

Growth of Liberalism in England during the Nineteenth Century

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt in denying the fact that Liberalism has its roots in several sources. It mainly drew its inspiration from English century radical Whig tradition and their source in commonwealth men. The philosophical ideals propounded from Bentham through John Stuart Mill provided some active debates in the form of liberal periodicals and books including the parliamentary commissions and other bodies. During the nineteenth century, the economic school of economics provided some Liberal tenets witnessed in Anti-Com Law League. On the one hand, historians perceived support for foreign self-determination as the sign of English Liberalism, but on the other hand, modern historian found the paradox that the constituencies for English liberalism were the oppressed people of the Celtic Fringe. In parliament Celtic support for liberalism was clear with the Irish Nationalist members seated with the Whigs and Radical.

The eighteenth century had been prolific of men and great in individual energies, but its corporate and institutional life had been lethargic. The nineteenth century, on the other hand, not only put fresh democratic vigour in parliament, municipalities, church, universities, schools and civil services, but created a wealth of new organisms, public and private, dealing with every department of life.

It is an established fact that England was the first nation to adopt the liberal ideas and attitudes. During the seventeenth century, there was a constant constitutional conflict between the parliament and the king of England which came to an end with the Glorious Revolution of 1688. After the Glorious Revolution, after the anarchy, there was established a constitutional rule. Besides, the superiority of the parliament was also established in the country, but the real constitutional freedom had not been achieved. People of the country did not get political rights which resulted into the liberal ideas among the people. Consequently, they started demanding social and parliamentary reforms, and the government managed to get passed various acts and certain other social laws.

It is very difficult to describe the term, Liberalism as we can witness changes in its perspective from time to time. That is why, it has been interpreted and explored by different scholars and critics as per their taste, temperament and angle of perception. While, some scholars find liberalism as man's state of mind, but some other consider it as an ideology. There are some who compare liberalism to individualism, but on the other hand, some find Liberalism as the form of democratic socialism. According to Laski, "Liberalism is the expression less of a trend rather than a temperament. It implies a passion for liberty; and that the passion may be compelling. It requires a power to be tolerant." One another scholar, David. G. Smith "Liberalism is a belief in a set of methods and policies that have as their common aim greater freedom for individual man."

Beginning of Liberalism

Liberalism came into existence as a strong reaction against feudalism and excessive domination of church. It was mainly inspired by the religious improvement movement. As a result of that, there was an expansion of humanistic ideas and all the obstacles in the way of human development were eliminated. At that time, individuals were under many social

and political boundation and restrictions. In order to remove these restrictions, many social reformers tried their best. They emphasized on secularism and freedom to think which they found necessary for man's development in every field. They strongly advocated that there should not monopoly of one particular ideology or class that hampers the growth of development.

Growth of Liberalism in England

The word Liberalism was first used in Spain in 1791 where the liberal group wanted to implement the constitution of 1791 of France, but the liberal system was not fully in existence. In politics, the word liberal was used for the first time in Spain. In England, this word came into use in 1816 when there were two groups: Tory and Whig. The Tory group members used to call the members of Whig party as liberal and also criticized as well. Later on, when the Whig party was constituted, it was called as liberal party, but if seen from the other angle, Liberalism was not started all of a sudden in England. It is believed that it originated between the glorious revolution of 1688 and the parliamentary reform act of 1867. The following factors contributed in the beginning of liberalism in England which are as follow:

1. **Events Before the Glorious Revolution:** in 1215, an incident in England took place which is known as the milestone in the history of its development. Feudal lords of England compelled the ruler of England, John to sign what they were demanding which is known as 'Magna Carta'. Although according to this bill, only the rights of feudal lords were protected and the power of the ruler got weak. In 1485, the emergence of Tudor family was also the main reason behind the development of liberalism in England.

2. **The Glorious Revolution of 1688:** in 1688, James second was forced by the people of England to escape from England without any bloodshed, and in 1689, Mary and William were crowned as the successors. In the history of England, it is known as glorious revolution. After that, with the bill of right, the power of the rulers was limited and confined, and parliament was given the prime importance.

3. Impact of American and French Revolution on

Liberalism: Liberalism was also affected by two revolutions in America and France in 1783, when America got freedom after defeating England, and then there was an establishment of democratic constitution according to the principles of Liberalism. It left a deep and profound impact on the minds of people of England. Thomas Pen, who wrote the book, rights of man, was also deeply influenced by the French Revolution who emphasized on the natural rights of man.

4. Influence of Theories of Adam Smith and Jeremy

Bentham: Adam Smith is generally hailed as a great scholar and philosopher. He wrote a book, wealth of nation in the eighteenth century. He was against all the restriction put on the trade and strongly advocated the policy of open trade that will be beneficial for the world. This ideology helped in the progression of liberal values. Jeremy Bentham was also one of the leading philosophers of 18th century. He founded the ideology of utilitarianism which meant the welfare of more and more people. He said that to make rules and principles for the welfare of people is the work of state. Utilitarianism emphasized on the individual liberty. Many laws and acts were passed by the politicians of England for the welfare of masses.

Liberalism in the 19th Century

As an ideology and in practice liberalism became the preeminent reform movement in Europe during the 19th century. Its fortunes, however, varied with the historical conditions in each country—the strength of the crown, the élan of the aristocracy, the pace of industrialization, and the circumstances of national unification. The national character of a liberal movement could even be affected by religion. Liberalism in Roman Catholic countries such as France, Italy, and Spain, for example, tended to acquire anticlerical overtones, and liberals in those countries tended to favour legislation restricting the civil authority and political power of the Catholic clergy.

In Great Britain the Whigs had evolved by the mid-19th century into the Liberal Party, whose reformist programs became the model for liberal political parties throughout Europe. Liberals propelled the long campaign that abolished Britain's slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself throughout the British dominions in 1833. The liberal project of broadening the franchise in Britain bore fruit in the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867, and 1884–85. The sweeping reforms achieved by Liberal Party governments led by William Gladstone for 14 years between 1868 and 1894 marked the apex of British liberalism.

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