

Political Aspects of Civil Society in Indian Working Culture

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Abstract-Civil society is a voluntarily organized body that is intermediate between the state and the family. People here live with their self-interest and personal choice and with minimum constraints. Though traditionally civil society and state were treated synonymously, Hegel separated these terms for the first time. Civil society has been described as a primary source for the civic virtues required to maintain a stable polity. Though it is a source of community and solidarity and also a sphere of social homogeneity and identity, yet it is also a sphere of plurality, diversity and conflict. The values of civil society are those of political participation and state accountability. Thus, it provides the necessary basis for participation in formal political institutions. The institutions of civil society are associational. It advocates pluralism and is opposed to totalitarianism. When state becomes an authoritarian political institution, its authority is to be challenged by the civil society.

Keyword:-Civil Society, Political Institutions, Pluralism, State, Voluntarily.

Introduction-Civil society is a vital pre-condition for the existence of democracy. For this reason, authoritarian states attempt to stifle civil society. The existence of civil society does not mean that it always challenges the state authority. Thomas Paine argued that the power of the state must be restricted in favor of the civil society as individuals are having a natural propensity for society which exists before the formation of the states. India is a civilized country with rich cultural heritage. With the advent of the Britishers, western values entered in this society. There was a conflict between the modernity and age old traditional values. While some blindly followed the modern life of the west, revivalists like Dayananda and Vivekananda wanted to reform the Hindu tradition making it suitable to modern period.

Western values of liberalism, individualism, and constitutionalism made its inroad to Indian society by which it became politically conscious and vigilant. British imperial rule economically ruined India and weakened

the rising Indian nationalism with the policy of 'divide and rule.' The germ of communalism entered into the society finding its naked expression in post-independent India. After independence, the new ruling class wanted to make India prosperous at par with other developed nations of the world.

People want to protect their interest through group engagements and interactions in post-independent India. Indian civil society becomes more effective with the civic virtues and also acquires the capability to organize itself independent of state authority. Individual rights and liberties are safeguarded; a number of autonomous associations are created within the state.

The harmonious co-existence of both the state and the civil society safeguards the interest of both the government and the citizens. The democratic nature of the Indian civil society is reflected in the formation of a democratic state along with the implementation of a democratic constitution. There is occasional rise of conflict between the civil society and the state as the demands and expectation of the society are not fulfilled. Occasionally, state also ignores the interests of the majority and intervenes into the sphere of the civil society. As a welfare state, India is expected to ensure social justice along with economic growth. A number of schemes are adopted for the eradication of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition etc. With the expansion of state functions, too much bureaucratization becomes the order of the system with its ugly faces of corruption, red tapism etc. Indian civil society raises its voice against such development. 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 prepares the people to participate in state functioning and thus, it provides a solid base of citizenship. Civil society can be described as something private as contrasted to the state and as something public when contrasted to the family.

Though it is an aspect of the modern state and is subject to its control, yet it is autonomous and voluntarily organized. It is a commercial society that includes both economic associations as well as the domain of non-economic voluntary associations.

Gellner observed that "civil society is that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance

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the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating atomizing the rest of society”.

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The values of civil society are those of political participation and state accountability. Thus, it provides the necessary basis for participation in formal political institutions. The institutions of civil society are associational. It advocates pluralism and is opposed to totalitarianism. When state becomes an authoritarian political institution, its authority is to be challenged by the civil society.

Within the civil society, individuals enjoy enforceable rights of free expression, freedom to form associations, formulation of opinions and freedom to dissent. It is now widely believed that transnational civil society plays a vital role in the global governance. In the last 30 years, civil society organisations have become increasingly relevant in international affairs. They have played crucial roles in agenda setting, international law making and governance, transnational diplomacy and the implementation and monitoring of the crucial global issues ranging from trade to development and poverty reduction, from democratic governance to human rights, from peace to the environment, and from security to the information society. The CSOs have therefore been significant actors as advocates for policy solutions, service providers, knowledge brokers, or simply watchdogs and monitors of state and international actions.

A number of international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (WB) have supported inclusion of civil society actors in international decision making. The UN has actively promoted cooperation with civil society actors in global governance, especially in relation to the world summits, which have provided a forum for global civil encounters to occur. The European Union has followed a similar

approach by integrating different CSOs within its governance mechanisms. In the age of global transformations, traditional intergovernmental institutions have struggled to provide effective and legitimate responses to global issues, such as, climate change, financial instability, epidemics, intercultural violence, inequalities, etc. As response to these shortcomings multi-level stakeholder governance based on public and private participation has been established in many countries. This has increased the effectiveness of civil society actors in these initiatives. Civil society action at international level is predominantly focused on building a new conceptual and political framework.

A formidable factor that puts a question mark on the functioning of these international mechanisms is their legitimacy and accountability. The executive councils of such global regulatory bodies are mainly composed of bureaucrats, who lack the traditional formal mechanisms of democratic accountability that are found among popularly elected leaders, parliamentary oversight, non partisan courts, etc. Nevertheless, the inclusion of civil society actors not only makes decision-making processes more transparent and legitimate, but, also makes them more inclusive and responsive to the political claims coming from below. Civil society till few decades before evoked little interest in the academic circles. Civil society for philosophers, like, Locke, meant establishment of institutions by a constitutional democratic state that would protect and enlarge the principle of liberty. For such thinkers, civil society represented a break from the traditional order—hierarchical and absolutist. But state continued to remain as an important institution that overshadowed anything associated with the civil society.

Civil society was thus recognized as a catalyst in promoting liberal democracy and establishing democratic institutions in such societies. It also figured in the discourse which advocated a powerful and regulatory state which would be balanced by an active civil society. It was believed to be a bulwark against the arbitrary power of the state and prevent authoritarian tendencies from taking root. It is also believed to mediate between state and market. It constitutes a sphere which is outside the control of the state and ensures maximum freedom and self-determination to the individuals.

Following its influential role in the breakup of the communist regimes in India, the role of global civil society acquired new salience and visibility. This in turn generated vast interest in civil society and its

role in the growth of liberal democracy. An active and vibrant civil society is considered important to establish and strengthen the democratic institutions which were dominated by the authoritarian bureaucratic regimes. While Cohen calls civil society as a sphere of social self management, freedom of thought and association, civil society was strengthened by the social movements which developed around that time in country, aiming to democratize the state and society, further.

Global civil society is considered important as far as maintenance of associational pluralism and democracy is concerned. During Cold War it was considered as the democratic answer to Soviet totalitarianism. Subsequently, it was presented as a means to democratize the bureaucratic liberal welfare states. Thus, the concept was incorporated in neoliberal theories forming the main discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. It advocated a powerful, regulatory state along a vibrant and active civil society. It is supposed to mediate between the state and market to help in containing the power of state. It is believed to represent a sphere that is independent of state and the one that guarantees maximum freedom and autonomy to the individual and other social groups. Cohen states that it is out of excitement that supporters of civil society call for it to foster freedom, self-determination and creativity, but the actual purpose is that state should shed some of its functions in the interests of efficiency and economy. She further states that in order to enhance popular participation in the decision making, the civil society-state partnership can play a vital role. Cohen places much faith in non-party political processes and political society to make democracy more meaningful, vibrant and participatory.⁶

More and more importance is given to decentralization of power, people's participation in the process of administration and to ensure transparency in administration with the right to information. However, regional disparity in economic development and persistent neglect of certain genuine grievances lead to the emergence of secessionism. Rise of terrorism, criminalization of politics, communalism, casteism are other threats to Indian civil society.

Conclusion-Civil society is not a political society. Despite the dissolution of the government, the civil society continues to satisfy the interest of the individuals. Antonio Gramsci interpreted the civil society in terms of the political and cultural hegemony where a social group exercise control over the whole of the society as the ethical content of the state. Though

the existence of civil society is essential, yet is not a sufficient pre-condition for the existence of democracy. The accountability of the state can be ensured only when the civil society is self-conscious, vibrant and active. An inactive civil society- leads to unresponsive states. Thus, the relationship between the state and the civil society is a mutual one based on the principle of reciprocity.

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