

Congruency of Liberty and Equality: A conceptual study

Dr. Nanjundamurthy

*Assistant Professor of Political Science, Government First Grade College, Yedyur, Jayanagara,
Bangalore-560070*

Abstract - Equality and Liberty are considered to be two faces of the same coin. Liberty is not possible if there is no equality in the society. Where there is no equal protection of law, the liberty of one person invariably means, bondage of the other person. Therefore, understanding the correlation between, these two important concepts is essential. This paper attempts to understand the different facets of Liberty and equality and their inter-relationship. Defining liberty in precise words or sentences is difficult because the meaning of liberty differs from person to person. For an industrialist, liberty means freedom to establish any type of industry as he wishes and allowing him or her to earn as much profit as possible, but for workers, liberty means freedom from being exploited in the factory. The etymology of liberty clarifies this dichotomy. The term liberty is derived from a Latin word 'Liber', which means 'freedom'. Therefore, in congruency, liberty means absence of all restraints and freedom to do anything as per their discretion. But on the other hand, it is not possible to have such absolute liberty in a society, because, man being a social animal, he must observe certain set of rules and regulations, without which, it would lead to survival of the fittest concept. Hence it is said, social life means regulated life. Similar way, equality means, that all men are equal and hence, they deserve identity of treatment. The advocates of such type of absolute equality assert that all men are born equal and nature has willed them to remain so. It is an essential equal right of man. This appears to be a paper tiger as we witness non-egalitarian society in reality. Therefore as pointed out by Prof. Sartorii "Liberty and Equality has so many facets and so many implications that after we have studied it from all angles, we are left with a feeling of not having really mastered it". Hence an attempt has been made in this paper to have conceptual clarity on liberty and equality.

Index Terms - Liberty, Freedom, Dignity of life, Equality, Society.

INTRODUCTION

Man being a social animal, must live in society to fulfill most of his desires. While living with others we

have to observe a set of common rules of behavior as completely unregulated life and behavior would create total anarchy and chaotic condition in the society. Therefore, social life is synonyms with regulated and restricted life. While living in society man must adjust his liberty with due regard to the liberty of others. Hence restrictions on the activities of all to protect the equal right of every individual is essential as it ensures protection to all and liberty to everybody. Therefore, liberty means the right to do anything, without harming the freedom of others. To quote here Prof. Herbert Spencer words: "Every man is free to do what he wills, provided he does not intrigue the equal freedom of any other man". Liberty is a two-dimensional concept. One it has a positive shade and the other one, is negative of course. Negative liberty implies the absence of restraints and maximum freedom of action. The individual must be left alone as long as he does not interfere with his fellow beings. Positive liberty means that the state creates those conditions which help man to develop his personality to the fullest extent. As Laski quotes, positive liberty is the eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which the men have the opportunity to be their best selves. There can be no liberty without rights, liberty does not simply mean the obedience of laws. Laws will protect the rights of all, and the state should guarantee all those rights which man needs for the development of his personality. Liberty is created by the guarantee of rights.

KINDS OF LIBERTY

There are five forms of liberty. They are (a) Natural (b) Civil (c) Political (d) Economic (e) National. A brief description of these five forms of liberty is stated as follows.

Natural liberty means unlimited and unrestrained freedom. This type of liberty was enjoyed by man before the state came into being as there were no rules and regulations expect the law of nature. All

individuals were at liberty to do whatever they liked. Rousseau was the main advocate of this. Though conceptually this natural liberty appears to be better, in reality, such liberty is not possible.

Civil liberty is the liberty enjoyed by man in the society. It is not unlimited and absolute. It is restricted as well as protected by laws. The state, through its agent government, maintains and safeguards the enjoyment of civil liberty. If any individual overrides the liberty of other he or she will be punished. An individual is permitted to do whatever he likes, but within the limits set by the law.

Political liberty is also known as constitutional liberty. Political liberty means the rights enjoyed by the citizens to constitute and control the government. Through their right to vote, citizens constitute and controls the government. Therefore, political liberty ensures citizens participating in formation and controlling of government. Hence Gilchrist names political liberty as democracy.

Economic liberty ensures reasonable material security. It is the freedom from want and freedom from fear. Civil and political liberties became meaningless in the absence of economic liberty. If people suffer from starvation and unemployment, then civil and political liberty have no relevance. Right to work, right to an adequate wage, right to reasonable hours of work, leisure, right to social insurance like old age, sickness, disablement, unemployment insurance comes under the ambit of economic liberty.

National liberty implies freedom or independency from foreign control and domination. Every nation has the right to regulate its national life according to its own will. No cultural, social, economic, and political development is possible, if a nation is under the foreign control.

EQUALITY: MEANING AND ITS TYPES

Equality means that all men are equal and hence they deserve identity of treatment. Equality is an essential natural right of man. But in reality, achieving absolute liberty is impossible, because men by nature are unequal. Some men are physically strong, some are weak. No two individuals are identical. Therefore, ensuring equality between men is as good as describing that land surface is perfectly flat, which is not possible. However, according to Prof. Laski “equality is an attempt to give each man as similar a

chance as possible to utilize what power he may possess. Equality simply means the absence of special privileges. All barriers of birth, wealth, caste, and sex should be removed in social and political life. So that the differential treatment is removed.” In other words, equality implies providing adequate opportunities for self-development to all. Since men differ in their needs and capacities, they require different opportunities for their development. Hence the state should provide suitable opportunities to all for the development of their personalities depending on their faculties.

Lord Bryce has categorized equality into five types. They are (a) Civil (b) Political (c) Social (d) Natural (e) Economic. Let us understand these.

Civil equality means equality of civil rights and liberty for all the citizens. There should be no difference in the treatment of law. All are equal before the law. The rich and poor, the high and low should be treated alike. Both protection and punishment to all individual should be alike. All citizens possess equal rights. In protecting the rights no distinction should be made between man and man on the basis of social status, religious faith or political opinion. People enjoy civil equality when the similar civil rights and liberties are given to all.

Political equality means equal political rights and privileges to all citizens. It implies right to vote, right to contest in the election, right to hold public office and criticizing the government. All citizens without any discrimination, should have equal voice in the affairs of the government. This implies democracy and universal adult franchise.

Social equality believes in classless society. It means removing all kinds of caste and class distinctions. It does not accept any difference in the social status of man. All should have equal status. All are equally useful members of society and possess equal rights. No class or group is entitled to any special privilege on the ground of caste, colour, creed, place of birth or religion. It is to be noted that in India, there is no social equality because the Indians believe in caste system, which is negation of social equality.

Natural equality means absence of artificial or man-made inequalities. No doubt natural inequalities cannot be removed but artificial inequalities created by man can be removed. Laws should not create inequalities on the basis of natural inequalities. The state should reduce the disadvantages arising from

natural inequalities by providing social and economic opportunities to the weak.

Economic equality implies removal of gross inequalities of wealth and certain leveling of incomes. According to Lord Bryce “Economic equality is the attempt to expunge all difference in wealth, allotting to every man and woman an equal share in worldly goods”, but such an absolute economic equality is neither possible to attain nor desirable. Economic equality does not mean that all should have the same income because human wants differ and with it the individual capacity to people should have an adequate opportunity for earning a certain minimum standard or income.

CONGRUENCY BETWEEN LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

There is a clear dichotomy in the opinion about relationship between Liberty and Equality. Political thinkers like Lord Acton and De Tocqueville are of the opinion that liberty and equality are in contrast with each other. Lord Acton says that “the passion for equality made vain the hope of freedom”. Great inequalities of wealth made enjoyment of liberty impossible for the unfortunate many. Those who are wealthy and control the government use their authority to the detriment of the poor. Therefore, in the larger interest of society, imposing certain reasonable restrictions on individual freedom is necessary. Thus, liberty by nature is limited. Everyone should be given opportunities to develop his or her personality freely and fully. This would mean imposition of restraints on individual freedom. Equality without liberty is unreal. It is liberty which makes equality real. Similarly, equality does not mean uniformity or identity of treatment. Equality means that there should be equal opportunity for self-development irrespective of caste, colour, creed or wealth. Equality which tries to put an end to gross inequalities of wealth and power in society and ensures everyone the economic minimum, forms the real basis of liberty.

CONCLUSION

Thus, liberty and equality far from being opposed to each other, go together. They are inseparable, without equality liberty is meaningless and without liberty equality is impossible. Liberty and equality support

and complement each other. Hence, they are compared to two faces of the same coin.

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