

## Liberalism

Liberalism is one of the major political traditions of the Western world and the prevailing political ideology in the United States. Liberals adopt numerous views depending on their understanding of these principles, but generally they support ideas and programmes such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free markets, civil rights, democratic societies, secular governments, and international cooperation.

Historical facts about liberalism:

Liberalism first emerged as a different political movement during the Age of Enlightenment. This became widespread among philosophers and economists in the West. Liberalism rejected the prevailing social and political customs of hereditary privilege, state religion, absolute monarchy, and the Divine Right of Kings. Liberalism can be traced back to John Locke. Locke was a 17th century English philosopher and political theorist. The 17th-century philosopher, Locke's *Two Dissertations of Government* is considered to be the first exposition of liberalism. Locke argues that legitimate political authority only comes from the consent of the governed. The purpose of the government, according to Locke, is to protect citizens' lives, liberty and property. Locke also sustained limited government and the idea of a separate executive branch, legislation and the rule of law.

In basic form, classical liberalism is a political ideology belonging to liberalism in which primary emphasis is placed on securing the freedom of the individual by limiting the power of the government. The philosophy emerged as a response to the Industrial Revolution and urbanization in the 19th century in Europe and the United States. It advocates civil liberties with a limited government under the rule of law, private property, and belief in laissez-faire economic policy.

Liberalism's dedication to free markets and capitalism can be found to Adam Smith, an 18th century Scottish moral philosopher who is most renowned for his work, *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith debated that effective way for a society to generate wealth and prosperity is through division of labour and decentralized decision-makers acting in their own interest. In other words, competitive free markets are feasible way to generate wealth for all.

Another crucial element of classical liberalism is economic liberalism. This principle was mostly provided by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. It was elaborated by philosophers that classical liberals advocate *Laissez-faire*, believing in the self-regulating of the market and the minimum of government intervention, which guarantees liberty of individuals and the prosperity of the market.

The philosophical reason of classical liberalism is supplemented by utilitarianism. It was suggested by Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and J.S. Mill. They believe that the goal of a society is to obtain "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". In achieving this goal, a representative government which upholds liberty is necessary.

Concept of liberalism:

Liberalism is a group of political, social and economic theories that centres on the values of individual liberty, equality, economic freedom, limited and democratic government and the rule of law.

Liberalism, from the Latin *liberalis*, is a broad political ideology or worldview originated from the ideas of liberty and equality. According to theorists, Liberalism is a political ideology whose main concern is to protect and enhance the liberty of individuals. As a political principle, liberalism did not emerge until the early nineteenth century. However, liberal thoughts and values had been developed through enormous social changes from the sixteenth century, and can even be traced back to as early as ancient Greece and Rome.

Some important liberties in modern liberal states include freedom of speech, press, religion and association. Liberalism holds that all individuals should have equal treatment before the law irrespective of social status, race or sex. Economic freedom is also closely related with liberalism and involves support for free markets and private property rights.

There are several common fundamentals shared by all variants of liberalism. Firstly, individualism; It reproduces the belief that human beings are primary individuals, rather than subjected to any collectively. Therefore, liberals aim to build a society in which individuals are provided the freedom to pursue his or her own good or happiness. Secondly, democratic or equality; however, as people have different aptitudes or abilities, liberals are enthusiastic to provide equal chances for everyone to realize their uneven potential.

Through reasoning, individuals can make intelligent judgments and resolve disagreements by the means of debate and discussion. A limited and democratic government is also important to liberalism. A limited government is one controlled by the law.

It is documented in vat literature that Liberalism is a political ideology whose main topic is a commitment to the individual and to the building of the society in which individuals can satisfy their interests or achieve fulfilment. The liberal conviction that human beings are, first and foremost, individuals, endowed with reason, suggests that each individual should enjoy the maximum possible freedom consistent with a like freedom for all.

Classical liberalism is a conviction in a 'minimal' state, whose function is limited to the maintenance of domestic order and personal security. Classical liberals stress that human beings are essentially self-interested and largely self-sufficient; as far as possible, people should be responsible for their own lives and circumstances. As an economic principle, classical liberalism admires the merits of a self-regulating market in which government intervention is seen as both unnecessary and damaging.

### Central features of liberalism

#### 1. Individualism:

Individualism is the central idea or theme of liberalism. It believes that the interests or welfare of the individual should be given primacy over all other values and principles. Individual is the basic concept of political theory and arrangements shall be made to safeguard his interest. Liberalism says that since a political system consists of individuals it should be the chief objective of this system to see that their interests are fully protected and the individuals are quite capable of doing their own job. The role of the state is to some extent like a night watchman.

## 2. Freedom:

Another important core value, principle or element of liberalism is freedom. To the liberals it is the value of supreme importance because without it the individual will simply be a unit without any dignity. Moreover, liberty or freedom is the best vehicle for developing the best qualities. But the liberals do not advocate for absolute or unrestricted freedom because freedom/liberty will do more harm.

## 3. Reason:

Liberalism harbours upon reason. To put it in other words, liberalism and reason are inseparable from each other. Liberalism partially the product of Enlightenment which strongly emphasises that man is rational being and guided by reason and rationality. The advent of Enlightenment emancipated man from age- old superstition, ignorance and bondage. Enlightenment also established the age of reason. Since individuals are rational and reasonable they are quite capable of taking any decision and to judge what is good and what is bad for them. In that case there is no necessity of imposing any decision by any outside power/authority.

The liberals believe that real progress of society could be achieved only through the individual initiative and outside interference will dampen the spirit of initiative.

## 4. Toleration:

Toleration is another value/element of liberalism. In any society there is found different opinions, religious sects or communities of belief and faith. All of them must live side by side peacefully and for this is required toleration. Also various ideologies and opinions make a society diverse. It is the basic feature of any society. Liberalism believes that all these diversities must exist side by side.

#### 5. Consent:

Consent is another value/element of liberalism. The idea of consent though very old, its modern appearance took place in the hands of the contractualists, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Both of them assertively argued that the members of the state of nature assembled together to take a decision about the setting up of a body politic and behind this decision there was the consent of all. Locke dealt elaborately with consent and this was one of the pillars of his liberalism.

The liberal thinkers even go a step ahead and declare that every law and policy must be based on the consent of those for whom these are made. That is, consent of all or majority must constitute the basic structure of society.

#### 6. Constitutionalism:

Constitutionalism is an important principle/value/element of liberalism. It has two meanings—narrow and broad. In its narrow meaning constitutionalism means certain limitations upon the government specified by constitution. The narrow meaning further states that whenever a government intends to discharge any function or adopt a policy it must follow the restrictions.