

Civil Society, Democratic Space, and Social Work

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Abstract

Civil Society envisages the growth of civilization in a way that the society is in “civilized form.” It has been prominent in Social science since time immemorial. Till 18th century, it was synonymous with the state or political society. It was more or less direct translation of Cicero’s *Societas’ Civilis* and Aristotle’s *Koinonia politike*. According to Karl Marx, “Civil Society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of development of productive forces.” Civil Society is an arena where modern man legitimately gratifies his self-interest and develops his individuality, but also learns the value of group action, social solidarity which educates him for citizenship and equips him to participate in the political sphere of the state. It provides “networks of civic engagement” within which reciprocity is learned and enforced, trust is generated. An active and diverse civil society plays a valuable role in advancement of democracy. It seeks to ensure that citizen’s interests are taken seriously. The social work intervention may not be democratically envisaged until it is promulgated by civic engagement through Civil Society. **Methodology:** This is a descriptive study which consists of secondary source of data collection based on reports, books, periodic journals, web-based articles. There have been utilized three case studies for reaching the findings of study. This article will highlight on role of civil society in providing democratic space and assisting social workers to ensure inclusive growth through conglomeration of state and individuals.

Keywords

civil society, civic virtue, social capital, democracy, social work, solidarity, social cohesion

Introduction

Civil society consists of groups and organizations, both formal and informal, which act independent of the state and market to promote diverse interests in society. It represents self-generating, self-supporting, state-independent organizations that allow citizens to act collectively in the *public* sphere to express their interests. It is associated with a set of institutions that mediate between the individual and the state. Therefore, it acts at a macroscopic level. It includes the gamut of organizations that political scientists traditionally label interest groups—not just advocacy nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) but also labor unions, professional associations (such as those of doctors and lawyers), chambers of commerce, ethnic associations, and others. They foster citizen participation and civic education. They provide leadership training for young people who want to engage in civic life but are uninterested in working through political parties. Civil society in this sense is an arena in which modern man not only legitimately gratifies his self-interest and develops his individuality, but also learns the value of group action, social solidarity, and the dependence of his welfare on others, which educate him for citizenship and prepare him for participation in the political arena of the state (Kumar, 1993). The key distinction with civil society per se is the idea

of activism that tackles international problems and acts across geographical borders, and is generally interrelated with the process of enhancing globalization and “turbo-capitalism” (Keane, 2001). The main actors in this sphere are international NGOs that are increasingly developing links with governments, intergovernmental policy makers and transnational corporations; self-organizations across borders of transnational communities and international social movements, civic networks and social forums (Kaldor, Anheier, & Glasius, 2003).

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2002, as cited in Tabbush, 2005), in his report “Strengthening of the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change” stresses that a plurality of actors—namely civil society and the private sector—are increasingly involved in international cooperation, thus explaining why, in the Millennium Declaration, member states agreed to give them additional opportunities to contribute to the realization of the UN’s goals. At international

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level, civil society is viewed as an attractive partner that could further enhance their legitimacy and encourage public and political constituencies to support them. Civil society is seen as the holder of the moral authority for action and operational knowledge, or what Chandhoke (2002) calls “the peculiar hallmark of ethical political intervention: moral authority and legitimacy” (Tabbush, 2005).

Definition

Civil society is such a contentious concept in the history of social science that has got different connotations in different periods. It has been one of the favorite buzzwords among the global chattering classes, touted by President and political scientists as the key to political, economic, and societal success. The renaissance of interest in civil society draws strength from its European roots, which are traceable to the late 17th century to 18th century and early 19th century (Keane, 1998). During 17th century, civil society was related with charitable groups, clubs, and voluntary associations independent of state machinery. Locke differentiated civil society from the state of nature as well as from political society. According to him, civil society comes into existence when men possessing the natural right to life, liberty, and estate come together, sign a contract, and constitute a common public authority. Locke contrasts this civil society with the state of nature, where in the latter men have equal natural rights but there is no legal authority that can uphold these rights and punish its offenders (Mahajan, 1999). In the 18th century, the idea of civil society got a new shape. The political theorists from Thomas Paine to Georg Hegel developed the notion of civil society as a domain parallel to but separate from the state—a realm where citizens associate according to their own interests and wishes. Hegel says,

The creation of Civil society is the achievement of the modern world which has for the first time, given all determinations of the idea their due. It is, moreover indeed the case that civil society is a realm of appearance where particularity and egoism lead to measureless excess and ethical life, which is essentially social, seems to be lost in a riot of self-seeking. (Kumar, 2001, pp. 145)

This new thinking reflected on contemporary economic realities, that is, the rise of private property, market competition, and the bourgeoisie (Carothers, 1999). It resembled with what Karl Marx called it “*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.” The Marxian thought attributed the entire notion of civil society with social organization evolving directly out of production and commerce.

This Marxian thought was further elaborated in the 19th century when the economic exchange of goods was attributed with civil society. It was considered as legitimization of private property and propagator of market elements. It transcended the boundary of state and aligned with market forces.

But the current situation negates all these propositions and broadens the horizon of civil society. Civil society embodies not only economic institutions but also classes, corporations related with social, religious, professional life, welfare agencies, educational and training institutes concerned with civic purposes. Elaborating further, Pelczynski (as cited in Connelly & Hayward, 2012, p. 41) states,

Civil society in this sense is an arena in which modern man legitimately gratifies his self-interest and develops his individuality, but also learns the value of group action, social solidarity and the dependence of his welfare on others.

Even Richard Holloway defines civil society on contemporary line which states, “citizens, associating neither for power nor profit, are the third sector of society, complementing government and business and they are the people who constitute Civil Society organizations” (Holloway, 2001, p. Xiii).

In the words of Carolyn M. Elliott, “Civil society is a space between the family and the state where people associate across ties of kinship, aside from the market, and independent of the state” (Sapru, 2011, p. 166).

The London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society states

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2008, p. 124)

In this way, the evolving connotation of civil society in different phases of history brings this conception whereby civil society is considered not a subsidiary unit of the state but a third independent entity that assists the state in maintaining governance and rule of law. This term came in because of the need felt by German scholars to distinguish between “bourgeois society” and “civil society” as *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as used by Karl Marx. Civil society is beyond market forces and state-centric institutions. It can strengthen public sphere and provide a haven from the Behemoth state.

Various Schools of Thought on Civil Society

Hegel

Hegel remarked that earlier societies did not possess civil societies. To him civil society was distinct from either the household or the state in a manner that the state is not only responsible for the creation of a civil society, but also for its

sustenance (J. P. S. Uberoi in Jayaram, 2005). Hegel enlarged the notion of civil society from the liberal emphasis on the market to include social practices distinct from economic life. Hegel perceived civil society as being egoist, selfish, and fragmented (Elliott, 2003). According to him, civil society is situated between the “early moment” in the progress of family and its definitive form as “state” (Medeiros, 2009). In addition, he argues that civil society does not arise out of natural ties of kinship and community. Instead it develops in the course of their actual attainment of selfish ends. For Hegel, “civil society” is the moment in which the family unity starts to dissolve, as a result of the emergence of antagonist economic relations (Medeiros, 2009). According to him civil or bourgeoisie is the realm of individuals who have left the unity of the family to enter into economic competition. It is the arena of particular needs, self-interests, and divisiveness with potentials for self-distraction. The state comes into being because civil society is not in itself sufficient, and it does for civil society what it cannot do for itself. Civil society represents a step forward from feudal to bourgeois society (P. K. B. Nayar in Jayaram, 2005).

Marx

According to Marx, civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces. Based on a particular interpretation of Hegel’s work, Marx defines civil society as the realm of economic activities (Medeiros, 2009). It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given state and insofar transcends the state and the nation. In the “critique of Hegel’s philosophy of rights,” Marx emphasized the nexus between economic interests and political institutions. Marx ruptures definitively the classical notion of civil society as synonymous with state (Medeiros, 2009). Focusing on the right to property sanctioned by civil society, he maintained that the latter lacked the ability to express universal interests common to society as a whole. Like the capitalist state, it remained the voice of the ruling class (Mahajan, 1999). Marx tends to reduce the development of civil society to the structure of productive forces and social relations arising out of them. Because Marx thought statism, centralism, and bureaucratism only organize, centralize, and institutionalize social and political alienation that would by definition be authentic to civil society and he considers civil society as belonging to the structural sphere, to “base” rather than to the superstructure (D. N. Dhanagre in N. Jayaram, 2005). According to his view, the creation of civil society is the achievement of modern world that has for the first time given all determinations of the idea their due. It is simply a cockpit of competing individuals pursuing their private ends.

Gramsci

To Gramsci, civil society belongs to the superstructural sphere. It comprises of not only material relationships, but

all ideological cultural relations along with the whole of commercial and industrial life (D. N. Dhanagre in Jayaram, 2005). Unlike Marx, Gramsci argues that civil society is not simply a sphere of selfish and egoistic individual needs but of organizations representing broader community interests that have the potential of rational self-regulation and freedom. Gramsci sets himself against the pure economic interpretation of civil society as laid down by Marx and his followers. Actually, Gramsci distinguishes civil society not only from state, but also from the capitalist market, founding a tripartite conception of the term. He conceived civil society within the context of cultural institutions including the church, educational, establishments, professional associations, and the trade union movement (Milkias, 2006). For Gramsci, though civil society, subsumed within the concept of “cultural superstructure,” enables the bourgeois class to impose its hegemony to keep the working class in its place; it also acts as a wedge between the state and the class structured system (Milkias, 2006). Civil society is not to be found in the sphere of production or economic organization but in the state. The formula most commonly found in Gramsci is the state = political society plus civil society. He further says that it is precisely in civil society that intellectuals operate and perform their key function of supplying legitimacy and creating consensus on behalf of the ruling class (Kumar, 1993).

Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato

In 1992, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato published a massive work about importance of the concept “civil society” to the political and social analyses. In fact, in accordance with what is mentioned in the previous section, their reading of Hegel’s work represents a critique against Marx, in that they disagree with the definition of civil society as the sphere of economic needs (Medeiros, 2009). With this purpose, they present their own theory of civil society that, as they claim, would be responsible not only for understanding these new movements, but also for clarifying the political debate on which these movements have influenced (Medeiros, 2009). Part of Cohen & Arato’s work is dedicated to the analysis of recent social movements where they take into account the recent debate between new social movement and resource mobilization theories. According to the two-front mission of civil society agents, social movements’ actions are aimed not only at the polity, but also at the social institutions of civil society. Thus, civil society is conceived as the “terrain and target” of social movements, and the latter are defined as the “dynamic element in processes that might realize the positive potential of modern civil societies” (Medeiros, 2009).

After having visualized respective debates between political thinkers on civil society, it is imperative to know its distinction from social movement. As both the actors bring structural changes against repressive state and market forces, there is need to analyze the crucial difference between the same.

Distinction Between Civil Society and Social Movement

Civil society and Social movement are two independent entities of contemporary world. Civil society and social movements often have complex and contradictory practices and relationships that do not fit into easily definable categories. Sometimes, civil society enters the arena of social movement to bring change in governance structure. Basically, social movements are those actions that are not regulated by existing norms or common understanding. These social movements are actively engaged in a struggle to recapture political space and develop a new form of knowledge construction. They assert popular sovereignty and challenge the aristocratic dominance so that representation of people against repressive state may be restored. While social movement is an accumulation of mass voice to repress any authoritative action, civil society is defined as a competitive, voluntary sphere whose primary function is to keep the state under check and even substitute for the state. Social movement is a more contentious mode of transformation whereas civil society transforms norms and values prevalent in the society for further change in structure. Social movement seeks to bring mobilization of those who have failed to get their grievances redressed. Civil society organizations do not mobilize people directly for any agitation but provide resources to disadvantaged groups to raise their voice (Medeiros, 2009). This means speaking for those who cannot speak (Medeiros, 2009). These organizations influence the decision makers indirectly through various advocacy efforts and shift the normative terms of debate. The civil society may shift the informational base on which institutional actors make decisions. The civil society is an institutional base for bringing transformation in status quo. It should not be seen a mere realm of creating trust, reciprocity, but an arena of continuous conflict involving resources, cultural values. It may be seen as terrain and target for collective action whereas social movement is upheaval of dominant socioeconomic structure.

Despite slight differences between Civil society and Social movement, both transcend their boundaries to control the repressive nature of political system. Through legitimizing power of civil society, social movement produces civil repairs. Jeffery Alexander argues that civil society itself has the capacity to make repairs through mobilization in social movements, creation of public opinion, engagement in voluntary associations, and opening of channels for pressuring the process of legislation (Medeiros, 2009).

In this way, it may be distinguished that social movements are actions that are not regulated by existing norms or common understanding, thus fundamentally non-institutional. Social movements are explained basically through a circular dynamic of mutual stimulation, in which one's actions are continuously reinforced by the others' through a process that amplifies and reinforces the causes that first

generated the action (Medeiros, 2009). However, civil society is an institutional force to bring systemic changes (Medeiros, 2009). They provide a political space where voluntary associations shape the rules that govern one or the other aspect of social life.

Role of Civil Society in Ensuring Democracy

The Democratic governance is considered to be people-centric rule. Democratic governance provides an institutional framework for participation by all citizens in economic and political processes. Each and every individual gets an opportunity to select his or her governance structure as per his or her own will. From policy legislation to its implementation and further adjudication of its violations, a common man is aware. The free and fair election, independent judiciary, and free media assist in securing welfare of the people. This ultimately helps in strengthening socioeconomic and political freedom of individuals. In this case, civil society has the potential to add to democracy. An active, diverse civil society often does play a valuable role in helping advance democracy. It provides a normative basis for legitimating democratic rule. It can discipline the state, ensure that citizens' interests are taken seriously, and foster greater civic and political participation. The state machinery is always affected by various socioeconomic and political factors. In addition to it, the structural changes of globalization has also created nuances for national democracy. In this era of globalization, the contemporary space is not democratic space (Scholte, 2001). We do not have a situation where the governed have accorded the right of rule to existing regimes (Scholte, 2001). The emergence of transnational corporations has narrowed down independent broad democratic governance. The popular participation, consultation, and accountability seem to be weak in policy formulation. The core problems of poverty, lack of representation, inequality, and attendant violence, corruption, and polarization require complex and long-term solutions, which must be based on strengthening fundamental elements and principles in societies across the region. Among these elements is the need for information and ideas that provide citizens, politicians, and policy makers with a common basis for informed discussion and decision making. Second, is the need for pluralism and respect for difference of opinion. Third, is the need for consensus-building techniques that allow citizens to reach agreement and identify common objectives for national life at the local and national level. Finally, there is a need for heightened transparency and accountability in government activity to ensure that these shared visions are being implemented by elected officials. In all these respects, civil society provides a way to enhance public participation, consultation, transparency, and accountability that may foster democratic governance (Scholte, 2001).

Civil society plays an important role in promoting democracy through certain indicators that are as follows:

Public Education and Mass Awareness

One of the important contributions of civil society in the arena of democracy is its mass awareness activity. An effective democracy requires informed citizens to be aware about their governance system. A civil society organization is capable of conscientizing masses through various means like publication of handbooks, information booklets, organizing seminar and workshops, spreading information through curricular materials in educational institutions, advocating certain policy issues through mass media, and so on. The Civil society educates the people about their rights and responsibilities, consequences of certain policies on their lives, and strategy of government authorities behind any agreement or treaty. It also plays a role of making the elite and general masses more committed to democracy through disseminating democratic principles and ideas. They are involved in protection of civil rights as well as freedom. They encourage masses to involve them in political affairs through exercise of their franchise and associational activities.

Empowerment of Disenfranchised Communities

The civil society brings access to information, transparency, and consultation in decision-making process that ensures that interests of those excluded people may be addressed by policy makers. They strive to achieve more equitable distribution of power and resources. They provide a platform to masses so that they may initiate action for redressal of their grievances. It provides opportunities for concerned parties to broadcast information, analysis to governance agencies (Scholte, 2001). In a lay man's language, it gives microphone to the poor and the disadvantaged people to get hearing about their governance that they may not get through other channels. This civic activism has potential to make democracy more participatory that is its peculiarity. The civil society, through redressing the grievances and empowering their voice, assists in fostering a just and accountable democracy that is its true spirit. They check the abuse of government power by public officials at national and local levels through their access to media, and monitor the government mechanisms for service delivery and access (Cheema, 2011). They also protect the human rights of minorities, women, and marginalized groups (Cheema, 2011). They shape public affairs through which citizens articulate their interests and exercise their political, economic, and social rights.

Providing Space for Pluralism

Pluralism is one of the essential ingredients of democracy that helps in deconstructing policy framework. The people are capable of getting true knowledge of the happenings and

capacitated to analyze policy decisions. In other words, it helps in facilitating information sharing among masses through debates and expression of ideas that is base for a successful democracy. As envisaged, democracy is run by people from diverse socioeconomic and cultural manifestations. In such a condition, civil society assists in providing uninhibited discussion of these diverse views. Civil society represents a host of issues, interests, groups. In other words, they offer solutions to a variety of issues, bringing the perspectives and needs of various sectors of society. For example, civic groups have been instrumental in generating debate about the so-called "Washington Consensus" (Scholte, 2001). They have also raised ecological issues, advocated qualitative assessments of poverty so that a common man may be aware about shrinking democratic framework in globalized world.

Promoting Transparency and Accountability in the Governance Structure

Civic mobilization can increase the public transparency of global governance (Scholte, 2001). Civil society, being powerful interest groups, has potential to create pressure on state mechanism to ensure transparency in its legislation. Through connectivity with mass media, a common public may be made aware about any policy being formulated by the state so that it may be open for public scrutiny. Furthermore, they also work for public interest law reform, enhance access of the poor to justice through paralegal services, undertake advocacy and seek the accountability of public officials by informing media about violations by public officials. Civic groups can also interrogate the currently popular official rhetoric of "transparency" by asking critical questions about what is made transparent, at what time, in what forms, through what channels, on whose decision, for what purpose, and in whose interest (Scholte, 2001). In a global framework, the National democracy is no longer immune from getting swallowed by transnational governance. In this case, the civil society helps in maintaining accountability of national democratic structure toward indigenous people through connecting it with grassroot people. The presence of various advocacy groups, interest groups in national politics keep people active in policy formulation and its execution. Any repressive policy is supposed to be debated in public forum initiated by the civil society. For example, civic actors have pressed for and subsequently participated in independent policy evaluation mechanisms for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF; Scholte, 2001).

Establishing Legitimacy for Governance

Legitimacy is a key element for any governance system. Unless the government is able to garner support of masses, its governance is void. The democracy requires authentication by people. Therefore, it has to be acknowledged by

people that an authority has a right to govern them and frame directives on them. Once this consent is acquired, a democratic framework may run smoothly. There will not be any need for transformation of rule. Hence, civil society also plays a crucial role in this affair. It offers a means to citizens to reaffirm their governance system through expression of consensus. It bolsters public education or conscientize them for effective participation in governance. It facilitates dialogues among masses regarding any political party or structure so that a representative democracy may get legitimacy. In adverse situation, the civil society has played a role in overthrowing government through illegitimization of rule by people. The presence of media, educational institutes, advocacy, and interest groups bridges the gap between common people and government. The grassroot people are updated with the happenings of the center through innovative methods of civil society. The absence of red-tapism in civil society engages their own actors in prompt action and alerts others with certain impending crises. As the civil society does not depend on votes or large bureaucracies, it enjoys the freedom of action. In other words, it is a legitimizing force in democracy.

Facilitating Dialogue Among Masses

Democracy always lacks the broad-based consensus on basic national principles, polarization, and marginalization. In this affair, the people get space for mutual discussion, debate, and sharing of ideas through civil society. A moderate civil society may assist in bridging gaps between various groups and garner social and political consensus among masses. The civil society acts as a public forum for reviewing various decisions of the government. They initiate a process of provoking masses for dialogues in case certain policies are arbitrary. Through this strategy, the civil society becomes successful in strengthening democracy and linking a grassroot individual with decision makers.

Advocating for Better Policy Options

The civil society has the capability to influence government bodies and assist in formulating well-articulated policy and programs. They bring careful research findings to understand the crux of the situation and develop concrete agenda. They play a role of watchdog for certain policy formulation and its successful implementation. Therefore, they bring a feasible policy to ensure mass betterment. They provide an enabling environment for local governance and development through advocating for people-centric policies.

Assisting in Resolution of Conflicts

The civil society develops and helps in imparting conflict resolution strategies. They conciliate between individuals and government to enhance the smooth communication

between both of them. They acknowledge the fact that democracy cannot survive on the basis of disagreement. Therefore, civil society acts as a catalyst in removing this disagreement. The effective role of civil society in mobilizing social capital results into resolution of conflict. Robert Putnam in his book "Bowling Alone: America's declining social Capital" states that a weak civil society leads to a lack of "civic engagement" and "social trust." Social capital is nothing but norms, reciprocity, values that bind society into a thin layer of trust. Putnam states that social capital is based on the foundation of thin trust rather than thick trust within societies. Thick trust makes a community rigid in terms of its composition. An individual may not transcend its boundary to co-opt with other communities in thick trust-oriented communities (Harriss, 2001). Once an individual of a particular community is able to mingle with another community and develops a bond of trust and certain norms, intercommunity conflicts may easily be resolved. In this way, the civil society resolves the conflict through its bonding and bridging social capital.

Socialization

Socialization is the cultural process of learning to participate in group activities. It enables individuals to fit into all kinds of social groups. It is so significant for a human being that an individual cannot develop attitudes, beliefs, values concerned for a social being without it. In sociology, functionalist and conflict perspective schools have defined socialization. According to functionalist school, socialization helps in creating stable society through establishing basic norms, beliefs, and values. It helps in preventing a human being from becoming a deviant. However, conflict perspective school views socialization as a way of perpetuating the status quo. In its view, the powerful people keep the things same through socialization. It legitimizes their existence (Paffenholz, 2009).

In this process of socialization, civil society plays a very pivotal role. It helps society in realizing democratic attitudes and values through socialization. A culture of peace is restored among people through inculcating true spirit of democracy, mankind. Civil society attempts to modify the behavior of individuals by associating them with various networks, development projects. It empowers marginalized groups through restoring integrity, beliefs, and reciprocity for further group cohesiveness among them. In other words, they pave a way for socioeconomic advancement of society.

Flexible and Innovative Structure of Civil Society

Apart from its outcome, even its own functionality is crucial for promoting democracy. The civil society is called a very flexible, innovative, and informative institution that functions based on updated knowledge through concurrent research in relevant field. Due to prompt action through its

actors, any change in governance is reported to masses instantly. They have sound technical and managerial skills for transmitting any information among people. The active human resource and vast knowledge base assist civil society in getting into depth of any policy and critically evaluate its outcome for further dissemination.

After having reviewed the role of civil society in promoting democracy, it is pertinent for us to know about those key actors that help a civil society in this affair. A civil society functions as a change agent or catalyst in strengthening democracy and making its pro-people. But in all these activities, it does not have its independent tool. A civil society is assisted by social work that plays a role of agent for this change. It equips a civil society with certain tools through which it may gain access to masses and intervene between policy maker and common people. The utilization of social work methods and key strategies assist a civil society organization to connect people with governance mechanism. Therefore, it is imperative for us to know those strategies aligned with social work for assisting civil society in promotion of democracy.

How Social Work Can Assist Civil Society in Enhancing Democracy

The Social work is having lots of prospects to help the civil society in restoring democracy and ensuring the socioeconomic and political growth. The civil society cannot exist in vacuum. It requires the mobilization of people based on mutual trust, reciprocity, norms, and ethics so that there may be formed a strong bond among people. The grievances of people in a democratic state may be redressed through conscientization of masses through civil society. It can help people in forming a bridging capital between the upper strata and the lower strata. Therefore, the social work practice promotes civil society in building strong social capital through following measures:

Mobilizing Community

Social work assists in mobilizing community through strengthening bond among citizens. It brings social cohesion and bridges societal cleavages. It promotes the associational activity among the poor people. In many parts of the country, the community-based organizations (CBOs) are playing an active role in mobilizing the community. They reach the common people and get access to their mind due to their associational attributes.

Advocacy and Public Communication

Advocacy and Public Communication are such terminologies that assist social work in articulation of interests of

diverse backgrounds. Advocacy enables a person to express his or her voice and protects his or her interests. It is an independent help with understanding issues and putting further an individual's views and concerns. The National Lead for Advocacy, valuing People Team, 2009, defines advocacy as

taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need. Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice. (Boylan & Dalrymple, 2009, p. 78).

According to Henderson, the advocacy is taking affirmative action with or on behalf of a person who is unable to give a clear indication of their views or wishes in a specific situation (Harriss, 2001). In similar way, communication facilitates the process of dissemination of information among masses. Sociologists define communication "as the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop." According to Obilade (1989, as cited in National Open University of Nigeria, 2008), communication is a process that involves the transmission of message from a sender to the receiver. Therefore, social work helps civil society in advocating for various policy changes through raising public awareness. It coordinates people for various debates and brings those issues under public agenda.

Conflict Transformation

This approach stresses on conflict transformation. It recognizes the existence of irresolvable conflicts and attempts to transform the root causes of conflict so that peace may be restored. The social work practice concentrates on purposeful expression of feelings that may help in reconciliation within the society. It emphasizes on sensitization of external forces toward local culture. In this way, the long-term infrastructure for peace building may be supported.

Enabling Environment

The Social work facilitates the process of participatory development due to organizing people for decentralized planning. It ensures greater participation of people at decision-making level so that transparency and accountability may be maintained. In other words, it can be said that social work promotes civil society in enabling communities to become effective agents of livability. For example, several social movement activists have facilitated an enabling environment for people for either protecting forests, natural habitat, or preventing land alienation and domestic atrocities. All these activities help a civil society in restoring propeople democracy and ensure equitable socioeconomic development of people.

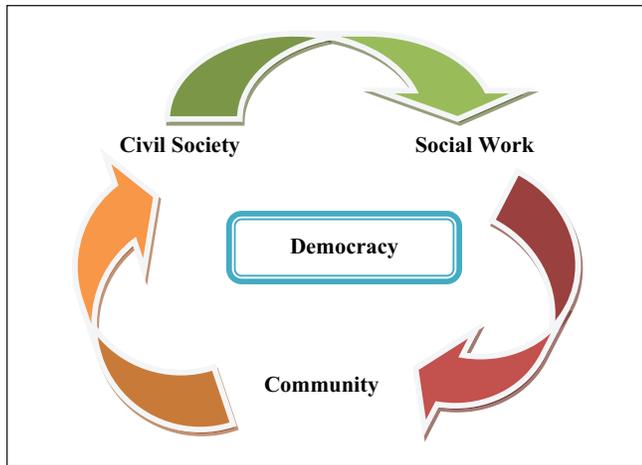


Figure 1. Interface between civil society, community, and role of social work for enhancing democracy.

Promotion of Social Cohesion and Solidarity

The social work practice enhances the mutual bonding among people through supporting established order and relations in society. It establishes human rights, social justice, and economic growth through various policy level advocacy efforts that ultimately strengthens democracy. The civil society based on these social work strategies, attempts to assist state in running a smooth governance. The interests of people are fulfilled by the state on initiation of social cohesion by civil society. John Harriss states that social capital and civil society have proven so attractive in the development discourse that they seem to hold out the prospects of democracy without inconveniences of contestational politics and conflict of ideas that are essential parts of democracy. The collaboration between civil society and social work in terms of bringing solidarity for restoration of pro-people democracy can be illustrated through Figure 1.

Therefore, civil society plays a very crucial role in promoting democracy. It brings stability, transparency, cohesiveness, empowerment that may facilitate a process of accountable democracy toward its people. The common man may be able to get connected with policy-making bodies. The trauma and grievances of individuals are supposed to be redressed by policy makers due to advocacy efforts of civil society. Through strengthening bonds of reciprocity and social connection, civil society promotes harmony among masses that is crucial for conflict transformation.

In this affair, the role of social work may not be ignored. It provides a space where masses may be reoriented about their rights and privileges through public communication and advocacy efforts. Social work enables people to form their integrity and unity through getting associated with organizations. It assists civil society in advocating for certain policy changes if interests of common people are being undermined. Through organizing people based on social

work methods, civil society helps in reconciling between the interests of the people and the state. In other words, civil society strengthens democracy by utilizing the tools of social work, for example, community mobilization, social advocacy. This proposition is explained further through certain case studies.

Case Study

Indonesia

Indonesia has been a crucial example for exhibiting role of civil society in strengthening democracy through overthrowing a 32-year authoritarian regime. It shows how a civil society may render an authoritarian regime irrelevant and promote democracy for just and more accountable governance. In Indonesia, Suharto's New Order had undermined independent power and voices of authority in the name of national stability (Lowry, 2008). During the New Order, associations were very much under state control. Even informal institutions like traditional mechanism of decision making at the local level had lost most of their influence (Lowry, 2008). As Donald Emmerson points out, economic growth in Indonesia during the Suharto era facilitated polycentrism in society, making political monopoly by those in power impossible (Bunbongkarn, 2001). The effect of this systematic emasculation of civil society was to weaken its ability to influence the government and hold it accountable (Bunbongkarn, 2001). Although economic growth under the Suharto's New Order had helped legitimize his regime, especially during the 1980s, by the 1990s this economic success had exposed the expanding middle class to the foreign values such as democracy. The expanding urban middle class and ethnic groups empowered by economic success were increasing critical of Suharto's authoritarian government (Bunbongkarn, 2001). Therefore, some academicians, intellectuals, and students initiated the first step of advocacy for representing the desires and interests of populace (Lowry, 2008). They facilitated people's movement by helping people to organize themselves to identify local needs and mobilize potential resources (Lowry, 2008). Their modus operandi was protecting and taking the side of the feeble/weak. Their emphasis was on problems of democracy and human rights (Lowry, 2008). Furthermore, the decline of Suharto's regime in 1998 opened a space for these civil society organizations to fulfill their dreams. Some organizations like LPSM (self-reliant community development organization, *lembaga pengembangan swadaya masyarakat*) or LSM (self-reliant community organization, *lembaga swadaya masyarakat*) held current government accountable for backwardness of economy and asserted the need for contribution of civil society in upgrading it (Lowry, 2008). They emerged as "watchdog" of governance and almost all aspects of state started to be monitored by them. In post-Suharto's era, these NGOs have started the work of rebuilding its economy. In this

process, they have grouped themselves in various coalitions to carry out advocacy to change, draft new laws (Lowry, 2008). Citizens in Indonesia have a myriad of ways making their voices heard, fill spaces opened by democratization and decentralization, and are in the process of building a new relationship with the state (Lowry, 2008).

South Korea

In South Korea, the role of civil society in fostering democratic transition was reflected in a series of student and worker demonstrations against authoritarian rule and demanding liberalization and democratization during the latter part of the 1980s. The middle class also exerted strong pressure for true democratic change. The strength of the middle class, students, and workers was the result of South Korean success in economic development and industrialization.

Previously, the South Korean middle class and workers were traditionally compliant and reserved. Even civil society organizations were more or less service-oriented organizations under the control of the state, for example, Asan Foundation (1977) and Samsung Welfare Foundation (1989, as cited in Lowry, 2008). These organizations played a role in providing public goods and social services as stated by the state. In this period, independent civil activities in South Korea could develop only within a limited political space (Lowry, 2008). The agrarian economy had been kinship-based. So, the economy was strictly controlled by the state and their kith and kin. Only the students were politically active and had demonstrated against the authoritarian regime. But after a long period of economic growth, the attitudes of the middle class, labor, and civil society groups became less tolerant of repressive rule. Some famous advocacy civil organizations as Lawyers for a Democratic Society, the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), and the Citizen's Coalition of Economic Justice (CCEJ) grew out of this environment (Lowry, 2008). In post-1980 era, awareness about problems of authoritarian regime started prevailing among all sections of society. During this period diverse elements in South Korean civil society rapidly mobilized into a militant prodemocracy force, and waged intense struggles against the authoritarian regime (Lowry, 2008). The mobilization of a civil society coalition of student and labor organizations, journalists, writers, academics, religious groups, and peasants against the authoritarian regime of Chun Doo-hwan weakened his rule (Bunbongkarn, 2001). The government responded with further repression, resulting in an explosion of labor and student unrest. Chun's legitimacy was gone and his close associate, Roh Tae-woo broke ranks with the regime. These events gave Chun no choice except to comply with the public demands to establish full democracy with direct election of the president. Government policy toward civil advocacy organizations greatly changed after the launching of Kim Yong-sam's

government in early 1990s (Lowry, 2008). Now, the civil society in South Korea emerged as a very powerful civic group led by many younger generations. They emphasized progressive advocacy functions including efforts to broaden public debate and participation in the formulation of public policy, safeguard or expand the domain of human rights, and safeguard public resources such as the environment from the pressures of economic growth (Lowry, 2008). They became capable enough to pressurize bureaucrats, politicians, corporate giants to contribute toward accountable democratic governance (Lowry, 2008). Major civil society organizations like Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice and PSPD have equipped themselves with research institutes and policy commissions to strengthen their policy-presenting capacity (Lowry, 2008). Therefore, the role of civil society in South Korea has been intensive right from the beginning of protest against the repressive rule to post-Chun regime policy formulation and political participation in current democracy. Utilizing information and communication technology, they have broadened the scope of citizen participation and information dissemination for strengthening democratic governance (Lowry, 2008). Civic groups that pursue public interests have proliferated—not only groups advocating rights of the formerly marginalized, but also groups speaking for broader causes such as environmentalism and other understandings of what is good for society as a whole (Lowry, 2008). The growth of civil society organizations is itself proof that the kind of public space that the government has been either unwilling or unable to handle, is rapidly expanding (Lowry, 2008). Apart from policy formulation, civil society in South Korea has participated in formation of democratic government also. In the general election in 2000, CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) announced a list of candidates that they determined were not qualified as parliamentarians and conducted nationwide campaigns against them (Lowry, 2008). The reason behind it was to ensure corruption-free democracy as some of the parliamentarians were involved in corrupt practices. Approximately 1,000 civic organizations joined this campaign. As a result, 59 of a total of 86 candidates lost their elections, and particularly in Seoul, 19 out of the 20 candidates were defeated (Lowry, 2008). Currently, South Korea is in the maturing phase of substantive democratization. In this way, civil society remained active in promoting democracy in South Korea from protesting against authoritarian regime to ensuring just, transparent, and corruption-free democracy. In this process, it utilized the strategies of social work like advocacy, public communication for making people aware about intentions of government, enabling favorable environment for people and enhancing solidarity and cohesiveness among people through several social services. It gained the attention of all sections of society especially middle class that were sleeping previously. Social work assisted civil society in reaching the heart of people and convincing them for revolt against repressive rule.

India

In India, the civil society organizations have been quite instrumental in social service and in strengthening people's power to promote just and democratic governance. Since the British period, the concept of welfarism has been quite prevalent in India. The volunteers have been rewarded for their social service. Apart from social services, India has witnessed a plethora of civil society organizations active in promoting democratic governance. They have contributed directly or indirectly in upgradation of propeople governance. It has made Indian people confident of power of local community. Rather than focusing on macroissues, it has gathered masses around local issues of concern that ultimately affects the governance. As the state has neglected popular interests, the civil society organizations have raised those issues either in terms of housing facilities, infrastructure development, corruption-free governance, or employment opportunities for poor people. One of the most crucial roles played by civil society in contemporary India has been to act as a "watchdog" to the state, and in doing so push the state in directions that are accountable and responsive to citizens thereby protecting and deepening their democratic rights (Lowry, 2008). The illustration of some of those civil society organizations are as follows:

Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan [Save House and Build House Movement]. *Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan* is a fine example of mobilization of people at a mass scale by civil society in India. It was evolved as a movement when massive slum demolition drive started in November 2004. At that time, the established slum community at once started to be ransacked. The police charged *laathis*, threw away house materials, and sent many behind bars. In this scenario, the community was totally dismantled, hopeless, and decision less. This was the time when NAPM (National Alliance of People's Movement) stepped into the matter and started its work of engaging into the issue. The slogan *Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao* became the name of movement. It was the voice of people that necessitated this movement. At the time of the beginning of the movement, the main issue was protection of the slum houses and restraining the unlawful decision of builders, BMC (Bombay Municipal Corporation), and SRA (Slum Rehabilitation Authority). Now, together with the issue of housing, the movement is dealing simultaneously with various related issues like ration card, voter ID card, *jeevan shala* (Balwadi), *sakhi navnirmaan* (income-generation activity), advocacy at different levels of government machinery and exposing corruption of Government officials, nexus of builders, BMC and SRA. In this entire process, workers of this movement have been assisted by huge masses. It is organizing the people through empowering their ideological base and engulfing all other processes like Right to information, advocating for ID card, ensuring availability of ration cards. Then movement is supported not by a limited community but entire masses.

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS [Workers and Farmers Power Organization]). Another civil society in India that has been active in promoting propeople governance is MKSS. It is a voice of people against corrupt bureaucratic machinery. The MKSS is a grassroots organization of mainly poor people based in Rajasthan's economically underdeveloped Rajsamand district. The MKSS's campaign to secure minimum wages for employees on drought-relief works highlighted the role of corruption in the underpayment of wages, as it became clear that local authorities were billing the central and state governments for amounts that far exceeded what workers were paid (Lowry, 2008). To combat these forms of fraud, access was required not only to balance sheets, but also to supporting documentation that could be cross-checked by workers organized through the MKSS (Lowry, 2008). Therefore, this civil society organization demanded access to information for their just and transparent governance. With this continual resistance, the government had to lean before it and provided access to this information that later on became a very helpful ground for demanding "Right to Information." The protagonist of this movement remained active in "Right to Information" campaign also which has ultimately led to passing of "Right to Information Act, 2005" in India. It is a revolutionary and historical step that has given power in the hands of people to ensure corruption-free government. A common man can get response from the state regarding utilization of money in various developmental activities through this right.

Here, with the help of these above-mentioned case studies an attempt has been made to highlight the role of civil society in restoring democratic consolidation. The civil society not only educates, conscientize, but also mobilizes masses for their welfare that ultimately strengthens the democracy. The democracy is a phenomenon that exists in institutionalization of rights by government machinery. If the socioeconomic conditions of people are encroached by the political forces or economic giants, the existence of propeople governance is questioned. Therefore, the civil society assists in facilitating dialogue, conciliating between diverse interests of government and people through its innovative ways. The mobilization of masses on the lines of uprising can be possible through civil society. In this entire framework, social work plays a very crucial role. It garners support of masses through community mobilization, social advocacy, conscientization of people through public communication, reconciliation of diverse interests through conflict resolution and mass campaigns. It ensures that civil society gets popular support and its voice becomes mass voice. The democratic governance that is principally, based on representation of people's interests, accountable and transparent rule, may not materialize unless it is corresponded by people's participation in their governance. Civil society, being nonstate actor, assists in empowering people for promotion of a just and accountable democracy.

Critical Assessment of Role of Civil Society in Democracy

Apart from strength of civil society in restoration of democracy, they lack certain parameters that negate their significance in democracy. There are certain schools of thought that challenge the role of civil society in restoration of peace and democratic space. They are as follows:

- Mark Robinson says that it is frequently difficult to distinguish between civil and political organizations because the same or related organizations are active in both sectors. His account of Hindu politics in India shows how militant nationalists are seeking to create an ideological hegemony through such civil society institutions as the media, research institutes, religious bodies, youth organizations while also pursuing power through a cadre-based political party (Elliott, 2003).
- Civil society might detract from democracy in global governance if its interventions are ill-conceived in design and execution (Scholte, 2001). For example, activists may lack clear objectives, or they may have little understanding of the mandates and modus operandi of the institutions of global governance, or they may neglect key global policy areas that require democratization (Scholte, 2001).
- Civil society might undermine democracy in global governance when it suffers from inadequate representation (Scholte, 2001). If civil society is fully to realize its promises, then all interested parties must have access and preferably equal opportunities to participate (Scholte, 2001). Otherwise, civil society can reproduce or even enlarge structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges connected with class, gender, nationality, race, religion, urban versus rural location, and so on (Scholte, 2001).
- Civil society activity might not pursue democratic purposes (Scholte, 2001). Although the term *civil society* carries connotations of civility and virtue, voluntary associations do not ipso facto have the promotion of democracy on their agenda (Scholte, 2001). On the contrary, elements of uncivil society may actually aim to undermine democracy. For example, some civic associations can use underhanded tactics in the pursuit of special privileges for private interests (Scholte, 2001).
- In many settings, local governments display more of the qualities of voluntary association than of the state. They often function as lobbies for local interests confronting a hierarchical bureaucracy for eliciting voluntary participation by citizens in collective projects. Trade unions and employers associations in western states often work so closely with government that distinguishing between government and civil society becomes difficult (Elliott, 2003).
- Some schools of thought predict the imminent political co-optation with civil society. They argue that civil society may also expect benefits from political institutions and mobilize people even against their welfare. As a result, the political co-optation sacrifices the ability of civil society to impartially control the compliance of state and political actors with democratic norms and procedures.
- Civil society is said to be biased interest representative by some propagandist. Civil society is a realm open to the formation, organization and representation of any interest regardless of its particular nature, scope or social significance.
- Some authors ignore role of civil society in democratic restoration. They assert that habituation and eventual appreciation of democratic procedures and norms, to which civil society contributes through facilitating more frequent and immediate political participation, depends on features of internal procedures of organization. In other words, compliance with democratic credentials cannot be taken for granted for each and every civil society.
- It has also been criticized that civil society has amateurism in its professional conduct. Some of civil society organizations lack good managers, policy makers and analysts who may guide state in acting for restoration of mass prosperity.
- The impulse of civil society is inclusion, the notion of civil excludes those that act primarily outside the law. Mafia organization and criminal groups; guerilla movements and terrorist cells cannot be considered as members of civil society. This is because they not only challenge the accepted rules that protect civil society space; their use of violence denies the efficacy of discourse that connects civil society association with each other and the state. Partha Chatterjee gives the example of squatter communities in Kolkata that lives outside the law and conduct their internal affairs depicting a model of civil society. These settlements occupy land illegally; have no police protection and no access to city services. Yet they have developed mechanisms to solve collective problems, and to integrate a great diversity of residents (Elliott, 2003).

Conclusion

Civil societies are being called on to play increasingly important roles in development efforts. This article has argued that a range of challenges predictably emerge for civil societies, especially those concerned with promoting development. We regard this analysis as a step in developing conceptual maps that can guide efforts to strengthen civil society organizations and the sector as a whole. On the basis of improvement in its internal structure, civil society may respond to various emerging challenges/problems and assist the state in restoration of democracy. It has potential to garner support from

people through advocacy efforts and guide the state in formulating pro-people policies. Civic associations can advance public education, provide platforms, fuel debate, increase transparency and accountability, and enhance the democratic legitimacy of governance. Some civil society organizations may pursue antidemocratic goals, use antidemocratic means, and produce antidemocratic consequences but still, these risks are by no means grounds to exclude civil society. The establishment of social cohesion and solidarity through social work practices may leverage the process of bridging social capital which is the foundation for a true democracy. The conglomeration of social work strategies with civil society can assist people in strengthening their democracy and facilitating smooth communication between the state and themselves, which is the soul of democratic governance.

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