

# Manifesto for Indian Liberals

(DRAWN UP AT THE CONFERENCE OF INDIAN LIBERALS HELD ON NOVEMBER 21 1985 AT THE ROYAL BOMBAY YACHT CLUB).

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We, the liberals of India assembled in Bombay on November 21, 1985 at a time of gross violations of human rights and persistent grave tensions which threaten peace and democracy, are convinced that this condition is largely due to the abandonment of liberal principles and affirm our faith in this Declaration.

## I. Democracy & Freedom

- i) Man is first and foremost a being endowed with the power of independent thought and action, and with the ability to distinguish right from wrong.
- ii) Respect for the individual as guaranteed under the original Constitution of 1950 is the true basis of society.
- iii) The State is only the instrument of the community : it should assume no power which conflicts with the fundamental rights of the citizens and with the conditions essential for a responsible and creative life; namely :
  - a) Personal freedom, guaranteed by the independence of the administration of law and justice.
  - b) Freedom of worship and conscience.
  - c) Freedom of speech and of the Press.
  - d) Freedom to associate or not to associate.
  - e) Free choice of occupation.
  - f) The right to free and compulsory education for all upto a minimum basic level.
  - g) The right to private ownership of property and the right to embark on individual enterprise.
  - h) Consumer's free choice and the opportunity to reap the full benefit of the productivity of the soil and the enterprise of man.
  - i) Equality of rights between men and women.
- iv) These rights and conditions can be secured only by true democracy which is inseparable from political liberty and is based on the conscious, free and enlightened consent of the majority, expressed through a free and secret ballot, with due respect for the liberties and opinions of minorities and even the individual.
- v) The wide-spread disenchantment or disaffection, prevalent especially among the young, is the result of the failure to create, support and promote desirable values as well as of the incapacity to adapt institutions and to ensure more justice and a better quality of living. In extreme cases, this disaffection has led to terrorism, in others, to anarchism or to a refusal to participate in public life. The values of freedom and independence, promoted by liberalism, can overcome this void, particularly if liberals make it clear that freedom for the individual is not to be confused with egoism, but is freedom within the context of community, implying responsibility and solidarity with fellow men.

## II. Decentralisation and Freedom

- i) Co-operation and solidarity between free men are a growing necessity in the modern world. However, the drive towards unhealthy centralisation has encouraged the downgrading of parliamentary institutions, the excessive dependence of the individual on the State and the growth of new forms of absolutism and of irresponsible centres of power through uncontrolled

bureaucratic growth, the formation of public and private monopolies and the restrictiveness of some combinations of employers, of workers, or of both together

ii) We believe that these tendencies can only be fought by devoted concentration on the overriding need for freedom in all its aspects, and in particular by :

- (a) the greatest possible devolution and spread of power in the economic social and governmental fields, especially by determined action against monopolies.
- (b) maintenance of the widest multiplicity of expression and initiative in all matters of education and culture, including mass media of communication.
- (c) making all necessary information available to enable each citizen to form objective judgments on all matters of public interest.
- (d) protection of the rights of minorities to enjoy the essential liberties.
- (e) elimination of racial and all other forms of oppressive discrimination.
- (f) protection of the individual and group from all forms of unwarranted invasion of personal private life.

iii) One area which requires immediate consideration is the relationship between the Centre and the States. The Constitution of India enacted in 1950 has balanced fairly the needs of national unity with those of reasonable authority for States. During the last 30 years, however, all major economic power has been concentrated in the hands of the Union Government, as a consequence of centralised planning. This imbalance has to be rectified by a greater measure of autonomy for the States and local self Government within the frame-work of the original Constitution of the Republic. There is no reason why a strong Centre should mean weak States or vice-versa.

#### iii) Institutional Issues In Modern Democracies.

i) Liberalism requires the continual reform and renewal of democratic institutions.

ii) Improvement and renewal in the institution of State and Society is seen by modern liberals as most important in :

- (a) the effective representation of the people's will in the legislative power, e.g. through proportional representation which will ensure a legislature which fairly reflects the will of the people, and the protection of minorities to ensure equality of opportunity;
- (b) the decentralisation of power by the proper and clearly defined organisation of State and local self government;
- (c) the inclusion of trade unions and business and professional associations in the liberal democratic system of checks and balances, in order to achieve healthier and more just industrial relations;
- (d) without individual initiative and responsibility both in the private and public sectors, the State turns itself into a soulless bureaucratic machine and rapidly loses efficiency.

#### iv) Educational and Cultural Issues

i) Modern liberalism is faced with

- (a) worldwide pluralism of cultures;
- (b) the need for a uniform Civil Code;
- (c) the need for freedom and pluralism in the media.

ii) The main instrument with which to break down barriers to culture and to

fight cultural, political and racial intolerance is education, based on democratic methods, Liberals, therefore, ask for the promotion of education for both sexes and all ages.

iii) Freedom and pluralism in the mass media are essential to a liberal society. There can be no political freedom where the media are in the hands of a monopoly or quasi-monopoly, private or public. Liberals see, with growing concern, the powerful attacks against press freedom.

#### V. Economic Issues

i) The following are of crucial importance today :

- (a) the role of the economy in a liberal democracy;
- (b) the limited role of the State and planning in a social market economy;
- (c) new technologies and the protection of the environment.

ii) The basic liberal principle in the economy is that there can be no political freedom where the State dominates the economy and less room is left for private initiative. Notwithstanding some delusions to the contrary, there can also be no real and lasting economic freedom where the importance of political freedom is not understood and human rights are not respected. It is particularly emphasised that economic growth cannot and should not be at the cost of political freedom.

iii) The link which exists for liberals between a social market economy and liberal democracy also implies a constant battle against monopolies, cartels, restrictive trusts, restrictive practises and so-called "dominant positions", open or disguised, private or public except for cases authorised by law for justified and defined social needs.

iv) The liberal concept of the market is not that of an economy controlled by purely monetary means but to the contrary it includes and is closely associated with the interests of the poor and of the community as a whole.

v) The state controlled and dominated system as practised in India for the past over three decades is the root of slow economic growth, rampant lawlessness and corruption and proliferation of the black market economy. The only solution is a changeover to a liberal system which can undo the damage.

vi) Planning, in the liberal sense of the word, means indicative planning of and for liberty leading to a minimum or limited government. A strong vested interest has developed in the existing system where the public sector has become the private sector of the politician, the bureaucrat, the trader and entrepreneur who thrive on it and the disciplined worker with the consumer left to fend for himself and live in a despondent milieu of 'choicelessness' and resulting 'voicelessness'.

vii) With this undogmatic approach towards the role of the State in the economy, liberals do not see the relations between the private and the public sector in a given economy and at a given time as static or final. Whilst the State or local authorities can be at times forced by their obligations to public welfare to take over economic activities, there must be a constant review of the public activities, to decide which of them should be returned in some form to private enterprise or to voluntary organisations.

viii) The corrective role of the State must not make everybody dependent on it. The main dangers inherent in an overextended welfare State are :

- (a) It makes people dependent on government and bureaucracy, thereby reducing their sense of responsibility and their freedom;
- (b) it creates an expanding bureaucracy which inclines to grab power for itself which is detrimental to the national economy, increasing waste and corruption.

- (c) by taxes or by waste, it subtracts too large a portion of the national income from the growing needs for productive investment, research and development;
- (d) it can feed inflation and, therefore, make employment and investment more difficult.

(ix) Liberals believe that taxation should be fairly balanced between the needs of the individual and the needs of society for saving and investment. Taxation should, therefore, play a positive role in encouraging enterprise and in ensuring a greater equality of opportunity.

s) To try to eliminate poverty and social injustice is not to accept egalitarianism viz. the abstract right to rigid equality of conditions for all, independent of talent, work or forethought. While liberals strongly support measures to reduce differences in wealth, to protect each citizen and to increase equality of opportunity, they decidedly oppose egalitarianism which degrades the individual, whereas the recognition of merit in conditions of social justice is stimulating.

#### The Test of Character

India's development by a democratic and liberal philosophy and action presupposes and requires that the elected representatives firmly believe in integrity and competence. India also needs men and women who uphold values and excellence, protect public interest, whose motivation is achievement - not power - and whose faith is outside partisan politics. To develop such men and women with such faith and principles is the real task and goal before liberals. If India has to reach its full potential, the test of Character is of prime importance.