Role of Civil Society in Politics of India

Rafia Banoo Dar[*]

[*]**Masters in Political Sciences, Jammu University, Jammu (J&K) INDIA**

Abstract - There have been vigorous efforts in contemporary political theory to review the concept of Civil Society and bring it to the foreground in the academic and policy discussion. The concept of civil society is one of the key concepts of modern political analysis since the last quarter of the earlier century and now it is undoubtedly a significant trend in the process of international development as well. Initially, the concept of civil society and it's contestations mainly led a strong Eurocentric or more precisely, western Europe centric bias but now the debates and discussions regarding it have permeated to the erstwhile socialist block as well as to different parts of developing and underdeveloped political cultures as well. This article focuses on history and practice of civil Society in india searching the old and new connotations thereof.

Introduction - Contractualists Hobbes and Locke emphasized the primacy of civil society in order to get out of the state of nature though they differed regarding the construction and role of it.

David Hume and Adam Smith envisaged a civil society where economic and Social transactions mattered as much as political Institutions.

For Smith, it was the economy of civil society that was natural to man and therefore central to his existence.

Alexis de Tocqueville considred that the civil Society constitutes the third sphere of society. The first sphere comprises the state and it's institutions and the second is the economy.

For Marx, Civill Society and the bourgeois Society were the same. The potential idealism of civil society was marred for it's crass materialism.

Antonio Gramsci developed the idea of civil society in relation to the concept of "hegemony".

Civil society can be considered as a melting pot which "incarnates a desire to recover for society powers-economic, Social and expressive - believed to have been illegitimately usurped by states.

Civil Society and the Indian Scenario: India has a comparatively well developed civil society and some of it's CSO's have made commendable contribution both to the cause of democracy and to national development. However, the socio-political space in which CSO's are operating does not seem to be conducive to the healthy growth of civil Society.

There are several prerequisites for the civil society to function effectively.

Considering the conditions prevailing in India, these may be formulated as follows"

1. **A political system with a neutral state and a liberal democratic setup:** Toleration of opposing ideologies and groups, respect for the rule of law and protection of the fundamental freedom of the citizens are basic to this system.

2. **An economic system guaranteeing economic justice to all citizen:** welfare provisions and meeting the minimum needs of the citizens are a sine qua non of the system.

3. **A socio-cultural System based on universalistic Values:** Affective neutrality must have precedence over affectivity orientation of the citizenry. The performance of the civil society in India will be conditioned by the extent to which these prerequisites' are met.

In India, the state declares itself to be Secular and democratic where the citizens right to equality before the law is enshrined in the Constitution. However, this equality is negated in several cases by the states inability to make uniform laws for all citizens especially women and other weaker sections of the society.The countless cases before the Human Rights Commission are a proof of this

The economic system, in spite of severel welfare provisions in the constitution and several welfare programmes being implemented, continues to be skewed as regards economic justice. Around one-third of the population lives below the poverty line and suffer from privations of all Sorts. This has also distracted CSO's in their advocacy role and as a consequence, they are unequally placed vis-a-vs other organisations and the state in terms of power resources and bargaining capacity.

The Socio-cultural values in India are lacking in many

qualities that promote the growth of a healthy democracy and effective civil society.Social behaviour in several areas is guided by particularistic values and this has often led to conflict and confrontation. Many CSO's are governed by narrow ethics ,regional, communal and linguistic considerations.

Modern civil society in India has been a post-Independence phenomenon. Within half a century of its existence as a free nation, the country has witnessed the birth and development of a multitude of CSOs-large and small; local, state and national level. However only very few of them have been able to live upto their objectives. Lack of proper leadership, inadequate economic base and structural and ideological contradictions have been a bane of most of them, even those that are working with some efficiency. The availability of foreign funds has been able to prop up many NGO's in India but their real Contribution to civil society objectives is yet to be examined. A few NGO's, no doubt, have attracted the attention of scholars but the findings do not augur well for many of them. It is in this light that the insistence of the UNO and other international organisations that the state should share funds with NGO's as they fare better in development activities than the government departments has to be viewed. The need for healthy coexistence of and complementarity between CSO's and the state is axiomatic and this should govern the efforts at establishing government – CSO's transactions.

Indian Civil Society in Action: the Areas: Several areas can be counted with which Several civil Society interests contributed a lot.The areas of their thought and action follows:

1. Transparency and Right to Information:. training and sensitizing communities and people for its use and strong mobilizations against diluting the provisions of the act.

2. MNREGA: This limited employment guarantees has bean also possible due to the intense pressure of the civil society. The important role being played Is in dissemination and sensitizing people, Social audits and exposing the corruption demanding action.

3. Education: CSO's are also playing important role in innovations in teaching methods for children, bringing out of school children in the mainstream both as partners community mobilization.

4. Policy Advocacy: Participation in policy dialogues with various levels in government, policy focusing youth, women and child, tribal and forest etc.

5. Implementation of Programs: like watershed, innovations, livelihood programs, Self Help Groups and micro finance.

6. Demanding Accountability: through public watch reports, Social audits and public hearings and budget analysis has important Impact on the government functioning.

7. Environment and resettlement/Rehabilitation Issues: making them national and international agenda,sensitizing and dialogues with the government/ multilateral funding agencies.

8. Panchayti Raj Institutions Strengthening: voter awareness, helping the most underprivileged to come and participate and Sensitizing people.

9. National Rural Health Mission and Right to Health: Health concerns are sparked off the participation and debated the issue.

10. Human Rights watch Groups: The Indian universities came up with curriculum on human rights under UGC Special program and Ngo's raising the issue and pleading to minorities, women and other vulnerable groups and individuals.

Changes In Indian Civil Society: The compositions roles and relationships of civil society in India are influenced by the Socio-economic changes that indian society is witnessing.

Changing Composition: Over a period of two decades, since the early 1990s, there has been a "mushrooming of voluntary organisations" in India. Many organIsations have emerged abruptly without being aware of the local content and its need. Many more, instead of pursuing Social commitments, pursue business and Commercial motivations. Another prevailing trend is for political leaders to form CSO's. Many CSO's are set up by "bureaucrats, ex- corporate employees, and industrialists who have no vision for development or welfare and who regard the sector from a bussiness or profit-making perspective.

Changing Roles: In the decades prior to economic liberalisation in India, CSO's worked for the overall development of the society, focusing mainly on uplifting the downtrodden. Since the early 1990's, when the state started withdrawing from some of it's responsibilities, CSO's focused more upon governance and development. Various International organisiations and UN agencies started working actively with Indian CSO's by providing aId, monitoring and overseeing development programmes in regions hit hard by socio-economic problems. According to Tandon (2002), the three most important contributions of CSO's in national development were : Innovation (2) empowerment (3) research and advocacy with changing times and emerging challenges the roles of CSO's have been diversifying and changing.

Changing Relations: With the change in India's economy, it's international relations and it's geopolitical interests, CSO's have witnessed significant changes in their relationship with other Sectors like the government, political Society, market and even among themselves.

Relationship with the government: Since the onset of liberalisation , privatisation and globalisation processes in India,there has been increasing interaction between the government and civil society. The Indian state operating In multiple spheres (local/municipal, provincial, national, transnational) plays Specific functions which inevitavaly impact on civil society (a) the Indian state guarantees

democratic rights to it's citizens, thereby providing legitimacy to all civil society functions in India; (b) It is the primary actor behind policy-making in India; (c) it also promotes national development, planning and implementation. Thus, the state acts both as funder and regulator of CSO's in India which in turn remain inextricably linked to it. since the early 1990's many CSOs have been implementing national government programmes and collaborating with local government agencies

Relationship with the market:

Much of the previous generation of NGO leaders and civil society activists grew up in an area where market Institutions were weak; the new era has seen a dramatic rise of private Sector and market-led economic development. So, for this generation of civil society activists the biggest challenge is to come to terms with the rise of the free market and visibility, legitimacy and credibility of the private sector. For a new generation of CSOs, the market is the acceptable route to prosperity and civil society can support that process. Hence relations with the private sector, by and large are non- existent for a vast segment of indian civil society.

Conclusion: Civil Society in India has shown considerable response to the political, Social and economic problems in the post independent India and has been able to influence policies, demanded accountability and also created social harmony in the wake of communalism and fundamentalism in the country. The growth of the civil society organizations and change in their composition in India can also be traced at the changing scenario. However, a number of internal and external constraints limits the effectiveness of the interventions of civil society in governance for effective delivery of the entitlements.

References:-
1. Kaviraj and Khilnani (ed) 2001. Civil Society- History and Possibilities. Verso Pub.
2. Michael, Edwards. 2009. Civil Society. Cambridge, Polity Press
3. Ghanshyam, Shah. 1990. Social Movements in India - A Review of the Literature, New Delhi, Sage Publications
4. Baviskar, B.S. 2001. "NGOs and Civil Society in India", Sociological Bulletin, vol. 50, issue 1.
5. Amir. Ali, 2001'. The Evolution of the Public Sphere in India ', Economic and Political Weekly, 30 June.
6. Neera chandhoke. 2003. State and Civil Society: explorations in political theory. New Delhi.Sage Publications
7. Andrew, Arato, & Jean L. Cohen. 1994. Civil society and Political theory. The MIT Press.

❊❊❊❊❊❊❊❊❊❊❊