

## Herbert Spencer

Herbert Spencer (born April 27, 1820) was an uncompromising advocate of extreme form of individualism. Though he was a nineteenth century thinker his arguments still create interest in the minds of students of Western political thought. He wrote many articles on economics philosophy, science sociology etc. By 1848 Spencer succeeded in establishing himself as a writer. In 1848 he was appointed a sub-editor of the famous *The Economist*. By virtue of his position as a sub-editor he came in close contact with many noted personalities such as Huxley, George Eliot etc. In 1858 he brought out *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* His other works *The Principles of Biology*, *The Principles of Sociology*, *The Principles of Ethics* were published between 1862 and 1892. He also wrote several other books such as *Justice, Nature and Reality of Religion*. His most important work on politics, *The Man Versus the State*, was published in 1884.

### Political Ideas of Herbert Spencer:

#### 1. Method:

It is said that the method applied by Spencer for the analysis of political phenomena and related ideas is called scientific method. This is because Spencer claimed that he applied scientific method and principles of natural science for the analysis of political issues. He did not follow utilitarianism which in his opinion is nothing but "expediency philosophy". But he did not rule out the idea of utilitarianism. He supported it in an indirect way. Each and every man must be able to maximize his happiness in the social system. Laws should be framed keeping this general idea in mind He had no weakness for morality which was assiduously propagated by Green and other Oxford idealists.

He was of opinion that morality is essentially one with physical truth is in fact a species of transcendental psychology. Spencer's chief objective was to synthesize all the scientific knowledge. He was least interested whether this was possible or not. But his inclination to scientific method and his determination to apply it to ethics, politics and above a 1 philosophy augmented his position as a philosopher and secured for him a very high place in the philosophical world of the nineteenth century.

He deeply involved himself into the exploration of knowledge contained in metaphysics, ethics, theology, biology, psychology and sociology. He failed in this field no doubt, but he differed from his predecessors. In his analysis of political ideas and issues he applied the general principles of evolutionism and for that reason he was called an evolutionist. There is no doubt that he was tremendously influenced by Charles Darwin. Six years before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* Spencer published several essays and books on the nature of evolution. Spencer's attitude to evolutionism brought him nearer to Darwin, Wallace, Huxley and Lewes. An evolutionist though he was, he disagreed with Darwin on some points or conclusions. "He did not agree with Darwin that natural selection takes place through accidental variation, but held that variation and adaptation were manifestation of purpose".

Spencer's political thought is the manifest product of his scientific knowledge, particularly his theory of evolution. He applied his theory of purposive adaptation and selection to political theory. Spencer also believed in the organic character of society. That is, society is analogous to biological organism and it is subject to the same law of evolution. In his view, as society evolves so also human thought and specifically the political thought.

To sum up, Herbert Spencer attempts to apply the theory of evolution to all spheres of knowledge. The characters of human beings come under the influence of evolution. The human qualities are transmitted through natural selection. An important aspect of Spencer's method is he applied systematic and scientific method for the analysis of the various issues of politics and chiefly for this reason he has been called a system-builder. He believed that without systematic and scientific knowledge political issues can never be properly explained.

His study of biology, psychology and other subjects enabled him to arrive at this conclusion. He also applied strict disciplines for the analysis of political ideas. He is generally called a system builder. But many of his critics do not agree. His sole purpose was to arrive at a single formula. Spencer's systematization is an outgrowth of his theory of evolution. By evolution he means "An integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which matter passes from a relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a relatively definite, coherent heterogeneity and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation." This process of evolution is to be found everywhere in highly organized complex living bodies, in the growth of language and also in the evolution of social and political organizations.

Herbert Spencer says that these organisations move from relative indefiniteness to relative definiteness, from incoherence to coherence. With the evolution, structural and functional differentiations also surface. In this way, Spencer systematizes and unifies the philosophy. Barker strongly criticizes Spencer's attempt to view politics in the light of natural science. His purpose was not to enrich politics with the principles of science or to elicit the political lessons which science might teach. Herbert Spencer was extremely obsessed with the freedom of the individual and consequently with the limitations of state power. The power of the state should be cut to size for the purpose of enhancing the liberty of the individual. He came to the conclusion that the evolution of human being has reached the apex stage and because of this reason he should be given maximum freedom. Only in this way a desirable level of social development can be achieved. Spencer was thus one of the chief exponents of laissez-faire doctrine.

## 2. Theory of Evolution:

We have already stated that Spencer applied principles of evolution in the study and proper analysis of political principles. Now let us see what did he mean by the principles of evolution. In the principle of evolution he has shown how the material world is changing constantly. It evolves from one stage to another, from indefinite to definite, from incoherent to coherent, from incoherent homogeneity to coherent heterogeneity. The earth also develops from uniform liquid mass to diversified form and structure. The law of evolution also works in the development of society. According to Spencer, the primitive society was incoherent and simple. Complexity and coherence have become prominent in the developed state of society. In the Social Statics Spencer has elaborated the concept of evolution.

The process of evolution results from the perpetual antithesis of two great forces of nature the dynamic tendency towards change and the static tendency towards equilibrium. This is a very important principle of the theory of evolution. Darwin discovered it and Spencer borrowed it from him and applied it to political studies. **Herbert Spencer writes in Social Statics:** "All evil results from the non-adaptation of constitution to conditions. Equally true is it that evil perpetually tends to disappear. In virtue of an essential principle of life, this non-adaptation of an organism to its conditions is ever being rectified; and modification of one or both, continues until the adaptation is complete. Whatever possesses vitality, from the elementary cell up to man himself, inclusive, obeys this law." Applying the general principles of evolution Spencer has said that as animals have adjusted

with changes in environment and in this way both animals and society of animal have evolved, so men will have to adjust with the environment that exists around them. The success of men in the process of adjustment will finally result in the setting up of an equilibrium—equilibrium among all the forces or element that exist. When such equilibrium appears it will be assumed that perfection has arrived. In other words in a perfect society man and his environment are both in a balanced position.

Herbert Spencer further observes that such a balanced and static position may not be fully achieved, but the concept of evolution may be approached from this angle. If we accept the principle of evolution this conclusion is inevitable. It has been argued by Spencer that the growth of society is accompanied by a progressive differentiation of structures, which results in progressive differentiation of functions. The principle of evolution states that the “state of homogeneity is an unstable state; and where there is already some heterogeneity, the tendency is towards greater heterogeneity.” From this it follows that the movement of evolution is greater in a heterogeneous society. A society with greater and deeper differentiation is subject to bigger dynamic changes. So contradiction or differentiation is a vital aspect of social change. Coherence and incoherence; homogeneity and heterogeneity are very important terms of Spencer’s theory of evolution. Armed with these terms Spencer distinguishes between militant society and industrial society. He assumes that in the former there is coherence of homogeneity. In other words, uniformity is the characteristic feature of militant society. Various stringent regulations control the conduct of individuals and they have no freedom of action and thought. Because of great homogeneity the militant society naturally does not achieve spectacular progress.

The individuality of each member has to be so subordinated in life, liberty and property, that he is largely or completely owned by the state. Militant type of society aims at self-sufficiency, political autonomy tends to be accompanied by economic autonomy. By industrial society Spencer means a society dominated by the principle of laissez-faire. In Spencer’s judgment, in an industrial society there is ample scope of evolution. Heterogeneity and differentiation lead it to greater amount of perfection. Again, such societies are rich in experience. Differentiation and heterogeneity act as inducement to progress. Herbert Spencer has said that the concept of evolution is not confined only in the physical world. He has said that the experience, knowledge and ideas all change through the process of evolution. The consequence is the idea; knowledge and experience of one epoch are higher and developed from the previous epoch. In this process experience and knowledge proceed towards higher or better stage or quality. The experience of one generation is transmitted to the next.

The human faculties, through the process of evolution, achieve more and more perfection. Spencer’s theory of evolution thus encompasses both external and internal factors. With the process of evolution the adaptation and adjustment also takes place. Experience and knowledge enable man to adapt with the new environment. So the development of knowledge and experience is essential to evolution. What Herbert Spencer asserts is that without knowledge and experience both progress nor evolution is possible and an industrial society assures it.

### **Survival of the Fittest:**

The survival of the fittest can reasonably be called the product of the theory of evolution. Darwin said so. But some scholars are of opinion that Spencer coined the phrase-‘survival of the fittest’. It however goes with the name of Darwin. The possibility to survive depends upon the ability to adapt or adjust with the physical environment. The weak or sick incapable of adjusting with the environment becomes victim of extinction. So the first and foremost condition of survival is fitness.

Spencer says that a labourer incapacitated by sickness from competing with stronger fellows should have to bear the resulting privations. In other words, adaptation and adjustment is the primary condition of survival and it is corroborated by history. In his opinion, philanthropic organizations and kind-hearted persons are giving continuous help to disabled persons and by doing this they are entailing greater misery and misfortune upon the society.

Herbert Spencer is a logical thinker and because of this he has illustrated his contention. When a mother, disregarding the advice of doctor, gives sweets to her child that cannot be treated as kindness. If a doctor considering the pain refrains from operation, surely he is not doing benefit to the patient. Under the natural order of things the society is constantly excreting its unhealthy, imbecile, slow, vacillating faithless members. In this natural way the society purifies itself. But if this purification is stopped by artificial means the society will become filled up with under serving persons. The venture of the philanthropists discourages the multiplication of competent persons.

His extreme love for the theory of evolution inspired him to frame certain conclusions which have been vociferously denounced by many. He said that the philanthropists or state authority adopt several welfare measures for the improvement of physical and economic conditions of the weaker or poorer sections of the community. Apparently these measures improve their conditions but ultimately these welfare measures are doing more harm than benefit. How? Spencer says that man constantly adapts himself with the environment taking the help of his acquired knowledge and experience. But, being helped by others, man loses the urge to adjust. That is, power of adaptation fails to develop. This is a dangerous tendency. The dependence of weak persons is making them more and more weak and this is multiplying the burden of society.

The creative faculties are discouraged and inefficient faculties are encouraged. This never produces salutary results. Spencer, therefore, concludes that nature should be given a free hand in the selection of persons who are fit for the society after studying all the aspects of evolution and natural selection. Spencer was confirmed that the state interference or the activities of the philanthropists were halting the process of natural selection and this led to the halt or demise of survival of the fittest. The result was that the equilibrium among the various sections could not find any opportunity to develop. He also said that everyman has certain creative faculties and these develop through the process of survival of the fittest. To sum up, Spencer adopted Darwin's theory to the study of social as well as political phenomena and framed conclusions.

Herbert Spencer was to some extent influenced by German idealism and this led him to propagate the theory of universal evolution. In the entire universe different forces or energies are constantly proceeding towards perfection and to achieve that goal they are adjusting with the environment. The perfection may be termed as equilibrium. To make the universal equilibrium a possibility it is necessary that the power of government should be curtailed. Spencer emphasizes that the whole universe is under the process of evolution and no part can be separated artificially.

### **3. Theory of State:**

Plato and other idealist philosophers viewed the state as an organic whole in the sense the individuals constituting the state are its integral parts. Hobbes's state was an all-powerful Leviathan. But Spencer's analysis of state does not fall in this category. He treated the state as an organism and he uses the word in a metaphorical sense. He says that organic bodies are all subject to the laws of growth and decay. Birth, growth and decay all are the characteristic features of every organic body. Spencer asserts that the state, like an organic body, is also subject to the same laws of birth, growth and decay. It is interesting to note that Spencer borrowed this idea from biological science and

applied it to the theory of politics. Let us note some of the aspects of similarities between human body and state as conceived by Spencer. There are various parts of every human body, so also has the state manifold parts. There are farmers, workers, retail traders, wholesalers, manufacturers, professional persons, engineers, lawyers, bankers, priests and academicians. All these persons constitute the structure of the state and participate in its administration. They have their different functions as the different parts of the human body discharge different duties. Elaborating the analogy between the state and organic body he further observes that the population of the state increases that is the indication of its growth. Sometimes foreign territories are added to a state through aggression which is also a sign of growth.

It is also found that new states are created. Due to political turmoil or other factors some states are merged with others that are called decay. How the birth, growth and decay characterize the human body require no elaboration. Both human body and state pass through evolutionary process. Herbert Spencer says that the growth of both human body and state passes through complexities and differentiations as well as long process of time. In other words according to Spencer evolution works behind both of man and state. The primitive state was coherent and simple. This is not the case with the modern state. The same also applies to human body. The growth of the body invites both complications and differentiation. In developed industrial societies the division of labour is strictly adhered to. As different parts of the human body are dependent on each other and the whole body functions because of the cooperation of these parts, so also the several parts of the state are dependent upon each other and the non-cooperation of any one part or department or section can throw the entire state into disarray. All the parts of human body are not of equal importance—some are more vital than the others. The same thing applies to the state. In a state, there are several departments without which the normal functioning of the state will be impossible—military or defence, finance and railway. The normality of both body and state depends upon the proper functioning, healthy conditions and the spontaneous cooperation of all the vital organs. That is why careful attention is always focused to these vital organs.

Herbert Spencer in his *Principles of Sociology* has drawn our attention to other aspects of similarities between human body and state. He says that both human body and state have passed through several stages to reach the apex position. The primitive societies were very simple. When it became industrial society, new feature cropped up, making it a complex one. Similarly, primitive man was not intelligent and their inventive power was not of high quality. Evolution has made him intelligent and inventive. But, at the same time, his life has become complicated. The similarities between state and human body need not lead one to jump upon the conclusion that both the state and human body are almost identical in many respects. There are vital dissimilarities between the two. The units or organs of the state are not fixed in size and function. With the progress of state, different organs grow in size and the functions also assume complexity. On the other hand, the parts of body are always fixed. In the society there is no single centre of consciousness but in body there is such a single centre.

### **Functions of State:**

The state conceived by Spencer is basically an individualist state which means that the state is an independent unit like an individual and it discharges its responsibilities independently. Each individual is a separate centre of consciousness and he claims that individuals should be permitted to have distinct identity. According to Herbert Spencer it is the impact of evolution that has enabled man to develop and exercise separate identity and due to this heterogeneity has become a feature of society. Heterogeneity is the basic characteristic of man. This is the source of Spencer's individualism. There is another potential source. Spencer sprang from a family essentially dissenting

and, as such, opposed to authority; and his non-conformist instincts and non-conformist training in his youth left an abiding mark. He had formed a firm belief that the absence of any type of state control upon people would invariably lead them to reach the maximum level of pleasure. He, of course, endorsed the governmental interference for maintaining law and order.

Commenting on Spencer's elaborate account of the functions of state Prof. Ernest Barker makes the following succinct comment "Spencer's account of the function of the state is mainly an account of what the state ought not to do." On an earlier occasion we pointed out that Spencer was not a utilitarian in the sense Bentham was. But he believed in utilitarianism. Only the minimum "governance can ensure maximum happiness". That means Spencer's state has practically nothing to do except maintaining law and order.

Herbert Spencer was an advocate of laissez-faire doctrine free play of individual's freedom in economic field would ensure profit and growth of industry. So a government with a minimum amount of reason should not try to interfere with the activities of the industrialists. In order to allow the natural selection to operate, it is the duty of the state not to provide relief to the poor. The persons who are incapable to fight away the odd situation would ultimately succumb and finally this will bring about a great relief for the entire society and it will be benefited. The man who cannot compete with others has no right to live. The society is meant for the fittest persons. In religious affairs, state interference cannot be tolerated.

If the state launches welfare projects to give relief to the poor and disabled persons they will be completely dependent upon state, will not be able to adapt with the environment, and, finally, will never learn the discipline. What appears from Spencer's account of the functions of the state is that he was in favour of limiting its functions. It is also the duty of the state to see that the society is capable of maintaining its competitive character which is a criterion of growth. Herbert Spencer is also against state-sponsored education system. He proposes that the entire system of education shall be fully controlled by individuals or organizations existing beyond the control of all types of control of state. Man will purchase his daily necessities from open market and he will educate his children according to his own choice.

State-controlled education is always conservative in character. Education of the state has no power to check crime. Nor can it broaden the human mind. Spencer even goes further when he observes that it is unnecessary for the state to set-up mint or to erect a lighthouse. Barker writes, "It has, in a word, no business to interfere with the wise severity of nature's discipline, which makes us better when we do things for ourselves, and what is more makes the things which we do for ourselves better done than those which the state does for us."

Herbert Spencer is quite meticulous in regard to what a state cannot do. In fact he has given a long list of areas in which the state has practically no role to play. He has, however, said that the state has something to do. In his view the chief function of the state is to make the process of evolution obstacle free. Laissez-faire is the only way to social progress and scientific development. People will be able to enrich fund of knowledge and experience from trial and error, but will learn very little if doctored by others. So the process of evolution should not be stopped and, on the contrary, by all means it should be encouraged.

In the Social Statics Herbert Spencer enumerates the following functions of the state: "It is clear that any being, whose constitution is to be moulded into fitness for new conditions of existence, must be placed under these conditions. This granted, it follows that as man has been, and is still, deficient in those feelings which prevent the recurring antagonisms of individuals and their

consequent disunion, some artificial agency is required by which their union may be maintained. Only by the process of adaptation itself can be produced that character which makes social equilibrium spontaneous. And hence, while this process is going on, an instrumentality must be employed, firstly to bind men into the social state, and secondly to check all conduct endangering the existence of that state. Such an instrumentality we have in government." While analysing the functions of state Spencer always emphasized that the state interference must not dwarf the intelligence, reason and initiative of individuals. They are the final authority to take a decision about what action is to be performed or decision is to be taken.

In the opinion of Spencer a state has chiefly two roles to play—a protector and an aggressor. ***The activities of the state are limited only to the protection of individuals. Beyond that, the state cannot do anything.*** But if it exceeds that limit it is to be regarded as an aggressor. In Spencer's own words "For, if regarded as a protector, we find that the moment it does anything more than protect, it becomes an aggressor instead of a protector, and if regarded as a help to adaptation, we find that when it does anything more than sustain the social state, it retards adaptation instead of hastening it."

Spencerian theory of the nature of the state has very little to do with the controversy between capitalism and socialism. According to Spencer the basic issue is not who owns the means of production, rather it is whether the ownership succeeds in producing more wealth and ensuring greatest happiness. The purpose of social wealth is always to maximize the happiness of individuals. If the ownership of the wealth goes to the state and not to individuals this objective will remain unfulfilled. Hence there is no question of state ownership. Gradual expansion of state power is always inimical to individual freedom and also to the production of wealth.

Herbert Spencer also treats laissez-faire or private enterprise as the potential precondition of internal and international peace and prosperity. If we analyse Spencer's analysis about the functions of state we shall come to the conclusion that he had no respect or sympathy for socialism. To him socialism meant the loss of individual's initiative and expansion of state intervention in the economic activities of men. Again, according to Ebenstein, socialism meant to him a sure return to pre-industrial type of military society. He was against the militarization of society through the intensification of states activities and role.

### **Spencer's Man versus the State:**

Spencer's political ideas are sporadically stated in many of his voluminous works but in two books Social Statics and Man versus the State we find a clear picture. Ebenstein calls the Man versus the State his most famous work on politics. This book contains his forceful arguments on laissez-faire and liberalism. It is a fact that we do not agree with his views. But still there is worth in his arguments and these have made him famous. In 1884 Spencer wrote four essays for the publication in the Contemporary Review, and these were assembled together in the form of a book entitled Man versus the State.

Herbert Spencer noticed that economic individualism had been adopted by the conservatives. He foresaw that the British Conservative Party would in future be the party of free enterprise and economic individualism. He criticized the liberal party on the ground that it was in favour of welfare programmes for the benefit of the weaker sections and people. His reasons can be briefly state in the following way. He thought that the welfare programmes would ultimately lead to socialism and he was so much against socialism that this might pertinently be called socialism-phobia. In his judgment "all socialism is slavery." His main argument against socialism is that it

creates the greatest assault on individual's freedom. Under socialism or communism the individual is enslaved to the wishes of the authority. Spontaneity becomes the greatest victim of socialization of the means of production.

Herbert Spencer admits that there are numerous problems and difficulties in society and all or most of them are created by human nature. But he thinks institutional changes cannot free the society from these difficulties. Spencer's main objection against socialism is it allows sick and incapable persons to occupy their places along with the able and well equipped individuals and this process discourages the latter. This defective procedure leads to the greatest inefficiency.

In his essay "The Sins of Legislators" Spencer says that before embarking upon any enactment of law the legislator must know the laws of social progress and the laws of society as a whole. In this essay he further states that the guiding principle of family is generosity. Whereas, the same of the state is justice. Here the weak and disabled cannot be favoured or fostered at the cost of the rich or able or healthy persons. By favouring the sick the government is inflicting injustice on the society as a whole. In other words, in the calculation of Spencer, any sort of favour shown to the weak and incapable persons is an indicator of gross injustice. It is injustice because the state cannot favour one at the cost of another. Piety and kindness is absolutely an individual affair.

Herbert Spencer announces that all the small and great discoveries until now have not been made by the government. People's painstaking research work is behind all these. Again, in navigation, arts, literature and science, the government's contribution are nothing. If this is so, why should a government interfere with the spontaneous activities of individuals? The government he defines as a "begotten of aggression and by aggression" So, he abhors state interference. On this point Spencer is perfectly right. Only individual initiative and hard labour produced most of revolutionary discoveries. If the government were allowed to conduct the scientific affairs discoveries and inventions would never happen.

In his final essay "The Great Political Superstition." Spencer equates the divine right of kings with the divine right of parliament. He says that in the past it was thought that the monarch was the representative of God on earth and because of his divinity he was above all. This is a political superstition. Today, it is thought that parliament is supreme and it is also a political superstition. Herbert Spencer rejected Hobbesian theory of absolute sovereignty and Benthamite concept of rights on the ground that both clearly aimed at enhancing the power and authority of the state. But he was not in favour of proliferation of state activities. This again means the invariable loss of individual's freedom. Spencer, the orthodox champion of individual liberty, wants to assert that justification of state authority is the abnegation of individual liberty. Even before the existence of state there were rights and people enjoyed them. So the rights are not due to the state, but they are simply sanctioned by it. Particularly, right to property existed before there was any law. The reverse picture is rather true. As the state grows, people lose their rights. In other words, the rise of state power goes with the rise of slavery. In practice, a state is never sympathetic to the rights of the people.

#### **4. Theory of Rights:**

If we go through the writings of Spencer regarding his ideas about rights, freedom etc. we shall find that he has viewed all from a broader perspective. According to Spencer freedom is the antecedent of government. Freedom is its standard. Freedom means that everyman shall enjoy his natural rights. Denial of freedom means denial of natural rights and justice. By justice Spencer meant that everyman shall be free to do what he wills provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any



other man; what he wants to say is that all the individuals shall have freedom, natural rights, and, when these are fully achieved, only then people will have the opportunity to enjoy justice. So we find that in the absence of natural rights and freedom there cannot be justice. Again, by freedom he meant the absence of all restrictions. His clear argument is that even before the creation of government there were rights and freedom.

Naturally, it is beyond the authority and power of a government to control rights and freedom. Spencer wants to make the state almost powerless chiefly for the sake of freedom, right and justice. To him all these were extremely important. **Rights are "nothing but artificial divisions of the general claim to exercise the faculties."** He calls the rights natural because they are pre-social rights. The rights are inherent properties of human constitution as divinely ordained. From this account we can frame certain features or rights. Rights are the inherent properties of every man. Man is the creation of God and by virtue of that he is entitled to enjoy rights. Then, therefore, the rights are the artificial divisions of claim made by man. These claims are essential for the development of faculties which a man possesses. Since rights are pre-social they are not created by the state.

Herbert Spencer further makes the distinction between private rights and public rights. Private rights of citizens relate particularly to property and family. Whereas, public rights are concerned with his relations to the state. Barker thinks that Spencer's private rights have certain peculiarities. He does not recognize any private right in land. That is, right to land-property is inadmissible. Why? Everyone has equal freedom to land. So there shall be public and national ownership of land and law is to be enacted to that effect. But although private property in land is not allowed, private ownership of products is to be permitted. Man will cultivate the soil and before that he will obtain the permission of the society. Once he obtains the permission he has every right to be the owner of the product.

The above conception of Spencer as to the recognition of right by society is incongruous to his original view that natural right is independent of social recognition. It is very difficult to reconcile these contradictory views. Everyone shall have free and equal access to land but that does not debar one from enjoying private right to land. National ownership of land is recognized only in socialist societies. But Spencer is a prime critic of socialism. However, this view of Spencer is revolutionary. Spencer's conception of private right to family is even more revolutionary than his right to property of land. He successfully established himself as the champion of woman's liberty. He, in unambiguous language, attacked the subjection of women and this he did even decades before J. S. Mill. Women should have right to vote. He did not also approve the subjection of children and was against coercion applied to them. He advocated the extension of liberty to children. There should not be any difference between adults and children so far as rights are concerned.

Spencer's theory of public rights is based on his attitude to government. The government is a temporary social institution. In the primitive society, when men were uncivilized and selfish, there was the necessity of government. The cage and the government are of the same category. The purpose of both is to control. But for civilized people the government is a necessary evil. To such people it is a vicious and immoral institution. It simply interferes with the free exercise of human faculty. This conception of Spencer reminds us of anarchist theory of state. The anarchists believed that at the primary stage of evolution there was the necessity of state. Since society and individuals have reached the final stage of evolution, there is no necessity of state. The state can assert its importance or existence in the following fields. First, the state will justify its existence by allowing its citizens to ignore it. The implication is that the state will do as little as possible. In the rest of the spheres the state will not exert its influence. Barker calls it effacing itself. The state will not bestow

benefits and even if it does the citizens will abandon them. Secondly, the state admits that everyone has equal freedom and the restraints it imposes upon its citizens will be shared equally by them. Partiality and the part of the state are quite unjustified and it should not be allowed to spread its roots. Finally, the state must clearly state its function. One function of the state, says Barker is protection administration of law of equal freedom maintenance of natural rights. It has been pointed out by Spencer that the state is a "joint stock protection company for mutual assistance." Criticizing Spencer's theory of natural rights Barker observes "the doctrine of natural rights is simply a doctrine of the blessedness of final anarchy." This is a serious charge against Spencer's concept of natural rights.

According to Spencer, evolution comes to an end when equilibrium is reached. It is a future stage. However, it is an absolute standard or norm. It is also a social ideal. When society, through the evolutionary process, reaches that equilibrium, people will perfectly adapt themselves with the environment. They will be perfectly intelligent, wise and rational. They will do what they ought to do. The government will be rejected just like used vesture. Since, in the perfect equilibrium, there will be no necessity of government; Barker apprehends that will create anarchy. So the social ideal is another name of anarchy. Social ideal or perfect equilibrium is a Utopia is always far from reality. So Spencer's social ideal is simply an idle conjecture. The concepts of social ideal cannot be taken too seriously. Spencer is quite wrong is assuming that the evolution of human behaviour will ever attain a state of perfect equilibrium and it will permanently stay there.

Herbert Spencer's natural rights are also called ethical rights. People voluntarily part with a portion of their rights so that their fellow citizens will enjoy these rights. Spencer's men will not claim something depriving other people. This is morality or ethics. T. H. Green spoke of the rights in the same idea. Right is a social concept and any one man cannot claim all the rights. But here is a confusion. According to Barker, if rights are ethical they cannot be natural. There is a clear difference between the approaches of Spencer and that of us. Spencer did not think that in the realization or attainment of rights state or any other authority has anything to do or contribute. People come to enjoy freedom, exercise rights and attain justice as a result of evolution.

##### **5. Liberalism:**

Herbert Spencer is undoubtedly a very important figure in the history of Western political thought and this importance is due to his contribution to liberal thought and philosophy. The central theme of his liberalism is the establishment, recognition and development of individuality and, to that end, the role of the state should be as far as practicable non-functioning or, if at all functioning, it should be limited to the minimum. Spencer's division of society into militant and industrial is significant in more than one respect. The important point is in the militant society there is uniformity. The nation is one and the army is all and the individual is nothing. Opposite to this is the industrial type of society. This type of society is famous for its heterogeneity, differentiation in function, and emphasis on individuality. Emphasis is shifted from totality to individuals. According to Spencer, "Under the industrial regime the citizen's individuality, instead of being sacrificed by the society, has to be defended by the society. Defence of his individuality becomes the society's essential duty."

In Spencer's judgment, this is the most desirable state since it is characterized by individual's freedom and minimum state interference. In *The Man versus the State* Spencer has said: "The great political superstition of the past was the divine right of kings. The great political superstition of the present is the divine right of Parliament." In this oft-quoted statement Spencer wants to emphasize that the supremacy, in both cases, is harmful for freedom. The all-powerful parliament has replaced

the all-powerful king. Otherwise there is no difference. Freedom of people in both cases was at stake. In Spencer's liberalism, therefore, there is no place of parliament or monarchy the individual is the central figure of all social activities. In the same book there is another comment: "The function of Liberalism in the past was that of putting a limit to the powers of the king. The function of the true Liberalism in the future will be that of putting a limit to the powers of Parliaments." What transpires from the above comments is that to Spencer neither the king nor the government nor parliament is above criticism. Even they are not to be regarded as divine institutions. They are created by human beings for the fulfilment of certain specific objectives. Therefore there is no divinity in all these institutions. Man constitutes the central part of the entire organisational structure and the chief function of this organisation is to make all men happy.

The interference with the economic activities by the authority appeared to Herbert Spencer economically and morally unsound and unacceptable. The law of evolution and concomitant with it is the law of the survival of the fittest operate in both animal world and society. But in the latter case the law of evolution ensures all-round progress and posits it on solid foundation. But all did not go well. Capitalism towards the end of the nineteenth century was faced with a number of crises. Spencer thought that it was free from crisis and would remain free. Subsequent events belied his hope. Public pressure was heaped upon the government to take action to arrest the crisis. It was forced to believe that the primary duty of any and every civilized government is to provide its citizens minimum necessities such as clothing, food, housing etc.

The government cannot shirk off its responsibility. Spencer's liberalism, based upon natural science, was felt inadequate. Government adopted several welfare schemes. All these irritated Spencer and towards the last years of his life he wrote "The Coming Slavery" condemning all government measures. Spencer's liberalism was no doubt an extreme form and because of this it has been revised again and again but it has never been rejected. The liberal thought started its journey from the writings of Locke and still it exists. But it has changed its colour and to some extent contents. Needless to say that demise of socialism has strengthened liberalism.

#### **Assessment of Spencer's Political Ideas:**

There are several confusions and inconsistencies in the political thought of Spencer. But in this respect Spencer is no exception. Many great thinkers suffer from this. Our objection is he was an individualist to the stage of extremity. This position of Spencer made him extremely unpopular. He believed that men were capable of ensuring their own good and naturally there was no necessity of any form of state interference. But this is not the actual situation. Social evolution teaches us that step by step the state will have to take the responsibility of the weaker sections of the society. The conflict between individualism and social organism are simply imaginary.

The presence of state in the large number of social and welfare activities does not mean the loss of individual's freedom. Rather, through the activities of state the people will be in a position to realize freedom. In the opinion of Hearnshaw "the course of social development naturally tended to display itself as a gradual movement away from primitive, anarchic individualism towards the unity of a complete communism." As an individualist Spencer's excessive zeal for preserving rights of man is quite reasonable and consistent. But we cannot reconcile this with his assertion that the private property of land cannot be permitted. He postulates national and public ownership of land. Again, though private ownership of soil is not granted private ownership of product is allowed. These are contradictory proposals. Moreover, the national ownership of land is destructive.

Spencer was not a farsighted philosopher or thinker. He saw the state simply as an evil. He might have understood that it was beyond the capacity of any individual to solve the growing economic crises. His orthodox individualism had no limits and for that reason he ruled out the possibility of state intervention. Towards the end of his life he saw the state to interfere with the free play of economic activities and this stopped the aggravation of economic situation. He vehemently opposed it, but it was welcomed by all sections of society. It is evident that Spencer's liberalism was unsuitable for the contemporary situation.

Herbert Spencer was the chief protagonist of the highly criticized doctrine—the survival of the fittest. Today it is the belief of all over the world that, it is not birth of a person which is the determiner of his subsequent fitness or unfitness. There is a tremendous impact of environment upon the character building of an individual. It is a tragedy that Spencer forgot to notice this fact. By changing or improving the environment human ability and character can be remarkably changed and remoulded. Experience tells us that under favourable circumstances man can exhibit his fitness or ability and in the opposite situation the failure of the same person will appear. A true humanitarian cannot rely on the survival of the fittest doctrine. Moreover, science cannot accept this doctrine. It believes in change and progress and this it wants to do by changing the physical environment. Science can never surrender to fate or to any supernatural element.

Sabine calls Spencer a “reactionary”. In his judgment some persons are fit and, therefore, are entitled to survive. While the rest are unfit and are not entitled to survive. This view is definitely a reactionary thought. Sabine has further concluded that Spencer's belief is baseless and a source of endless confusion about the nature of culture and social changes. When the social change takes place it makes no distinction between fit and unfit. If there are any unfit persons social change brings them under its huge and comprehensive fold and this is the exact nature of social change. So it is true that Spencer's philosophy is really the source of a lot of confusion as well as a reactionary one.

However, some people have made attempts to protect Herbert Spencer from criticism. They are of opinion that the chief objective of Herbert Spencer was to make people hard-working and self-dependent. If the weaker people are allowed permanently to depend upon the government subsidy and help that populist measure will make these men idle. It is argued that Spencer disliked this very much. Keeping this in mind Spencer strongly opposed any move on the part of the government with the sole purpose of protecting the unfit persons. It shall be the duty of any rational government to remove the hindrances which stand on the way of social progress and encourage the spontaneity of individuals. If it were the real motive of Spencer we think that he gets a plank to keep his feet for standing straight.

It cannot be said that Spencer was quite indifferent to the general welfare of society and its residents. We are of opinion that he indulged in a different view about welfare. He believed that every person should be taught that it is his duty to build up his own fate. Permanent dependence upon the state cannot ensure the improvement of human condition. Today the governments of welfare states are giving lot of material help to the weaker sections of society. But this is mainly on populist considerations. The purpose of a true welfare state must be to help its citizens to be self-sufficient and we think that Spencer wanted this. Many people felt that the state should play an increasing and positive role for the consolidation of the benefits of Industrial Revolution and because of their insistence the post-Industrial Revolution state started to play greater and crucial role. His inordinate love for Darwin's love for evolution theory led him to propound such an extreme form of individualism.