Koinonia Politike- Sphere of Critical Reasoning

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Abstract

The term *koinonia* often refers to communion or fellowship and the phrase *politike* has its roots from the Greek city states- *polis*. Though koinonia politike is better to be translated as political association, it is now commonly used as civil society in political discussions with a quite different meaning from the Greek political context. In the 1970s, as the communist states began to disintegrate, intellectuals and political activists throughout Eastern Europe evoked the image of civil society to mobilize citizens against repressive states and reclaimed a sphere of privacy in social life. The language of civil society was picked up by people's movements in large parts of the world. . It no longer became a politically constituted community, instead a sphere of critical reasoning. Sometimes it took the form of a democratically organised political opposition against the state apparatus (Antoinette Saxer). More concretely, it can also be understood as an ecosystem of organized and organic social and cultural relations existing in the space between the state, business, and family, which builds on indigenous and external knowledge, values, traditions, and principles to foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders. It may include CSOs comprising NGOs, *faith-based organizations*, and community-based organizations that have an organized structure and mission, online groups and activities, including social media communities, social movements of collective action and/or identity, labour unions and labour organizations representing workers, social entrepreneurs employing innovative and/or market-oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes etc.

Keywords: *Koinonia Politike, Critical Reasoning, Social Movements, Non-Government Organizations.*

Introduction

The history of the phrase *Koinonia Politike* goes back to the period of Aristotle, that simply means political community or society and can be defined as an ethical political community of free and equal citizens under a legally defined system of rule (Cohen L., 84). The term *koinonia* often refers to communion or fellowship and the phrase *politike* has its roots from the Greek city states- *polis*. Though koinonia politike is better to be translated as political association, it is now commonly used as civil society in political discussions with a quite different meaning from the Greek political context. It was Roman jurist Cicero, who used the phrase in Latin as *Societas Civilis* (Civil Society).

Civil Society- Different Understandings

Concept of civil society has a rich history, but it is only in last century they have moved to the centre of the international stage. First articulated by liberals during the eighteenth-century Europe, the phrase had fallen into disuse during the nineteenth century's fascination with the state. In the 1970s, as the communist states began to disintegrate, intellectuals and political activists throughout Eastern Europe evoked the image of civil society to mobilize citizens against repressive states and reclaimed a sphere of privacy in social life. The language of civil society was picked up by people's movements in large parts of the world. In the era of globalisation, the fascination towards civil society is increasing, where a general view of minimal role of the state is gradually inculcated into the sphere. (Elliot, 2007)

Though the phrase civil society was used adjacent to state in the beginning, later it denoted a body outside and often in opposition to the state. It no longer became a politically constituted community, instead a sphere of critical reasoning. Sometimes it took the form of a democratically organised political opposition against the state apparatus (Antoinette Saxer).

Tienanmen Square incident in China illuminated that civil society became a kind of 'aspirational shorthand' for ideas of equity, participation, and public fairness. In Southeast Asia it has been used by advocates of democracy and civil rights, in Latin America by social movements seeking transformation into a new egalitarian and participatory socio-political order, and in the Middle East by those opposing repressive regimes. In Africa analysts have noted the capacity of peasants to subvert or defy the predatory state through diverse ways of 'invisible government' embedded in kinship, ritual, and magic. The image of civil society has had strong resonance among reformers in India too (Elliot, 2007, pp. 3-4).

Defining the Concept

Defining civil society is not a simple task. In as much as there is evidence of similar experiences across continents and regions, countries, and more specifically, groups that share similar cultural values and attributes within a country, have some distinct forms of social organization, cultural and political traditions, as well as contemporary economic structures. The concept of civil society is defined by different thinkers variedly depending on the focus they give.

For Hegel, civil society comprises the realm of organizations that lie between the family at one extreme and the state at the other. (Ottaway, 2012)

According to Civicus: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, civil society is the arena outside the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations, and institutions to advance shared interests. (Nations, 2018) It can be understood as "an ecosystem of organized and organic social and cultural relations existing in the space between the state, business, and family, which builds on indigenous and external knowledge, values, traditions, and principles to foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders." Civicus is an international

alliance of members and partners which constitutes an influential network of organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels, and spans the spectrum of civil society. It has a vision of a global community of active, engaged citizens committed to the creation of a more just and equitable world. They believe that the health of societies exists in direct proportion to the degree of balance between the state, the private sector and civil society. (Srinath, 2018)

Gramsci Considers civil society as the public sphere where trade unions and political parties gained concessions from the bourgeois state, and the sphere in which ideas and beliefs were shaped, where bourgeois 'hegemony' was reproduced in cultural life through the media, universities and religious institutions to 'manufacture consent' and legitimacy. (Heywood, 2018)

According to the World Bank, the term civil society implies a wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society therefore refers to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations. (Ashwini, 2018)

The word 'civil society' refers to the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks- formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology- that fill this space. At an elementary level, the concept of civil society pinpoints and values associational life- interest groups, professional and other associations, voluntary agencies, grassroots organisations, social movements and all other social orders- because it brings people together in networks and shared concerns. All this is important in itself, for modern life is atomised, alienated and fragmented simply because individualism as the hallmark of the modern world breeds self-interested action.

Some other notions are to be discussed too. Every of them has truths in it, but nothing is all inclusive in itself.

- *Societas Civilis* is understood in contrast to the non civilized or barbarian people and is something governed by the rule of law and typified by a degree of urbanity (Cicero) (Kenny, 2018).
- Civil society refers to a realm of associations, business, interest groups, classes, families and so on (Andrew Heywood)
- Civil society includes all private organizations of the people. Press, professional associations of the people, Human Right groups and organizations, voluntary social service organizations, and in fact, all NGOs working in society (Sam, 2018).
- Virtually all kinds of associations which are not governed by the political orientation of the state or the private profit orientations of the market are termed as civil society. Voluntary developmental organizations, community-based organizations, social movements, charitable trusts and hospitals, philanthropic organizations, professional associations like lawyers association, rotary clubs, Lions clubs, and the media are all clubbed together here. It engages the citizens with the state, promotes

good governance, counterbalances the state, undertakes social provisioning, enhances the social responsibility of the market, (Mohanty, 2002, pp. 216-220)

- In the South, civil society has come almost exclusively to mean all those forces and agencies which oppose the state and its efforts at regulation: it has been used to describe agents and practices which wish to recapture areas of life from the state. (Khilnani, 2006, p. 30)

- Civil Society or the commonwealth is an assemblage of men associated by a common acknowledgement of right and by a community of interests (St. Augustine) (Metzger, 2006).

- Civil society is a normative model of a societal realm different from the state and the economy and having the components as

  1. Plurality: families, informal groups, and voluntary associations whose plurality and autonomy allow for a variety of forms of life
  2. Publicity: institutions of culture and communication
  3. Privacy: a domain of individual self- development and moral choice, and
  4. Legality: structures of general laws and basic rights needed to demarcate plurality, privacy, and publicity form at least the State and, tendentially, the economic. (Chandhoke, 2003, pp. 40-41)

- Civil society is the sphere of public activity of private individuals who believe them to be endowed with rights and act as autonomous subjects. (Kumar, 2000)

- Civil society is an intermediate entity that separates the private sphere and the state. It excludes individual and families, group activities that look inwards, for-profit enterprises, individual business firms, and political efforts to take over control of the state (Rojas, 2005).

- The words civil society name the spheres of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology. As an area of uncoerced associative life, civil society includes such associations as the family, trade unions, universities, the press, professional bodies, churches, nongovernmental organizations, and social movements (Michael Walzer). (Parekh, 2012, pp. 20-21)

- G K Rathod provides certain notions regarding civil society:

a. Civil society refers to the realm of interaction, institutions and social cohesion that sustain public life outside the spheres of the state and economy.

b. It is a domain of public participation that is founded upon cooperation, empathy, and reciprocity.

c. Civil Society is a realm of power, inequality and struggle and conflicts among competitive interests. It is invariably competitive and heterogeneous. (Rathod, 2012, pp. 4-6)

- Civil society describes:

  a. Certain activities organized outside the state and clustered around faith, interest, and sometimes, visions of the preferred future.
  b. Characterizes unconstrained search for alternatives to the present.
  c. Expresses rejection of both capitalism and communism
  d. Plurality, difference, initiative, and decentralization. (Palshikar, 2002)

Civil society within this context comprises qualities associated with goals, relationships, contextual experiences, values, and informal and formal structures.

Recent Typologies

In recent times, the different typologies of civil society are:

- Civil society organizations comprising NGOs, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations that have an organized structure and mission and are typically registered entities and groups;
- Online groups and activities, including social media communities that can be "organized" but do not necessarily have physical, legal, or financial structures;
- Social movements of collective action and/or identity, which can be online or physical;
- Labour unions and labour organizations representing workers; and
- Social entrepreneurs employing innovative and/or market-oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes. (VanDyck, 2018)

Conclusion

In Short, Civil society can be understood as the realm of organizations that lie between the family at one extreme and the state at the other. It is a community made up of private people gathered together as a public with public critical debate and articulating the needs of society with the state. (Soules, 2018) More concretely, it can also be understood as an ecosystem of organized and organic social and cultural relations existing in the space between the state, business, and family, which builds on indigenous and external knowledge, values, traditions, and principles to foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders. It may include CSOs comprising NGOs, *faith-based organizations*, and community-based organizations that have an organized structure and mission, online groups and activities, including social media communities, social movements of collective action and/or identity, labour unions and labour organizations representing workers, social entrepreneurs employing innovative and/or market-oriented approaches for social and environmental outcomes etc. (Ashwini, 2018)

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