

Civil Society and the State: Connections and Interjections

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ABSTRACT

Theoretically, the paper discusses the meaning of the state and its association with civil society. It highlights the origin and development of civil society in the Western intellectual discourse. Does civil society emerge from reason? In comparison to the state, how may civil society be understood? Can it be understood through importance of the state? Are state and civil society dependent categories or are autonomous to each other? Does civil society represent as a political category? The paper discusses the idea of civil society given by Hegel, Gramsci and Adam Ferguson. It also discusses how Ferguson's idea of civil society is relevant in contemporary times. Ferguson's idea of civil society is significant because it contributed a different set up meanings from other early modern and modern political philosophers. The paper also narrates Hegel's idea of civil society and compares it with Ferguson.

KEYWORDS: *Civil Society, State, government, political society, association, institution.*

INTRODUCTION

Civil society, the term, is one of the most confusing concepts. It became popular during modern times; as political theorists noted that its relevance in contemporary times goes back to the social contractarians. More importantly, with the Hegelian notion, meaning of civil society has drastically got changed. Because, Hegel expresses civil society as a sphere of egoism where they (individuals) promote their selfish interests. However, the forms of civil society are non-governmental organizations, social movements and other private organizations which function for the progress of individual. Also, it promotes welfarism. The basic purpose that the civil society institutions serve is to protect the rights and liberties of the marginalized and depressed sections. On the other hand, state refers to a broad array

of things. Government is part of the state. It is the apex and primordial institutions among all institutions in society. The laws and institutions of the state protect society from

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violators. State came into existence with an emergence of the social contract among individuals. Those who violate the very ethos of society in which it is stood, it is the duty of the state to secure its citizens and maintain law and order.

THE TRADITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The connection of the state with institutions of civil society is one of the complicated one. Andre Beteille, a former sociologist of the Delhi School of Economics at Delhi University argues that, civil society is described through a set of institutions; they are either distinguished from the social movements or from the voluntary institutions. However, the meaning of the modern state is found in the writings of political philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau who are important political philosophers to contribute to the meaning of civil society. Their writing possesses meanings of the state and relationships of the individuals with the state. It means, for political philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, the state acts as an important agency for the development of the individual self. The idea civil society became popular during modern times, primarily, during eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century and was distinguished either from sphere of the state or were used in an interchangeable manner. In Hobbes and Locke's texts, civil society and the state mean the same. Philosophers like Adam Smith, David Hume found civil society as a socio-economic sphere. They rejected political institutions as a part of civil society. Neera Chandhoke argues that, to understand the meaning of the state, we need to first understand civil society (Chandhoke, 1995). Then, what is civil society and why it is so special? Because it is the starting point from where the state shall be understood. However, the space civil society is now way valid without locating the state. This has been found in Hegel for whom interconnectedness or mutuality exists between both the spheres. Corresponding to Hegel, civil society do not form meanings unless and until it is related to the state. Hegel, in *Philosophy of Right* asserts, the community of civics in which individuals are found themselves is a space of diversity and is a balancing point between the family and the state (Hegel, 2001). With the creation of state, the creation of civil society may become possible.

Further, Hegel asserts that, within civil society, individual connect others to establish a community where s/he promotes his/her selfish interests. So, by establishing connection with other individuals, s/he satisfies his/her own need. Hegel emphasizes on 'civic community' in

Philosophy of right. Every individual maximizes their interests inside this 'civic community' and he/she can maximize their interests through the means of others; the help of the universality is important to maximize the individual potentialities (Hegel, 2001). Further, civil society creates those spaces where individual connect others to establish a community by promoting selfish interests.

In a similar way, Gramsci points out the complications of civil society and the state. He found civil society and state both represent in an equal as well as in distinct ways. He sometimes refers civil society both as the state and political society and sometimes the state as civil society and political society. Civil society in Gramsci is understood as it protects the dangers that comes on the state. He illustrates the link between civil society and political society by directing to a certain period. The Church, according to him, represents both a sphere of civil society and political society. For better comprehension we must move further. The existence of civil society is inherently contingent upon the presence state. Also, the concept is so vast which includes an array of things and is so complex to interpret. During contemporary times, there are disagreements among scholars regarding the meaning. In this sense, it can be understood in two ways. It can either work independently from the sphere that the state maintains or can be interpreted from three strands: liberal, radical and conservative. From the liberal stand, civil society is understood through economy, rights of the individual, property and markets. It is independent from the sphere of the state in a radical standpoint where it demands rights of the individual and future actions for those who wish to violate societal norms. So, creation of associations and free exchange of ideas may occur without any compulsion. Individuals may join and quit an association in his/her own choice. Freedom of the individual is given primacy and civil society creates awareness among individuals to protect their liberties. Conservatives believe that civil society's meaning lies in cultural associations and the ways civil society represents itself as a historical concept. I mean, they more stressed on the civility of civil society.

Civil society involves institutions for the protection and promotion of democracy. These institutions are functioning to serve the interests of the individual, group interests and community interests. Andre Beteille asserts that when civil society is considered from the institutional point of view, it must reflect those characters that must

bear certain secular values for example rational-legal intermediary institutions like universities, schools and hospitals are some of the examples. These institutions may be distinguished either from the voluntary associations or from social movements. Even, social movements and voluntary associations may acquire as institutions in due course of time (Beteille, 2012).

Civil society promotes the interests of individuals and protects their rights. The civil society institutions become dormant as long as the state acts in an authoritarian manner. Civil societies are more robust and powerful in liberal democracies. Civil society during Mao Zedong in China and Stalin in the Soviet Union became unsuccessful for which the rights of the individual were taken away. The dictators and their dictatorships not only curbed civil society movements rather it created chaos in society. Therefore, the institutions of democracy in these societies, were in the hands of the dictators. They did whatever they wanted. Individuals voiced their rights against excessive tyranny and betrayal and what they were committed in most of the Eastern European states failed. Protecting individual rights and right to live with dignity was important in these Communist East European states.

Further, as per Beteille, rational legal intermediary institutions are important from the concept of freedom, equality and liberty because they can be realized and describable. The political parties, courts and legislatures are important agencies because they are highly describable, observable and more importantly persuadable (Beteille, 2012). Rajeev Bhargava took a different direction to define civil society. He prioritizes individual autonomy and for which civil society is important. According to Bhargava, the Individual can join or leave civil society institution with his/her own choice. For Bhargava, institutions like civil society may stand as voluntaristic. What involuntary for a human being? Suppose, born in a family, having certain identity may be choiceless or are spheres where individuals have no control on it. Civil society is constructed by free individuals and they constitute associations for themselves. These associations lie outside the boundary of the state (Bhargava and Reifeld, 2005). Civil society must ensure that no state should interfere upon individual freedoms and those private areas of life where individual create associations for the protection and preservation of right to life, liberty and property.

Civil society create associations to protect freedom of press and expression. Within the sphere of civil society, right bearing individuals exist (Hegel, 2001). It includes

freedom of expression, freedom to have dissent against tyranny and authoritarianism, freedom to form associations and freedom of public opinion. It respects law, protects freedom and promotes citizenship rights. If the state goes against the very ethos of society on which it is built, it challenges the state by providing and securing societal values. Therefore, civil society challenged those authoritarian states which broke laws and orders of society. Neera Chandhoke talks the bases on which civil society is stood. It creates spaces where citizens and their rights is awful and is a privilege for democratic theorists and the whole story of democracy is based on the foundation of the democratic norms. Many authoritarian states failed due to protests and demonstrations and of massive civil society movements in Eastern Europe (Chandhoke, 1995).

Civil society will be negatively defined when it serves the state's interests. It becomes a weapon in the hands of the state. In this regard, Chandhoke asserts, the state controls social practices by weaponizing civil society (Chandhoke, 1995). Critics of civil society suggested that, the importance of the concept is required still cannot be a satisfactory condition to ensure state accountability. In order to make the state more accountable, vigilant civil societies are important. The state becomes cautious where civil society institutions are proactive. The signs of good democracy are the active participants of its individual members. A dormant civil society becomes the result of an irresponsible state, and a civil society which is politically designed may regulate state's excessive powers. In a consequence, civil society and politics are inherently connected to each other. The civility of society depends on the conscious and active individual members. These active and conscious individuals who are not only conscious of their rights but create spaces for those who are deprived of getting their rights by the state. Therefore, a self-conscious civil society overtake the political terrain on which the state is circumscribed otherwise it will face serious consequences on its legitimacy. Vigilant civil societies are important for democracies.

The significance of civil society is highly realized during contemporary times. It became prominent due to the emergence of global markets. For example, neoliberalism not only promoted global goods to local markets rather it created local markets as important spheres for neo-liberalism to flourish. Neo-liberalism wanted non-statist approach and created spaces for privatization (Chandhoke, 1995). According to Chandhoke, civil society of this type has shorter duration.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY

Further, civil society and democracy are closely linked to each other. During the reemergence of the concept, it was expected that the state would deliver social service welfares. Instead of alleviating poverty and providing necessary human securities, it failed in these areas. Chandhoke argues, civil society inspires and animates the spirit of democracy (Chandhoke, 1995). People demanded their basic rights and for which most of the Eastern-European Communist countries became unable to provide the demands of the individuals. Therefore, in these countries, civil society became the bedrock for political activism at that point of time and it demanded states to become accountable to its citizens and their rights shall be protected at any situation (Chandhoke, 1995). It is also the case that, Eastern-Europe brought experiences that the idea of civil society was more associated with freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom to dissent and right to live in a dignified way. Hence, the concept civil society was more important for bringing bring peace and stability. It enhances social harmony by creating spheres of trust and mutual respect. Civil society occupied a unique historical position to defend civil liberties by limiting the power of the state by launching its own movements in Eastern Europe. Consequentially, civil societies are more essential for democracies to flourish. However, it cannot create its own spheres. By politics, civil society can control the complete monopoly of the state. And this complete monopoly can be ousted only by civil society. This becomes possible when civil society is called as democratic.

Further, as posited by thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Hume, civil society is fundamentally rooted in economic transactions. Also, Adam Ferguson is an important philosopher to describe ideas on the concept of civil society and their relationship with the state. For Ferguson, both civil society and the state represent one. Civil society refers to the political state and in a similar

way, the state is referred to civil society. Army, police and judiciary are the part and parcel of it. It is the absence of rude society and is referred as polished society.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, civil society and the state in the Western intellectual tradition primarily in the works of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Ferguson, Hegel and Gramsci brought new dimensions. The idea of civil society underwent significant transformations. Civil society during the reemergence period acted as a political category. It acted against authoritarian states to protect individual rights and freedom.

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