Chapter 6: Citizenship

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Citizenship as full and equal membership of a political community involves both rights and obligations. Which rights could citizens expect to enjoy in most democratic states today? What kind of obligations will they have to their state and fellow citizens?

Citizenship means full and equal membership of a political community. In most democratic countries citizens can expect three kinds of rights. Political rights include the right to vote. Civil rights include freedom of speech and belief and the protection of life, liberty and property. Socio-economic rights may include the right to a minimum wage and the right to education. Equality of rights and status is itself a basic right of citizenship. Citizens also expect help and protection from their state wherever they travel. Obligations run in two directions. Towards the state, citizens must obey the legal obligations the state imposes. Towards fellow citizens and society, they carry a moral obligation to take part in and contribute to the shared life of the community. They are also seen as inheritors and trustees of the country's culture and natural resources. Democratic citizens must also settle disputes by negotiation and discussion rather than force, and protest only in ways that do not harm the life or property of others or the State.

Q2 All citizens may be granted equal rights but all may not be able to equally exercise them. Explain.

Having equal rights on paper does not guarantee that everyone can use them equally. The chapter shows this with the urban poor. Slum-dwellers and pavement dwellers often lack toilets, running water, sanitation and secure housing. Even the basic political right to vote can be hard for them to use, because inclusion in the voters' list needs a fixed address, which squatters and pavement dwellers may not be able to provide. Street vendors face police harassment. Tribal people and forest dwellers depend on forests and natural resources, and their livelihood is threatened by population pressure, mining interests and tourism. Skilled, affluent migrants are welcomed, while poor, unskilled migrants often meet resistance. So equal citizenship cannot simply mean uniform policies for all. Groups have different needs, and the rights of one group may conflict with another's. To make people truly more equal, policies must take these different needs and claims into account.

Q3 Write a short note on any two struggles for full enjoyment of citizen rights which have taken place in India in recent years. Which rights were being claimed in each case?

Two struggles can be taken from the chapter. First, the struggle of slum-dwellers and pavement dwellers. In the Olga Tellis case against the Bombay Municipal Corporation (1985), a Public Interest Litigation claimed the right to live on pavements or in slums, since no alternative housing existed near their workplace and eviction would destroy their livelihood. The Supreme Court held that Article 21, the right to life, includes the right to livelihood, so pavement dwellers should first be given alternative accommodation under the right to shelter. Similarly, street vendors, who faced harassment, won a national policy on urban street vendors (January 2004) giving them recognition and regulation. The rights claimed were livelihood, shelter and the freedom to carry on a profession. Second, the women's movement and the dalit movement. They aim to change public opinion and influence government policy so that women and dalits get equal rights and opportunities, including equal status and non-discrimination. People displaced by development projects have also struggled for their rights.

Q4 What are some of the problems faced by refugees? In what ways could the concept of global citizenship benefit them?

Refugees are people displaced by war, persecution, famine or other causes whom no state is willing to accept, and who cannot return home. They become stateless or illegal migrants and are guaranteed rights by no state. They often live in camps or in precarious conditions, and frequently cannot legally work, educate their children or acquire property. They also have no alternative identity to replace the citizenship they cannot obtain. Palestinian refugees in the Middle East are one example. Global citizenship could help because it moves from state-guaranteed rights towards human rights. Problems that cross national boundaries, such as migration and statelessness, need cooperative action by the people and governments of many states. A notion of global citizenship could make it easier to find acceptable solutions, or at least to ensure refugees basic rights and protection regardless of the country in which they live.

Q5 Migration of people to different regions within the country is often resisted by the local inhabitants. What are some of the contributions that the migrants could make to the local economy?

Freedom of movement lets labour migrate where jobs are available, and migrants contribute in many ways. Skilled workers add expertise, such as I.T. workers in Bangalore and nurses from Kerala who serve across the country. Unskilled workers supply labour for the booming building industry and infrastructure projects like road making. Migrant and slum-dwelling workers also do necessary work, often at low wages, as hawkers, petty traders, scavengers, domestic workers, plumbers and mechanics. Small businesses such as cane weaving, textile printing and tailoring develop in slums. The city spends relatively little on their services such as sanitation and water, yet their labour makes a significant contribution to the economy. States are even proud of their ability to attract skilled workers. Local resentment arises mainly when jobs are scarce or wages are lower, but migrants fill labour needs and help local economies grow.

Q6 "Democratic citizenship is a project rather than an accomplished fact even in countries like India which grant equal citizenship". Discuss some of the issues regarding citizenship being raised in India today.

The Indian Constitution adopted an inclusive, democratic notion of citizenship. Citizenship can be acquired by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation or inclusion of territory. The state may not discriminate on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and the rights of religious and linguistic minorities are protected. Yet struggles continue because many groups feel denied full rights. The women's movement, the dalit movement and the struggles of people displaced by development projects are examples. Other live issues are resistance to migrants from other regions ('Mumbai for Mumbaikars'), demands to reserve jobs or college seats for locals, the housing, livelihood and voting problems of the urban poor, the threats to tribal and forest-dwelling people, and stateless people and refugees from neighbouring countries, of whom only a few get citizenship. Since societies change and marginalised groups raise new demands, these must be negotiated democratically. Citizenship is therefore an ideal to work towards, not a finished achievement.