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Citizenship in contemporary societies

In a world where people of different cultures end up living in one country, it is important to come with laws that can define the citizenship of the people. Coming up with a universal code for citizenship has not been easy since different people always have different social status in the society. There are three ways with which one can become a citizen of a country. The major question that people always ask is whether every person should have the same rights regardless of the means they used to become citizens of a given country. Modern societies, like Canada, contain people from different cultures which make it hard for them to come up with laws that govern citizenship. This paper aims to look at the how the proposition by T.H Marshall changed the idea of citizenship and what his critics are saying. The paper will also look at whether the idea of universal citizenship is the best or whether people can use differentiated citizenship as argued out by Kymlicka and Norman.

Citizenship is one of the most crucial topics that people are currently a discussion in the world. Different countries have different ways of dealing with their citizens. Different scholars have tried to come up with some of the best ways that can be used to bring fairness and quality to every person in any given country. The problem with such principles is that they do not always relate to every citizen within the country. Modern citizenship is mainly focused on the social rights of individuals. This is a branch of international law since it focuses on the lives of people living in any given county. Discussion on the rights of citizens is a topic that has been discussed for a long duration. During the 1943 lecture, T.H Marshall argued that the best type of citizenship is one that focuses on the civil, political and social rights of any person within a state. The thoughts of the scholar have been respected by many people, but over the years, critics have come up with ways of improving the thoughts of Marshall (Kirsten, P67).

T.H Marshall’s view of social citizenship

In the eighteenth century, people were mainly concerned about the economic rights. Most of the people felt that the laws did not in any way contribute to the economic empowerment of the people within the country. When talking about international laws, it is important to put into consideration both the natives of the specific country and those that gained citizenship of the country by other means. There are three major ways that one can use to get the citizenship of any country. The first one is by birth. A child born within a given country is automatically a citizen of that specific country. One can also become a citizen of a country by naturalization. This implies that one can live within a given country for a given number of years after which he or she will be identified as a citizen of the country. The major point is that the person has to be within the country for the specified period. One can also become a citizen by registration. It refers to a situation where one applies to become a citizen of a country. In most cases, people who use this method are interested in working or investing in the country for a long duration. They feel that the citizens of the country enjoy more rights and hence the only way they can be comfortable in the country is to become citizens.

T.H Marshall looked at the evolution of social rights from the 18th century to the 20th century. The social rights of the people evolved depending on the issues that people were facing at that particular time. The 18th century was mainly concerned with the economic rights as it aimed at giving opportunities to every person within a given country. In the 19th century, there were a lot of political activities all over the world, and the major discussion revolved around the politics. The political activities led to the emergence of contemporary societies like Canada which had a lot of problems with their social rights. It is the reason why the 20th century was mainly involved with the social rights of the citizens (Kirsten, P90).

According to T.H Marshall, modern citizenship is majorly constituted of political, civil and social rights. People who live within a country have to enjoy a certain level of rights that allow them to engage in the politics of the region, engage in civic activities for the benefit of the country and also feel free to socialize with other people. Marshall believed that the laws would bring equality to every person within the state where they lived. As he gave his lecture, his major case study was England which is the country that he was most conversant with. His lecture aimed at providing equal opportunities to all the people that lived within any country. As a result of increased interaction between people of different countries, people from other countries would also end up in other countries. They could as well choose to be citizens of that particular country. In this case, it was important to come up with a certain set of rules that could govern their operations within the country.

The result of his thoughts and arguments was the social citizenship. It was meant to provide a certain set of standards with which citizens of a given country would interact based on politics, civil activities and the social interactions with amongst themselves. Marshall argued that one could only become a citizen of a given country by either birth or naturalization. The citizenship by birth was an automatic one while the citizenship by naturalization took a certain period according to the society where one lived. Even in the case of citizenship by naturalization, Marshall argued that one had to enjoy rights just like any other citizen in the country. The rights could not only be limited to the labor market and the economic ability of the citizens. It also had a lot to do with eh civil, political and social rights of every citizen within the country.

Marshall said that all the three rights within social citizenship le to equal opportunities for every person within the society. He implied that with the same rights, all the citizens had access to the same opportunities within the country and could be allowed to engage in the politics of the land. In most cases, citizens from other countries were not allowed to engage in the politics of the country in question, and this was not fair on their part. They also needed to exercise their political rights just like the other citizens. They also had to enjoy the same social rights as the other citizens. This would make them to freely interact with other members of the society. They could as well marry other citizens without fear of being secluded within the law. Marshall had in mind the things that were going in at that particular time, just after the Second World War. He believed that the best way that could be used to solve such problems was by ensuring every person in the world enjoyed the political, social and civil rights.

Contribution by Revi

Another proponent of social citizenship was Revi. Although he criticizes the method of solving a majority of the problems in capitalist states as proposed by Marshall, he goes ahead to agree that social citizenship is one of the ways that can be used to solve the problems. He agrees that by ensuring that the citizens have civil, political and social rights, citizens can have access to equal opportunities from the government and the country at large. Revi thinks that social citizenship can help in solving most of the problems experienced by capitalist states.

The major problem pointed out by Revi is the fact that it can result in passive citizens. It is always essential that every citizen within the country should take part in activities that require their participation. He goes ahead to point out the gaps that appear in social citizenship. The first gap is that it gives citizens the freedom to choose whether they want to engage in activities that involve the state or if they wish to stay away from such activities. The problem of passive citizens is common in most capitalist states. People are only interested in the money that they make from their daily activities without taking into account the interaction they should be having with other people as well as their role as civilians in the country.

Citizens must ensure that they reject some of the rules that might be of any importance to them. Having passive citizens in a country makes it hard for the country to bring the interest of every citizen on board. The problem is not with the government; the citizens are to blame for the not coming out to point out the things that they would wish to include in the rules that govern them. Apart from pointing out the problem associated with social citizenship. Marshall assumes that same social status means that people will have equal opportunities. In reality, there are a lot of factors that can determine the opportunities that people get in the country. It does not have a direct correspondence with the social status of the people. The government must play its part. He suggested that amendments should be made to the social citizenship so that it can solve the majority of the problems that people experience.

Solution highlighted by Kymlicka and Norman

Kymlicka and Norman are among the groups of people who rejected the social citizenship as a way of solving the major problems that people face in the capitalist states. They talked about the issue of citizenship, and social policy in contemporary societies. They argued that contemporary societies like Canada are constituted of people from different cultures. Universal citizenship as outlined by Marshall cannot cater for such special groups. Social citizenship has been rejected by people from different groups because it does not take into account the special groups of people. It is common knowledge that each group of people is affected by different things and therefore need to have different rights compared to what Marshall offers (Kymlicka & Norman, P45).

They agree that the thoughts of Marshall can work well but not in a society with different groups of people. Having universal laws makes it hard for people with physical disabilities to enjoy the same civil, political and social rights just like the rest of the citizens in the country. Kymlicka and Norman suggest that the special groups should have special laws that relate to them. It is the only way that every person within the country can feel that their rights have been handled. With the universal citizenship, it is not easy to find even one group of people who feel satisfied with the laws that they have. It is important to differentiate the rights of individuals in a manner that every group of people have their rights and interests enshrined in the law of the country. Kymlicka and Norman proposal is the best that can be used to solve the problems in contemporary societies like Canada. These are societies that have different groups of people that require to have a different level of rights.

They argue that the rights that individuals have should correspond to the responsibilities they have in life. Kymlicka and Norman says that social citizenship instead of coming up with ways of including all the particular groups that are many in the contemporary societies. Different countries have come up with ways that can be sued to address the problems that people have depending on the groups in which they can be classified. If a country wants to attain equality for every person within its borders, the best thing to do is to come up with rights that are differentiated based on the groups present in the country. The process can only be achieved when people take time to consult and know what other groups want to have as rights. Another alternative that can be used is to incorporate all the rights of the groups in the social citizenship to improve it (Kymlicka & Norman, P50).

In Quebec, the ban on religious symbols is a fight against the minority groups that are exercising their religious rights. Leaders in government say that it is the best way that they can deal with the emergence of such groups. The problem with such a ban is that it does not take into account the minority groups who want to enjoy their right to practice their religious beliefs. Differentiated rights and responsibilities are the only way that the government can use to accommodate every individual in the country.

Works Cited

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