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WHO IS A LIBERTARIAN AND WHY DO WE NEED A LIBERTARIAN PARTY IN INDIA?

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ABSTRACT

There are a number of different ways to look at the social, political and economic climate prevailing at any point of time, some of the major ones would be Communism, Socialism, Liberalism, Welfarism and so on. These ideologies act as prisms through which a person would look at the world, the world as it is and the world as it should be. They are all encompassing ideologies, which means that they are not limited any particular sphere of life but cover the full spectrum. Libertarianism is another such prism to look at the world centred around the core value of freedom maximizing. The following paper attempts to describe the core tenets of libertarianism, or put another way, it aspires to chalk out who a libertarian is and at the same time make a case as to why we are in a dire need of libertarian party in a deeply socialist country.

Introduction

Today the world is freer than ever and the yet the control of the government over her citizens is more all-encompassing and stricter than ever. There is hardly any area of human life in which the government does not involve itself and impose its will on the people, especially in the economic arena. The major ideologies prevailing today, even the seemingly contrasting ones like socialism and liberalism, readily accept the overreach of the state apparatus in private life. Libertarianism is that creed or ideology which focuses itself on

maximizing the freedom that an individual enjoys to the greatest extent possible. It believes that the state apparatus should seldom interfere in the private life of the individual and the economic sphere should be free from socialistic intervention by the government, the people should have absolute rights over their bodies and no laws should regulate the self-regarding actions of an individual.

Review of Literature

The article titled “What is A Libertarian” by Libertarianism.org is great piece to start one’s

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journey of acquainting oneself with the basic beliefs of libertarianism. The article provides information as to what the stance of libertarians is on important topics and also delves on the history of libertarian thought to some extent.

Another great article is titled “Key Concepts of Libertarianism” written by David Boaz on Cato.org which discusses the libertarian stance on issues like Individual rights, Free Market, Rule of law etc. It acts as a starter pack for someone who is new to the concept and wishes to understand what it stands for when it comes to the vital issues of our time.

The book titled “FREE TO CHOOSE” by lifelong libertarian and noble winning economist Milton Friedman is great read to understand the economic basis and tenets of libertarianism. The book shows how the perception of people that the intervention of government in the economy can be justified is a wrong one by giving multiple examples of the same failing to rescue the economy and instead exacerbate the issue, Friedman argues that the economy as well as the society works much better when left alone from the overreach of the government and how almost every single step taken by the government to help the poor end failing miserably.

War

The stance of libertarianism is very clear when it comes to the topic of war, it disagrees with every kind of war except a war of self defence. Libertarians argue that there is no moral reason for which a war waged on a non-aggressor can possibly be justified. Libertarians have continuously protested the numerous wars started by the US be it the Iraq war or the Vietnam war.

Libertarians believe that even though dictator like Saddam Hussein should not be in power and should be punished for their heinous acts, they do not support the idea of a foreign intervention on the grounds that a foreign army has no right to interfere in the internal matters of the Iraqi people and also that an interventionist foreign policy has never been able to achieve its stated goals.

Bodily Autonomy

In almost every single country in the world there are strict rules against the use of drugs, libertarians argue that these laws are wrong on the grounds that first of all, they violate the inalienable right of a human being over his/her own body and secondly, that they are hypocritical as other harmful substances such as liquor and tobacco are sold without any restriction. They argue that it is a person’s own prerogative as to what he wishes to do with his own body over which he should have absolute right. It is argued on the same grounds that sex work/prostitution should be permitted as long as it is practiced by adults of sound mind under no external influence and euthanasia and suicide should also be permitted given that they are committed by adults who are of a sound mind and are not under any external influence. Moreover, libertarianism believes that a person should have an absolute right over his own body and should be allowed to do whatever he wishes as long as he does not cause any harm to anyone else.

Civil Rights:

Libertarians have a deep skepticism towards the government and for that very reason believe that certain inalienable civil rights should be granted to every person in a civil society. The right to vote,

form organizations, freedom of speech and expression, fair trial in civil and criminal cases, right to protest peacefully etc. are some of the important ones to be provided to every person.

Absence of certain laws

Libertarians believe that the number of laws in any society should be as limited as possible as laws curtail the freedom of a person. They also argue that certain laws like the law of Blasphemy, defamation, treason and hate speech should not exist at all as they are archaic laws which do nothing but restrict the freedom enjoyed by an individual and act as a tool in the hands of the state apparatus.

Freedom of Speech

The right to freedom of speech and expression is sacrosanct for libertarians and they argue that it should be absolute, that is, unless someone directly threatens a person with physical violence or encourages people to commit physical violence against someone, they should be permitted to say anything they wish.

Economy

A large number of views have been expressed as to how the economy should work and what role the government should play in it. While the socialists believe that the government should play a proactive role in the management of the economy, the Marxists argue that the whole economy should be entirely controlled by the state. Libertarians on the other hand believe that the government has no substantial role to play in the economy that could possibly benefit anyone, they believe that it is much better to leave the economy to the invisible hand of the market which guide it to equilibrium to

the benefit of all. This skepticism of government intervention in the economy is not unfounded as is clear from the examples of the soviet economy or the pre-1980s China. The libertarians believe that when the government intervenes in the economy it only makes the situation worse and hampers economic growth and prosperity.

Education

The libertarians argue that school system does not provide the children the education they need and instead it just becomes a mechanism of regurgitating facts and information that might as well be redundant. They also lament the standardization of education as it restricts the development of the natural talents of the child by teaching everyone the same thing when it is an accepted fact that children differ not only their abilities but also their interests. They believe that the parents and guardians should have a much larger say in deciding the curriculum of their children, much more so than they have now.

Arms Ownership

Libertarians argue that any adult who is of sound mind and has no criminal history, after the requisite checks by law enforcement should be allowed to own arms and weaponry in order to protect himself. The more core argument for arms ownership for civilian population dates back to the foundation of the United States of America, when Thomas Jefferson said that the civilian population should be sufficiently armed in order to resist any draconian attempt by the government. This argument carries no substantial weight today as no civilian population around the world could possibly be armed enough to resist the modern and

sophisticated weaponry of any their national government, however libertarians argue that while it may be true that civilians cannot resist the government successfully, they can at least force the government to exercise excessive force if it tries to establish a dictatorship against the wishes of the people.

Property Rights

The property rights of an individual are as sacrosanct to the libertarians as the right to freedom of speech and expression. They hold the view that the government should not be able to confiscate the property owned by a person under any circumstance. They completely disagree with the concept of redistribution of property propounded by the socialist. The libertarians hold right to life, liberty and property as propounded by John Locke in the highest regard possible. The Entitlement theory of justice propounded by Robert Nozick describes the view of libertarians on private property. It states that:

1. Justice in Acquisition- As long as a person acquires property justly, he is entitled to it.
2. Justice in Transfer- The way a person can acquire property from another, including voluntary exchange and gifts.
3. Principle of Rectification- How to rectify the situation if the property has been acquired in an unjust manner.

Role of State:

As mentioned above, the libertarians have a very skeptical view of state and government and consider it, at best, a necessary evil. They believe that the government is an institution that people should be wary of and that the interference of

government in any part of a person's life should be as limited as possible. They believe that the government should be responsible for the foreign policy of the nation, maintenance of law and order in the country and the making sure that the contracts signed by sovereign individuals are abided by, any interference of the government beyond these areas should be looked at with extreme skepticism and should be considered to be bad for the society until proven good. Libertarians criticize the government the most for her economic intervention which it believes, for good reason, hardly if ever, work.

Liberty not Anarchy

One of the most common argument against libertarianism is that it promotes anarchy and that if all the principles held by libertarians were to be implemented in real life, it would lead to the break-up of the social fabric. The issue with the argument is that it assumes that it assumes that libertarians want anarchy by abolishing authority, which is entirely untrue. What libertarians want is to increase the area in which the individual is free to do as he wishes without any external impediment, they are not advocating for absolute freedom which would lead to anarchy. As for authority, libertarians do accept the minimum authority that the state has to exercise in order to keep the society functioning, but anything beyond the minimum is what they question, they are not anti-authority, they are simply pro-personal freedom to the maximum. They also criticize the hypocritical moral standards of society and believe that the society has no right to tell anyone how he/she should live his/her life.

The need of a Libertarian political party in India:

Our great nation since her independence has been a socialist state. The first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself was a Fabian socialist and attempted to model the economy of the country on the basis of his deeply held socialist beliefs. Mahatma Gandhi, while not overtly subscribing to any ideology, was entirely socialist in his economic views at the very least. The other freedom fighters as well as the members of the first few Lok Sabha's were also very influenced by socialist thought and impressed by the soviet model of the economy. All these factors have led to the country becoming a socialist nation both in terms of economy and politics. All the political parties in the country today can be described as socialist, albeit some more than others. The country progressed at a much faster pace and the standard of living of the people increased drastically since the implementation of the policies of liberalisation in the 1990s, which is a testament that government intervention in the economy does more harm than good even in the case of India. The closest India has to a libertarian political party was the erstwhile

Swatantra Party which was dissolved in the year 1974, this party suggested the liberal reforms decades before they were eventually implemented, this fact only goes on to show that while the Swatantra party may have been early, they were spot on and that the libertarian economics is the best path to a developed nation. A libertarian party will not only educate Indians about the ills of socialism and innumerable benefits of personal freedom and laissez-faire economy but will also be a breath of fresh air in a country dominated by the left.

Conclusion:

“A society that puts equality before freedom will get neither. A society that puts freedom before equality will get a high degree of both”, this quote by Milton Friedman aptly describes the stance of libertarians towards the economy as well as the society. What they stand for is liberty, what they believe in is liberty.

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