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## Supplementary Role of Civil Society in Governance: An Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

*A strong civil society has the potential to hold the government and the private sector accountable. Civil society can be a crucial provider of government legitimacy. Civil society gradually came to be recognised as an essential requirement to preserve democratic ethos and spirit. The liberal theory insisted on the need to create and sustain a sphere of individual and social interaction free of state intervention, and the state will not get an opportunity to suppress the voice of the civil society. Individuals are largely free from the encroachment by the state and hierarchical bureaucratic administration. In the changing scenario, there emerged a view that individualism, which was embedded in the market and in a government guided by market forces, is not favourable to any society. Hence, states and markets need to be supplemented by another institutional alternative in the form of civil society organizations or non-state actors. In this paper focus would be, to understand and analyse the place of civil Society and its significant in democratic governance. What would be the supplementary roles and functions of civil society in the fast changing process of governance, and what are the various challenges, constraints and pressures before Civil society organization and finally, to outline brief Conceptual and theoretical bases of civil society in the developments of administrative discourse .*

**Key-words:** *New Public Management, Public choice theory, social capital, Participative Planning and Community Development.*

### INRODUCTION:

Civil society as a kind of sphere outside and distinct from the political sphere of the state emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It refers to the self-organisation of citizens in contrast to the state or government, and is rooted in western rational decisions and political culture, civil society is the collective of those social organizations that enjoy autonomy from the state, and have important goal, among others, to seek to influence the state on behalf of their members. Civil society organizations are networks of groups formed for pursuing special interests, and include all local and external financial, private, and charitable, social service, developmental and professional organizations.<sup>1</sup> Civil society furthers non-political relationships and behavioural patterns between several interdependent actors, which function in a particular political territory.

The *World Development Report* 1999-2000 also links social capital to development and eradication of poverty. It defines social capital as the networks and relationships that both encourage trust and reciprocity. The level of social capital has a significant implication for development, such as educational development, health services and rural development. Social

capital serves as an insurance mechanism for the poor who are unable to access market-based alternatives. The Report, therefore, stresses on the importance to facilitate the formation of new networks in situations where the old ones are disintegrating- as, for example, during urbanisation. While emphasising on the role of institutions in development, the Report states that a strong network of effective organisations enabling institutions is central to holistic development. The term 'institution' as it is used here, refers to sets of formal and informal rules governing the actions of individuals and organisations and the interactions of participants in the developmental process. The institutional infrastructure of an economy embraces two primary areas. The *first* includes social capital and norms - the unwritten rules of behaviour that allow co-operation and dispute resolution, with low transaction costs. The *second* includes formal legal rules, which ensure that contracts are enforced, property rights honoured, bankruptcies settled, and competition maintained. From this we see, how the World Bank attaches importance to the presence of social capital and civil society for its developmental and welfare objectives. One can substantiate this by citing instances from rural India. Many rural areas have the natural resources like land, water, and minerals (natural capital), but they lack the skills (human capital) and organisations (social capital) to explore the natural resources and turn them into physical assets for their well being. Social capital would be much beneficial for the rural communities in order to bring co-ordination and resolving conflicts among them.

A strong civil society has the potential to hold the government and the private sector accountable. Civil society can be a crucial provider of government legitimacy. Putnam's seminal work *Making Democracy Work* (1993) shows that citizens who are active in local organisations, even non-political ones, tend to take a greater interest in public affairs. This interest, coupled with interpersonal social capital between government officials and other citizens which is fostered when both belong to the same groups and associations, renders the government more accountable. Putnam in his study says that there is better democratic governmental performance in northern Italy in comparison to southern Italy, and this is because of low level of social capital in southern Italy. The regional governments of northern Italy are more responsive to people's demands and aspirations and thus function efficiently and fairly. All this is attributed to the civil society present in northern Italy and which is absent in southern Italy. Civil society gives a voice to the people, elicits participation and can thereby pressure the state. Civil society is the domain that can potentially mediate between the state and the private actors and offer women and men a space for activity that is simultaneously voluntary and public- a space that unites the virtue of the private sector, i.e., liberty, with the virtue of the public sector, namely a concern for the general good. It shares with the private sector the gift of liberty; it is voluntary and is constituted by freely associated individuals and groups. But unlike the private sector, it aims at common ground and consensual, integrative, and collaborative action. Civil society is thus public without being coercive, voluntary without being private.<sup>ii</sup>

Civil society gradually came to be recognised as an essential requirement to preserve democratic ethos and spirit, according to the liberals. The liberal theory insisted on the need to create and sustain a sphere of individual and social interaction free of state intervention, and the state will not get an opportunity to suppress the voice of the civil society. Individuals are largely free from the encroachment by the state and hierarchical bureaucratic administration. By maintaining its autonomy civil society can function as per the good wishes of the community in promoting common welfare. The issue is better conceived as the freedom of individuals within institutions

and the autonomy of institutions within their legitimate sphere, or in other words, how to achieve effective democratic governance of both public and private institution. The issue of autonomy assumes greater significance for centralised and unitary states, like United Kingdom which does not have a written Constitution, where there is a threat of 'bureaucratic monoculture'. Bureaucratic monoculture thrives due to people's indifference to freedom at work and in relation to social and public services but indulging only in activities of private life and leisure. Tocqueville argued for the autonomy of secondary associations from the state precisely because he saw the consequences of the centralising tendencies of those who had inherited and implemented the programme of the bureaucratic reformers under the monarchy, the officials of the Revolution and the Empire.<sup>iii</sup>

In the changing scenario, there emerged a view that individualism, which was embedded in the market and in a government guided by market forces, is not favourable to any society. Hence, states and markets need to be supplemented by another institutional alternative in the form of civil society organizations or non-state actors.

#### **THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:**

Due to the process of globalisation and its impact on the role of state, the market with its merits and demerits gained prominence roles in the process of Governance, Hence, what could be the roles, functions and significance of civil society to make accountable to market as well as state in a democratic governance?

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

To understand and analyse the place of civil Society and its significant in democratic governance.

To discuss and analyse the supplementary roles and functions of civil society in the fast changing process of governance.

To analyse the various challenges, constrains and pressures before Civil society organisation.

To outline brief Conceptual and theoretical bases of civil society in the developments of administrative discourse .

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The study would be based on secondary sources that are various journals, books, articles and other source of secondary sources.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:**

The markets being driven by the profit criterion and the state organizations being inefficient and unresponsive, the civil society organizations have gained prominence owing to their participatory, flexible, less bureaucratic and cost-effective nature, and ability to reach out to the people. Diamond (1991) identifies at least six functions of civil society in shaping democracy. These are as follows:

- Civil society is a reservoir of political, economic, cultural and moral resources to check the process of the state.
- The diversity of civil society will ensure that the state is not held captive by a few groups.
- The growth of associative life will supplement the work of political parties in stimulating political participation.
- Civil society will eventually stabilize the state because citizens will have a deeper stake in the social order. Further, while civil society may multiply of the state, it may also multiply the capacity of groups to improve their own welfare.
- Civil society is a locus for recruiting new political leadership.
- Civil society resists authoritarianism.<sup>iv</sup>

The development of civil society organizations is considered as growth of communitarianism. Whether attached to and promoted by the political left or right, communitarianism would emphasise the growth of the third sector, meaning non-profit organizations other than those in the public sector, as a solution to many problems of contemporary society.<sup>v</sup>

The state and market are generally considered as sources of remote decisions that might not have much of an impact on the lives of the community. The emergence of the communitarian movement, which is a new development but is gaining momentum, provides a broader perspective to society as comprising new forms of community (local, voluntary and professional) working with the spirit of mutual concern and cooperation. The thinking is that gaining coinage is of the state delegating more of its functions to partly autonomous local agencies, communities and cooperatives. This is a way of democratic decentralization.

The limitations of a free market doctrine have now yielded place to a third way, which gives importance to the strengthening of government, citizens and private sector firms. This priority directs governmental attention to improving universal education and technical training, as well as technological research and development. Additionally, the state assumes responsibility for providing minimally adequate safety nets for those individuals who cannot market effectively. The third ways focus is to create equality of opportunity and minimal support for the market's losers rather than to promote equality of outcome by regulating markets.<sup>vi</sup>

Currently two global observations appear to be the prevailing trends.<sup>vii</sup>

They are as follows;

- Globalisation and cultural convergence of the world by western instrumental rationality, especially through the current government reinventing, reengineering, structural adjustments, privatization, and redefinition of public-private sector configuration designed and led by corporate and government elites.
- Counter-pressures from below by masses of citizenry against the rampant instrumental rationality in industrialized nations such as the US and Europe, as well as in developing countries. Demands for citizen participation and the democratization of governance have been increasing as elites press for more work force downsizing, privatisation, cutting and eliminating employment benefits, and high efficiency empire building. All these

pressures are leading to the emergence of complementary roles of government, market and civil society, and their integration. The state and market as the two key partners in the task of governance are giving way to the establishment of an interactive governance process. Governance issues, in the present times, are receiving the attention of researchers, policymakers and of the international development community. Governance does not imply strengthening the processes and institutions of merely the government, but also looking into the needs of the governed, making them partners in the process of development, harnessing their capacities and empowering them. There is a rapid shift towards a society-centered approach to the development, with emphasis on the centrality of 'social capital' to development.

Hence, it is commented that, if Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson were to suddenly appear on the landscape of modern public administration today, it is likely that they would be unable to recognise the field. The comprehensive and functionally uniform hierarchical organisations governed by strong leaders who are democratically responsible, and staffed by neutral and competent civil servants who deliver services to citizen are long gone. They have been replaced by an 'organisational Society' in which many important services are provided through multi-organisational programmes. These programmes are essentially interconnected clusters of firms, governments and associations, which come together with the framework of these programmes.<sup>viii</sup>

Civil society provides a single civic identity, which is distinct, belong to various groups of citizens, and acts as a mediating link between the state and markets. Anthony Giddens in his work *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* makes a case for the broadening of democracy with government acting in partnership with agencies in civil society so as to combat civil decline. As Anthony says;

The established traditions of participative planning and community development can be complemented by experiments in direct democracy. The fostering of civil society is an important task for the state, along with support for the 'bottom-up' politics of community renewal. This implies a greater role for service provision by non-profit organisations, more localised distribution channels and responsibility on the public sector to develop the capacities of local communities.<sup>ix</sup>

The growing importance of civil society had also brought with it a variety of constraints and pressures. In reiteration of some of the maladies that have inflicted civil society, it can be pointed out that the civil society has not been conceptualised tightly, that varied perspectives on its meaning, nature and composition have come to camouflage its very essence. It has been observed by Neera Chandhoke that just as the attention paid to the state has failed to account for civil society, the focus on civil society fails to comprehend its complex relationship with the state for instance, in India, civil society is seen by most theorists as a volatile association of social groupings, which are based on caste and kinship linkages, or on religious mobilization as much as on voluntary social associations. The problem with this kind of formulation, she maintains is that it fails to distinguish between counter civil society movement. Society, in this perspective, is collapsed into civil society. The civil society is thus being treated as a residual category, as an authentic collection of everything that is not the state. It has become a conceptual ragbag, consisting of households, religious denominations, and each and every activity, which is unconnected with the state.<sup>x</sup>

Community identities, as has been observed have always been fluid in India. This fluidity gives considerable scope for political entrepreneurs to reshape the boundary and the concerns of the identity of a community. In recent years, the process of modernization and participatory politics and access to media, and other technological devices have actually increased the mobilization potential and sharpened the self-image of splinter ethnic groups and sub national identities, quite contrary to homogenising efforts of modernizing elite.<sup>xi</sup>

When civil society is seen as tradition, the internal contradictions between communities and within communities are completely overlooked. Andre Beteilli argues that the well-being of modern institutions can be guaranteed only if civil societies are understood as comprising truly autonomous bodies.<sup>xii</sup> In the view of Dipankar Gupta, there is a need to be wary of giving in to traditional solidarities and associations, as they are unfavourable to the modern institutions.<sup>xiii</sup>

Civil society by itself, observes Neera chandhoke has no teleological virtue, unless it is accompanied both by an interrogation of the sphere of civil society itself and a project for democratising civil society. And a call for rolling back the state has no particular virtue, unless it is accompanied by a determination that the oppressions of civil society will be dismantled. The ability of civil society to prevent the state from exercising absolute control is an essential but not a sufficient condition for democracy. The existence of civil society as a sphere of participation, deliberation, dialogue and contestation is no indication of the capacities of individuals to participate in all these activities.<sup>xiv</sup>

Critics have even pointed out the various limitations of the idea of social capital in explaining state-society interactions in the context of developing countries. It has been felt that there are a few potential problems associated with the development of civil society institutions that would nurture social capital. Looking at the state-civil society institutions develop in an authoritarian environment and what state can do in enabling the growth and expansion of those institutions, the emphasis is on the recursive cycles of interaction between the state and civil society actors. Putnam's work is derived from the historical experience of Italy that suggests that a country's stock of social capital is inherited. Social capital with putnam's framework thus cannot be accumulated.<sup>xv</sup>

The civil society organizations are generally equated with NGOs. If NGOs are seen doing welfare and developmental work, we feel civil society is working well. This approach ignores the intermediate institutions and their role in the society. This tendency also limits our understanding of a broad process of interaction among different types of organizations. The concept of civil society, points out Alan whites has been 'grabbed' by NGOs as one relating closely to their own natural strengths. On the surface civil society is indigenous NGO sector. In the globalization scenario, it needs to be kept in view that among the donor agencies, the interest in civil society has been associated with the evolution of the conditionality of aid in the 1980s. Donors have begun to re-appraise the role of civil society in providing a foundation for sustainable democracy. The combination of donors, NGOs and UN's interest provides the background to what has been termed as the civil society 'grab'.<sup>xvi</sup>

The states, as has been observed by He Baogang, are adopting new strategies, using NGOs for their own purposes, some critics see the recent quests for community control as little more than a state-orchestrated managerial reform to take over institutions.<sup>xvii</sup> Other critics view it as an interpretation between the state and community spheres that is more than genuine community

control. Still others portray it as an attempt to redress profound crises that is now confronting capitalist classes. Both state-centred and society-centred approaches are now proving problematic and inadequate. Importantly, it is believed that the society approach is itself problematic, if it does not take cognisance of global civil society.

The idea of global civil society combines elements of both anti-state and anti-nation positions. The growing size, sophistication, and influence of the global civil society organizations (NGOs) have been facilitated and actively encouraged by one major factor-the Neo-liberal consensus that emerges from the power centres in the west. Among other things, the consensus dictates; i) The state, particularly in Third world countries, should withdraw from the social sector, ii) The market should be freed from all constraints, and communities in civil society should organise their own social and economic reproduction and well being. The state has thus been liberated from its traditional responsibilities of providing the conditions of human flourishing.<sup>xviii</sup> This stance is particularly complex of governance as the state has to assume the role of facilitator and catalyst in bringing about just and egalitarian governance. The Neo-liberal states roll back ideology is misplaced in the context of developing countries like India.

The vision of civil society minus a well defined role of the state is therefore replete with serious consequences, which not only weakens civil society, but also jeopardizes the future of Global Civil Society Organisations (GCSOs). It has been pointed out that by drastically reducing the importance of proximity; the new technologies, change people perceptions of community. The potential for building global civil society might come at the expense of weakened identity with ones state and with the civil society within ones country.<sup>xix</sup> In the absence of a global public space and an opportunity for dialogue, robust global community may remain a distant dream.

There is a need to look into the role of media too as a challenge in building civil society. It has been seen that instead of a positive role, the media many a time camouflages important issues. The mediascape, for instance in India, seems to give its subscribers a sense of collective identity and participation in public affairs. At the same time, it also reduces the discussion of vital issues to simple caricature, leaving people interconnected but dangerously uninformed. The mediascape has the power to displace the substantive with the symbolic.<sup>xx</sup>

The developments in administrative discourse such as public choice approach, and now the New Public Management (NPM) make an Endeavour to provide alternatives to bureaucratic hegemony. But while the public choice perspective seeks to reduce individuals to utility maximisers and focuses on individual interest, it does not provide the mechanism for arriving at a collective general interest. The NPM, on the hand, treats the citizens-as mere clients and customers. The pluralistic, communitarian, New Public Service and Network Agency perspectives give due regard to community, non bureaucratic institutions and values, but do not focus much on the development of the idea of autonomous, self-reflective, humane and conscientious civil society with an accent on genuine public interest. Francis Fukuyama in his original essay *'The End of History'*, offered a vision of a world purged of ideology, in which history has come to an end because there are no alternatives to the institutions of the present representative democracy and the market. The future would, be the endless repetition of more of the same, with politics centred in bureaucratic problem-solving, limited social engineering and liberal compromise.<sup>xxi</sup>

This indeed is a very pessimistic projection of the socio-economic and political reality. If one goes by it, the alternatives to absolute state or market control over production and provision of goods seem almost elusive. A ray of hope could be democratic decentralization, participative decision-making, institution building and community management of resources through different civil society organizations which can surely solve the problem to some extent. Voluntarism and associationalism have been a part of the culture in the developing countries, their potential needs to be harnessed, more so, in the globalisation situation. The very fact that the number of community organization, voluntary agencies, self help groups, and non public, non market associations has grown tremendously in the last decade is a step in the right direction. It needs to be seen that their welfare and developmental goals are not sidelined or discarded.

### CONCLUSION:

The reappearance of civil society institutions has historically heralded the advent of democracy. In fact, to a large extent how we conceptualise and evaluate civil society. As has been observed depends on how we visualize democracy, the converse also holds true. Democratic political theory privileges civil society because it assumes that the existence of democracy is inextricably linked with the life of civil society.<sup>xxii</sup>

The labelling of civil society as NGOs and vice versa needs to be addressed. For some NGOs, the labelling of all potential partner groups as civil society organizations reflects the continued acceptance of a universalistic view of civil society. As has been pointed out, when civil society is referred to as sphere of public debate, its meaning goes beyond the synonymous treatment with NGOs that it receives. For instance, newspaper readership is used by Robert Putnam as one of the indicators for contrasting the strength of civil society in Northern Italy with its weakness in the south. Questions that need to be taken up are; How do NGOs separate beneficial from non-beneficial civil society, how do they maintain autonomy and accountability, what type of self-regulation do they follow, and how do they weave a strategy for nurturing civil society into a strategy for building the capacity of the state.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Given the importance that donors and NGOs attach to the concept of civil society, it matters a great deal, as cautioned by many, that NGOs do not slip into the divide over the meaning of civil society, particularly where societies are heterogeneous and divided. The ways in which NGOs perceive civil society, and consequently plan projects to facilitate the work of civil associations, can have a significant effect on the extent of devolution of civil society in the countries in which they work. The NGOs should try to explore the full theoretical implications of civil society, and clearly articulate their own interpretations of its nuances.<sup>xxiv</sup>

T.K Oommen (2004) observes that looking at civil society in India from the vantage point of religion, caste and language, it is clear that the associations and movements anchored to them are instruments of establishing equality between the privileged and the deprive groups. But mobilization by the underprivileged social categories are geared to bring about dignity and emancipation for them. In contrast, mobilizations by the dominant categories are efforts to reinforce their hegemony. Both these tendencies should be recognized as different aspects of civil society.<sup>xxv</sup>

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The post-modern discourse, observes Neera Chandhoke has been helpful in understanding the role of local narratives and marginalized groups in civil society. The political solution to the crisis of representation offered by post-modern politics has been to privilege difference over reductive unity and identification, historical plurality over political monism, and multiplicity of representations over collective projects. The collective projects based upon priorities and preferences have been rejected, and the argument that multiple social struggles articulating specific, local and personal issues should be prioritised, has been promoted.<sup>xxvi</sup>

To be usable today, the category of civil society must be reconstructed. 'Reconstruction' could be defined in the non-systematic sense, as 'Tasking a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set itself.'<sup>xxvii</sup> The 'resurrection of civil society' that pushes the democratisation process forward is possible in either case, with or without surviving forms of recognised association, and with or without memories of earlier mass mobilization. What is needed is a civil society, which is seriously engaged in self-reflection, is preoccupied with the means used to accomplish its tasks, and which brings about slow and incremental but substantial changes in the state.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In the words of Neera Chandhoke, we need a civil society that is accessible and responsive to the subalterns, the marginal and the radical.<sup>xxix</sup> A critical narrative of civil society has to include those features of the sphere, which make it vulnerable to class oppression. Critical theory has to look at the oppressions of civil society itself. It has to see how this sphere needs to be democratised by social movements before it can become the basis of supportive structures and communitarian self-help organizations. Political forms, John Urry opines, need to be understood in their relationship with the anatomy of civil society.<sup>xxx</sup>

In the view of Jürgen Habermas, the institutions of civil society must act to protect the autonomous development of public sphere from being undermined by state bureaucracy and economic power of the market. He observes that public opinion that is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power in specific directions.<sup>xxxi</sup> In fact, this viewpoint renders the contemporary civil society different from its earlier counterpart.

Habermas makes a distinction between symbolic and system-integrating function. The earlier symbolic aspects of family and interpersonal relations based on consensus have been taken over by the system-integrating functions that relate to political power and economy. The present day civil society is concerned more with rectifying the market and the state through empowerment of the marginalized.<sup>xxxii</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, the predecessor of the pluralist approach, talks of civil society as defensive counterbalance to the increased capabilities of the Modern state. It provides a realm in which society interacts constructively. Unless a positive and complementary relationship between state administration and society is conceived, civil society's role in governance and development will not produce constructive results.

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