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## ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

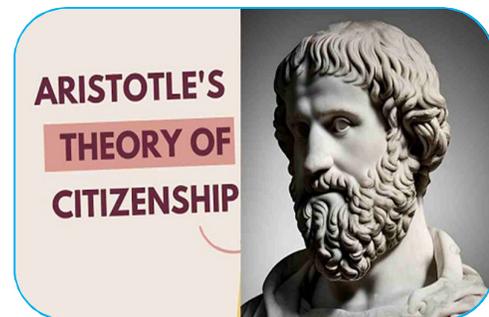
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### ABSTRACT :

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), the Greek philosopher and disciple of Plato, is often called the 'Father of Political Science'. In his famous work 'Politics', he discusses the concept of citizenship in detail. Aristotle's theory of citizenship is considered one of the earliest systematic accounts of the subject. He connected the idea of citizenship with the functioning of the polis (city-state) and defined it in terms of participation in governance. His views have greatly influenced Western political thought.



**KEYWORDS :** Active Participation, Deliberative or judicial offices, women, slaves.

### INTRODUCTION:

Aristotle discusses about who a citizen is in his work named Politics. He begins with a definition of the citizen, since the city-state is by nature a collective entity, a multitude of citizens. Citizens are differentiated from other inhabitants, such as women, children and elderly members of city-states on the one hand, resident aliens and slaves on the other hand. After more analysis, he defines the citizen as a person who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office. For instance, in Athens citizens had the right to attend the assembly, the council and other bodies or to sit on juries. The Athenian system varied from a modern representative democracy in that the citizens were more directly involved in governing. Although full citizenship was restricted in the Greek city-states (with women, slaves, foreigners and some others excluded), the citizens were more deeply enfranchised than in modern representative democracies because they were more directly involved in governing. This is reflected in Aristotle's definition of the citizen (without qualification). Further, he defines the city-state as a multitude of such citizens which is adequate for a self-sufficient life.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Both descriptive and analytical methods are used in this paper. This is done on the basis of secondary data collected from various books, research journals, scholarly articles and web materials.

### DEFINITION OF CITIZENSHIP:

Aristotle defined a state as a collective body of citizens. Citizenship was not to be determined by residence, since the resident aliens and slaves also shared a common residence with citizens, but were not citizens. Nor could citizenship be defined by the share one had in civic rights, to the extent of being entitled to use and be sued in courts of law, for this right belonged to aliens as well.

A citizen was one who enjoyed the right to share in the deliberative or judicial offices, and was able to exercise his political rights effectively. A citizen also enjoyed constitutional rights under the system of public law.

For Aristotle, a citizen was one who shared power in the polis, and unlike Plato, did not distinguish between "an active ruling group and a politically passive community". Aristotle stipulated that the young and the old could not be citizen, for one was immature and the other infirm. He did not regard women as citizens, for they lacked the deliberative faculty and leisure to understand the working of politics.

#### **FEATURES OF ARISTOTLE'S CITIZENSHIP :**

1. Active Participation – A citizen must actively participate in decision making and governance of the state.
2. Political and Legal Functions – Citizenship is defined by taking part in law-making, judicial duties, and holding public office.
3. Not Based on Residence Alone – Merely living in a city does not make a person a citizen.
4. Exclusion of Certain Groups – Women, slaves, laborers, and foreigners were excluded from citizenship in Aristotle's time.
5. Citizenship and Polis – Citizenship was meaningful only within the framework of the polis (city-state).

#### **Types of Citizens According to Aristotle:**

Aristotle recognized that different types of constitutions produce different forms of citizenship. For example, citizens in a democracy are different from citizens in an oligarchy or aristocracy. Thus, the nature of citizenship is closely linked to the constitution of the state.

#### **Status of Citizen:**

According to Aristotle, the nature of political authority is different from all other types of authority. Political authority stands for the authority used by political office-holders over other citizens. This authority is used according to the rules of the prevalent constitution. In other words, the relation between the ruler and other citizens in a state is determined by the prevalent form of government. Thus different patterns of relations between the ruler and other citizens may be found under different types of constitutions of the state. For example, citizen under a despotic rule would not enjoy the same privileges as those under a monarchical role.

#### **Good citizens versus good men**

One of the most intriguing aspects of Aristotle's discussion on citizenship is his distinction between the virtue of a good man and the virtue of a good citizen. According to Aristotle, a good man pursues virtue for its own sake, striving to achieve moral excellence in all areas of life. This idea is closely related to Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, or human flourishing, which is the ultimate goal of life.

On the other hand, a good citizen possesses virtues that support the specific regime of the polis. These virtues may not necessarily align with the virtues of a good man but are essential for the stability and functioning of the political community. For example, in a democratic polis, a good citizen might value equality and participation, while in an oligarchic polis, a good citizen might value wealth and status.

This distinction highlights the complexity of Aristotle's thought. He recognizes that the virtues required for good citizenship can vary depending on the political context, and these virtues may not always lead to individual moral excellence.

#### **The importance of participation:**

A key component of Aristotle's definition of citizenship is active participation in the political life of the polis. For Aristotle, being a citizen is not a passive status but an active role that involves engaging

in deliberative and judicial processes. This participation is crucial for the health and stability of the polis, as it ensures that citizens are invested in the community's well-being and governance.

Aristotle's emphasis on participation contrasts with more modern, passive notions of citizenship, where individuals might be citizens in name but not actively involved in political processes. For Aristotle, true citizenship requires a deep commitment to the common good and a willingness to contribute to the community's governance.

### Importance of Citizenship:

1. Foundation of the State – Citizenship defines the political community and gives it identity.
2. Ensures Political Stability – Active citizen participation maintains stability and order in the state.
3. Moral Development – Citizenship develops moral and civic virtues among individuals.
4. Collective Good – Citizens work for the welfare of the community, not just personal gain.
5. Defines Rights and Duties – Citizenship determines who has rights and responsibilities in the polis.

### Limitations of Aristotle's Citizenship:

1. Exclusionary – It excluded women, slaves, laborers, and foreigners from political participation.
2. City-State Bound – Citizenship was limited to small city-states and could not be applied to larger states.
3. Class Bias – Favored the elite and educated classes, ignoring the majority population.
4. Outdated Today – Modern citizenship is universal and inclusive, unlike Aristotle's restricted view.

### Relevance of contemporary society:

While Aristotle's views on citizenship are rooted in the context of the ancient Greek polis, they offer valuable insights for contemporary discussions about citizenship and political participation. Several aspects of his thought are particularly relevant today:

- **Active participation:** Aristotle's emphasis on active participation reminds us of the importance of civic engagement. In a time when voter turnout is often low, and political apathy is widespread, Aristotle's call for active involvement in political life is a timely reminder of the responsibilities of citizenship.
- **Virtues supporting the regime:** Aristotle's distinction between the virtues of a good citizen and a good man can help us think about the specific virtues needed to support democratic governance today. These might include tolerance, respect for diversity, and a commitment to justice.
- **Dynamic nature of citizenship:** Aristotle's recognition that citizenship can change with political shifts highlights the importance of being vigilant about who is included and excluded in our political communities. As societies evolve, so too must our understanding of citizenship and inclusion.

### CONCLUSION:

Aristotle's concept of citizenship highlights the importance of active participation in political life. For him, a citizen was not merely a resident but a participant in governance and justice. Although his definition was narrow and excluded many groups, the essence of his theory – that citizenship involves rights, duties, and responsibilities – continues to influence political theory. In modern times, citizenship has expanded to include equality, inclusiveness, and universal rights, but Aristotle's emphasis on civic virtue and political participation still forms the core of democratic life.

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