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Citizenship and Wellbeing

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1. Introduction

This piece is a critical engagement with the contemporary research on wellbeing which provides realistic promise of moving away from the income-oriented and materialist conception of development. Wellbeing as a perspective has attempted to overcome the shortcomings that have been associated with the mainstream understandings of development that pervaded academic as well as practical discourses for around half a century. Research from this new position has revealed the ways in which conventional economistic conceptions prove to be narrow and misleading in placing utmost importance on the objective circumstances of the person. On the contrary, wellbeing perspective highlights the significance of taking the subjective evaluation of the circumstances by the person as well as objective condition into account. It argues that any state of wellbeing or illbeing is produced in a given time through the interplay of social, political and cultural processes under which human beings live their lives. Thus wellbeing emerges as a holistic concept that seeks to engage in understanding people's lives as they are lived in society. Social factors such as relationships with family, community and state are given prime importance; going beyond monetary gains wider range of factors such as cultural status, political participation and recognition, psychological satisfaction etc. are taken as significant constituent of wellbeing.

However, wellbeing is rather a newer venture within development spectrum with its focus on normative understanding and explanation of the ways in which people can pursue their lives in more meaningful way. The perspective has already made significant stride forward in outlining its theoretical and conceptual grounding. With acknowledgement of this achievement, the present paper intends to contribute towards further conceptual enhancement of wellbeing. It

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contemplates that the ways in which the perspective currently outlines some of its theoretical underpinnings can be substantially moved forward; the standpoints can be further illuminated and strengthened. Precisely the argument is that critical incorporation of some of the conceptions and understandings that emanate from contemporary citizenship debate within the wellbeing framework would widen and strengthen its theoretical and conceptual foundation.

The position can be made clearer with a reference to what Sointu (2005) has observed in her review of the popular discourses of wellbeing in developed countries, particularly in UK. She noted that there has been a manifestation of change from "subjects as citizens" to "subjects as consumers" in recent time. In contrast to this shift in popular consumerist discourses, what wellbeing needs to focus, this paper argues, is promoting "subjects as citizens". Putting greater focus on subjectivity of citizenship can widen the conceptual grounding of wellbeing.

However, the conception of citizenship that the paper argues to bring in is not non-problematic one. The conception of citizenship itself is very much contested. In recent years there has been particular attention on how a broader conception of citizenship can contribute toward the goal of building inclusive societies (Gaventa 2002; Cornwall 2002). A more sociologically oriented conception of citizenship has been proposed (Kabeer 2005) that focuses on the ways in which a person's social relationships are intertwined with her senses of rights and obligations – at community level as well as at different levels of the state. This also highlights how different forms of relationships and memberships interact with the patterns of access and exclusion in the society. It is this revised and extended conception of citizenship that, I argue, can provide key insight and understanding about the dynamism of wellbeing as it is produced through the social and political processes.

Thus this piece is an attempt to theoretically outline how citizenship debate can contribute toward wider grounding of wellbeing

perspective. First it will review the areas in which wellbeing has moved away from conventional developments thoughts, and highlight the distinction and strength of the perspective. While doing so, it will also identify the areas which need to be more adequately and elaborately accounted for. Then, with a detailed examination of the citizenship debate, it will specify the ways in which conceptions of citizenship can significantly illuminate the wellbeing perspective.

2. Wellbeing – A distinctive perspective

Wellbeing as a concept has been in the process of gaining precise and focused connotation in recent years. Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2006) noted that a settled consensus on the meaning of wellbeing was yet to emerge. However, efforts from within the academic discourse of development and social policy, particularly with the works of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) research group into Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) at University of Bath, UK has contributed significantly toward outlining a practical and operationalizabale conception of wellbeing that synthesizes major bodies of contemporary development thinking under its rubric (McGregor 2008). As the leading academic initiative to explore the conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the social and cultural construction of wellbeing in specific developing societies, WeD has brought together varieties of related ideas and concepts and highlighted wellbeing as both relational and dynamic idea.

In WeD approach the conception of wellbeing is distinctive, in the first place, for its positive connotations. It departs from dominant studies of poverty and deprivation with the recognition that poor men, women and children in developing countries are not completely defined by their poverty; nor can they be fully understood in terms of impoverishment alone. On contrary to the policy approaches that have taken negatives as their focus, the approach of wellbeing sets out by acknowledging the 'fully rounded humanity' of these people (Gough, McGregor, Camfield 2006; White 2008). It underlines that

even alongside deprivations, poor people in developing contexts are able to achieve some elements of what they conceive as wellbeing (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001; cited in Gough, McGregor, Camfield 2006). This positive shift in approach might be more significant than what it appears at first (White 2009). Most importantly, this brings in a holistic outlook .The single operational definition that WeD has developed focuses on relationships (being with others), need fulfilment, meaningful acting, and satisfactory enjoyment of life; it views that all these are intertwined with each other.

This conception of wellbeing is holistic at different levels (White 2009). *Firstly*, it takes account of the objective circumstances of the person as well as their subjective evaluation of these. In doing so it promises to connect mind, body and spirit of the person, overcoming the divisions that emanate from post-enlightened modernist understanding of the person. *Secondly*, it imagines a person in the centre of wellbeing process who is free from the flawed conception of neo-classical economics; the person is no more the *homo economicus* who always strive to maximize self-interest and utility, rather is located in the society and behaves in terms of the culture in which she lives. The person is situated within the social ontology. *Thirdly*, wellbeing rejects the compartmentalisation of people's lives according to areas of professional specialisation or sectoral divisions that characterise public policy and practice.

3. Wellbeing and Centrality of Social Relationship

As McGregor (2006) notes, wellbeing is distinctive from other perspectives because it recognises the centrality of social human being. It places the individual in the context of society and social collectivity – an acknowledgement of 'human ontology'. McGregor (ibid.: 6) observes,

> 'We argue that placing the human being at the centre of analysis requires us to acknowledge the entirely social nature of that human being. We cannot understand the human being without reference to the collectivities, communities and societies within

> which they are located and live their lives. These different forms of collectivities bring with them the social structures and ideologies within which human beings interact'.

The argument of Douglas and Ney (1998) that many of the theories that dominate the analysis of poverty, welfare and wellbeing in contemporary social science lack 'a theory of the person' is endorsed by McGregor (2006). Douglas and Ney (1998) propose that such a theory would require a conception of the person as a 'social being'. The social being is constituted through relationships with other persons. Responding to this analysis, wellbeing adopts the human ontology and places the social human being at the centre of the analysis.

The recognition of centrality of social relationship is surely one of the major theoretical advancement through which wellbeing perspective moves away from the limitations of conventional development approaches. This also manifests wider responsiveness of the framework towards contemporary theoretical debates in social sciences. However, the approach does not appear to be fully placed to account for social relationships in its full complexity. Precisely, the approach does not adequately explain the issues of power and politics that every social relationship involves. It is one of the major areas in which the incorporation of citizenship understanding can provide current understanding of wellbeing with wider conceptual grounding, this paper argues.

3.1. Relationship and power: Wellbeing perspective's 'incompleteness'

It will be exaggeration to claim that wellbeing does not account for the complexity of social relationship at all. In fact, all the areas that this piece identifies as 'areas for improvement' have got attention at some stage or other in the WeD research. The point to highlight here is that by taking the body of citizenship thinking on board the theoretical and conceptual framework of wellbeing can attain much fuller and clearer position in addressing the issues of complex social relationship.

White (2008) brings forth the complexity of relationship while she comments:

> 'Relationships are not, as in a social capital approach, something that an individual 'has'. Rather, people become who and what they are in and through their relatedness to others' (p. 12).

There were other moments in WeD research when the dilemmas and ambiguities of 'relationships' were judiciously pointed. Camfield, Choudhury and Devine (2006) in their analysis of Bangladesh society commented,

> '....(M)any of the relationships that poor people use to secure their livelihood are hierarchical, exploitative, and sometimes violent. Relationships are important precisely because they are often the immediate cause of people's unhappiness and poverty. It is this ambiguity that makes increasingly the profile of relationships in development intervention such a difficult and yet urgent task' (p. 25-26).

Thus what appears to be at stake is more explicit account of political nature of social relationships. Relationships are not unequivocal, plain or even; relationships involve tensions, negotiations, contestations, and more importantly, on many occasions, exploitation and deprivations.

3.2. The questions of adverse incorporation and exclusion

Social relationships are not always readily available for every person, nor do they necessarily generate positive outcome in the process of wellbeing. In most of the cases relationships are political in nature. Particularly the relationships between individual and institutions necessarily involve power and negotiation. Wellbeing – the 'relational and dynamic concept' of being – needs to adequately account for the power dimension of the relationships. Again there have been occasions when the dangers of relationships well featured WeD literature. Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2006: 36) observe:

> 'Specific cultural practices can be both a form of moral bonding and source of meaning, and can block the critical autonomy of persons and groups. History and the current news is replete with cases where local cultural practices – in North and South - conflict with notions of universal human needs and recognised human rights …. As a result, people can be forced into relationships whereby their wellbeing is grossly compromised, or is only achievable at the costs of adverse dependence on more powerful others ... This in turn can reproduce poverty and exclusion over time….'

Despite such responsiveness toward the issues of exclusion, adverse incorporation or dangers of social relationships, there is still scope for offsetting the conceptual ambiguities that one could critically discern. Widened position could be taken up while explaining issues like relationship between institutions and individual (Bastiaesen *et al* 2005), or participation in collective action. This offers the ground for incorporating the insights from citizenship debate. In the following section I delineate the conception of citizenship that I propose to incorporate.

4. Exploring citizenship

'Citizenship' as a concept is neither uncontested nor unproblematic. For understanding the dynamics of contemporary society, the conception of citizenship needs to be significantly expanded and reworked – a shift from classical state-centric idea is the foremost requirement. Conceptualising citizenship entails examining the tensions that are inherent within the idea of citizenship.

Contemporary theorists have described the notion of citizenship as 'a key aspect of Western political thinking since the formation of classical Greek political culture' (Turner 1993: vii) and 'one of the central organising features of Western political discourse' (Hindess 1993: 19). The earliest form of citizenship is generally associated with the ancient city state of Greece (Kabeer 2002a) where it implied that some members of the community would be freed from the

particularities of their own immediate needs associated with the private sphere of the household in order that they could focus on the affairs of the community as a whole (Clark 1994). In the context of Imperial Rome a two-tier citizenship was established with a distinction between 'active citizen' and 'passive citizen': for Romans citizenship was 'a legal status rather than a fact of everyday life' (Walzer 1989: 215; also cited in Kabeer 2002a). Whereas the notion of citizenship as a legal status persisted through much of the feudal period, it was with the changes which occurred in the course of what Polyani (1944) famously called "great transformations" in Europe that modern idea of citizenship, based on the rights of the individual, began.

However, as T.H. Marshal (1998 [1950]), the most prominent British sociologist shaping post-war thinking about citizenship, observes, the rise of modern citizenship and universalisation of political rights came about through a long gradual process; a modern citizenship based on the guarantee of civil rights helped to transform citizenship from a local to a national institution. He also points out that the process of expansion of citizenship was not something that happened involuntarily – in most of the cases extension of old rights to new sections of the population happened in response to their struggles.

The experiences of the colonised countries with respect to citizenship are different from industrialised West. The citizenship that colonial powers practiced in the colonies failed to challenge pre-existing hierarchies based on tradition, custom and 'moral economy'; the practices rather actively strengthened and reified them through the defining powers of the state apparatus and codified system of law (Kabeer 2002b; Mamdani 1996; Khilnani 1998). The situation in most post-colonial states remains to be same. The difficulties are probably best summarized by Lister (1997) when she comments that 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' are indeed two sides of the coin of citizenship.

Whereas the history of citizenship is thus full of contested and differentiated conceptions and practices, it was during the 1990s that

governments, NGOs, donor and lenders showed a wave of enthusiasm for promoting citizenship in ways of involving people more actively in shaping decisions that affect their lives (Gaventa 2002). It is with the wake of this interest that the difficulties and dilemmas involving citizenship have come to the fore; the challenge of conceiving and practicing 'inclusive citizenship' has been highlighted; notions like 'citizenship participation' have been put forward so as to underline the importance of power and politics in expanding citizenship in meaningful ways.

4.1. Citizenship as membership: Questions of identity and affiliation

As we have already noted there is lot of difficulties in arriving at an exhaustive and comprehensive definition of citizenship as it is continually contested (Lister 1997; Armstrong 2006). The definition provided by T.H. Marshall (1999 [1950]) has been influential than anyone else, though recently theorists have tried to broaden the framework provided by him.

> 'Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed' (p. 18-9).

This emphasis upon the membership of the *community* is part of the efforts to expand the notion beyond what traditional political philosophy essentially means. Within political theory citizenship is understood in terms of rights and duties associated with membership of the *nation-state*. Theorists have criticised this state-centred approach on the point that such membership may mean little to its members compared to other forms of community with which they identify and through which they exercised their claims and obligations (Kymlicka 1995; Isin and Wood 1999). Therefore, a "society-centred" approach focuses less on the relationship between individual and state and more on 'promotion of a rich autonomous participation in social life' (La Torre 1998: 10; cited in Kabeer 2002b).

However as Kabeer (2002a: 2) noted, the focus upon this broader societal citizenship involve one significant danger:

> '...replacing membership of a nation-state as the basis of citizenship status with membership of a variety of social communities loses sight altogether of what is distinctive to citizenship as a form of identity and differentiates it from other forms of identity that individuals may have'.

With this note Kabeer focuses on the ways in which different forms of memberships help to shape prevailing patterns of access and exclusion, both separately and in interaction with each other. She is in favour of taking up a *sociological approach to citizenship* with a focus on its implications for the distribution of rights, resources and recognitions within politically constructed boundaries of nation-state. Such an understanding of citizenship underscores the allocative function of citizenship. Citizenship affirms and legitimates one's position and identity within the society (Mouffe 1993; Kabeer 2002a).

The significance of citizenship as membership is also highlighted by Turner (1999: 2) when he observes that citizenship is 'that set of practices (judicial, political, economic and cultural) which define a person as a member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups'. This is in the same vein that Armstrong (2006) views citizenship as the ways in which a variety of institutions (among which state is historically most typical) apprehend and incorporate individuals as equal members of the polity.

From this perspective, citizenship identity can be broader than national identity: it includes identification as a member of nation-state as well as group identification on ethnic or racial lines. Isin and Wood (1999) recognize the rise of new identities and claim for group identities as a challenge to the modern interpretation of universal citizenship within a state. For Ichilov (1998) individual

identity in contemporary world is decentred, diffused and fragmented, since societies themselves are equally fragmented.

Such interpretations have lead to the rise of conception of differentiated citizenship. This is an idea that takes account of the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of modern societies (Heater, 1999). However, despite the fragmentation of identity and relevance of differentiated citizenship, one distinctive aspect of citizenship perspective is that it puts the role of state in guaranteeing rights and protecting citizens in the centre. In doing so it brings the relationship between state and its members under strong focus.

4.2. Citizenship and equality: Inclusive citizenship

Since citizenship thus brings forward the questions of exclusion and inequality, theorists have argued that an inclusive – and specifically democratic – conception of citizenship would bring the question of equality into focus (Walzer 1983, Armstrong 2006, Siim and Squires 2008). Such conception holds the promise of single, non-hierarchical citizenship status within it.

What we have noted above is endorsed by Webner and Yuval-Davis (1999) when they observe that not all the types of citizenship contain same level of promises; different versions of citizenship incorporate within them specific horizons of possibility, immanent ideal, blueprints, and even utopias. Thus the extent to which citizenship practices might contribute for emancipation and equality is dependent on how it is conceptualised and turned into action.

This suggests that citizenship conceptions and practices require not only the challenge of progressive deepening but also the question of expanding the frontier of citizenship itself. This brings forth the question as to whether different forms of exclusions are abolished or moderated through the new practices. This again is related to the ways in which citizenship debate relates with cotemporary social science theories as regards agency and structure.

4.3. Citizenship: Between agency and structure

As it is currently conceived, one implicit danger in wellbeing perspective is that it has the trend to end up being located in the properties of individuals; serious attention to structural inequalities seems to ebb away despite the relationship parley. An extended conception of citizenship while being linked with wellbeing can work to the end this possibility. Again, these theories are no way anything new in wellbeing's conceptual terrain. With it's incorporation of 'participation and livelihood framework' (McGregor 2008), it has already accounted for these issues. However, citizenship debate provides opportunity to specifically highlight the political aspects of relationship between individual and social structure.

By bringing forth the idea of agency opens the possibility of synthesizing the basic elements of citizenship that emerges from two historical traditions – liberal and republican – "citizenship as participation" and "citizenship as right". Whereas 'participation' represents an expression of human agency in the political arena, 'rights' enables people to act as agents (Lister 1997). However, as Lister (1997) points out, all expressions of agency do not necessarily constitute citizenship. One aspect of the problem associated with the notion of agency is highlighted through Doyal and Gough's (1991) distinction between 'simple autonomy' and 'critical autonomy'. According to them whereas agency expresses simple autonomy, "the higher degrees of critical autonomy" is entailed by 'democratic participation in the political process at whatever level' (1991: 68). The point is more elaborated by Lister (1997:39),

> ...(W)hile we can distinguish between simple agency and citizenship agency, they are nevertheless intertwined, acting upon each other. To act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one can act; acting as a citizen, especially collectively, in turn fosters that sense of agency. Thus agency is not simply about the capacity to choose and act but it is also about a conscious capacity, which is important to the individual's self identity'.

In her review of a range of theories as regards the ways in which individual human agency is shaped and exercised in respect to collective action, Cleaver (2007: 225) has shown that agency needs to be conceptualised as relational; it does not exist in vacuum but is exercised in a social world in which structure shapes the opportunities and resources available to individuals. Appropriate ways of being and behaving are not simply a matter of individual choice. This is the point which is strongly resonated in Boudieu's (1977) famous formulation of *habitus*. He has underlined the significance of the ways in which individuality and relationality come into interaction. Whereas habitus as a set of dispositions inclines agents to act and react in different ways, on the one hand, the hegemonic elites shape habitus itself, on the other. For him individuals have agency, but the kind of agency they have is partially prescribed by the culture of which they are members. Giddens (1984) recognizes that to exercise agency means to exercise power of some sort.

What this debate about agency, structure and collective action underlines is that whereas agency is central to social change, capacity to exercise agency is not merely an issue of isolated practice at individual level, it is more an issue of collective struggle. Processes of transformation towards understandings and practices of more inclusive citizenship therefore would require creating spaces for participation in collective action.

4.4. Citizenship and participation: 'Citizen Participation'

Since the 1990s across the spectrum of development there has been much focus on the process of strengthening participation with the belief that such initiative would work for narrowing down the gap that exists between individuals and institutions (Gaventa 2002; Cornwall 2002). Often participation was linked with the claim of 'empowerment' and 'transformation'; rise and spread of 'participatory development' was quite remarkable. However, the past decade has witnessed a growing backlash against participation rhetoric partly on the basis that it appears to "tyrannize" development

debates without sufficient evidence that it actually empower poor and marginal people (e.g. Cook and Kothari 2001). It has been noted that participatory approaches often failed to achieve meaningful social change, largely due to a failure to engage with issues of power and politics (Hickey and Mohan 200). It is against this backdrop that some critiques have argued for participation to be conceptualised in terms of "an expanded and radicalised understanding of citizenship" (ibid: 238). The notion of 'participatory citizenship' has been defined in terms of people playing 'an active role in shaping the future of his or her society through political debate and decision-making' (Miller 1995: 443).

Relocating 'participation' within citizenship entails significant conceptual and practical shifts. Whereas participatory development was accused of being too obsessed with the 'local' as opposed to wider structures of injustice and oppression, this citizenship based approach challenge wider structures of marginalisation and stresses political engagement at local, national and international levels. Here, participation is no more a technical method of project work, rather a political methodology of empowerment (Cleaver 1999). This approach recognises the fact that 'a useful contribution is not to take an atomistic view of local organisations, but to address political processes that shape and constrain local' (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 246). This also highlights that participatory politics of cultural identity, material redistribution and social justice are not alternatives, but can be part of a single political project.

5. Conclusion: Towards greater Synthesis

This paper has highlighted the importance of bringing together the perspective of wellbeing and a broadened conception of inclusive citizenship. Such combination can adequately focus the political dynamics of the social relatedness through which wellbeing is pursued; it particularly brings forth the importance of engagement with the institutional processes at both local and national level. How people define themselves, and are defined by others, is relevant to

citizenship as practice because of its implications for their capacity to act as citizens. Institutions and the relationships of power, access and exclusion that they embody are relevant because they determine the terms on which people participate in their societies and gain access to the resources they need to live their lives with dignity. And finally, while individual agency may be a central aspect of claiming rights and observing duties, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of the collective struggles of those who are denied full citizenship status; such collective actions play critical role in driving the processes of transformation towards more inclusive definitions and practices. The ways in which individuals interact with each other as well as with the institutions and organisations thus get attention; democratising these ways of interaction comes to the centre as development agenda.

As it has been argued already, these distinctive features and focuses of citizenship debate can significantly illuminate wellbeing as a widened perspective of international development and policy. Incorporation of the citizenship understanding places wellbeing perspective in better position for explaining different issues. *Firstly*, power and politics that every social relationship involves would be better accounted for. *Secondly*, greater focus will be placed on the institutional landscape and the issues of relationship between individual and institutions would be highlighted. The formal and informal dynamism of the institutional landscape would come under more focus. State institutions and their role in governance and service delivery would stand out as issues of great significance. Non-state institutions accountability and ways of action would not remain beyond purview of examination either. *Thirdly*, the processes of exclusion, deprivation and adverse incorporation would get more attention and come under scrutiny. *Fourthly*, the process of right realisation will be much highlighted and issues of participation (in the sense of *citizen participation)* and collective action will be dealt with adequate attention – particularly with attention to the political nature of the issues.

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