

Civil Society: A theoretical conceptualization

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Abstracts : From the very beginning, civil society has become one of the key concepts of modern political analysis. Civil Society is a state of democratic political culture, a conglomerate of norms and values typical of a community of citizens who are free and equal before law, which they shape and develop through their active participation in public life. Western and Indian thinkers have different views and opinions about the nature, scope and sphere of activities of civil society but all of them are aware about the great important of civil society in making state policy. Now a days, in the changing sinario, both the structure and role of the civiol society are rapidly evolving. As much as the civil society be active, it would be able to be the vanguard of future human civilization as well.

Key words : Civil Society, Private and public sphere, liberal democracy, socialist perspective, democratic process, global invironment.

Since the last quarter of earlier century, civil society has become one of the key concepts of modern political analysis. Civil Society as an idea is quite difficult to comprehend because of the enormous confusions and conflicting notions surrounding it. Different disciplines approach it in different ways and there does not seem to have any fixed meaning from which critical evaluation of the concept could be initiated. From the historical perspective, the actual meaning of the concept of civil society has changed twice from its original. The first change occurred after the French Revolution and the second during the fall of communism in Europe. From the perspective of political sociology basic characteristic of Civil Society lies in attitudinal capability of its members that is to actively organize the citizens and to pursue certain common good within a frame work of specific formal institutions. Actually, the seeds of civil society are rooted in Western European political philosophical tradition. In classical European tradition Civil Society was regarded as morals and political community pursuing a common good, where citizens realize

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their freedom by exercising their rights, nonetheless most analysts would probably agree with the statement that Civil Society is the sum of institutions, organizations and individuals located among which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests. Alex de Tocqueville considered civil society as 'third sphere' which consists parties, public opinion, churches, oral crusades, literary and scientific societies and professional recreational groups possessing super abundant force and energy.

Civil Society is a state of democratic political culture, a conglomerate of norms and values typical of a community of citizens who are free and equal before law, which they shape and develop through their active participation in public life. For Aristotle a Civil Society was an ethical and political community of free citizens pursuing and achieving full humanity through active participation in the life of polis. In Roman idea civil society was related to natural law, discovered through rational thought. David Hume and Adam Smith envisaged a Civil Society where economic and social Transactions mattered as much as political institution. For Smith it was economy or Civil Society that was natural to man and therefore central to his existence. For Smith "men and women can no longer afford to spend their time in domestic space they have to leave it every day for Civil Society, which is the site of both economic and social inter action." Thus civil society is constituted as a set of social transactions that accompany and surround the motor for economic accumulation. Considered civil society (societies civilis) was the highest kind of social order, reflecting eternal and unchangeable natural law, a community of people who recognize same law and work together for common good. Niccole Machiavelli considered it as the community marked by efficient governance that ensured its stability internal order, harmony, security and glory, contractualist Hobbes and Locke emphasized primacy of civil society in order to get out of the "state of nature" though they differed regarding the construction and role of it. Locke, a pioneer in developing the concept of modern civil society, did not consider it to be political or social substance that can be set over against an existing state. Civil Society, for him, is "state liked and it has to be as effectively purged of the state of nature as it can be Civil Society, in Locke's view it is the optimal remedy for state of nature from Seventeenth Century onwards thinkers expressed the need for a strong and vibrant civil society. It was held as a sphere of independent and freedom extending between family and state where as spontaneous self- organization of individuals can emerge with a strong pluralist economic and

cultural levels In other words civil society is a type of society not identical to national society. Idea of civil society as a locus of ethical and social solidarity played a prominent role in social and political philosophy of Scottish Enlightenment in eighteenth century. David Hume and Adam Smith envisaged a civil society where economic and social transactions mattered as much as political institutions. For Smith, it was economy or civil society that was natural to man and therefore central to his existence civil society was the fulcrum of individual and collective energies and life as well as residual to economy. Thus civil society is constituted as a set of social transactions that accompany and surround the motor force of economic accumulation. Ideas of consulting civil society as important for good governance were first advanced by John Stuart Mill. Free trade for Mill was a one way freedom and here the idea of civil society was an integral part of colonial policies. In the German tradition Hegel placed civil society somewhere between family and state. For Hegel civil society is an inescapable bridge to reach two states, which is actually the ultimate destiny of individual life. He considered civil society as a moment of ethical life that regulates two life of individual. Hegel's analysis of civil society reflects complete dialectical analysis, meaning thereby a way of reaching truth by contradictions by developing thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis i.e. firstly civil society and ultimately the state represents the concept of synthesis resolving the contradictory traits of family and civil society within itself. Thus civil society is one of the achievements of modern world because it is here that individuals can realize self in conditions of freedom.

Karl Marx followed the Hegelian way of using the concept of civil society. For Marx, civil society was the base where productive forces and social relations were taking place, whereas political society was the super structure agreeing with the link between capitalism and civil society. Marx held that the latter represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. Therefore the state as super structure also represents the interests of the dominant class. Under capitalism it maintains the domination of the bourgeoisie.

The above view about civil society was criticized by Antonio Gramsci. Departing somehow from Marx Gramsci did not consider civil society as co-terminous with the socio-economic base of the state. Rather he located civil society in the political superstructure. In the first half of the twentieth century Antonio Gramsci

developed his idea of civil society with reference to Hegelian and Marxist ideas and explained it in relation to the concept of hegemony. To Gramsci hegemony is the organization of a collective will. The main institutional framework through which hegemony is organized is civil society. By civil society Gramsci meant the private voluntary organization that has developed in many societies in modern times. Civil society, according to Gramsci, transmits the ideas, attitude and values of the ruling class and more importantly helps to maintain and perpetuate its power. Thus civil society reproduces relations of power without the lies of force. In other words, Gramsci's theory, it must not be forgotten, is an attempt to capture the nature of power and civil society is the institutional form in which power is exercised by means that depend on highly organized will of individuals. Thus by civil society Gramsci meant the private, voluntary organizations that have developed in many societies in modern times. Civil society, according to Gramsci, transmits the ideas, attitudes and values of the ruling class and more importantly helps to maintain and perpetuate its power. Thus civil society reproduces relations of power without the use of force. In other words, Gramsci's theory, it must not be forgotten, is an attempt to capture the nature of power and civil society is the institutional form in which power is exercised by means that depend on highly organized will of individuals. Thus by civil society Gramsci meant the private, voluntary organizations that have developed in many societies in modern times.

From Althusserian perspective the concept is explained with a slight difference. His main concern was ideology and in time of discussing about the ideological State Apparatus (ISA) he discussed a critical question of developed liberal democracy. That is, how ideology is reproduced in the so called private institutions of civil society - the theatre of consent- apparently outside of the direct sphere of play of the state itself. If everything is more or less, under the supervision of the state, it is quite easy to see why the only ideology that gets reproduced is the dominant one. But the question is how a society allows the, relative freedom of civil institutions to operate in the ideological field, day after day, without direction or compulsion by the state and why the consequence of the "free play" of civil society, through a very complex reproductive process, nevertheless consistently reconstitutes ideology a "structured in dominance." Althusser refuses to distinguish between state and civil society which also was supported by Poulantzas, His nomenclature does not give sufficient weight

to what Gramsci would call the immense complexities of society in modern social formations "the trenches and fortification of civil society."

According to pluralist thinkers civil society refers to uncoerced associational life distinct from the family and institutions of the state. In order to discuss the theoretical foundation of the concept of civil society we must recall H.J. Laski, the most significant, provocative and civil pluralist society theorist. To his civil society constitutes an intrinsic element of democratic organization, at least if we are referring to well-functioning democracies. As far as the British pluralist, Cole and Laski are concerned; they simply presume that civil society consists of associations, not of individuals. According to them, civil society should not only be grasped as the sum of various associations but as 'the sum of organized social structure', as the organization of associations, so to speak.

Thus from several viewpoints it can be summarized that the very term civil society refers to the sphere of social interaction, separate from both state and economy, within which citizens communicate with one another directly and via different media and organize collectively to meet a variety of purposes. A vigorous associational life in civil society is the key stone of democracy because it enables citizens to develop and articulate opinions independently of government, to work collectively to solve their own problems and to bring pressure to bear on government across the whole range of policy. It is important to note that one fundamental question in analysis of civil society is regarding its varied natures and role in developed, developing and under developed countries. Civil Society in these three categories of countries fundamentally differs from each other. Developed countries which experienced Industrial Revolution directly witnessed destruction of feudal modes of production and establishment of bourgeois system. Naturally in these countries civil societies are more matured, largely having a communitarian perspective and comparatively less corrupt. On the contrary in the developing countries like India which suffer from "phony industrialization" and "incomplete modernization" and are marked by large scale poverty, illiteracy and unemployment the civil society is quite often uncivil and majority of the people even do not adhere to the basic norms of civility. India discourse for civil society definitely requires space for analysis. According to Sudipta Kaviraj establishment of colonial power started a long historical process of political transformation that led to its present predicaments. Europeanized

elites gradually developed a literary public sphere and growth of newspapers contributed in developing a public arena of discussion on common issues side by side, in India, newly developed commercial and working classes in colonies began to display a kind of interrelation ship which was not following the European model. European states, Kaviraj opined, on their part, after eighteenth century were used to live with new social ontology of civil society. In India also British rulers partly out of their own conceptual habits partly out of convenience, allowed substantial part of social life in the colonies to be free to their direct control-"creating an inchoate, early civil society."

According to Partha Chatterjee sharpness of nineteenth century 8indeiction between state and civil society developed along the tradition of European anti-absolutist thinking has analytical disadvantage today. According to Partha Chatterjee, the relation between civil society and state in modern history of countries like India is quite problematic. The legal bureaucratic apparatus of state has been able to reach through many of its activities virtually to the entire populations inhabiting its geographical territory while domains of civil society institutions are still restricted to a fairly small section of citizens. Chatterjee has told that civil society in those countries like India is best used to describe those institutions of modern associational life set up by nationalist elitist in the era of colonial modernity, though often as part of their ant colonial struggle. The new domain of civil society sometimes remain an exclusive 'public' will not match up to the standards required by civil society and that function of civil society institutions in relation to public at large will be one of pedagogy rather than free association for Chatterjee the mediation between population and state takes place on the site of a new political society. Act ually, and methods of mobilization and participation in political society, which is built around the frame work of modern political associations like political parties. Practices that activate forms and methods of mobilization and participation in political society are not always consistence with principles of association in civil society. Chatterjee has concluded by saying that in the context of globalization of capital an opposition has emerged between modernity and democracy i.e. between civil society and political society.

Contemporary theorist of civil society in India is Neera Chandhoke believes that civil society is desirable in itself. Today's dominant need is to hold states accountable for acts of omission and commission through a vibrant widely believed that state power can be controlled only when groups in civil society exercise constant

vigilance and display critically. Civil society organizations cultivate care and concern for others. It imparts citizenship skills and train people in art or participation civil society is representational in nature and becomes staging ground for organizing challenge against state given notion of politically permissible. Civil society threatens state's monopoly of power by talking about desirable kind of society in reality is not easily receptive to voices of the excluded and even revealed that some in habitants of its sphere may actually participate in multiple oppression of vulnerable sections. Thus "language of civil society is not dialogue but contestation."

Rajesh Tandon, another leading figure of civil society literature analyzes the issue predominately from point of view of governance. Tandon reveals that different forms of civil society contribute to different aspects of governance agenda. Firstly he described that civil society represents the space where subaltern, hitherto inaudible and unarticulated views can be expressed. It can be defined as a movement for advancing various causes, like women's rights, tribal rights, peace and environmental issues; Secondly as movement it creates pressure for governance reform. There are movements for protest against policies and actions of powerful national and international institutions that go against ordinary people's definition of public good; against dams, factories, mines, dislocation and displacement etc. Thirdly civil society organizations contribute to practical tasks associated with self governance and represents a set of organizations of primary self help, mutual support groups. Fourthly, civil society organizations are inspired by a wide range of intellectual ideological and spiritual persuasions and finally, according to Tandon, co-operative engagement by civil society uses available social capital to build base for sustainable development.

Issue of good governance is inextricably associated with the concept of civil society neither state nor is civil society any autonomous or neutral actor. But the first and most basic role of civil society is to limit and control the power of the state and to expose the corrupt conduct of public for good governance reforms. Another function of civil society is to promote political participation "civil society organization can help to develop the other values of democratic life i.e. Tolerance, moderation compromise and respect for opposing points of view civil society can strengthen democracy is to provide new forms of interest and solidarity that cut across old forms of tribal, linguistic, religious and other identity, ties, the role of

civil society in policy formulation and implementation (or, in the entire policy process) is extremely important in the changed context of governance and development civil society acts as the positive connections among citizen, government and the non government actors including the development partners. It is well-placed to articulate citizens' real needs and demands. Similarly it can develop and promote alternative development thin kings. It role in policy implementation is also crucial as they can facilitate obstruct or even block the implementation process, civil society also has active role to play in democratic system of government its platforms gives the ideas of what to be included and what not to be included in public policy. Thus it brings population's inputs to add reality to the planning system of a particular comity.

At the same time the crisis of democratic process is the starting point of modern dy analysis of civil society. Today democratic representation is not guaranteed through electoral participation, political parties, free press and writhen constitution civil society enters at this specific point not so much for dealing with a threat to representative democracy, but rather with potential evolution of democracy across the wider canvass of democratic representation. Limitation of civil society is revealed by the fact that it cannot act independent of state. State everywhere draws boundaries of political permissibility and prescribes limits of civil society operation. Civil society is never a threat to the existence of state but opposite is true. Another problem associated with civil society activism is the fact that states like India does not have any universal character and it operates at different levels refection different voice and nature. So civil society here has to choose diverse methods in respect to different issues relatred to national, provincial and local authorities. Another paradoxical thing about civil society intervention in counters like India is that mainstream polities usually is little hesitant in supporting civil society initiatives opposition political parties do support such initiatives for gaining popular support and mustering provisions for electoral gains. Another important fact needs to be remembered in analyzing the concept of civil society marginalized group of society always have to battle heavy odds whenever they have tried to make them heard in this sphere or they resolve that civil society should register their condition and demands. Besides, civil society is not inherently virtuous and is also fractured from within. The divisiveness of larger society vitiates state and civil society alike. Marginal and poor are also not any

homogeneous category and stratification among them leads to competition and contestation for scarce resources.

In spite of all the above discussion, in the turbulent global environment, both the structures and roles of civil society are rapidly evolving. Basically, civil society populate discursive sphere to involve all stake holders including the citizens or rights holders to exercise their agency in the formulations of policies. They are the connection between the citizens (including both the excluded and marginalized community) and the government and multinational corporation. In a way, it broadens the policy arena to include all dissenting voices. More over civil society organization, at present, are saddled with most of the alternative development thinking that could yield favorable outcome. Except it, at implementation stage, the above strengths of the policy sphere because of the likes of civil society at present promote participatory mechanism and ownership guarantees positive outcomes. There is no denying the fact that the role of civil society, in almost every developing country, is very much vary depending on the political will. Yet still in democratic society civil society is now playing its role as a main partner in the formulation and implication of public policies no longer a simple receiver beyond creating awareness or serving as watchdog. The best role of civil society is to provide ideas make suggestions and assist in the monitoring of public policies implemented in this present world maddened with intolerance, violence, alienation, injustice and all the evil virtues of the Pandora's Box, we are in dire need of a sensitive civil society alert round the clock over coming all its limitations. Only this would be the vanguard of future human civilization for equality, liberty, fraternity, justice and democracy above all.

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