

Importance of Civil Societies and their Movement

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Abstract : In the era of globalization, the relationship between civil society and the state is getting complex, but the state cannot exist without the presence of civil societies. They facilitate the functioning of the government by acting as mediator between the government and the public. Thus, making the government truly democratic, liberal and welfare oriented. The paper examines the concept of civil society and explains various roles performed by the civil societies with special references of various civil society movements.

Keywords: Civil Society, Civil Society Movements, State of Nature, Peoples' Participation, Democracy.

Introduction

The civil society being different from the state implies an arena in which people can realize their self interest, develop their personality and learn the value of group action by depending on others for their welfare. Civil society can be described as something private as contrast to the state and as something public when contrasted to the family.

It is reflected in the writings of *Thomas Hobbes* (1688), that the concept 'civil society' is derived from the word 'civitas' or 'commonwealth' meaning a society which was formed by individuals who were living in a 'state of nature' to overcome the untenable situation prevailing there, a pre-social, pre-political condition where self-survival and preservation was the responsibility of each person who was governed by 'self-interest'. To him, to end the law of jungle, people entered into a covenant by which they agreed to renounce their right of self-preservation at the expense of others. So, they agreed to appoint a sovereign in the form of civil society to fulfill that objective.

According to *Amanda Bernard* (1998), a meeting was organised by the Council of Europe and OECD in 1998, which defined civil society as third sector, between the state and the market, occupied by non-governmental, non-commercial citizens, and organised and devoted to the public good. This meeting divided the NGOs into two categories : (1) NGOs which operate for and on behalf of the people whom they serve (2) people's organizations represent people who are its member and remain accountable to them.

Thus, all sorts of NGOs, civic groups like Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), rotary group, labour unions, trade union confederations, world economic forum, guilds, non-profit organization, service agencies, churches etc. form the club of civil society.

Conceptual Attribute

Charles Taylor (1990) characterised it as a commercial society that includes both economic associations as well as the domain of non-economic voluntary associations.

To *Giner* (1995), 'Civil society is a historically evolved sphere of individual rights, freedoms and voluntary associations whose politically undisturbed competition with each other in the pursuit of their respective private concerns, interests, preferences and intentions is guaranteed by a public institution called the state'.

Gellner (1995) observed, "Civil society is that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counter-balance the state and while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of peace, and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state from dominating and atomising the rest of society."

According to *Mouzelis* (1995), 'Civil society refers to all social groups or institutions which in *Conditions of Modernity* (where public and private spheres are clearly differentiated) lie between primordial kinship groups or institutions on the one hand and state groups and institutions on the other.'

Marxian Views

Hegel (1967) advocates that civil society is a voluntarily organized body that is intermediate between the state and the family. Concentrating on its economic aspect, he says that civil or bourgeois society is the realm of individuals who have left the unity of the family to enter into economic competition. To him, it is an arena of particular needs, self-interests and divisiveness with a potential for self-destruction. Civil society demonstrates the superiority of the state and the state uses it to strengthen itself.

According to *Marx*, 'previously individuals were part of many different societies like guilds, estate etc. As these partial societies broke down, civil society arose in which the individuals became all important signifying the struggle of each against all. Civil society represents a step forward from feudal to bourgeois society'. To him, the state is a product of civil society and it is the requirement of civil society. Civil society is *a sphere of depraved, selfish and egotistic individuals* and the objectives of the state are geared to the needs of the economy animated by these selfish individuals. He argues that for ending the conflicts of civil society and for realising the full potential of human being both civil society and the state must be abolished (see *T.B. Bottomore*, 1983).

In the first half of the 20th century, *Gramsci* (1971) contributed to the concept of civil society as organisation *representing broader community interests* which have the potential of rational self-regulation and freedom. He found that there is interpenetration of political and economic society, or the state and civil society. An identifiable autonomy of civil society which gives it a distinct space for operation and development. Gramsci advocates that the state includes the element of civil society. The state is protected by the hegemony in civil society and hegemony of the dominant class is fortified by coercive state apparatus. Thus, civil society is a trench system which is able to resist 'incursion' of economic crisis and to protect the state.

Political Views

Hobbes assumed that political authority is at least hypothetically dispensable. He wanted a concept to define the remaining institutions of society : the family structure, economic relationship, religious communities etc. Civil society is the framework within which these institutions function. But he believed the neither civil society nor political authority can exist independently from each other in a long run.

According to *Montesquieu* (1989), civil society can be defined in terms of a singular role of defining those virtues by which government is to be guided. Thus, *civil society is in equilibrium with the government*.

John Locke (1967) says that civil society has association with the common purpose of society i.e. the protection of property and *the common consent leads to the establishment of*

civil society. 'Civil society' and 'commonwealth' involve an activity distinct from living simply under government, on the one hand and operating within society, on the other.

Thus, civil society is an aspect of the modern government and the state and is subject to its control, yet it is autonomous and voluntarily organised and is based on principles like :

- Sovereignty
- Secularism
- Democracy
- Partnership and participation
- Transparency
- Equity
- Civilizational and development
- Justice

Functional Attributes

Civic Virtues : Civil society is a primary source of the civic virtues required to maintain a stable polity. Within the civil society, individuals enjoy enforceable rights of free expressions, formulation of public opinions and freedom to dissent.

Democracy : Civil society is a vital pre-condition for the existence of democracy. *Pluralists* say interest groups are necessary elements in a democratic system and they keep democracy alive. They generate values like tolerance, moderation, compromise, accommodation etc. among people. They also hold that multiplicity of cultures can coexist within the boundaries of one political order. Civil society provides the arena for establishing a common ground, and integrative and collaborative modes of action. Civil society also helps to resolve the contradictions that a democratic state may generate or encounter in the course of its operation (*P.K.B. Nayar*).

Pluralism and Harmony : *John Locke* rightly says that the principle of consent is the underlying feature of a civil society. It is a source of community solidarity and also a sphere of social homogeneity and identity, yet it is also a sphere of plurality, diversity and conflict. It binds people of different identities on the basis of their common interests like artists, doctors, lawyers, women, students, human right activists, environmentalists and so on. It advocates pluralism and is opposed to totalitarianism. A balanced pluralism exists among civil societies so that none can establish absolute hegemony.

Accountability : Civil society is the treasure of values of political participation and state accountability. It provides the necessary basis for participation in formal political institutions. It can provide a training ground for future political leaders. According to *Montesquieu*, 'Civil society functions to protect individual liberty and preserve the virtues of moderation, trust and reason in government.'

Governance : It exposes the corrupt conduct of public officials and lobbies for good governance reforms. To *Thomas Hobbes*, 'law and justice will have meaning only if they rest on people's mandate. So, the defining principles by which society is to be governed and the terms of governance may be considered as contributing to civil society.'

Prevent abuse of Power : It prevents the state from being authoritarian. It raises public concern about any abuse of power. *Mouzelis*, deliberates about a strong civil society, that is, it is strongly organized non-state interest groups; checks eventual abuse of power by those who control the means of administration and coercion; and the 'rule of law' effectively protects citizens from the state's arbitrariness.

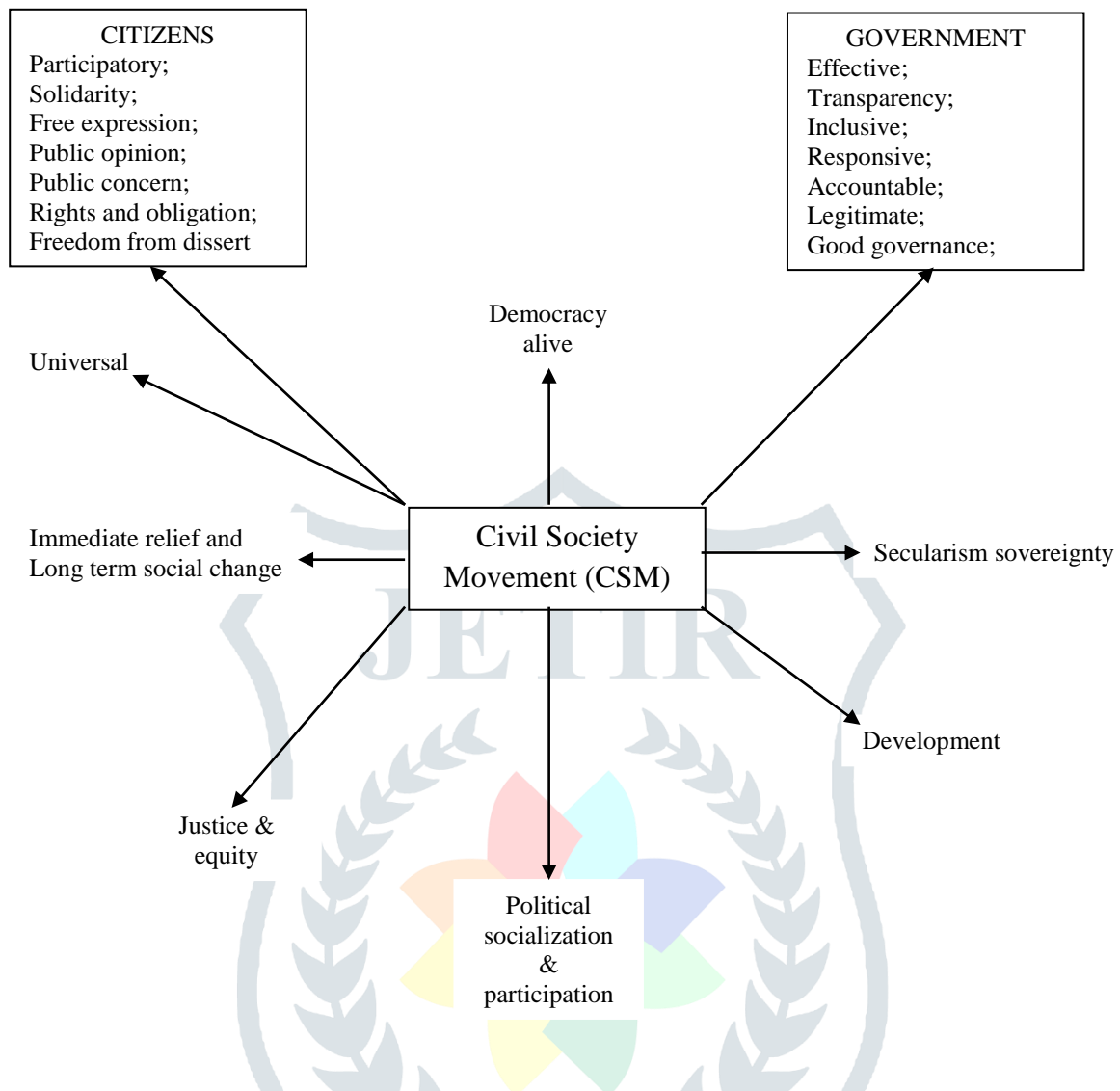
Mediator : *Montesquieu* rightly advocates that civil society is in equilibrium with the government. Government and civil society are in continuous interaction with each other, and each shaping and reshaping the other. It acts as a mediator between the government and people. It establish dialogue with relevant government, ministries and agencies to lobby for peoples' interests and concerns. Civil Society also helps in resolving the contradiction that arise in state's functioning. Both *Hobbes and Locke* view state as the creation of civil society for protecting the life and property of citizen.

Citing an example about trade unions, the Gandhian leaders looked upon unions not merely as bargaining and welfare agencies but also as instruments for mobilising public opinion in favour of political and moral programmes in order to achieve freedom for the country (*N.R. Sheth*).

Educating People : It helps to inform the public about important public issues. It educates people about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens, and encourages them to listen to election campaigns and vote in elections. It helps in developing citizens' skills to work with one another to solve common problems, to debate public issues and express their views.

Thus, civil societies make government more effective, accountable, transparent, responsive, inclusive, legitimate, democratic and welfare, and people as real citizens. The relationship between the state and civil societies is apparent and necessary for the state being affective neutral, liberal-democratic, welfare oriented and a facilitator of socio-economic justice to its citizens.

Model-2



Model-1 : Functions of Civil Society Movements

Civil Society Movements (CSM)

Movement by civil societies is called as civil society movement. These movements are tools to realise multi-dimensional functions of civil societies and variedly affect societies of world nations. These movements are too based on principle of civil societies like sovereignty, secularism, democracy, partnership, participation, justice, equity, transparency and development.

Civil society movement is a social-political movement aims to build the society as humanistic with the help of citizens, civil societies and social organizations in peaceful ways. CSM helps building free, democratic and secular citizens through basic principles of civil societies. CSM bring immediate relief and also longer term transformative change in the society by addressing different issues of public concern. It is a universal phenomenon and the process of globalization has accelerated the sprawl of CSM worldwide.

Examples of CSM are many, like : Eco-feminism, Environmental, LGBT, Black Power, Satyagrah, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Anti-apartheid Movement, Anti-globalization Movement, Disability Rights Movement, Hippie Movement, Labour Movement, Mee Too Movement and so on.

Few world wide CSM are mentioned below, addressing different issues globally and which indicates the universal nature of 'civil society' :

• India

Social Reform Movements – India is characterised by rich cultural heritage. With the advent of Britishers, western values entered in Indian society. Revivalists like Dayanand and Vivekanand wanted to reform the Hindu traditions making them suitable to modern period. Various social reformers took the cause and societies like Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission, Prathna Samaj etc. tried to change mind set of Indian people, remove social evils like *sati pratha*, *casteism*, *untouchability*, *female illiteracy* etc. from the Hindu society and try to make it a just society.

Appiko : It was a revolutionary movement based on environment conservation in India. It was organised by villagers of the district of Karnataka province in September 1983. It was led by Panduranga Hegde and men, women and children of Salkani 'hugged the trees' in Kalase forest. 'Appika' means hugging in Karnataka. Their techniques were foot marches in interior forest, slide shows, folk dances etc. to create awareness among the people.

Chipko Movement : It was an extension of Gandhian Satyagrah for justice and ecological stability in the hilly areas of Utrakhand. Not only it served for ecological consciousness but also for women empowerment. Sarla Behn and Sunderlal Bahuguna were its prominent leaders.

Narmada Bachao Andolan: This movement was constituted of tribal people, farmers, environmentalist, human rights activists against construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam which was being built across the Narmada river (Gujarat). They did hunger strikes, garnering support from noted film personalities. Medha Patkar and Baba Amte were its prominent leaders. They raised issues of environment, problems of displaced people and their rehabilitation.

LGBT Movement : Movement for LGBT rights in India, made the Supreme Court of India to decriminalise homosexuality by declaring Section 377 of the IPC as unconstitutional on 6th September 2018.

• USA

African-American Movement : It was an organized effort to abolished public and private acts of racial discrimination of Africans in America between 1954-1968. It is sometimes referred as second reconstruction era.

Black Power : Under the leadership of Martin Luther, black power movement was started in 1966 till 1975. It was for black self-determination and asserted their assimilation in the society.

Chicano Movement : Also known as EI Movimiento, started in 1960s and lasted till 1970s. This movement was for political empowerment and social inclusion for Mexican-Americans. Rodolfo Gonzales in Denver, Colorado and Reies Tijerina in New Mexico were its early heros. The movement addressed the immediate issues of Mexican-Americans like unequal educational and employment opportunities, political disfranchisement, and police brutality.

Gender Equity : First wave of feminism focussed upon absolute rights-suffrage and second wave of faminism for changing social attitudes and economic reproductive and educational equality (1963-82).

- **UK** : In Northern Ireland, which was dominated with protestant population, catholic community started a movement in 1964, known as catholic movement against their exploitation and organized campaign for social justice (CSJ).
- **Africa** : A wave of independence movements in Africa crested in the 1960s, includes Angolan war of Independence, the Guinea-Bissauan Revolution, Liberation Movement in Mozambique, and struggle against apartheid in South-Africa.
- **Australia** : On 27 May, 1967 Australians voted to amend their constitution, particularly the section which debarred Indigenous Australian from voting in state elections.
- **Germany** : A left-wing backlash against the post-nazi party era in Germany, against the perceived authoritarianism and hypocrisy of German government. This movement was organized by German students, sighting their poor living conditions under German government.
- **Israel / Palestine** : A group known as *Bat Shalom* (means daughter of peace) in Israel and Palestine, function for bringing women of Jew and Arab community together to campaign and demonstrate in public places for the end of the occupation, for a just peace; creation of a Palestinian state; and the sharing of Jerusalem (*Cynthia Cockburn, 2011*).
- **Bosnia-Hercegovina** : Similarly, in Bosnia-Hercegovina, *Medica Women's Association* works as women's therapy centre that provides gynaecological and psycho-social care to women refugees and their children, and it began as a resource particularly for women who were raped in the Yugoslav wars (*Cynthia Cockburn, 2011*).

CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENT

INDIA

- Social Reform Movement
- Appiko
- Chipko
- Narmada Bachao Andolan
- LGBT

HUNGARY

- Prague Spring

AFRICA

- Movement against Apartheid
- Mozambique Liberation Movement
- Angolan War
- Guinea-Bissauan Movement

UK

- Catholic Movement

GERMANY
• Students Movement
USA
• African-American • Black Power • LGBT • Gender Equity • Chicano
AUSTRALIA
• Constitutional Change Movement
ISRAEL/PALESTINE
• Women Movement
BOSNIA – HERCEGOVINA
• Women Movement

Conclusion

Civil society organisations are doing significant contribution to the cause of democracy, social welfare and national development. In era of globalisation, as *Neo-Tocquevillians* focus on the rise of non state actors during last ten years, most notably on the rise of cross-boarder network of NGOs, that are suppose to form a "global civil society". These international government organisations (IGOs) and trans-national NGOs are posing threat to a liberal democratic socio-political order of a state. International agencies like WTO, GATT, World Bank etc. puts pressure on many third world countries to follow their dictates, which is not desirable for healthy nation building.

Gramsci anticipates the fuller development of the self-regulating attributed of civil society, which reduces the sphere of the state. Similarly, *Ulrich Beck* (1986) advocates that in a risk society there is blurring of boundaries between political institutions and civil society. It is a risky situation as political agents gain perspective by invoking different forms of rationality but have an unrealistic trust in the social functioning of their new won rational capabilities.

Though era of globalisation have made the relationship of the state and civil society as complex and subtle but it is also true that an effective and efficient state is possible only when its civil societies are effective. As they facilitate the functioning of the pillars of the state : executive, legislature, judiciary, press and the army. 'Check and balance' technique should be effective in civil society and the state relationship.

The movements by civil society are tools in the hands of civil societies, for brings *inclusive social change* in a country. They make nature of the governance democratic as civil societies themselves are placed on wheels of democracy, accountability, transparency and reliability. Civil society movement is a *universal phenomenon* and as civil society brings to surface the issues of public to be solved by their respective governments. Civil society movements, thus, are *harbingers of social change*.

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