



DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Sarita Pani

Assistant Professor of Political science

Abstract :

Citizenship and Democracy are two sides of a coin. Active citizenship makes democracy more stronger and strong democracy makes citizens more responsible. The concept of traditional citizenship is now reshaped with digital citizenship, that makes democracy more active and more participatory. Citizens are no longer silent viewers of political decisions rather they are expressive within a short span of time. Digital world and internet connectivity makes them more responsible citizens. It refers to the responsible, informed and active participation of citizens in democracy through digital platforms. Social media, online campaign, digital petition, e-governance, podcast, online discussion, X, create new opportunities for citizens to be more active.

Introduction

‘Amrit Pidhi’ or Gen Z are playing an important role in the contemporary political, social, economic, and intellectual sphere. The new generation or Generation Z is very much open about their social, political, and economic role and status. They want to design each aspect according to their own way. ‘Why’ and ‘Why not’ is one of the major questions they have. They are time-oriented and goal-centric. In the process, they reshaped the concept of citizenship with Digital Citizenship.

What is Citizenship?

According to Aristotle: “Citizenship is associated with participation in the deliberative and judicial functions of the state.”

D. D. Raphael defines: “Citizenship involves membership of a political community and participation in its public affairs.”

T. H. Marshall: Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community, where all who possess the status are equal regarding shared rights and duties.

Citizenship is the legal status of being a member of a country, which connects an individual to a state and grants them specific rights, duties, and protections. Thus, citizenship means the rights and duties related with citizens. It is the legal and political relationship between state and citizen.

In simple terms, citizenship refers to the enjoyed rights and performed duties by individuals towards the state by being a citizen. A citizen enjoys certain rights and privileges and accepts certain duties and responsibilities towards the state. This is citizenship.

Digital Citizenship:

In simple terms, digital citizenship means enjoying citizenship through digital techniques. It is a multifaceted concept. It concerns the rights, responsibilities, skills and behaviour of individuals who participate in state activities through digital technology. In other words, digital citizenship is the capacity of individuals to participate effectively and responsibly in social, economic, cultural and political life through digital platforms.

It includes:

1. Digital literacy.
2. Access to digital technologies.
3. Responsible use of social media.
4. Protection of privacy and personal information.
5. Understanding of digital rights.
6. Critical evaluation of online information.
7. Respectful online communication.
8. Participation in digital civic and political activities.

Political Participation

Political participation is the process of activities taken part in political activities. It refers to activities through which citizens attempt to influence political decision-making, public policy and the functioning of government. Political participation includes voting in elections, contesting in elections, joining political parties, attending political meetings, contacting elected representatives, participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, working with civil society organizations, etc.

Digital Participation

Political participation through the above areas is now called traditional participation. Nowadays, political participation through digital platforms is one of the most effective and popular forms of participation. It includes:

1. Following political leaders on social media like X, Instagram, Facebook, etc.
2. Discussing political issues on social media.
3. Participating in online political discussions through social media forums and online communities.
4. Supporting or initiating petitions demanding changes in government policies.
5. Digital campaigning by political parties and candidates by using social media, websites and digital advertisements.
6. Means of connecting people with political representatives through mail, WhatsApp and online platforms.
7. Online voting on particular issues is now a popular platform to collect public opinion.
8. Citizens create blogs, videos, podcasts, memes and other content related to political issues.
9. Digital platforms are also used to oppose or protest on public issues.

10. It is the quickest platform for government information through government websites and portals to obtain information about policies, schemes and public programmes.

11. Citizens can give their suggestions, feedback and complaints through digital government platforms.

Digital Citizenship and Political Participation

In the age of Artificial Intelligence, digital citizenship and political participation through digital citizenship is very important. Political information can be accessed from anywhere with internet connectivity. Political messages and information are spread rapidly.

Digital citizenship develops interaction with politicians, institutions and citizens rapidly. It reduces the financial cost of participation. Citizens participate in political issues beyond elections. Participation of citizens is increasing day by day at a high rate. It strengthens citizens' participation through increased political awareness.

Digital participation develops new channels for communication between citizens and government. It encourages youth participation, facilitates youth participation and political mobilisation.

Challenges before Digital Citizenship

1. Digital divide: Not everyone has equal access to digital devices.

2. Misinformation and fake news.

3. Online polarization.

4. Privacy concerns.

5. Cybersecurity threats.

6. Online harassment.

7. Digital literacy gap.

8. Political manipulation.

Conclusion

In democracies, political participation is very necessary for its successful working. Nowadays, voters are very active and sensitive to political issues. They express their views and opinions through digital media. India as the largest democracy, participation is very much required. Digital citizenship and political participation are closely interconnected in modern democracies. Rapid development in digital technology, the internet and social media has transformed the way citizens interact with government, access political information, express their opinions and participate in public affairs.

Digital citizenship provides individuals with the knowledge, skills and responsibilities necessary to participate effectively and responsibly in the digital era. It strengthens democracy by making government more transparent, accountable and responsive. Citizens become more empowered and democracy becomes more strengthened.