**Question: Define liberal political theory. Critically discuss the features of Liberal political theory.**

**Answer**

**Meaning**

The term liberalism is derived from the Latin word “Liberalis” , means “pertaining to free man”, first emerged in the early 1800s, it believes in some aspects which includes civil liberties, political equality, freedom of conscience, and freedom of thought, the rule of law, limited government, private property, and laissez faire economics. Moreover, liberalism favors a pluralistic secular state and opposed all efforts to link religion to politics.

**Political concept:**  Political concept of liberalism means of freedom of choice of individuals to elect and be elected as representative to the legislative body. Again political liberalism implies that all individuals are equal before law and they have only a voluntary contractual relationship with the govt. It defends freedom of speech and freedom of press, freedom intellectual expression etc.

**Economic concept:** Economic concept of liberalism means that a govt. should not try to control prices, rents, and wages but instead of that it should allow open competition in economic field. Economic liberalism, in general favours redistribution of income through taxes and welfare payments.

The exponents of liberal political theory are- John Locke, Bentham, Adam Smith, John Start Mill, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Paine, Oakeshott, Thomas Hill Green, Laski, MacIver, John Galbraith, J.M. Keynes, F. A Hayek, Milton Friedrich and Robert Nozick etc.

**Definition**

1. **“***Liberalism is the theory and practice of individual liberty, judicial defense and constitutional state.”* Sartori
2. *“Liberalism begins and ends with the ideals of individual freedom, individual human rights and individual happiness.”* Koerner

Thus, from the above two definitions it can be said that liberal political theory is some ideal which support full freedom to individuals in socio-economic and political spheres.

**Features of classical Liberal Theory**

From the views mentioned above by the classical liberalists some features of liberalism can be pointed out. These are explained as follows:

* According to classical liberalists, “State is a mean to the end”. Therefore, the state should sacrifice for the individuals to develop their personality. The state as a social institution created by the individuals to fulfill their needs. The individuals should be given more importance than the state.
* The functions of the state should be limited. The state should not use excessive power on the individuals. The uses of excessive power will obstacle the individuals to enjoy their rights and freedom. The functions of the state should be confined only to maintain law and order for the peaceful co-existence of individuals in society.
* The individuals should be given full freedom within the state in every walk of life and especially in economic life. They should be allowed to establish and expand their business according to their own choice without any restrain from the state.
* There should be open competition among the individuals in socio- economic and political life. The classical liberalists believe in the theory of survival of the fittest.

**Features of the Modern Liberal Theory**

* The modern liberalism supports the representative form of govt. The concept of welfare state is another important feature of modern democracy.
* The state should also have some moral functions. It should remove all hindrances in the way of individual development.
* State is not an end but a mean to the end and that end is to develop the personality of the individuals.
* Modern liberalism stress the state regulated economy instead of free market economy.

**Features of Neo Liberal Theory**

* Like the classical liberalism, the Neo- Liberalism also emphasis the use of limited power of the state.
* The functions of the state should only be confined to maintain law and order of the society.
* Like classical liberalism the Neo-Liberalism also considers the supremacy of the individuals over the state.
* The Neo- Liberalism supports the concept of Liberalization, privatization and Globalization (LPG).
* The liberalism is against the concept of welfare state. It supports the doctrine of laissez faire.

**Criticism**

1. **Individuals cannot always judge him:** Due to the impact of modernization, industrialization and urbanization the society is also has been complexing. In this complex social system some of the individuals fall in dilemma to take decision for him. Therefore, they have to take the help of other agencies. The state is the most help full agency which helps the individuals to develop their personality.
2. **State is not an evil institution­:** For the common welfare of the people, the state plays a significant role. As a highest social institution the state takes some initiatives to develop the personality of the individuals. The most formidable duty of the state is to uplift the socio- economic condition of the downtrodden people of the society.
3. **The concept of survival of the fittest is not applicable for human being:** The concept of survival of the fittest as mentioned by Herbert Spencer is not applicable for the human being. The human being can adjust and adopt himself in any social phenomena. Hallowell is of the view that Spencer made a fatal mistake of transferring concepts that are appropriate to one science to another where phenomena are quite different.
4. **Open competition is not beneficial for the backward sections:** The open competition is not always beneficial for the backward sections of society. It is obvious that the capitalists enrich their business accumulating and investing their capital. The backward sections due to their lack of capital can not to go ahead with equal pace with the rich capitalists. According to Marx, the poor become poorer and the rich become richer.
5. **Liberalism supports the conservatism:** The classical liberalism gives emphasis to maintain the status quo. The ideology of status quo does not want any change in the existing socio- economic and political system. This ideology supports the class based society. Therefore, the classical liberal economy is not suitable for all countries and particularly for the third world countries.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion it can be said that the liberal political theory may have some drawbacks but this ideology paves the way for each and every individuals to choice his own life style in socio-economic and political field which helps him to develop his personality. The limitations of the classical liberalism have been overcome after the emergence of the modern and then after the neo-liberalism.