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Q2(c)

The nature of relationship between equality of democratic citizenship and liberty of citizens is influenced by economic equality. Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 1 · 15 marks · Equality

Equality: Social, political and economic; relationship between equality and freedom; Affirmative action.

Core demand of the question

- State democratic citizenship as equal civil and political status (15 marks)
- State liberty as non-arbitrary freedom of citizens
- Show how economic inequality alters the relation between the two
- Use **Rawls**, **Marshall**, and Indian constitutional practice

Revision summary

Democratic citizenship is equal civil and political standing; liberty is freedom from arbitrary interference and the chance to use that standing.

Marshall's social rights and **Rawls's** fair opportunity and difference principle treat economic conditions as part of justice, not as a private afterthought.

Marx and **Ambedkar** warn that political equality on a base of class and caste inequality is unstable and often empty.

Indian Directive Principles, reservations, and Minerva Mills show the constitutional attempt to keep rights and socio-economic justice together.

Economic equality in this argument is a floor against domination, not a demand to trade away equal basic liberties.

Introduction

- **Democratic citizenship promises equal standing:** the same vote, the same basic rights, the same claim to be heard. Liberty promises that this standing is not an empty title, but a space in which citizens can act without arbitrary interference. Economic inequality changes both. It can turn equal citizenship into a form and liberty into a privilege of those who can afford to use it.

Body

Equality of citizenship and liberty

T. H. Marshall distinguished civil, political, and social rights. Equal citizenship in a democracy is first civil and political: **Locke's** person under law, the franchise, association. Liberty here is both negative - not being arbitrarily jailed or censored - and the positive capacity to take part. **Isaiah Berlin** warned against crushing negative liberty in the name of a single real self. **John Rawls** answered by giving equal basic liberties lexical priority, then adding fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle so that liberty is not formal only.

How economic equality enters

If income, land, and education are concentrated, the poor citizen has the vote and little time, counsel, or media to use it. Campaign finance, unpaid care, and bonded labour show the point. **Marx** called bourgeois liberty the liberty of the property owner. **Ambedkar** insisted that political democracy cannot last on a base of social and economic inequality. India's Directive Principles, reservations, and land-reform attempts are constitutional admissions of that fact.

Economic equality need not mean identical incomes. It means a floor and a check on domination: the least advantaged can still be citizens in **Rawls**'s sense. Without that, equality of citizenship and liberty pull apart. The rich enjoy both; the poor are equal on paper and unfree in the market and the village.

Minerva Mills treated the harmony of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles as part of the basic structure. That judicial line is a comment on this question: liberty of citizens and socio-economic justice are not two unrelated lists.

Flow diagram

Equal citizenship -> Vote and civil rights
Liberty -> Non-arbitrary action
Economic equality -> Equal citizenship
Economic equality -> Liberty
Economic inequality -> Formal rights only

Conclusion

Equality of democratic citizenship and liberty of citizens support each other when economic inequality is limited enough that rights can be used. Extreme economic inequality makes citizenship formal and liberty unequal. **Rawls**, **Marshall**, **Ambedkar**, and the Indian pairing of rights with directive principles all state that relation. The comment is therefore an agreement with the given statement, with the caveat that economic equality is a condition of effective liberty, not a licence to abolish basic rights.

Facts & figures

Marshall

Citizenship is analysed as civil, political, and social rights unfolding historically; social rights address the market's threat to equal status.

Rawls

Equal basic liberties have priority; fair opportunity and the difference principle then regulate economic inequality.

Minerva Mills, 1980

The Supreme Court held that Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles must be read in harmony and that this balance is part of the basic structure.

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