

Discipline Courses-I

Semester-I

**Lesson: Traditions in Political Theory: Liberalism 2
Liberalism Journey Ahead : Some Challenges**

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Traditions in Political Theory : Liberalism 2

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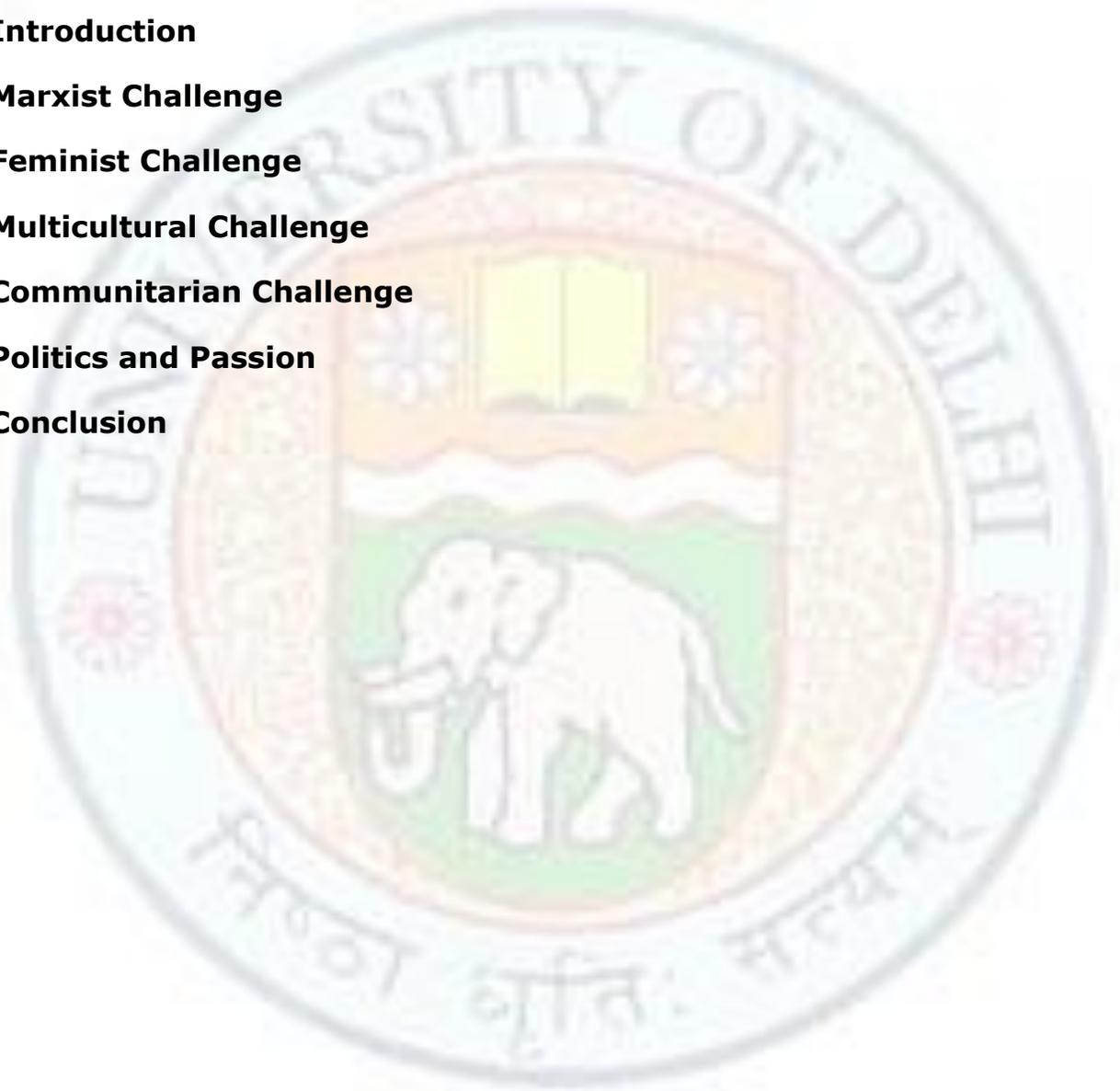
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Introduction :

In the late twentieth and twenty first century challenges to Liberalism came from various quarters that make the history of Liberal politics complicated and conflictual. Moreover the central themes of Liberalism were questioned and debate started between Liberals and various others. However the debate enriched Liberalism in a number of ways because in the process of responding to various challenges Liberalism undertook the task of incorporating those challenges, and broadening the conceptual parameters of Liberalism .Let's discuss some important challenges to Liberal ideas.

Marxist Challenge :

Marxist challenged the heart of liberal theory, its views on abstract individual and instead laid stress on social and historical nature of human beings. According to Marxist human beings need food, clothing and shelter in order to survive, thus the social nature of humans arise from biological necessities. Unlike animals they need to produce to meet their needs, which is a social activity and it depends on knowledge, skill and experience which is a social product. The way production is organized in any society conditions social, political and intellectual life. Human beings are determined by their material conditions and so is their position in social relations. Human interests are not defined subjectively by the autonomous individual, but are determined by the individual's position in the reproduction of social relations and are defined objectively in class terms. (Maureen Ramsay, 2004:22) Individual as member of classes do not always pursue their interests in rational ways because ruling class in addition to its economic dominance maintains its power through the control of the beliefs, values, and ideas of the subordinate class. Thus far from being the best judge of their own interests' individuals can have mistaken beliefs. Moreover humans are not just utility maximizers but are encouraged to act like this by the forces of capitalism that works for profit. State in this system also works like an instrument of oppression wielded by the economically dominant class.

Marxism's emphasis on the social and historical nature of humans provides a challenge to the Liberal idea of abstract individual, Freedom and State.

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Marxism

For most of the modern period Marxism, theory that derives inspiration from the writings of Karl Marx emerged as the principal alternative to Liberalism. Materialist conception of History is the most important Marxian analysis. Marxism defines the importance of economic life and condition under which people produce their means of subsistence reflected in the belief that economic base consisting of economic system determines the ideological and political 'superstructure'. Marxist attack Liberal view of individual and its narrow concern with civil and political rights on the ground that it ignores social and historical developments and thereby

Feminist Challenge :

Many strands of Feminism have in common the idea that the relationship between the sexes is unequal and oppressive. According to them distinction of gender structure every aspect of public and private existence and is also expressed by theory of patriarchy. Patriarchy literally means 'rule by the father' signifying social system based on male power and female subordination. Traditional power structures like the State, family are dominated by male traits and characteristics. This is further maintained by economic exploitation of women at work and economic dependency of women in home. The patriarchal power of men over women extends beyond the political and economic sphere; it permeates every aspect of cultural, social and personal life. "Patriarchal ideas are reinforced by the male control of knowledge, language, morality, religion and culture which structures attitudes and beliefs about what is normal, natural, superior or important"(Maureen Ramsay,2004 :29) The state is also not a neutral arbiter but it is systematically biased against women. Liberal Theory obscures how questions of family, sexuality, gender, housework, reproduction, knowledge, and language are political questions (Maureen Ramsay, 2004:29) Feminist challenge Liberal idea of abstract individual and notion of autonomy. Liberals

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fails to recognize the significance of gender differences and in the process champion a conception of personhood that represents male traits and characteristics.

Feminism

Feminist political thought is primarily concerned with issue of subordination of women and explores the ways through which this can be challenged. Feminist theory and practice is highly diverse and thus apart from Liberal, socialist and radical feminism its recent forms include black feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, eco feminism and postmodern feminism.

Multicultural Challenges :

Multiculturalism refers to cultural diversity in the society arising from existence of different groups whose beliefs and practices generate distinctive sense of collective identity. It also implies positive endorsement of cultural diversity and right of different cultural groups to recognition and respect. Today different groups demand a more inclusive conception of citizenship which "recognizes (rather than stigmatizes) their identities and which accommodates (rather than excludes) their difference. (Will Kymlicka, 2002:327) They argue that the common rights of citizenship cannot accommodate the needs of other groups. According to this view members of certain groups would be incorporated into the political community not only as individual but also through the group and their rights would depend in part on their group membership.

Multiculturalism emphasizes status as well as economic inequalities. Thin Multiculturalism view all cultural differences as disagreement between groups on Liberal Values but Thick Multiculturalism view some cultural differences also as difference between Liberals and non Liberals.

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Will Kymlicka a Canadian political philosopher who has written extensively on multiculturalism argues that, if Liberals care about equality then they should recognize the importance of cultural identity to individual autonomy and support group specific rights. However there can be different forms of group rights. Kymlicka defends the rights of National minorities which may enjoy representation rights up to those of full self government, and ethnic groups formed through immigration are entitled only to "polyethnic rights". Kymlicka's main works include Liberalism, Community and Culture (1989) and Multicultural Citizenship (1995)

Focus on

In globalized world people move across borders for variety of reasons. This definitely has an impact on their personality and understanding of self. The person might refuse to think of himself as defined by his location, or his citizenship or even his language and sometimes religion. He may live in Bombay and be of Italian ancestry, learns Hindi, eats Indian cuisine, wears clothes made in U.S.A. listens to rock music, follow Indian politics, works for M.N.C and practices Art of living mediation techniques. He is living in 21st century where world is a global village. For this individual or for many individuals like him in this world is there any human yearning or need to belong to his cultural group. but the reverse side of the picture is that in the process of adapting and transforming his culture would the same individual accept the pressure to abandon his group life entirely and assimilate into the larger society. Would he accept the discriminatory attitude of the agencies of the state because he belongs to a group which is non dominant in society?

Communitarian Challenge :

Communitarians criticize Liberalism for presenting individual as asocial, atomized, solitary and self seeking. Sandel (1982), Taylor (1990), Walzer (1983) and Macintyre (1981, 1988, 1990) have attacked the liberal idea of independent individual detached from all social roles. Walzer asks, "Can we really imagine individual without any involuntary ties at all, unbound by class

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ethnicity, religion, race or gender, unidentified, utterly free". (Michael Walzer, 2004: 14) They reject the concept of abstract individual/unencumbered self because it is impossible to conceive of an individual having experience, beliefs, desires or emotions without presupposing a social context which interpret and give meaning to our experiences. Desires do not just spontaneously occur within the individual but the very fact of wanting or preferring presupposes a social context.

They also challenge the idea that society is a collection of private individuals because the individual is not detached from other but is partly constituted by their social identities. If individual meaning, identities and interests are inherently communal then Liberal claims and values cannot apply universally because different cultures embody different values. what count as rational will be relative and internal to particular communities and their social practices.

While liberalism is based on the idea of "right is prior to good" and each individual has right to define and seek her own good. Communitarians believe that political structure play important role in defining rights and condition to seek the good. It is the role of the state to seek those community practices that encourage the development of human excellence. According to communitarians social disintegration, moral disaster, crime, drug abuse, violence and breakdown of institutions like family prevalent in modern liberal state is more or less because of liberal ideas of autonomous individual, socially disconnected being concerned only with their rights. Criticizing liberalism Michael Sandel refers to its failure to note our embeddedness in a particular time, place and culture. Liberal emphasis on freedom and autonomy of individual is questioned by communitarians because due to some inability like illness, mental impairment, or immaturity many adult humans are not able to make autonomous choices. Apart from autonomy there are some other values like preservation of social bonds, culture, safety that must be given due importance by the state. Liberal idea of autonomous individual pursuing its idea of good independent of cultural tradition and social roles is illusionary and ridiculous. For communitarians conception of reason disconnected from social tradition means operating in a vacuum it is important to engage in discourse tied to social practices that also constitute goal of the community.

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Communitarians believe that the value of community is not sufficiently recognized in Liberal Theory. Communitarians object to neutral state and prefer the notion of 'politics of common good'. In a Liberal society the common good is the result of a process of combining preferences all of which are counted equally but in a communitarian society the common good is conceived of as a substantive conception of good life which defines the community's way of life.

In every society people are born as members of some very important groups Christians or Hindus, white or black born with identities male or female and so on and many of their subsequent associations also express these underlying identities which again are not so much chosen as enacted. All these groups continue to exist and give shape and purpose to the lives of their members.

Could you imagine children being taught the values of individuality, autonomy, self realization, free choice, risk taking in personal and political engagements enjoying adventures, being courageous or religious as commands----- choose freely, be autonomous.

Perhaps No! They are best conveyed in form of narratives or stories about how a society of free individuals was created. This is how Communitarians criticize the idea of unencumbered self.

Focus On

In a multicultural society, some of the practices of the communities offend against the values of the majority. It cannot tolerate all the practices indiscriminately because on the one hand it has to raise its voice against morally outrageous practices on the other safeguard the integrity of its own moral culture and unity and stability of the polity.

- Muslim girls wearing hijab or heads scarf in schools. Although it is allowed in most western countries, it continues to arouse varying degrees of opposition in some of them.

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- Sikhs refused to wear helmets and wear their traditional turban when driving motor cycles or doing dangerous work on building sites, to take off their turbans when taking oaths in court or bowing before the speaker in house of commons, and to shave off their beards when working in places that involve handling of food.
- Requests by Hindu to be allowed to cremate their deceased on a funeral pyre scatter the ashes in rivers or flowing water and in rare cases to drown rather than cremate their corpses.
- Female circumcision
- Polygamy
- Muslim & jewish method of slaughtering animals

Politics and Passion :

Recognizing the important fact that society is not just a collection of individuals but also of the important groups of which individuals are members and that constitute who they are? Walzer in his book Politics and Passion defines his aim "to point provocatively to the whole range of issues raised by deficiencies of what I will be calling standard Liberalism" (Michael Walzer,2004 : xiv)

Michael Walzer

Michael Walzer's major works include Sphere of Justice(1983), Interpretation and social criticism (1987),Politics and Passion (2004).Rejecting Universal Theory of justice Walzer defends principle of 'complex equality' according to which different rules should apply to the distribution of different social goods , establishing separate spheres of justice.

What is passion and how important passion is in political life. Opponents of this associate it with actions of people that leads them to behave them in ways that can't be predicted by any rational account of interests. Passion knows no limit and sweeps interests, principles, debates and associated with impetus whereas politics in its Liberal and reasonable version is a matter of calm deliberation.

In many parts of the world people are politically and passionately engaged, they are not fighting to promote their economic interests but their

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identity and faith. It also involves terrible conflict in society where some groups are targeting the 'other' under passion. Referring to hierarchy of civil society, politics of social conflict, problem of cultural marginality Walzer argues "Liberalism in its standard contemporary version is an inadequate theory and a disabled political practice" (Michael Walzer, 2004: xi)

Liberalism has failed to acknowledge the importance of many involuntary association and existing inequality within them. Moreover Liberal emphasis on reasonableness ignores the role of passion in political life. Walzer argues "Social structures and political orders that sustain inequality cannot be actively opposed without a passionate intensity that Liberals do not (for good reasons) want to acknowledge or accommodate. (Michael Walzer, 2004: xii) Inequality in society is not just between individuals but it also refers to the group and affects them differently.

Walzer asks "What is our mind's picture of the place of passion in political life"(Michael Walzer,2004 :111) Passion is associated with the other and with the standard distinction of good and bad where bad passion are with 'other' because with this understanding worst people only have beliefs, doctrines, dogmas. Walzer argues "to associate passionate intensity with ignorance is a common mistake" (Michael Walzer, 2004:114) any strong emotional commitment is taken to be dangerous. " Terrorists and murderers whatever their passionate intensity are also driven by conviction that is by strong idea about the world" (Michael Walzer,2004 :117) Even if these derive from religion or political belief and the intellectual standards of terrorists and murderers are considered as low but they also take their lead from people like Marx, Rousseau, Neitzsche.

Referring to passion it is necessary to understand that political activists must be passionately engaged "or else they will lose every struggle for political power" (Michael Walzer, 2004: 118) "Nothing great was ever achieved wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson without enthusiasm" (Michael Walzer, 2004: 118)

Passionate activity is mostly associated with enraged and resentful mob or religious fanatics excited and passionately looking to shed the blood of their enemies. But this kind of understanding according to Walzer only focuses on the risk of passion and not at all on the risk of reason. The people who challenge the established social order in different times and at different

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places be it the workers demonstrating for the right to strike or better wages or to have their organization or civil right activists fighting for right to information or Feminist agitators fighting for women empowerment are driven by passion. "What we see in all of them is conviction energized by passion and passion restrained by conviction" (Michael Walzer, 2004: 120)

Politics has mostly to do with people who have both conviction and passion, reason and enthusiasm in always unstable combination (Michael Walzer,2004 :120) Moreover though passion is mostly identified with women in religious and secular discourse but in political sphere women are excluded. It is passion that leads to different behavioral patterns for example aristocrat's passion is for glory and for some others passion for enjoyment leads them to act mostly within the constraints of law and order because they understand they could enjoy only if there is peace.

Liberals recognize politics of competing interests and the resultant conflict but it stop well short of civil war and implicitly the passion of affiliation. "If a politics ruled entirely by conviction is difficult to imagine, a politics ruled by interest is easy to imagine. This is the form that Liberalism actually takes in the World, it is by recognizing interests that Liberalism accommodates itself to passion—while still excluding the fiercer forms of attachment and struggle" (Michael Walzer,2004 :123)

In recent years' identity and empowerment politics is being criticized because it is believed class politics makes for rational political behavior and associate people on the basis of their common economic interests whereas ethnicity rests on blood and birth and thus it represents collective and irrational passion. According to Walzer "movement for national liberation and racial and gender justice made rational appeals to the larger world and imposed moral constraints on their own activists. So the dichotomy of interest and passion is probably of even less use in doing that than dichotomy of good and bad is". Passionate intensity is not exclusively associated with the actions of the 'other' but is evident in the actions of both sides.

Competition for power is the primary form of political life. Various groups are also part of conflict of interests in politics. In this political scenario the role of each individual is to decide which group to join, which is that particular group with which individual involves emotional, moral and

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material commitment. The group's program can be a mix of many elements and so is its different members who may have different conviction, interests and of course passion. Thus Walzer writes, "No political party that sets itself against the established hierarchies of power and wealth, no movement for equality or national liberation, for emancipation or empowerment will ever succeed unless it arouses the affiliative and combative passion of the people at the lower end of the hierarchies". (Michael Walzer, 2004: 130) Passion also includes anger at injustice, sense of solidarity against anti hierarchical forces this may be the reason for Walzer to say that "We also have good reason not to surrender too quickly to anxiety". (Michael Walzer, 2004:130)

Conclusion :

Individual with rights which is a central theme of Liberalism is also individual with emotions and they have the affiliative passions that are part of their practical attachment. To strengthen individual this needs to be respected as well. Concluding this chapter we may agree with Walzer "As individual men and women, none of us are fully autonomous and none of us are fully integrated into and bound by any of our group. We are each unique, one and only one and we are at the same time tied closely to specific others in ways we sometimes resist sometimes embrace. We need a political theory and a politics as complicated as our lives". (Michael Walzer, 2004: 140)

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Exercise :

1. Liberalism is a justificatory ideology for capitalism. Analyze with reference to Marxist critique of Liberalism?
2. How do communitarians criticize Abstract Individual of Liberalism?
3. Does Liberalism ignore role of passion in Politics. Discuss with reference to ideas of Walzer?
4. The Liberal individual and State are essentially patriarchal construct. Do you agree with the feminist critique of Liberalism?



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