

Liberalism

There are numerous ways to define liberalism such as classical liberalism and modern liberalism. The features of liberalism have been highlighted herein. All tenants of liberal thought- from individualism, tolerance, social contract, and constitutionalism to democracy, rationality, reason, and free market emphasize individual liberty.

- Individualism is the central concept of liberalism. It holds that individual rights shall take precedence over all other principles and beliefs.
- Individuals are equal, intelligent, moral, and autonomous, capable of establishing their sense of what is good, according to liberals.
- According to Immanuel Kant, individuals are “ends in themselves, not merely means to another's will.”
- Liberalism rejects unfettered and arbitrary power. God's divine might, charisma, or historical needs do not provide authority. The goal of authority is to assist the political entity in achieving its objectives.

Liberalism - Origin and Evolution

Major liberal thinkers are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Charles de Montesquieu, Thomas Gordon, Voltaire, Adam Smith, and Immanuel Kant, among many others.

- The fall of feudalism marked the beginning of the era of liberalism. While the feudal period saw a greater control of the Church, the post-feudal era tried to limit the role of the Church and the State.
- Enlightenment contributed to the emergence of liberalism. Intellectuals were vociferous in their advocacy for the logical rebuilding of society for individuals to enjoy sufficient freedom.
- The Magna Carta (1215), Glorious Revolution (1688), Declaration of American Independence (1776), French Revolution (1789), and the Declaration of the Rights of the Man (1789) further fueled the growth of liberalism.

Features of Liberalism

Liberals care about religious tolerance and freedom of conscience. They are against religious monopolies. The sacred and the secular, according to John Locke, are two distinct realms. The features of liberalism has been elaborated here-

- Liberalism regards each individual as equal and unique. Therefore, liberalism promotes diversity, tolerance, and multiculturalism.

- As a product of Enlightenment, liberalism believes in the concept of “the age of reason,” highlighting the liberation of humankind from superstition and ignorance.
- “Just as the King is Law in absolute governments, the Law should be King in free countries, and there should be no other,” according to Thomas Paine.
- Liberals see the State as a threat to individual liberty. Hence, they believe in limiting its powers through a constitution, the rule of law, and the separation of powers. The government that governs the least is the best.
- They believe in a free-market economy. Classical liberals even believe in a “laissez-faire” economy.

To sum up, liberalism, they would say that it is a political philosophy built upon the idea of liberty.

Types of Liberalism

The liberal theory focuses on the individuals safeguarding their moral and human rights. In accordance with this theory, the State must provide a conducive environment for prospering of the human rights and not intervene. There are different types of liberalism such as the positive liberalism, negative liberalism, and neoliberalism.

Positive Liberalism- It focuses on the factors such as the impeccable balance between liberty, equality and economic freedom is to be focused. The State must not be considered a “necessary evil” but as an institution established for the welfare of the public. It reinstates the essentiality of moral freedom, Public good and distributive justice etc.

Negative Liberalism- It focuses on the factors such as the State being a “necessary evil”. It also establishes the concept of a self-centered individual. It also focuses on “Laissez-faire” as a medium of economic prosperity.

Neoliberalism- It reinstates the meaning of liberty as the restraint from coercion. The economic liberty also involves and comprises political liberty. Neoliberalism does not establish any relation between the liberty, justice and equality.

Liberalism In India

Liberalism in India has been nurtured through numerous developmental stages such as through the ancient theory that emphasized Earthly life. This theory also laid emphasis on materialism. Liberalism in India has made its way through numerous social reforms. Liberalism in India focuses on and emphasizes social and economic growth through minimal Government interference.

The idea of liberalism is based on restraining the Government from exhibiting uncontrolled power. Liberalism advances to promote individualism and equality.

Theory of Classical Liberalism

The theory of classical liberalism is being incorporated into a doctrine of politics after the French Revolution in the 16th to 18th centuries. This theory lays its emphasis on restricting and constraining the powers of the States.

- It focuses on egotism, self-reliance, and self-accountable. It reinstates that the interference of the State is needless and harmful.
- The doctrine of classical liberalism focuses on the self-operating market.
- Classical liberalism focuses on the non-interference of the State in human rights to safeguard them from political breaches.

Theory of Modern Liberalism

The lack of equal accessibility led to the creation of a wide disparity between the poor and the riches. The open market economy brought forth more profit for the States and a depleted economy for the poor. The enormous supply surplus and no consumption lead to the fall of the economy. Modern liberalism is another way to define liberalism. It focuses on the following factors-

- Equal accessibility and chances for all individuals regardless of their gender, identity, race.
- The State's interference must be channelized and restricted to promote equality and accessibility for all individuals.
- It also reinstates the essentiality of individualism and not egotism.
- Providing freedom of speech and expression.

