

# **MOOC ON INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY**

## **CITIZENSHIP: CONCEPT & EVOLUTION**

### **SCRIPT**

#### **Introduction**

The notion of citizenship denotes the status of an individual as a full and responsible member of a political community. It has evolved historically. Its form and substance in each historical period reflect the dominant configuration of political as well as socio-economic forces of each historical period. Citizen is a person who owes allegiance to the state and, in turn, receives protection from the state. Citizen must fulfill his duties and obligations toward the state as the state grants to citizen civil, political and social rights. Hence, citizenship implies a two-way relationship between the individual and the state.

In order to understand the significance of citizenship a distinction is made between a 'subject' and a 'citizen'. A subject is usually subservient to the state where the right to

rule is reserved for a privilege class, whereas citizens as a group of persons constitute an important element of the state. Citizenship is the product of a political community where the right to rule is decided by a prescribed procedure accepted by the general body of its members. While ascertaining the will of the general body, nobody is discriminated on grounds of race, religion, gender and place of birth.

Citizenship is generally defined in terms of legal-formal status as well as specific duties and responsibilities laid down in the Constitution and law of the land. The idea of citizenship, however, is a broader concept beyond the legal-formal framework, denoting substantive membership in the political community. T. H. Marshall in his *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950) has defined citizenship as "full and equal membership in a political community" which holds the promise of equality and integration within the political community. As societies are always marked by hierarchies of class, caste, sex, race and religion, citizenship may actually appear elusive. Equality and integration, which are constitutive elements of citizenship, however give it its

unique character as a very important concept of political science and jurisprudence. Its benefits necessarily become progressively more universal and egalitarian. Citizenship liberates people from political oppression and give them a definite legal status.

There is no consensus on the point whether citizenship only indicates a legal-political status or the expanse of political activity or the autonomy of the individual or the community and social contexts that shape the needs of the individual. The legitimate unit of citizenship can be the nation-state or the global civil society.

## **Historical Development**

The word citizenship is derived from the Latin word 'civis'. It is similar to the Greek word 'polites', meaning member of the polis (city). In modern time citizenship is understood as a system of equal rights, as opposed to privileges, based on birth. The idea of citizenship took roots in the French Revolution. As the ideologies of capitalism and liberalism developed, the idea of the 'citizen' as an individual having rights irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, caste or class

gained in wide acceptance. In recent time, especially in the context of globalization and multi-culturalism, the conventional notion of citizenship has come to be challenged.

It is possible to identify four broad historical periods when the cognitive ideas of citizenship have developed, viz. (a) classical Graeco-Roman period (4<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards); (b) late-medieval and early-modern period (late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the French and American Revolutions occurred; (c) throughout 19<sup>th</sup> century which saw the rise and growth of liberalism and capitalism; (d) contests over the form and substance of citizenship (late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries), with increasing concern for multiculturalism and community rights.

It must be noted that the form of ancient Greek community was entirely different from the present-day political community of democratic nation-state. In ancient Greek city-states a small part of the inhabitants enjoyed the status of 'freemen' who were treated as full citizens. These 'freemen' as citizens were equal among themselves as

regards their rights. There was no discrimination between the rich and the poor among 'freemen'. The rest of the inhabitant community comprised of women, slaves and foreigners (aliens) who had no rights of citizenship. This was the reason while Aristotle regarded citizenship as a privilege as the ruling class and maintained that only the citizens were to be entitled to enjoy the right to participate effectively in exercising power. Moreover, the citizens were also vested with certain duties in order to secure good life for themselves as well as non-citizens.

A new definition of citizenship evolved in the Roman Empire. Initially here too citizenship was confined to power-holders. Later it was extended to ordinary people and prisoners of war. Only the slaves and women were excluded from the benefit of citizenship. However, different categories of 'citizens' were entitled to different types of rights. This practice of the ancient Romans does not fit into the modern concept of citizenship.

In medieval Europe political authority of the state was

eclipsed by ecclesiastical authority. Temporal citizenship was no longer considered important. With the advent of moral thought in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the idea of citizenship, again, occupied the center-stage in Italian republics. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), the Italian statesman and political thinker, gave a new lease of life to the idea of citizenship. In the seventeenth century England, James Harrington (1611-1677) and John Milton (1608-1674) redefined the idea of citizenship by giving a futuristic "empire of laws, not of men". The ideological supporters of the Glorious Revolution like John Locke and others popularized the idea of citizenship. In the eighteenth century this idea became very popular during the days of American Revolution (1776).

The idea of citizenship reached its zenith with the French Revolution (1789) and the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen (1792). This Declaration echoed the views of the Revolution's philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who in his important book Social Contract (1762) observed that 'citizen' is a free and autonomous person. Citizen is entitled to participate in all those decisions; which

are binding on all citizens. Rousseau clearly saw the coming clash of interests between the private interests of the nobility and the mercantile class, on the one hand, and the common good of society and citizens. Rousseau gave prominence to the idea of common good of citizens.

In the nineteenth century the ascendancy of Liberalism gave rise to market relations; which brought a new notion of citizenship. The idea of 'natural rights' as propounded by John Locke (1632-1704) in England inspired a new concept of the right of citizens ~ "right to resist the state" ~ whenever the state fails to protect the citizens' basic "right to life, liberty and property". The bourgeois leaders of the capitalist class were strong supporters of this notion of citizens' right to resist the state's policy if such policy goes against their class interests.

From the mid-twentieth century onwards emerged a fresh idea of citizenship in the context of emerging social-political philosophy of multiculturalism and community rights.

Reviewing the developments over these four periods, it is

found that there are two major traditions in the discourse of citizenship and rights. First, civic republicanism, characterized by such thematic concerns as the idea of political participation, common good, public spirit and civic virtue; and secondly, liberal citizenship with an emphasis on individual rights and private interests. Both these traditions have been criticized by the Marxists and the feminists, who have suggested radical changes in the theory and practice of citizenship. Moreover, there are cultural pluralists, radical pluralists and civil society theorists offering their alternative views on citizenship and rights.

### **Civic republicanism**

The term 'civic republicanism' denotes a constitutional government founded on principles of sharing power to prevent arbitrary authority, and the involvement of citizens in public affairs to the mutual benefit of the individual and the community. The classical view of civic republicanism has been exemplified in Greek and Roman concepts of citizenship. The ancient Greek city-states are the examples of the classical model of the civic republican tradition that underlines the principles of classical citizenship as public



service and civic duties. In Aristotelian understanding of politics, citizenship is the primary organizing principles of human social and political life. Aristotle believed that humans attain their natural selves, that is, citizenship only by living in polis (state); that is to say, citizenship is, therefore, participation in civic life of ruling and being ruled in turn. However, in the Greek tradition, participation in the governance process was confined to free native-born men only, excluding the women, children, slaves and resident aliens. The Greek notion of citizenship was thus conceived in terms of privileges and exclusion.

The Greek idea of citizenship as active participation was modified by the Roman philosophers and jurists. In contrast to the Greek city-states, the imperial Rome had to face the task of holding together a very large and heterogeneous empire. They felt the need of integrating a diverse population and took an inclusive strategy, but a gradation was introduced in the framework of citizenship, by differentiating a legal distinction between the Roman citizens and the ethnically different non-Roman citizens living under the Roman rule and influence. Citizenship was

thus defined as a notion of legal status involving certain rights and equal protection of law. The ethnically non-Romans were however denied any political rights. Unlike the Roman citizens, the ethnically non-Romans could not take part in the process of exercising powers in the governance of the empire, and hold any public office. Moreover, women and the rural plebians were denied the status of citizens. Citizens were required thus to develop qualities of "civic virtue" meaning "manliness" in the sense of performing military duty, patriotism, and devotion to duty and the law.

The jurists and citizenship theorists in the late medieval and early modern period mainly followed the Roman tradition. Jean Bodin, the 16<sup>th</sup> century French jurist, defined a citizen as one who enjoys the common liberty and protection of the state. Thus citizenship was now primarily a passive idea. Instead of shared public responsibility and civic virtues, the notion of 'common liberty' became the primary concern of citizenship, thereby implying that the state would ensure the equal protection of law to the citizens. What the early modern liberals wanted to be protected was physical life

(Hobbes), the family and home (Bodin and Montesquieu), or conscience and property (Locke). According to this tradition, each citizen is entitled to enjoy the liberty of private pleasures and pursuit of happiness and the security of the individual and family. Hence the notion of passive citizenship as a legal status became dominant during this period. Side by side, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Rousseau could see the importance of "civic virtue" of the active citizens as an ideal to be pursued. They therefore favoured the revival of the civic ideals of the classical republican tradition.

The French Revolution (1789) revived the strand of civic republicanism and, along with the American Revolution (1776), introduced the important element of 'rights' into the notion of citizenship. These two Revolutions helped the process of emergence of the modern notion of the citizen as a free, rational and autonomous individual. This line of thinking finally led to the emergence of the ideology of nationalism and the nation-state in modern times. This new ideology implies that the 'nation' as a group of active citizens is self-determining and should be free from external

interference and internal divisions to frame its own rules and create its own institutions of governance.

## **Liberal Citizenship**

With the development of capitalist market relations and the growing influence of Liberalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of citizens as individuals with private and conflicting interests gradually gained precedence. The emergent liberal notion of citizenship, involving a loosely committed relationship to the state, demanded as little state interference in the citizen's life as possible and championed a set of civic rights for the individual. In course of time, the feudal and quasi-feudal socio-economic structures were dismantled in order to set free the citizens for exercising initiative and autonomy. The idea of citizenship was characterized by individual rights and individual mobility across social class, the idea of equality among citizens and the replacement of a localized civic society by the national political community.

In the study of liberal citizenship, T. H. Marshall has made a significant advance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to him,

the concept of citizenship developed in a peculiar relationship of conflict and collusion with capitalism. He studied citizenship as a process of expanding equality against the inequality of social class as an integral element of capitalist society. In his *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950), Marshall identifies three strands of rights, viz. civil, political, and social, constituting citizenship. Civil rights (the 18<sup>th</sup> century) advance the rights necessary for individual freedom. For example rights of freedom of speech, movement, conscience, equality before law, and property. They limit or check the exercise of government power. Political rights (19<sup>th</sup> century) include the rights to vote, to stand for elections, to hold public office. They develop political equality and democratic government. Social rights (20<sup>th</sup> century) guarantee the individual a minimum social status and provide the socio-economic basis for enjoying civil and political rights. They enable the individual to live the life of a civilized being as per the standards prevailing in society, and require state intervention in the form of social services introduced in a welfare state.

Marshall's definition of citizenship as "full and equal

membership in a political community” encapsulate two promises, viz (a) a horizontal camaraderie or equality among citizens, and (b) an ‘integration’ process bringing into the fold of citizenship the various excluded and marginalized sections of the population. Citizenship, in this sense, creates a sense of identity of belonging to the political community called ‘nation-state’ having its own social heritage and common (national) culture. Thus, in the liberal state, all citizens are entitled to equal rights or equal protection of law irrespective of differentiation of caste, class, gender, race, religion etc., thereby generalizing citizenship across social structure and promising application of same rules. This equality, however, disregards the differential situation of persons across classes to exercise the rights or legal capacities that constitute citizenship. That is to say, legal or political equality in the liberal state cannot ensure equal participation of the disadvantaged classes in enjoying citizenship rights effectively.

The political Left, feminists, communitarians, multiculturalists have all criticized the liberal concept of citizenship. Marshall himself also located the roots of

contradictions and ambivalences in the liberal theory of citizenship. These contradictory aspects of liberalism were addressed by John Rawls in his theory of justice and political liberalism since the 1970s. He underlined that citizens in a free liberal society need some “primary social goods” like liberty, equal opportunity, income and wealth as well as the bases of self-respect. He enunciated the “difference principle” whereby social and economic inequality could be acceptable only if it could ensure the greatest benefit to the least advantaged section of society.