
UNIT 14 DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

Structure

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14.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit would enable you to understand:

- The meaning of citizenship;
- Ambedkar's idea of citizenship, individual, society and state;
- Ambedkar's idea of democracy and citizenship; and
- Ambedkar thoughts on fundamental rights and directive principles.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will discuss the meaning of citizenship, Ambedkar's idea of citizenship, individual, society, state, and democracy. Citizenship is a status given to the residents of a society as its members. The term is derived from the Latin word 'civitas' meaning city, since the ancient Romans associated themselves with their city-states. Only citizens were allowed to participate in governmental activities such as voting, making legal contracts and standing for public offices. Women, slaves, freedmen and client states were not given the status of citizens, so citizenship was restrictive in nature.

In modern democracies, the meaning of citizenship expanded to become a legal status given to an individual by the constitution of the state. With modernity, citizenship was not limited to territorial connotations only but had political, cultural and social connotations as well.

The term citizenship gradually developed in the West passing from one phase to another and expanding its meaning in the process. In 18th century Britain, when the capitalist political system was protecting property and civil liberties of the individual, citizenship had civil connotations where citizens enjoyed right to speech, property and faith.

In the 19th century with the granting of adult franchise to the middle-class in Britain, citizenship became political with the citizens enjoying the right to participate in political procedures and become members of a political party.

In the 20th century according to Katz¹, social citizenship grew where citizens enjoyed wide range of rights ranging from economic welfare to the protection of

social heritage (Katz 2008). The state was transformed into a welfare state to look after its citizens.

14.2 INDIA AND CITIZENSHIP

The concept of citizenship in India was imported from the West by the European powers. Prior to the advent of the British, India had community based on kinship. Modernity and colonialism together acted on India's past and ushered in a new future. According to Nicholas Dirks,² the British crystallised the identities for proper functioning of the administration (Dirks 1992). They brought the idea of recognition and stratification. They identified the issues of caste and religion with their understanding of fluid identity and recognition through multiple ideas of governance. It has been argued by some historians that the census created caste. The British created a system that was distinct and created a new space where individuals could not escape their community. The community and the modern concept of democracy shaped the concept of citizenship in India.

Since citizenship has been tailored externally on the Indian society, we need to understand the concept of citizenship so as to capture the intricacies of state-led changes in society and focus upon the nature and conditions of political membership as a source of social integration in the context of changing state-market relations.³ (Stewart 1995). It is important to understand citizenship as modernity recognized the fragments in the society but failed to propose its eradication. Indian society had always been holistic in nature and an individual was not much emphasised upon.

In his famous essay "Castes in India: the Genesis, Mechanism and Development,"⁴ Ambedkar highlighted how the Indian society was fragmented on the basis of patriarchy, caste, class and religion (Ambedkar 2007). He felt that India was not a nation as he opined that a population divided into three thousand castes could not ignore mutual suspicion and jealousy. Nation is an idea that is built on shared emotions and agonies of its citizens.

Meaning of Citizenship

The term citizenship has been interpreted in various ways by different thinkers during its historical development. Plato's polis was based upon the citizenship that was discriminatory and unequal in nature. It excluded the women, slaves and foreigners from the umbra of citizenship. There was no distinction between the public and the private life of the citizens. Romans on the other hand expanded the concept of citizenship from the status of political equality to the judicial safeguard i.e. provision of equality under the law. During renaissance the kings demised and gradually with the rise in republicanism citizenship became the relationship between an individual and the state. The citizens no more submitted to the kings and lords. Gradually in the modern times citizenship became the membership in the political body that not only limited itself to the political sphere but also spread its influence over the social sphere by giving equal status and equal opportunities in the society. Right to citizenship is protected by law. The state not only provides with the fundamental rights but also the fundamental duties. Thus, it became a mixed bundle of rights and duties.

Thinkers like Turner⁵ understood citizenship under the realm of public/private and active/passive (Turner 1993). Gunsteren and Leca⁶ viewed citizenship in the light of historical participants and refused to bind the description of the term in a fixed understanding (Gunsteren and Leca 1994). As per the liberalist and the civic republicanism, citizenship was the confluence of rights and political obligations. It prioritized the citizens over the larger interest of the community. T. H. Marshall⁷ enhanced this theory of citizenship by integrating social, political and civil obligations (Marshall 2009). This gave rise to two types of rights.

- The reproductive rights that assimilated the tripartite of civil, social and political rights
- The right to participate in decision-making processes.

Ambedkar was highly influenced by the confluence of the liberalist civic republicanism so as to understand the concept of citizenship in the Indian context. From the liberalist individual approach he tried to imbibe the right to human dignity for all sans discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour or sex. It became the obligation of the state to protect the interests of the autonomous individuals. On the other hand from the civic republican approach he imbibed the healthy relationship between a republican state and the free individuals.

14.3 INDIVIDUAL, SOCIETY AND STATE: AMBEDKAR'S PERSPECTIVE

Ambedkar's concept of citizenship percolated down to the individual. His individual was never atomistic and isolated in nature but was embedded in the social. A man by birth was categorised under a group/caste in the society. The predestined castes gave away class privileges. The system was never based on choice. This excluded the dalits from the rest of the castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The dalits were exploited, dominated and excluded from the mainstream society.

According to Partha Chatterjee,⁸ Ambedkar emphasised upon not only the relationship between individuals but also the relationship between an individual and society. For him society was a product of the associations of the individuals. Society was the horizon while the individuals had the capacity of creating a societal environment that could protect the civil, political and social rights. Thus Ambedkar was between liberalism and communitarianism.

Gayatri Spivak⁹ opined that Ambedkar used the term endosmosis as a grounding concept to learn about the individual and group. She said that society is a relation between two groups. Chatterjee opined that Ambedkar lived in two different time zones – modernity and caste system. He had a universalistic as well as particularistic approach to mark the membership of the community. Thus Ambedkar used the idea of human institution to understand a society within and beyond.

Ambedkar, as a part of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, intended to safeguard the rights of every Indian, including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, women, and members of the religious minorities. He believed that a society with deep fissures of caste inequality was not open to changes. It was vulnerable and could succumb to instability. Rabindranath Tagore too gave

priority to the society over state as it aided in the human development. Tagore believed that society is an end in itself where people lived in cooperation. While state on the other hand was a product of commerce and politics that suppressed the natural human instincts of living with harmony and peace.

Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah marked a difference between the social and the political. Unlike other modern Indian political thinkers, Ambedkar talked of reform from social to political to ensure the recognition of citizenship in true sense. Society was basic but the state was a necessary institution.

Unlike Gandhi who held an anarchic approach to the state or Hobbes and Hegel who held an absolutist view to the state, Ambedkar found state as a means for the good of the individual. He was a liberal democrat. Unlike Tagore who dismissed the political, Ambedkar had faith in the political. He believed that state is a pragmatic idea of power. The constitution must fulfil the needs of the people.

Influenced by the French Revolution, Ambedkar stressed on the reconstruction of the social and the political based on democratic socialism. He envisioned a government that was dedicated to the consolidation of social, political and economic justice within the framework of liberty, equality and fraternity. He found democracy as the best form of government that could entail rights of its citizens in the best possible way. He believed that only the political can aid in the progress of the society.

14.4 AMBEDKAR'S IDEA ON DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

Democracy, for Ambedkar, meant an associated life. It was the process of endosmosis that linked the individuals with the groups. He opined that democracy is an arrangement in society where on the one hand there is enough space to change the society and on the other hand, there is common interest shared by the group. When the state becomes authoritative and ignores the society then the location of society becomes important. Only a democratic society can recognize the right of freedom and equal opportunity to its citizens and advance personality development of not just the citizens but also the society on the whole. Thus democracy for him was essentially a form of society rather than a form of government. Ambedkar used Dewey's concept of associated life to form the basis of his definition of citizenship.

Using the Deweyian term, "social endosmosis", Ambedkar said that there is a blockage in the process of social endosmosis in the Indian society because the society is compartmentalised on the basis of caste system. The Indian society followed the varnashram dharma which was predetermined by birth. This resulted in isolation between various castes and the impregnation of an anti-social spirit, which affected the spirit of fraternity amongst the citizens of the state.

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar writes that people do not become a society by merely living in proximity with each other. Caste prevented people from integrating into a unified society. The caste was decided by birth and was based on the occupational stratification. These castes existed in watertight compartments where the Brahmins, Vaishyas, Kshetrias and Shudras although practiced the same varna system but they were not allowed to intermarry amongst each other. The Brahmins hegemonised the varna system but they practiced

untouchability and exclusiveness. The similar attitude was imitated by the Kshetriyas and the Vaishyas. On the other hand, shudras had no other option than to live in seclusion. This way Ambedkar believed that inspite of following the same Varna system and being the part of the Hindu religion, the castes were secluded from each other and formed a distinct group identity in themselves resulting in the restriction of mobility and proximity with each other. In the Round Table Conference, Gandhi on these lines opined that since the 'untouchables' were a part of the Hindu community and lived in proximity, thus there was no requirement for a separate electorate for the Untouchables. However Ambedkar outrightly rejected Gandhi and added that since there was a conflict of like-minded groups, thus endosmosis was impossible. Ambedkar believed that the Brahmanic hegemony was so strong that the protection of the distinctiveness of the practice of custom and occupation, food habits, endogamy of each jati would offer a bottleneck to the consolidation of the real integration of castes in a society based on fraternity.

In the Southborough Committee on Franchise, he demonstrated the significance of caste. He maintained that the group interest of a higher caste mars the freedom of the lower group. Therefore, in the interest of the depressed classes, he called for franchise to provide access to public property such as wells, schools and temples and also to provide recognition and identity to all. He promoted universal adult franchise.

The isolation of the lower classes and exclusiveness of the higher, had cultivated an anti- social spirit that had shunned the development of the society. In the manuscript, "Away from the Hindus" Ambedkar stated that the social isolation of the 'untouchables' could only be dissolved by the establishment of kinship. Society is based on citizenship while religion is based on kinship. Ambedkar advocated Buddhism. In a letter to Gandhi he wrote, "I was born as a Hindu but shall not die like one."¹⁰ He found Hinduism sickened by the staunch conservative closed minded beliefs which sprang from graded inequality determined by birth. Thus, he took to Buddhism and considered it as a liberation theology under Navayana which was a new vehicle for a new journey towards emancipation and a new identity. In the second Dhammachakra Pravartan in 1956, he applied Buddhism to the larger political life of society. Ramesh Kamble¹¹ in his article "Contextualizing Ambekarian Conversion" examined that Ambedkar not only saw the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity in Buddhism as privileges but also saw Buddhism as a critique of the Brahmanic chaturvarnya system which was antithetical to Buddha's conception of righteous moral order. But largely, in the complete reading of Buddha and his dhamma, Ambedkar discovered the constituents, processes and objects of the society that he wanted to establish through his counter hegemonic struggle. Thus conversion was one of the most important tools for the struggle through which religious, spiritual and political aspects had to be transformed.

In reformulating the Buddhist tradition, Ambedkar objected to the prevalence of dukha and linked it to social economic exploitation. For him the objective of life was to be a liberated individual. In fact, for Ambedkar, religion played an important role in the matter of society and education. It enhanced personal purity and social strength. It contributed to the common good. Thus, Ambedkar considered religion essential for man and society. He considered religion as an integral part of social life and legacy.

Another theory that held importance for Ambedkar was Robertson Smith's theory of kinship that he applied to understand the social and psychological aspect of the history of identity formation of the tribes, untouchables etc. He opined that kinship allows the society to be responsible and stand against wrong that occurs. Kinship thus, instils morality and fraternity. Ambedkar therefore stressed upon the inter caste marriages as he believed that in the process of establishing the kinship the dalits could incorporate themselves in the other community which is free from the caste grid system. While quoting "Introduction to Social Psychology"¹² written by John Dewey and J H Tuffs, Ambedkar stated that kinship is the antithesis of isolation. The untouchables entering into kinship shall be able to drift away from isolation.

But Ambedkar had doubts that they would be completely free while they were under the hierarchical Hindu order. He often quoted Herbert Aptheker who demonstrated how the Afro-Americans in spite of actively participating in the Civil War were cheated of their rights. Ambedkar feared that the Untouchables would meet a similar fate.

The problem was not only social in nature. It also had deep impact on the economy. Thinkers like Saroj Giri in his Marxist reading of Ambedkar saw him as a Marxist sympathiser who viewed caste as a class struggle. If one compares Ambedkar and Fanon one observes that just as the Western capitalism monopolised the resources similarly, in the caste system Brahmanism hegemonised the Hindu culture leading to the introduction of exclusionary character in occupation, food, marriage, touch etc. Ambedkar saw the laws of Manu and the invisible hands of the market excluding and discriminating against the broken people. Therefore he followed the Marxist method of socialism to bring about emancipation in the society. Like Locke, Ambedkar stood for both political and economic liberalism. The only point in which he differed from Marx was that he wanted to avoid bloodshed to bring a change in society. He rather wanted changes in the society through parliamentary means.

Ambedkar knew that merely passing of laws would not suffice in upholding democracy and protecting citizen's rights. He opined that since the practice of caste system is so deeply embedded in the Indian society and so very normalised in the day-to-day practices, any attempt by the Untouchables to claim their citizenship rights shall be put down as has been common in history.

Thus, while drafting the Indian Constitution, he mandated the reservation policy so as to promote social endosmosis. He believed that free and equal opportunities must be available to all individuals. As a government is an association of citizens, they should have a role in determining as well as obeying the laws. In his famous work *Annihilation of Caste*,¹³ Ambedkar thus tried to integrate the civil rights of the excluded group through persuasion as well as by direct affirmative action. He had a two-pronged approach to deal with the problem.

- The humanistic approach to restore the dignity of an individual
- The approach based on social efficiency.

Ambedkar was a progressive radical who was an ardent votary of freedom. He saw freedom as a positive power which strengthened people to make their choices. The right to choose is an important aspect of empowering the citizen. Heading the drafting Committee, Ambedkar said it is necessary to make political democracy

a social democracy as well. Thus Ambedkar's understanding of citizenship is based on the theory of one-man- one-vote. Under the universal adult franchise, irrespective of caste, creed, colour or sex, all citizens enjoy the right to vote for their representative in the elections that is held every five years. The value of each vote is the same. All citizens play an important role in deciding the fate of the government. Since all citizens are important units in the state Ambedkar stressed on the importance of education. He raised the slogan "Educate, Agitate and Organise" to release humanity from bondage. He believed that cultivation of the mind would lead to ultimate freedom from any form of exploitation. It would lead to the ultimate path of human existence. It would influence social conscience and humanity in a positive way leading to the establishment of social justice.

Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles

If a society lacks social conscience, then the fundamental rights merely become the trappings of democracy. If the fundamental rights are not accepted by the society then no law or government or state could safeguard them for the citizens in real terms. Thus the fundamental rights should be such that they are inalienable to the individuals. They fulfil two objectives.

- All citizens are in the position to ascertain their rights.
- All governmental authorities are bound to guarantee them.

Under Part III of the Constitution of India, the following rights are given to every citizen:

- Right to Equality
- Right to Freedom
- Right against Exploitation
- Right to Freedom of Religion
- Cultural and Educational Rights
- Right to Constitutional Remedies
- Right to Education.

These rights are not absolute and are subject to some restrictions owing to the interests of the security of the state. Chinna Rao¹⁴ furthering the discourse on Ambedkar and rights, questioned, who needs rights. He reflected on Ambedkar's ideas in "State and Minorities," to bring out how Ambedkar was a pioneer in integrating women, scheduled caste and tribes and other minorities into the mainstream society by recognising them as equals before law and giving them equal legal safeguard. By providing them with reservation at central, state and local level, he tried to provide them with redistributive justice. Ambedkar's theory of distributive justice was based on three principles.

- equal opportunity for all citizens,
- critique of Hindu system based on autonomous ideology
- establishment of a casteless society.

He tried to remove the arbitrary privileges in the social and economic spheres. He believed fundamental rights essential for the development of every individual and preservation of human dignity.

To protect the fundamental rights of the citizens from tyranny, discrimination and social ostracism of a large section of the society, Ambedkar consolidated the Directive Principles under part IV of the Indian Constitution. This instrument of instructions aimed at the concept of a welfare state by regulating the policy of the State that would help in the making of the social and economic framework. These principles are non-justiciable. Thus the fundamental rights and the directive principles protect the rights of the citizens of India.

In the light of the above discussion on Ambedkar's perspective on citizenship, let us now learn the definition of 'citizens of India' as per the Constitution, keeping in mind that India is a heterogeneous composition of diverse cultures, castes, races and genders.

Who are the Citizens in India?

Under the Citizenship Act, 1955, the Indian Constitution acknowledges the following are eligible for citizenship of India:

- 1) People who are domiciled in India and are born in India.
- 2) Persons who are domiciled in India but are not born in India naturally. For example, Portuguese and French who have settled in India.
- 3) Persons who are residents of India but have migrated to Pakistan.
- 4) Persons who are residents of Pakistan but have migrated to India.
- 5) Persons whose parents are born in India but are residing outside India.¹⁵

The Indian Constitution provides for a dual polity with a single citizenship. India's population can be divided into natural citizens and aliens. Unlike aliens, natural citizens enjoy full political and civil rights. Only natural citizens can contest for offices such as those of the President, the Vice President and Judges of the Supreme Court.

The rights the citizens claim are equally enjoyed by all. It also becomes the duty of the state to provide equal protection of these fundamental rights for all the citizens sans any discrimination. According to Ambedkar, the right to social life is important for all individuals as denial of the same infringes upon the sense of belongingness. It forms association and identity. This identity of a citizen is not merely from a political perspective, rather it comes under the realms of social, public and interpersonal spheres too. All these spheres are built within the ambit of culture and society.

It is interesting to note that Ambedkar not only discussed the integration of all the citizens but also laid the criteria during the Constituent Assembly debates on the disqualification of Indian citizenship. Under Part II of the provisions of the Citizenship Act of the Indian Constitution, if any citizen, by virtue of naturalisation, registration or at the time of India becoming a republic on 26th January, 1950 voluntarily accepts the citizenship of any other country, then he shall cease to be a citizen of India.

14.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learned Ambedkar's views on citizenship, society and state, democracy and citizenship. A citizen is a basic unit of not only a state but

also a society. The concept of citizenship is value laden as it amalgamates all into one thread for the cause of common good. In contemporary times when the state is facing the problem of identity politics and fear of number game in democracy, Ambedkar's redistribution justice and recognition policy still finds relevance to protect the identity and rights of the citizens of India.

14.7 QUESTIONS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) What do you understand about the citizenship of India?
- 2) What are Ambedkar's views on citizenship, society and state?
- 3) Discuss Ambedkar's views on Democracy and Citizenship.
- 4) Discuss Ambedkar's thoughts on Fundamental Rights and Directives Principles of India.
- 5) What are the rules to become a citizen of India?

SUGGESTED READINGS

B R Ambedkar. Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2007.

B R Ambedkar. Annihilation of Caste. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2007.

Arun P Mukherjee, "B R Ambedkar, John Dewey and the Meaning of Democracy," New Literary History, Vol. 40, No. 2, India and the West (2009) Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

End Notes

¹ Michael B Katz. The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, discussed how the concept of welfare state promoted economic security and guaranteed basic necessity of each citizen.

² Nicholas B Dirks. Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India. University of California Press, 1992, used the historical and the anthropological approach to understand caste system in India and opined that caste was a modern phenomena and under the British administration it became a single term for capping the diverse identities in India.

³ Angus Stewart. "Two Conceptions of Citizenship," in The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1995), p. 64.

⁴ B R Ambedkar. Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2007.

⁵ Bryan S Turner, in the book "Citizenship and Social Theory," Sage Publication (1993), New Delhi, went beyond the traditional liberal theories of democracy and Marxist theory of civil society to understand the relation between individual, family, state and community so as to assess the changing nature of political and social participation of citizens in the modern world.

⁶ In the book titled, "Citizenship: Critical Concepts," Volume 1 ed. by Bryan S Turner and Peter Hamilton, Routledge (1994) London and New York,

Gunsteren and Jean Leca in the chapter “Individualism and Citizenship” had historical approach to understand the concept of citizenship.

⁷ T H Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class,” in *Inequality and Society*, ed. by Jeff Manza and Michael Sauder, New York: W.W. Norton and Co, (2009).

⁸ Partha Chatterjee. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections of Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

⁹ Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 198

¹⁰ Kancha Illiah. “Whose Ambedkar is he Anyway,” *Outlook Magazine*. New Delhi, 18 April, 2016

¹¹ Ramesh Kamble. “Contextualising Ambedkarian Conversion,” in *Economic and Political Weekly*. October, 2011.

¹² John Dewey. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. published by Library of Alexandria (1992), United of States.

¹³ B R Ambedkar. *Annihilation of Caste*. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2007.

¹⁴ Yagati Chinna Rao, in the book titled “Dalit’s Struggle for Identity,” Hardcover, (2003), New Delhi, dealt with the dalit consciousness and self assertion of political rights.

¹⁵ *Eminent Parliamentarians Monograph Series*, Dr B R Ambedkar, NMML, Lok Sabha Secretariat (1991), New Delhi.

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