Cosmopolitanism And The Idea Of Ecological Citizenship

Dr Chandrachur Singh
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Hindu College, University of Delhi

Dr Hena Singh
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Miranda House, University of Delhi

Abstract

While the social economic and cultural impacts of globalization remain deeply contested, there seems to be a growing consensus on the plausibility of it providing mechanisms for resolving global environmental issues. Given the transnational nature of environmental problems it is natural that the solutions offered have to be ones that surpass the jurisdiction of nation-states. By enhancing local-global relations globalization can be seen contributing towards the establishment of a sustainable society. These propositions evidently have a profound impact on green political theory, given that one of its primary objectives is to comprehend the transformation of political communities within the context of the global extent of environmental issues. One approach is to lay the groundwork for an autochthonous concept of citizenship, namely ecological or environmental citizenship. The aim of this article is to scrutinize the interconnections between cosmopolitan deliberations on citizenship, on the one hand, and green political theory's endeavours to conceive its own notion of citizenship, on the other.

Key Words

Globalization, cosmopolitanism, citizenship, rights, duties, green political theory, ecological citizenship, democracy

The impacts of globalization on our social, political, and cultural modes of existence are both profound and significant. The advancement of mechanisms and procedures through which our social issues are raised, remedies are sought and addressed is perhaps one of the most intriguing facets of globalization (Held et al. 2000). The progressive reduction of the traditional function of the state, i.e. the consolidation and definition of civic responsibilities and identities, is an inherent consequence of such developments (Ohmae, 1995; Wapner, 1995). Arguably, there seems to be a burgeoning consensus on how globalization fosters increased interaction amongst human beings belonging to disparate geographical and national boundaries. This interaction not only allows for the reaping of benefits engendered by globalization but also enables the tackling of problems that impact individuals. Conversely, this has also opened up avenues

for the advent of the notion of global politics, promoting a reinvigorated understanding of the principles of democracy and citizenship within the broader moral context of cosmopolitanism.

One feasible approach to concretely comprehend these advancements is by examining environmental issues and challenges. It is an undisputed fact that the environmental crisis is one of the major problems that confront humanity at large (Carter 2001). The ever increasing human activities on the nature threaten to make the Earth as a whole significantly less hospitable to human habitation. Neither the damages nor their impacts however are evenly distributed, either spatially or temporally; vertically or horizontally. There is no universal acceptance of risks that are worth taking and those that are not. The benefits accrued from the human activities on nature are also not uniform and even though we may believe that the world is flattened its surface remains uneven.

Thus, primarily, environmental issues, particularly issues like climate change, are genuinely global in scope, necessitating transnational attempts and resolutions. Secondly, due to its spatial interconnectivity, globalization can potentially enable the realization of a sustainable society, as it provides the opportunities to contemplate and implement actions concurrently at both global and local levels.

The incorporation of environmentalism into the wider scope of political theory, referred to as Green Political Theory, is a consequence of such recent developments (Dobson 1991, 1996, 2003). Its goal is to not only to comprehend the transformation of political society in the worldwide context of ecological issues but the simultaneous development of moral framework to effectively deal with them as well. Normatively it involves dealing with questions of Justice as it is related to the moral and legal rights of some to act and restrictions of the others to not to act in either cleaning or mitigating climate and other environmental changes, or to distribute the costs and benefits of adaptation to these changes? How should we deal with the puzzles and riddles that threaten to rip us apart?

While this task is affected by diverse factors, a particular approach that has emerged recently involves the establishment of a distinct concept of citizenship, known as ecological or environmental citizenship. The aim of this paper is to investigate the correlation between cosmopolitan deliberations on citizenship and the efforts of green political theory to establish its distinct concept of citizenship.

The Rise of Green Political Theory

As stated above, it is undisputedly clear that globalisation has had a profound impact on the role of the nation-state as the primary political community. Interestingly, this shift in the conventional ways of looking to the state also coincided with the advent of postmodernism in politics opening up new vistas in political theorizing by an enhanced incorporation of relevant international political issues. Among the new issues propped up was the environmental concern. That there was a limit to growth rejected the materialist-metanarrativist view of the enlightenment. The environment as a certain general aspect of all the vital activity of modern civilization became a top priority of the scientific world and world opinion.

The alarming, dangerous signs of ecological crisis and degradation of our planet's biosphere were first brought to notice with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring (1962)*. Carson's denunciation of the use of pesticides provided an impetus to the alarming doubts regarding human technological competence to manage the "resources" of the planet successfully. The publication ushered in what could be well and truly declared as 'the age of ecology'. Ever since then attempts have been made both within natural and social sciences to find a way out of the situation created and to revise the very conception of rationality in our impact on nature.

In the early years the responses to the environmental problems were varied. While some like Stewart Udall (*The Quiet Crisis*) suggested conservation as a strategy others were quick to fall into out-and-out utopianism by calling for a 'return to nature' and a rejection of 'the world of things. One of the most influential responses came from theorists such as Robert Heilbroner, Garrett Hardin, and William Ophuls (also called the Neo- Hobbesians). These scholars argued that since the ecological crisis is unparalleled, reliance on individual good will, conscience, and/or education is not sufficient; and that democratic institutions are inadequate to meet the challenge. Since "Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all" "mutual coercion mutually agreed upon" in which the individual's "right" to encroach on the commons is replaced by a system of centralized controls is the way out.

Some other however took a more realistic approach in advocating the need of developing preferential, attitudinal and value oriented changes in the way we look to the ecosystem. Deep ecology or a rejection of anthropocentric view of life as it later came to be known as was a logical outcome of this. This new philosophical challenge was directed against the all-encompassing unexamined speculations of western philosophy which had so well but very falsely portrayed man as the master of the universe. 'The green movement immensely gained from such thinking and has helped in transforming the way we think link and act in the world.

Lynn White, Jr., in a landmark essay "Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" Published in 1967 was very emphatic in rejecting this anthropocentric orientation by holding the Judeo Christian tradition in particular responsible for the environmental perils by projecting man 'as separate from and superior to nature'. In his essay White challenged the value neutrality of modern day for being man centric and gave a call to reject the Christian axiom that 'nature has no reason for existence save to serve man'. White's arguments opened a whole new world in the way nature was henceforth to be looked into. The essay had its own share of controversies as it generated intense responses. Some accepted the argument while others too sentimental to their religio-philosophic roots denounced it yet it helped in putting ecological thinking on the agenda. The writings of St Francis of Assisi all of a sudden became important and attempts were made to construct an ecological theology on this.

Ecological consciousness was also attempted to be built by pooling ideas from other traditions as well. Frank Egler in particular came up with the idea of Human Ecosystem Science in his work The Way of Science: A Philosophy of Ecology for the Layman. Egler looked to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism . . . as the womb from which a humanitarian-oriented Human Ecosystem Science may yet arise.

In his work 'Capitalism Socialism and the Environment', Hugh Streton showed that environmental protests were an aspect of a wider pursuit of distributive justice and democratic planning. The 1960s and early 1970s were also a time of theoretical stocktaking and revision for socialist theory, a revision spearheaded by the rise of the New Left. In particular Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man and the essays collected in Jurgen Habermas's Towards a Rational Society played an important role in identifying many of the problems of industrial society including its environmental dislocations to the dominance of instrumental or technocratic rationality.

In 1981 environmental thinking received another impetus in the writings of Anne and Paul Ehrlich who in their work 'The Causes and Consequences of the Disappearance of Species' argued that nonhuman species, have intrinsic value and the right to exist which is "the first and foremost argument for the preservation of all nonhuman species."

The literature that was fast emerging thus tried to create a kind of philosophic base on which the human actions vis-à-vis the nature were to be grounded. In doing so the writers looked into the varied but differentiated writings of not just political philosophers and literary luminaries but also of the other non-western religio-philosophic traditions. St Francis of Assisi, Spinoza, Hobbes Goethe, Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, John Muir, J.S.Mill, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley etc. became common nouns in the ecological literature. The soil for the 'Age of Ecology' to use Also Leopod's phrase was thus prepared.

As the 20th century moved closer to its end new streams of ecological thinking emerged. In his work 'Domination of Nature' William Leiss argued for the need of enhanced cooperation between societies in order to create a consensus on the use of technology for more liberatory objectives. In similar vein Carolyn Merchant's Radical Ecology proposed the need of creating a new consciousness of our responsibilities to the rest of nature and to other humans. Arne Naess in particular was more pronounced in his ideas on 'Deep Ecology'. Naess argued that there was an urgent need of the development of a philosophy that looked to human beings like all other beings embedded in nature. Edward Goldsmith's The Great U Turn sought to return to the traditional societies of the past for inspiration. Recently Robert Goodin has tried to inject more hard-edged arguments into ecological philosophy. Goodin's Green Political Theory argues that there is a concurrent green theory of value, on which more developed forms of ecological ideas rest, which allows us to put to one side some of the crazier views to do with transformation of consciousness.

Environmental Globalism

It cannot be denied that the Green movement in general and the Green thought in particular have led to the consolidation of the realization that we need to change our attitude vis-à-vis the biotic community. However it is equally true that the tenacity that is required for converting the environmental vision into corresponding policy alternatives and institutional mechanisms capable of enforcing them still remains elusive. It has to be understood very clearly that the issue as it is commonly refereed now as Global Commons implicates power relations between a numbers of national international as well as non-state actors. The challenge has an ethical dimension and that so far the issues of moral duty, principled conduct but more importantly the degree to which these raise new challenges for international law etc has not been brought in.

The key to a cardinal solution of the ecological problem lies in a social reconstruction of the existence and practice of the inhabitants of our planet on the principles of collectivism and planned development, in ending the exploitation of one part of society by other, and in orienting the efforts of society on a duly relational interaction with the nature. Consequently, ecological problems have become an integral component of global politics, and the perspective of green political theory on citizenship serves as a foundation for a conception of political community that deviates from traditional assumptions of liberal or social citizenship.

It is in this particular context, that the development of a cosmopolitan approach particularly pertaining to the formulation of ecological citizenship can be understood as a distinct endeavour of green political theory. Undoubtedly, the theoretical progression is attributable in part to the shift of ecological problems to the realm of what is now known as global governance. Apparently, the hazards generated by environmental issues like climate change and the destruction of the ozone layer are examples of new global public goods, which cannot be satisfied individually by states. Their resolutions necessitate cooperation at global scales. The dual nature of 'the environmental' as both a public good in need of protection and a potential threat extending beyond national borders thus necessitates the creation of novel theoretical frameworks to justify the preservation of nature and the prevention of ecological catastrophes. The notion of ecological citizenship represents such a novel theoretical domain amongst contemporary scholarship.

Cosmopolitan Ecological Citizenship

The transformations ushered in by globalization in social, political economic and cultural practices and processes resulting in the strengthening of the international dimension of politics and processes have led to a resurgence of interest in the idea and practices of citizenship in contemporary political theory (Cabrera 2008). Such developments on one hand have fuelled the need of understanding democratic oversights; on the other they also have provided a renewed impetus to cosmopolitan values and norms (Held 1995; Linklater 1998). Arguably, the cosmopolitan approach to citizenship comes off as a

mediating and dialogic approach allowing both compatriots and foreigners to adopt bridging attitudes towards each other. According to David Held 'citizenship in a democratic polity of the future is likely to involve a growing mediating role: a role which encompasses dialogue with traditions and discourses of others with the aim of expanding the horizons of one's own framework of meaning and prejudice' (Held, 2001: 399)

The developments are natural given the fact that the practice of citizenship not only involves enjoyment of civil, political, social, and cultural rights but also concerns with elaborations of corresponding duties to eliminate impediments to the equitable inclusions within a political community. A society that is wholeheartedly devoted to achieving the principles of citizenship is bound by this conviction to involve external parties in candid discussions regarding the ways in which its actions could potentially undermine their interests. It is incumbent upon such a society to surmount the dichotomy between citizens and non-citizens by instituting frameworks of shared governance (Linklater 1998:211).

The idea of cosmopolitan citizenship assumes utmost significance within the realm of environmentalism, because resolving environmental issues on one hand necessitate the development of theoretical conceptualizations like planetary or ecological citizenship (Steward, 1991 Dobson, 2000) on the other it also requires developing strategies and actions that are genuinely transnational in nature and scope. By invoking strategies of collective responsibility and emphasizing that duties citizens owe to their compatriots are no less thick than those they owe to others cosmopolitan ecological citizenship moves beyond the idea of bounded citizenship (Delanty, 1997: 286).

The concept of ecological citizenship places significant importance on the advocacy of environmental rights. This pertains to the fundamental entitlement of every human being to a healthy and ample environment that is conducive to a life of wellness and soundness. In order to achieve this, it is imperative for both society and the governing bodies to guarantee and safeguard a quality environment. According to Peter Christoff the understanding of ecological citizenship is an endeavor at universalizing the scope of social welfare in a way that it is able to comprehensively take into its fold rights of individuals beyond borders while simultaneously valuing their social cultural and political practices. It involves, in part, advocating for the active inclusion of non-citizens as well as the essential integration of the interests of other species and future generations into democratic considerations (Christoff, 1996: 161–162). Intricately connected to the concept of ecological welfare ecological citizenship thus involves broadening of political and social citizenship.

Cosmopolitan ecological citizenship diverges from the liberal democratic conception of citizenship, which is overly individualistic and atomized in its approach. Instead, it promotes a participatory understanding of democracy that facilitates a more informed decision-making process, capable of garnering broad-based support. To address global ecological issues effectively, it emphasizes the importance of a communicative and deliberative approach, calling for the creation of participative

networks of governance that involve a range of decentralized bodies, including workplace organizations, political parties, local government neighbourhood assemblies, and voluntary associations. In this way, the green movement is part of a much broader tradition of democracy, aimed at achieving a society where participatory democracy is widely practiced, and citizens are actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives, transcending national boundaries.

According to Andrew Dobson the understanding of ecological citizenship rests on four fundamental pillars of ethical responsibilities that individuals have towards each other. Dobson identifies these four attributes as the foundation of a post-cosmopolitan citizenship (Dobson 2003, 2011).

1. The fundamental duties and accountabilities of citizens are conventionally deemed non-reciprocal and of paramount importance. The primary responsibility of every citizen is to ensure that their personal influence does not impede the prospects of others to access opportunities and satisfy their requisites. Dobson (2004) employs the ecological footprint as a metric to gauge this impact.

2. The notion of Virtue holds a foundational place in the realm of Citizenship, warranting significant attention and consideration. Among the array of virtues, Justice and Equity emerge as preeminent. It is imperative to apply Justice spatially and temporally, encompassing all members of the present and future citizenry, irrespective of their origins, thereby promoting both intragenerational and intergenerational Justice. Furthermore, an additional tier of virtues comprises Care and Compassion.

3. Both the spheres of individuals, namely public and private, are deemed significant as private group and individual actions frequently bear significance for the public sphere. The private sphere is intricately connected to standards and ways of life.

4. The scope of ecological citizenship surpasses the state as it necessitates a global purview, encompassing the entire Earth.

The concept of cosmopolitan ecological citizenship extends beyond state borders and encompasses the entire world. It transcends generational barriers and public-private partitions. Additionally, it features a distinct characteristic of unevenly distributing responsibilities among the populace, with the largest consumers, or those who cause the most environmental damage, bearing the greatest eco-duties. Furthermore, it promotes active modes of political participation and public debate that challenge and undermine the traditional state and market systems.

Conclusion

To sum-up the idea of 'eco-cosmopolitanism' or environmental world citizenship is an attempt to comprehend the interwoven nature of both local cultural and ecological systems within a global framework (Heise, 2008). It takes individuals and groups as constituents of planetary imagined communities comprising both human and nonhuman entities. According to Wolf (2007), citizenship devoid of territoriality is imperative since national boundaries only serve as barriers to address concerns such as climate change, which is instigated by, impacts, and requires the participation of all terrestrial citizens, governments, and global actors. Ergo, cosmopolitan ecological citizenship necessitates being global by definition by emphasizing on the importance of safeguarding human rights and prioritizing global responsibilities (Beck 2006). It posits that individuals should perceive themselves as equivalent members of the political community of the cosmopolis, or planet Earth, and act accordingly. Moreover, the establishment of cosmopolitan ecological citizenship fosters a heightened sense of interconnectedness and interdependence on a worldwide scale that transcends state boundaries (Beck 2010).

Bibliography

Beck, U. (2006). *The cosmopolitan vision*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beck, U. (2010). Climate for change, or how to create a green modernity? *Theory, Society & Culture*, 27(2–3), 254–266.

Cabrera, L. (2008). Global citizenship as the completion of cosmopolitanism. *Journal of International Political Theory* 4(1: 84-104

Carter, N. (2011). *The politics of the environment: ideas activism policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Christoff, P. (1996). 'Ecological citizens and ecologically guided democracy', in B. Doherty and M.De Geus (eds.) *Democracy and Green Political Thought: Sustainability, Rights and Citizenship*. London: Routledge, pp. 151 – 69.

Delanty, G. (1997). Models of citizenship: defining European identity and citizenship, *Citizenship Studies* 1: 285–303.

Delanty, G. (2000). *Citizenship in a global Age: society, culture, politics*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dobson, A. (1990). *Green Political Thought*, London: Unwin Hyman.

Dobson, A. (1991). *The Green Reader*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Dobson, A. (2003). *Citizenship and the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dobson, A. (2006). Ecological citizenship: A defence. *Environmental Politics* 15: 447–51.

Held, D. (1995). *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Held, D. McGrew,A. Goldblatt, D. and Perraton, J. (2000). Rethinking Globalization. In David Held and Anthony McGrew, eds., *The Global Transformations Reader*. London: Blackwell Publishers

Held, D. (2001) 'Regulating globalisation? the reinvention of politics', in A. Giddens (ed.), *The Global Third Way Debate.* (Cambridge: Polity Press.

Linklater, A. (1998) 'Cosmopolitan citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 2: pp. 23–41.

Linklater, A. (1998). *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ohmae, K. (1995). *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies*. New York: The Free Press.

Steward, F. (1991). 'Citizens of the planet Earth', in G. Andrews (ed.) *Citizenship* London:Lawrence and Wishart.

Wapner, P. (1995) Politics beyond the state: Environmental activism and world civic politics. *World Politics*, 47:311-340.

Wolf, Johanna. (2007). The Ecological Citizen and Climate Change. In European Consortium for the Promotion of Political Science (ECPR) Joint Sessions: «Democracy on the Day after Tomorrow». Helsinki. Available online: https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/paperproposal/c9ae934f-f308-4612-95c7-67c9da8d882f.pdf