for the last four decades.

1) Negative Liberalism

-The earliest form of liberalism, Negative Liberalism is also known by many names like *Laissez Faire* Liberalism and Classical Liberalism. John Locke in his books "Two Treatises of Civil Government" propounded the basic political principles of Negative Liberalism that came to be implemented vigorously in the United States of America.

-Thomas Paine, Montesquieu, Jeremy Bentham are the other important proponents of Negative Liberalism. Economically Adam Smith advocated Negative Liberalism in his book "An inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations".

Essence of Negative Liberalism

-The ideology of Negative Liberalism considers man as a rational, capable and masterless individual. All human beings are equal and free. Everyone knows their interests and is endowed with the capacity to satisfy their interests. Society is a mere aggregate of freely existing individuals. There is no necessity for state and society to interfere or regulate the life of individuals.

-The state is a **necessary evil**. It is necessary for the protection of law and order without which individuals can not realize their interests. But nevertheless state is an evil as even its mere existence itself endangers the rights and liberties of the individuals.

-The state is a negative state as it is prohibited from carrying out developmental activities. The state is called as **Laissez Faire State**. *Laissez Faire* has its origin in the French language meaning Leave Alone. The state must leave the individuals alone to pursue their activities. **Maintenance of law and order and enforcement of legally made contracts** are the only functions assigned to the state by Negative Liberalism.

- Locke says that the "state exists for the people who form it and not they are for it". Locke further claims that all true states must be founded on consent of the governed

-Economically Negative Liberalism supports free market economy based on demand and supply. It prohibits the state from interfering with the economic activities. **The state under negative liberalism is akin to a cricket umpire in its**

powers and functions. The umpire does not play the game but watches whether the players are playing the game in accordance with the laws of the game. Similarly the state should not interfere in the economy as market alone determines its activities.

-Negative Liberalism believes in the **concept of natural rights**. When mother nature created man it endowed him with basic rights that are called Natural Rights. The state should not erode or undermine these natural rights. The Rights to Life, Liberty and Property are very indispensable for human existence and development and therefore the state should never abolish or erode them.

- The Right to Property is very special to the proponents of Negative Liberalism. It is an unlimited right as all individuals can acquire, enjoy and dispose of property without interference from the state.

- John Locke said “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common. . . . God, when he gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labour, and the penury of his condition required it of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, i.e. improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour. He that in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him.”

- Negative Liberalism believes in negative liberty. The essence of liberty is the absence of restraints. Freedom from the state is the core of liberty in Negative Liberalism

- Negative Liberalism believes in the equality of human beings. It emphasizes on the legal and political dimensions of Equality

- Negative Liberalism advocated evolutionary changes. It is against revolutionary and radical transformation

2) Positive Liberalism

-Negative liberalism metamorphosed into Positive liberalism in the twentieth century.

-Even though Negative Liberalism contributed to the generation of unprecedented wealth in the western countries it had also inflicted enormous pain on common people.

-**Glaring inequalities among the people, appearance of slums in the cities and exploitation of the workers exposed the deficiencies of Negative Liberalism.** Humanist thinkers like Ruskin protested against misery of the people.

-In this backdrop Negative Liberalism changed into Positive Liberalism because of two important factors i.e. **Democracy and Marxism.**

-Nineteenth century witnessed the gradual **spread of democracy** whereby the common people came to be provided with voting rights. They demanded fundamental changes in polity.

-The second factor is the **advent and rise of Marxism** that appealed to the workers to overthrow the exploitative inequality laden Negative Liberalism. Subsequently, under pressure from democracy and Marxism, Negative Liberalism changed into Positive Liberalism

-The liberal world experienced a devastating **Great Economic Depression from 1928** affecting economies of numerous countries including United States of America. The newly elected American President Franklin Roosevelt implemented the New Deal Program for uplifting American economy from the quagmire of depression.

- **J.M.Keyne**, the Economic Advisor to American President played a crucial role in the formulation of the New Deal program signifying the advent of Positive Liberalism.

-A number of thinkers enriched the content of Positive Liberalism of which **T.H.Green, Harold Laski, L.T.Hodhouse** are very important.

- Positive Liberalism brought out the **new concept of Social Welfare State**. This concept projects the state as a positive instrument for the promotion of social welfare. The role of the state is to provide social services to the people.

-It should construct and maintain hospitals, educational institutions, factories and industries, infrastructural facilities like roads, railway tracks and ports. The state also come to be known as **Social Democratic State**, a nomenclature that explains the significance of democracy in the constitution of a positive State.

- “The liberal state maintains a neutrality among all these groups. Since multiplicity of groups and organisations and coexistence among them are the characteristic features of a liberal state any conflict or clash of interests can also be regarded as inevitable consequence. Here the question is: What would be the exact role of the state in this situation? The liberal state maintains utmost neutrality.”

- “Liberal state is never a one-idea state; it embraces multiplicity of ideas, views and existence of numerous groups and parties. This finally indicates a competition among them. Competition involved seizure of political power through constitutional means, legal procedure and democratic ways, competition in views and ideas.”

-The rights of the people can be modified so that welfare of the society can be promoted. Positive liberalism supports a close relationship between rights and duties and argues for Social Welfare theory of Rights.

- Similarly, freedom is positive in content. While Negative Liberalism expounded freedom from the state Positive Liberalism recommends freedom through the state.

-Freedom does not mean being free from the interference of the state but adhering to the social welfare activities of the state. **Freedom through the State and Not from the State is their theme.**

-The **economy must be regulated** by the state so that alternate, painful appearance of Economic Booms and Depressions can be averted. Progressive taxation can be adopted by the state to generate resources required for its social welfare activities.

-Similarly the state has power and authority to adhere to economic strategies like bank nationalization, minimum wages and reservation of industries as public sector to bring in the upliftment of all sections of society.

-It believed in the concept of **Social Welfare Rights**. The major objective of the rights is to promote social development and welfare and not individual welfare. Therefore, rights can be restricted, modified and curtailed to promote social welfare

- It advocated **Positive Liberty**. The availability of socio-economic conditions for the development of people is the essence of Liberty. It rejected the narrow interpretation of liberty as the absence of restraints and restrictions

-Positive Liberalism was followed in the western democracies for many decades from 1930s.

-But gradually philosophers and political leaders began to question the utility of a Social Welfare State propagated by Positive Liberalism.

-They argued that state interference in society and economy had precipitated a plethora of problems like industrial sickness, economic inefficiency, lessened productivity, corruption, erosion of liberties of people and economic stagnation therefore should be curtailed.

3) Libertarianism

-The third phase in the history of liberalism is called as **contemporary Liberalism or Libertarianism**.

-It emerged in the western world after the end of positive liberalism and gradually spread to most parts of the political universe.

-The President of the United States **Ronald Reagan** implemented libertarian ideology in his country from 1980 to 1988.

- The first woman Prime Minister of the United Kingdom **Margaret Thatcher** was the political architect of libertarianism.

-The last president of Soviet Union Michel Gorbachev introduced the two path breaking reforms of *Perestrioka* (Restructuring) and *Glasnost* (openness)that pushed the Soviet India into the direction of libertarianism .

-A number of political scientists have advocated libertarianism. **F.A.Hayek, M.Oakeshott, Karl Popper, Milton Friedman, Nozick and Nock** are important among the supporters of libertarianism.

-Libertarianism is a reinvention and reapplication of Classical Liberalism in the second half of twentieth century and in the first half of twenty first century. It believes in the worth and importance of individuals.

- It firmly advocates that individual freedom is indispensable for the life of man. It staunchly supports the concept of 'Personal Autonomy' whereby every human being is provided with complete freedom of choice to make decisions in their life as they want. It restricts the domain of the state to maintenance of law and order.

-Nozick famously coined the slogan "**Minimal State is inspiring as well as right**". He criticized any more functions of the state as unjustified and unwarranted.

-Albert Jay Nock in his book "Our Enemy, the State" says

"All the power [the State] has is what society gives it, plus what it confiscates from time to time on one pretext or another; there is no other source from which State power can be drawn. Therefore every assumption of State power, whether by gift or seizure, leaves society with so much less power."

"State power has an unbroken record of inability to do anything efficiently, economically, disinterestedly or honestly; yet when the slightest dissatisfaction arises over any exercise of social power, the aid of the agent least qualified to give aid is immediately called for."

Robert Nozick in his book "Anarchy, State, and Utopia" says

"The minimal state treats us as inviolate individuals, who may not be used in certain ways by others as means or tools or instruments or resources; it treats us as persons having individual rights with the dignity this constitutes. Treating us with respect by respecting our rights, it allows us, individually or with whom we choose, to choose our life and to realize our ends and our conception of ourselves, insofar as we can, aided by the voluntary cooperation of other individuals possessing the same dignity. How dare any state or group of individuals do more. Or less."

Another proponent of libertarianism Oakeshort commented that the "Government merely pursues peace".

The libertarians argue that the increase in the functions of the state in the name of development and social welfare leads inevitably to emergence of collectivism and resultant concentration of power in the hands of the state leading to the destruction of personal liberties of man. Karl Popper wrote the book "Open Society and its Enemies" condemning positive state and advocating minimal state and the unregulated competitive society.

For Further Studies

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3. IGNOU MA POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDY MATERIALS
4. Popper.Karl (1945) Open Society and its Enemies, London: Routledge