

CHAPTER- VI

CIVIL SOCIETY IN EGYPT

After the Cold War era many of the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region were faced with international pressure to establish democratic systems. However, this did not result in greater democratization in the region rather it led to the adoption of certain governance strategies and tools aimed at liberalizing politically non threatening areas while maintaining tight control over those areas or actors which might pose as a threat to the regimes. This approach seeks to appease the Western demand for introducing democratic systems and institutions in the region by ushering in a series of gradual reforms that are essentially regarded as non-threatening to the ruling regime. However, these reforms remained merely a façade as is displayed by the major setbacks particularly in relation to freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association and the press. Writing about the future of civil society and democratization in the Middle East, A. Norton states, “some political leaders have been willing to liberalize, but none has been willing to democratize comprehensively. Liberalization here refers to reformist measures to open up outlets for free expression of opinion, to place limits on the arbitrary exercise of power, and to permit political association. In contrast, democratization, namely, freely contested elections, popular

participation in political life, and bluntly the unchaining of masses, has not yet occurred.”¹

Like many of its neighbouring authoritarian regimes Egypt had been very diplomatic in its dealings with the opposition at home resorting to violent suppression only when it is accompanied by internationally acceptable justifications like fight against terrorism or fears in relation to rise of political Islam. Egypt under President Hosni Mubarak had been known to witness strong suppression of any sign of opposition, for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood which proved its value after winning 88 seats in the 2005 legislative proved to be a threat to President Mubarak and his National Democratic Party (NDP). What followed in the subsequent years was a brutal crackdown leading to arbitrary arrests and detention of the members of the Brotherhood. In Mubarak’s Egypt police brutality was widespread and many of the social activists and human rights defenders had to face harsh treatments for raising their voice against the regime.

The Egyptian Constitution in Article 55 clearly states that citizens shall have the right to form societies provided that they are not ‘hostile to the social system, clandestine or have a military character.’² Article 56 also ensures the right to organize unions and federations. However, since Egypt had been under Emergency Law freedom of association had been restricted only to the ruling party. The Emergency Law along with a number of military decrees had bestowed wide powers on the authorities to suppress human rights and fundamental freedom in the name of national security. Arbitrary arrests,

¹See A. Norton as quoted by Bakry M. El Medni, *Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt: Premise and Promises*, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 3 No. 12 Special Issue – June 2013, p. 16, <http://www.ijhssnet.com>.

² See Kristina Kausch, *Defenders in Retreat Freedom of Association and Civil Society in Egypt*, Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) 2009, p. 4, <http://www.fride.org>.

prolonged detention, media censorship, prohibition of protests and demonstrations and electoral campaigns constitute some examples of the arbitrary laws prevalent in Egypt. And under these prevalent circumstances there was very limited scope for the emergence of any form of active opposition.

However, in the spring of 2011, millions of Egyptians participated in one of the largest protest movements of the 21st Century. Egyptians of all ages and backgrounds came together and took a stand in Tahrir Square chanting ‘Down with Hosni Mubarak!’ Prior to the revolution even in spite of the prohibition of protests as per the Emergency Law, Egypt had witnessed a series of protests which were launched by the worker and the union movements. These protests were harshly suppressed by the regime and the protesters were assaulted, arrested and imprisoned. Since these protests represented only specific interests of a particular section of the society it lacked active citizen participation. One of the most notable democratic movements which emerged in Egypt was the Kefaya Movement but this movement fizzled out soon as most of its activists were arrested by the regime. Moreover, the Kefaya Movement was a Cairo and Alexandria based middle class phenomenon and therefore failed to represent the grassroots level.

What distinguished the 25 January protest from the rest of the previous protest movements was the effective political mobilization of the Egyptians. Under President Mubarak the Emergency Law and the related military decrees had effectively acted as a barrier to the formation of any real opposition. The CSOs were also placed under strict laws which regulated every aspect of their activities. Under these circumstances there was very minimum scope for any real and effective political mobilization. Social media

offered an alternative platform in the form of a virtual public sphere which was easily accessible to all and which provided an interactive forum along with freedom of association. Clary Shirky stressing on this connection between social media and freedom had stated, Social tools create what economists would call a positive supply side shock to the amount of freedom in the world. To speak online is to publish, and to publish online is to connect with others. With the arrival of globally accessible publishing, freedom of speech is now freedom of the press, and freedom of the press is freedom of assembly.”³

The virtual environment thus enabled the Egyptians greater capacity to share, cooperate and act together thereby creating favourable grounds for effective political mobilization. Once common interests and goals were established the cyber activists found it easy to establish offline support. The 25 January protest appealed to the millions of Egyptians as it represented their common concerns and goals. The emphasis on common goals also helped in bringing together the different CSOs from trade unions to professional associations under one common platform. All this eventually culminated in the development of active citizen participation which contributed to the emergence of a vibrant civil society in Egypt in the spring of 2011.

6.1. Civil Society in Egypt Prior the Revolution

The development of civil society in Egypt in its modern form took place at the beginning of the 19th Century. During this period there was an increase in the number of students as well as the emergence of a bourgeoisie class and these classes in time created their own organizations and associations to represent the demands of the new middle class. The relation between the state and these citizen organizations were complementary to an

³ See for details Clary Shirky as quoted by Christian Fuchs, *Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, <http://www.triple-c.at>.

extent and there was no outright confrontation. However, situations began to change during the Colonial era (1882- 1922) as the CSOs began to confront the colonial state over the rights of the Egyptian citizens. It was during this time that a series of organization began to emerge in the form of trade unions, cooperatives, feminist movements etc. The adoption of the Constitution of 1923 which guaranteed freedom of association ushered in a new era for the CSOs in Egypt. Egypt witnessed an increase in the number of CSOs during the 1920s and 1930s. In the early part of the 1920s these CSOs not only worked for national independence but were also involved in providing a series of services to the deprived groups in the Egyptian society. By the 1930s many of these CSOs had become relatively strong which prompted the government to introduce certain legislations aimed at weakening them. These legislations dealt with regulating the politically oriented CSOs as well as bringing the charitable activities of the CSOs under surveillance. In 1939 the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) was founded and later this Ministry under Law 49 of 1945 was given the power to provide license as well as dissolve the NGOS if their activities were deemed as illegal or if they refuse to cooperate with the Ministry.

Following the 1952 Revolution, the government introduced Laws 91 of 1959 and 62 of 1964 which lead to heavy control of the unions by the government. The trade unions were brought under one general union which controlled and supervised all their activities. In addition to this, many restrictive laws were introduced relating to the NGOs, dealing with their autonomous civil activities and confiscation of their property. On account of these restrictive laws there was considerable decline in voluntary activism during this period. Post the Nasser's era, President Anwar al-Sadat maintained all the

laws regulating the CSOs. Under President Hosni Mubarak there was an increase in the number of CSOs but they were subjected to many restrictive laws. Report of the Egypt's State Information Service puts the number of CSOs in Egypt at 16,800 in 2011⁴. It was also during this time that one of the most restrictive laws affecting freedom of association was introduced.

Prior to the revolution the civil society in Egypt was governed by the provisions of the Association Law 84 of 2002 and the Regulation to Law 84 of 2002 (Associations and Non-Governmental Institutions). The Association Law 84 of 2002 which is regarded as one of the most restrictive laws in the Arab world is criticized for imposing heavy restrictions on CSOs. Some of the restrictions placed on CSOs under Law 84 are:

1. The registration process is cumbersome and some human rights NGOs had to struggle for years to get their registration done. And moreover since, they cannot function until they are registered this put all their work and activities on halt. Moreover, although the registration process solely rests with MOSA it is often referred to the secret services which also exercise extra legal roles thereby making it impossible to take legal actions against them.
2. Law 84 requires that all associations should be registered in order to operate. Informal or unregistered associations are prohibited. It also empowers the government to deny registration if the purpose of the association threaten national unity or is against public order.

⁴See Laurel E. Miller, Jeffrey Martini, Stephen F. Larrabee, Julie E. Taylor, Twewodaj Mengitsu, *Democratization in the Arab World: Lessons from around the Globe*, (RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1st Edition, 2012), p. 90.

3. Law 84 empowers the government to interfere in the internal affairs of the associations. For instance, according to Article 25 the administrative authority has the right to call a meeting of the General Assembly.
4. Law 84 empowers the government to dissolve the associations and does not require a court ruling. For instance, Article 42 empowers MOSA to dissolve as well as confiscate and dispose the property and funds of the association or if the association is affiliated to any club, association, authority or organization located outside Egypt.
5. Law 84 prohibits all political activities of the associations. For instance, as per Article 25, Regulations to Law No. 84 of 2002 on Associations and Non-Governmental Institutions advocating for political parties or putting candidates to run for elections is strictly prohibited.
6. Law 84 prohibits any association from receiving foreign funds. Moreover, the government can also prevent the associations or civil society activists from travelling outside Egypt to participate in international conferences and meetings. While at the same time, the government may also prevent representatives of international organizations from entering Egypt.
7. Law 84 prohibits the obtainment of funds from the Egyptian citizens by the associations without the prior approval of MOSA.
8. Law 84 imposes penalties for engaging in the activities of non registered NGOs.
9. Law 84 requires prior permission from the authorities for the NGOs to expand their geographical scope of work.

The government had from time to time had used these laws to effectively suppress opposition. For instance, the Administrative Judiciary Court refused to register the

Egyptian Association against Torture on December 15, 2005 because the court decided that the group's mission to pressure the government to eliminate torture in police stations and prisons was "political activity"; consequently, the association was prohibited from launching its activities.⁵ However, in spite of the restrictive laws, there was a steady rise in the number of CSOs but most of them were inactive and seemed to exist only on paper. In order to escape these harsh provisions particularly in regard to foreign funding many NGOs had registered themselves as foreign associations with a branch in Egypt. While others registered under more than one name so that in case they get dissolved they can continue under another name.

The CSOs in Egypt functions in a really unhealthy environment in addition to Law 84, it is also highly restricted by the Emergency Law. The Emergency Law empowers the ruling regime to arbitrarily suppress the fundamental freedom of the citizens for the sake of national security which had resulted in arbitrary arrests, assaults, long term imprisonments, and military trials without appeals, prohibition of strikes, demonstrations and electoral campaigns. According to Human Rights groups, the state holds at least 10,000 people detained without charge on the basis of the emergency law.⁶ Over the years the Emergency Law had been used to arbitrarily arrest and detain the civil and political activists as well as prosecute activists on grounds of national security. Many of the activists had been prosecuted on grounds of vague allegations from defamation claims to foreign funding without the government's permission. For instance, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a Sociology Professor at the American University in Cairo and also a human rights activist was arrested on 30th June, 2000, for an array of charges which included

⁵See for details <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/egypt.html>.

⁶ See Kristina Kausch, Note 2, p. 13.

financial improprieties, forgery, accepting foreign funding without government permission and seeking to ruin Egypt's image abroad. The charges were brought against Ibrahim on account of a European Union funded short film that Ibrahim's Ibn Khaldoun Center Development Studies was producing to encourage voter participation in parliamentary elections scheduled for that fall.⁷ Since the government did not possess any sufficient evidence they could not get him convicted in a normal court so his case was referred to the State Security Courts where the government had more control over the judicial process. Ibrahim was sentenced twice to long term imprisonment by the court and in both cases appeals were rejected. Finally, a third trial was held in the Court of Cassation, Egypt's highest civil court, which cleared him of all charges in 2003. The subsequent case of Ibrahim was viewed by many activists and NGOs as a warning that acceptance of even a harmless foreign fund or aid could result in similar treatment.

Besides the cases of harassment and torture the government also resorts to vicious media smear campaigns which seek to depict the CSOs as agents of foreign interests. These smear campaigns are usually directed at those CSOs that work for advocacy of democracy and human rights or combating corruption. Accusations relating to theft, conspiracy with international intelligence services and encouraging foreign interference in the internal affairs of Egypt are usually thrown against the CSOs. The government had also been known to curtail CSOs by encouraging many of its subordinates to establish institutions in the field of political development and human rights. This is done to deter the chances of the independent civil society associations from receiving foreign funds as

⁷ See Ashraf Khalil, *Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation: Liberation Square*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1st Edition, 2012), p. 32.

well as to improve the image of Egypt in the international system as a promoter of democracy and human rights.

The absence of an enabling environment however had not restricted the growth of the CSOs in Egypt. There exist a large number of trade unions, cooperatives, professional associations, human rights organizations etc. The CSOs in Egypt can be broadly classified into two classes. The first category consists of the interest groups and the second category consists of civil associations.

Interest Groups

The first category constitutes more than half of the CSOs in Egypt and consists of trade unions, professional syndicates and business associations. There are 89 such organizations, with an aggregate membership of some 7 million.⁸ The relation between the state and these CSOs are quite ambiguous. In regard to the trade unions, it shares a patron/ client relation with the state since the establishment of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) in 1957. The trade unions are generally viewed by the state as instruments for supporting the policies of the state as well as important voting banks. The state however places many restrictions to prevent the collective actions of the workers. Under the Unified Labor Law 12 of 2003 the workers can protest only when they have the prior approval of the ETUF. But in spite of the presence of the restrictive laws the workers movement have launched some of the most successful protest movements in Egyptian history. Aside from the workers movement, there also exist the syndicates consisting of the Bar association,

⁸ See for details Hamdy A. Hassan, *Civil Society in Egypt under the Mubarak Regime*, Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences Volume 2, No. 2.2 Quarter II 2011, ISSN 2229 – 5313, <http://www.onlineresearchjournals.com>.

journalists, medical doctors and engineers associations. Under Mubarak's regime most of the associations were dominated by the opposition groups particularly the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1980s and 1990s. Since the Brotherhood was banned from the civic life, it sought out these associations as a means to stay active in the public sphere by getting their members elected to the associations. However, with the passing of Law 100 of 1993 the Islamist hegemony in these syndicates came down drastically and later they came to be dominated by the members of the National Democratic Party (NDP). In the case of the business associations even though limited in number they had acquired significant influence over the years. Some of the prominent business associations in Egypt are the Egyptian American Council, the Egyptian Businessmen Association, and the Economic Committee for Alexandria Businessmen etc. Unlike the other interest groups in Egypt the business associations tend to cooperate more with the state which maybe particularly due to their shared political and ideological tendencies regarding the liberalization of the economy and the society and as such they do not make demands on the state regarding economic or political reforms.

Civil Associations

The second category of CSOs in Egypt consists of civil associations. There are approximately 138 associations or social movements in Egypt, and their activities range from the defense of human rights to the environment, gender issues, and cultural and educational initiatives.⁹ Many of these associations are independent to an extent from the state owing due to their foreign funding but they are also closely monitored through the various restrictive laws. Relationship with the state however differs based on the type of

⁹See for details Hamdy A. Hassan, Note 8.

activity pursued by these associations, for instance, the associations that works for environmental protection and social issues are enjoy a higher degree of freedom from the state. On the other hand, the various human rights organizations or NGOs seeking for political reforms or working for political issues like cases of torture, corruption and issues relating to political prisoners are more likely to be closely scrutinized by the state. Many of the civil associations also tend to have a strong Islamic influence; since the Egyptian Islamic movements are banned from political activities by law many of them tries to infiltrate the public sphere through the civil associations. The Muslim Brotherhood is one of the most influential Islamist groups in Egypt. Established in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna the Muslim Brotherhood consisted of one of the many small organizations that were formed in response to the British occupation. The original aim of Hassan was for his newfound organization to provide welfare and charitable services for the population while also educating and Islamizing society.¹⁰ Owing due to the charismatic leadership of Hassan the Brotherhood soon began to gain many supporters and by the 1940s it was a potent political and social force in Egypt. However in 1948, when Egypt, Syria and Jordan went to war with Israel the Brotherhood also sent volunteers to fight against the Israelis but the Arab countries were faced with a humiliating defeat and soon the political environment in Egypt turned chaotic. While the Brotherhood began to view the government as betraying the interests of the Egyptian people the government on the other hand stated viewing the Brotherhood as a potential threat. The Brotherhood members were subsequently implicated in a number of assassinations, most notably that of Prime Minister Mahmoud an Nukrashi Pasha, who had been convinced that a Brotherhood led

¹⁰ See Charles River Editors, *The Muslim Brotherhood: the History of the Middle East's Most Influential Islamist Group*, (Charles River Editors, USA), p.3.

coup plot was brewing and had outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood in December 1948.¹¹ During the 1950s and 1960s following an assassination attempt on President Gamal Abdel Nasser by one of the Brotherhood members, the government arrested and imprisoned many of its members and the organization crumbled. However, during the 1970s President Anwar Sadat lifted the ban on the Brotherhood and freed many of its members on the condition that it would support his government. It was during this period that the Brotherhood began to consolidate its influence in civil associations. It reached out to the people by providing education and health care services and tried to influence the activist groups and professional syndicates and trade unions. But things soon turned out for the worst again for the Brotherhood with the assassination of President Sadat in 1981 as his successor President Hosni Mubarak immediately began a heavy crackdown on the key members of the Brotherhood. With the ousting of the radical elements in the Brotherhood the regime grew tolerant of the Brotherhood but it still imposed many restrictions on its activities and the Brotherhood still remained a banned organization in Egypt. It was during this time that the Brotherhood began to participate in politics but it nevertheless continued to pursue its volunteering activities. For instance, in October 1992 when the Dashour Earthquake occurred in southern Egypt, the Brotherhood was able to show its capacity for serving the Egyptian people far more than the government was able to by organizing relief efforts and creating shelters, health clinics, schools and providing food and clothing for the victims.¹² The Brotherhood continued to participate in politics

¹¹ See Charles River Editors, *The Muslim Brotherhood: the History of the Middle East's Most Influential Islamist Group*, (Charles River Editors, USA), p.4.

¹² See Charles River Editors, *The Muslim Brotherhood: the History of the Middle East's Most Influential Islamist Group*, (Charles River Editors, USA), p.17.

and as a consequent result it faced some brutal crackdowns from the ruling regime till up to the revolution.

In addition to these organizations, Egypt also witnessed the rise of new civic movements in the form of the Kefaya Movement (Enough) or the National Movement for Change, the April 6 Movement and the National Association for Change. These movements were more vocal in their criticism against the regime and were more efficient at mobilizing the masses. The Kefaya Movement emerged as the first movement that truly challenged the regime. It burst upon the national scene in 2004 comprising of like minded leftist with the aim of preventing Gamal Mubarak from succeeding his father. Even though the movement failed to connect with the larger Egyptian masses it revitalized associational life and played a major role in training a new generation of young leftists who continued to be politically active even afterward. Another important movement which emerged in Egypt prior the 2011 revolution was the April 6 Movement. It was initially formed to show support to the Mahalla strikes and comprised of a group of internet savvy youth which helped in organizing the strikes. What April 6 Movement has done was extraordinary in showing young people that they can do something to change their realities given that Egypt is one of the countries that have a younger population; age group 15-40 constitutes about 45 per cent of the total population.¹³ The April 6 Movement recruited and organized youths from the different Egyptian governorates and took political activism to the towns and cities in an attempt to connect with the larger masses. It was also one of the first civic movements to use social media to call for civil

¹³ See Bakry M. El Medni as quoted by Bakry M. El Medni, *Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt: Premise and Promises*, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 3 No. 12 Special Issue – June 2013, p. 16, <http://www.ijhssnet.com>.

disobedience. The National Association for Change (NAC) built up on the efforts started by the Kefaya Movement and the April 6 Movement. The NAC called upon the Egyptians abroad to be involved in the political process in Egypt and urged them to use their economic leverage to demand change in Egypt. The NAC were successful in organizing some a series of online campaigns and unlike the previous civic movements it roped in prominent figures like ElBaradei to support their cause which helped in gathering support from the different socio economic background.

In spite of the various hurdles in the form of restrictive laws and vicious political tactics of the government to curb the CSOs from functioning properly, some of them remained truly committed to their cause and from time to time had challenged the authority of the government through strikes, protests and demonstrations. Even though the demonstrations were small and very often brutally repressed yet they became increasingly frequent in the final years of Mubarak's regime. The strikes and demonstrations can be broadly classified into two main categories based on the demands of the CSOs, the first category relates to profession related demonstrations and represents more than ninety percent of the protests and constitute mainly of the professional associations. Their demands generally relates to raising wages, improving working conditions etc. The second category relates to political demonstrations with demands for free elections, release of political prisoners, termination of the Emergency Law, freedom of the press etc.

Profession Related Demonstrations

In comparison to the political demonstrations, it is usually the profession- related demonstrations that are usually more successful in getting its demands. While

protests are prohibited by the Emergency Law, the right to strike is legally protected by the Egyptian Constitution however there have been no legal strikes in Egypt since Nasser consolidated power in March 1954. The workers movement had been most effective in fighting for their rights in comparison to the other CSOs in Egypt. One notable example of it would be the ‘bread riots’ which took place on 18th and 19th January 1977. The cause of the riots was the adoption of a new economic policy by the Egyptian government in 1976 on the recommendation of the IMF that seeks to cut subsidies on basic food commodities. Consequently, the industrial workers initiated an organized demonstration which was also joined by students, farmers and the poor classes. However, the organized demonstration soon escalated into riots in major cities across Egypt and on the second day it was harshly suppressed by the Army. Over the years, the workers movement had adopted a culture of protest which is apparent from the number of collective actions that had taken place. According to the 2004 annual report of the Land Centre for Human Rights (LCHR), from 1998 to 2004 there was over 1,000 workers’ collective actions, of which more than a quarter occurred in 2004 alone, a 200 per cent increase over 2003.¹⁴ LCHR reported 202 workers’ collective actions in 2005, 222 in 2006, and a staggering 614 in 2007.¹⁵ Under President Mubarak one of the most prominent workers protests movement occurred on 6th April, 2008 where workers at Egypt’s largest textile factory in the Nile Delta city of Mahalla al Kubra engaged in violent clashes with the police. The strikes were brought upon by the rising cost of living, falling wages and the economic liberalization program of the government.

¹⁴See for details Rahab –El Mahdi and Philip Marfleet, *Egypt the Moment of Change*, (Zed Books Ltd., London, 2009), p. 77.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.79.

The strike which lasted for two days witnessed extreme violence on both sides and ended leaving two dead and a dozens injured. The Mahalla al Kubra clashes moved Egypt's domestic economic problems onto the national front burner and helped kick off a wave of labour organization and activity that never really stopped, even after the revolution.¹⁶

The prominent professional associations in Egypt consist of the Judges Club, the Lawyers Association and the Journalist Association. The Judges Club and the Lawyers Association were both active in the public sphere and tended to organize strikes when faced with an issue concerning their profession but the Journalist Association is more active in comparison to the other two associations. For instance, in spite of being partially controlled by the government, as its executive council mainly consisted of the regime's supporters; it became a site for staging protest by the various groups.

Political Demonstrations

For decades political activists in Egypt had been kept under close monitor; the Emergency Law not only banned rallies and lobbies but those who dared to organize protests and demonstrations had been subjected to various forms of harassment and physical assault by the security forces. Under Mubarak's regime while the workers movement and the syndicates were to an extent tolerated it came down heavily on the pro- democracy actors. One of the most important new civic movements which emerged prior the 2011 revolution was the Kefaya (Enough) Movement or the National Movement for Change. Formed in 2004 the Kefaya Movement launched a series of memorable

¹⁶ Ashraf Khalil, "Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation: Liberation Square," Note 7, p. 55.

protests in 2004 and 2005. Kefaya shattered the mystique around the Mubarak name; they were the first to focus their chants directly against the dictator himself.¹⁷ As one journalist writes, no one could get anywhere near the President. No one could talk about the prolongation of the presidency as if he were a Pharaoh who lives and possesses the throne forever. The Kefaya movement had the audacity and bravery to pull the Pharaoh down from his sacred untouchable status to one within the human sphere where we could say to him: “no, no, we do not want you forever. We do not want your son. We do not want a hereditary throne.”

This bold action from Kefaya is enough of an accomplishment all by itself.”¹⁸ Kefaya was widely diverse, comprising of Islamists, communists and nationalists. It was the first ever movement or group to launch an anti Mubarak demonstration in Egypt. Its demands included terminating the Emergency Laws and the other restrictive laws, limiting a president to two six years terms, separation of powers, freedom to form political parties, freedom of the press, and lifting restrictions on the formation of trade unions and holding political parties under complete judicial supervision. Consistent with its claim to represent all Egyptians, the group advocated on behalf of Egyptian victims of the Red Sea ferry accident of 2006, launched protests denouncing the infamous Danish caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, and organized a march in commemoration of International Students’ Day.¹⁹ Kefaya became a pioneer in launching peaceful protests in Egypt however in time it began to decline predominantly due to state aggression,

¹⁷Ashraf Khalil, “Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation: Liberation Square,” Note 7, p.46.

¹⁸ See Nadia Oweidat, Cheryl Denard, Dale Stahl, Walid Kidani, Edward O’ Connel and Audra K. Grant, *The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 2008, p. 24. [http://www. www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) › Published Research › Monographs.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.14.

manipulation of the constitution through amendments to restrict civil liberties, smear campaigns and fall out with the Islamists but most importantly it failed to include the larger masses in the movement.

In spite of the growing numbers of CSOs along with the emergence of civic movements Egypt had a very low percentage of citizen participation in the public sphere. A despotic regime coupled with the absence of any real civil liberties prevented many Egyptians from participating in the public sphere. The regime adopted suppressive laws which acted not only as tools for restricting civil liberties but also as means for checking the emergence of any active opposition in the public sphere. In order to maintain its rule President Mubarak's regime tried to instigate fear amongst the Egyptian masses with the aid of the suppressive laws by arresting, detaining and torturing anyone who protested against it. In addition to this, the CSOs also failed considerably in encouraging citizen participation. It lacked real representation as most of the CSOs were mainly concentrated in the urban governorates while the poorer governorates which were mostly concentrated in Upper Egypt had a really low number of CSOs. According to the Egypt Human Development Report in 2008, more than 70% of CSOs were concentrated in the urban governorates.²⁰ Furthermore, many of these CSOs were only concerned with charitable activities and hence lacked the necessary skills to encourage participation. The absence of financial independence also acted as an impediment not only in regard to its functioning but also in terms of its networking and its capacity to induce effective mobilization. The new civic movements which emerged in the early part of 2000s also failed to reach the larger masses in spite of focusing on broad issues like corruption as it was mostly concentrated in the urban areas of Alexandria and Cairo. Moreover, since many of the

²⁰See for details <http://www.ncvo.org.uk>.

activists and protesters were arrested and imprisoned these new civic movements were not able to fully mobilize the masses. These factors together acted as hurdles for the emergence any form of effective political mobilization or active citizen participation in the public sphere.

6.2. Role of Civil Society in the Egyptian Revolution

The Egyptian Revolution (2011) is regarded as one of the biggest civil society movements in the 21st Century. Concepts of non violence, social solidarity and active citizen participation which are considered as the defining characteristics of civil society movements were witnessed in the revolution. Egyptians have revolted several times in recent history 1882, 1919, 1952, 1977 and 2011.²¹ However, the revolution of 2011 was unique from the other revolutions on account of its predominantly peaceful nature. The success of the peaceful mass movement in Tunisia as well as Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on 'non violence' served as sources of inspiration to the social and cyber activists. For instance, the Facebook page We Are All Khaled Said frequently posted quotes by Gandhi and in one instance the administrator Wael Ghonim even translated a scene from the movie 'Gandhi,' produced in 1982, to inspire and advocate the principle of non violence, "Gandhi interrupts: I am asking you to fight. To fight against their anger, not to provoke it. We will not strike a blow, but we will receive them. And through our pain we will make them see their injustice. And it will hurt, as all fighting hurts. But we cannot lose. We cannot. They may torture my body, break my bones, and even kill me.

²¹ See Emad el- din Shahin, *The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square*, Journal of the Middle East and Africa, Volume 3, Issue 1, 2012, p.47, <http://www.tandfonline.com>

Then they will have my dead body not my obedience.”²² The emphasis on a non-violent revolution is apparent from the instructions or ‘Protesting Guidelines’ that were uploaded by Wael Ghonim, the administrator of We Are All Khaled Said on the eve of the 25 January protest, “the protests are peaceful. We are peace advocates and not advocates of violence. We are demanding our rights and must uphold the rights of others. We will not respond to any provocation from security forces and lose control. This is what they want us to do. One of the security forces’ main goals is to portray the protesters as thugs who want to destroy our country. We must discipline ourselves and refrain from foolishness or any violations of the law, and we must not endanger any person’s life or cause harm to any public or private property. If you see someone behaving violently, please circle around this person and take him out of the protest.”²³

The organizers of the 25 January ‘event’ also stressed specifically on avoiding confrontations with the security forces. The ‘Protesting Guidelines’ further states, “please refrain from all profanity and do not enter into quarrels with security force members. Central security is not your enemy. They are guards who have been forced to spend their compulsory military service in this capacity, and if they disobeyed the orders they would be punished badly.”²⁴

To carry out a non-violent revolution was a challenge to the activists; to begin with the Ministry of Interior had already tightened security by placing its anti-riot forces on full alert 48 hours prior to that day. Moreover, in the past the protest tactics of the

²²See Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is greater than the People in Power*, (Harper Collins Publishers, London, 2012), pp. 167-168.

²³ Ibid, pp. 107- 108.

²⁴See Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is greater than the People in Power*, (Harper Collins Publishers, London, 2012), p.168.

activists had mainly revolved around gathering in one location where they would be eventually forced to disperse by the forces after harsh confrontations. Therefore, in order to avoid this tactical error, the activists decided to adopt a different strategy for the 25 January protests. The activists' main objective was to wear out the security forces and outlast them and this was done by keeping the security forces engaged for relatively long periods of time. Protesters were directed to organize demonstrations in different parts of the cities while some poured in from the mosques others came from the side streets. This same tactic was also employed in other cities aside from Cairo like Alexandria, Suez, and Ismailiya. This approach made it difficult for the security forces to contain the protesters and soon enough in the case of Cairo, thousands poured into the Square and soon outnumbered the security forces.

For the activists the emphasis on non violence was crucial as they wanted to gain sympathy to their cause- both domestically and internationally. Ashraf Khalil an Egyptian - American reporter for Foreign Policy and The Times (London) recounts an incident reflecting the peaceful nature of the revolution, "at one point, some hothead protester started vandalizing a roadside McDonald's advertisement; the others quickly dragged him away, shouting "Peaceful." It was an impressive moment, one which displayed the kind of spontaneous and sincere groupthink that would make Egypt's protesters such a potent force."²⁵

During the revolution in spite of the violent clashes between the protestors and the security forces the activists continued to encourage communication in the hope that it might help both sides to understand each other's perspectives. The brief statement issued

²⁵ Ashraf Khalil, "Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation: Liberation Square," Note 7, p. 167.

by the military on 31st January, 2011 further helped to acknowledge the real nature of the revolution, “guaranteeing that all peaceful freedom of expression would be protected. Your Armed Forces have not and will not resort to the use of force against this great people.”²⁶

The Egyptian Revolution also witnessed the emergence of a strong social solidarity. The revolution helped bring together the diverse Egyptian population under one single goal. Egyptians of all ages, young and old, women, children, rich and poor united together to stand against the injustices that were prevalent in Egypt and to bring down President Hosni Mubarak. This collective consciousness was forged out from the collective discontentment and resistance against an authoritarian regime and to reclaim justice for all the Egyptian people. Tahrir square brought together the diverse population of the Egyptian society and created an environment which was based on tolerance, respect and above all a sense of oneness. This sense of oneness further helped in developing a strong sense of community amongst the thousands of protestors who were gathered there in the Square. Committees were set up to look into the different needs of the protestors. For instance, there were committees which were set up to clean the Square, to distribute food and blankets, to set up lavatories and washroom, to protect the protestors from the attacks of the thugs hired by regime, field hospitals were also set up by volunteer doctors in case of emergencies.

Asmaa Mahfouz, an April 6 Movement activist posted a video message late on 26th January, 2011 emphasizing on the importance of unity and social solidarity amongst the Egyptians: “the people want the fall of the regime. What we learned yesterday was that

²⁶Ashraf Khalil, “Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation: Liberation Square,” Note 7, p.211.

power belongs to the people, no to the thugs. Power is in unity not division. Yesterday not even one girl was harassed, even among the thousands. No one stole anything, no fights broke out. We were defending each other. This is the Egyptian people we have always dreamed of. I can now say that I am proud to be Egyptian.”²⁷

The greatest demonstration of this unity was amongst the Egyptian Muslims and the Coptic Christians. During the revolution slogans and symbols were adopted to represent the Muslim Christian unity. One particular symbol was the Muslim crescent embracing the Christian cross with the words, ‘we are all against the regime.’²⁸ This symbol was found everywhere from handmade placards to walls. A further display of this unity was witnessed on the ‘Day of Departure’ protest (4th February, 2011) in Tahrir Square where the Coptic Christians made a human chain around the Muslims as they performed their noon prayers to protect them from the attacks by the security forces. Two days later on 6th February, 2011, the Muslims returned the favour by surrounding the Christians celebrating mass in Cairo’s Central Plaza. Stressing on the secular and inclusive nature of the revolution, Alaa al Aswany, a prominent Egyptian writer wrote: “millions of people took a stand in Tahrir Square, living together like members of one family. There was a deep feeling of solidarity and mutual courtesy, as if the revolution had not only rid Egyptians of fear but also cured them of their social defects.”²⁹

The strong sense of social solidarity and common consciousness further manifested itself in the slogans of the Revolution: “Leave, leave, leave, for good, let our country see the light,” “Raise, raise the chant / our people are free and not afraid,” “the

²⁷ See Asmaa Mahfouz as quoted by Ashraf Khalil, Note 7, pp. 158-159.

²⁸ See for details Anne Alexander, *Egypt’s Muslims and Christians join hands in protest*, 10 February 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12407793>.

²⁹ See Alaa Al Aswany, *On the State of Egypt*, (Random House, Inc., United States, 2011), p. 9.

crescent and the cross against murder and torture,” “revolution, revolution everywhere against the traitors and the scoundrels” and “Dignity and freedom is the demand of all Egyptians.”³⁰

However, this strong sense of social solidarity was not only limited to the Egyptian population within Egypt, it also included the Egyptians and non Egyptians abroad. The Egyptian Diaspora staged online protests and opened Facebook pages to show their support and sympathy to the revolution back home. While the Tunisian activists also showed solidarity with their Egyptian counterparts by offering tips to avoid police attacks as well as sent words of encouragement to the protesters through Facebook and Twitter.

Another unique feature of the revolution was the leaderless nature of the revolution. The revolution was not led by a political party nor by a charismatic leader rather it was a people’s movement, the people who were out on the streets coordinated and directed the revolution. Emphasizing on the leaderless nature of the revolution, Wael Ghonim the administrator of the Facebook page We Are All Khaled Said had stated in an interview with CNN: “the real heroes are the ones in the streets. There is no one leading this. The leaders, you know, on Tahrir Square was every single person there. The leader in Alexandria is every single person there.”³¹

There were no permanent organizations that coordinated the revolution. Most of the information relating to the protest was decided directly in the field. There was no organizations or leaders who were in charge of the decision making process; it was the

³⁰See The American University in Cairo, John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, *Youth Activism and Public Space in Egypt*, 2011, p. 13, <http://www.schools.aucegypt.edu>

³¹See Interview with Wael Ghonim: ‘*The Egyptian People Are the Leaders and Heroes of This Revolution*,’ <http://www.edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1102/11/bn.02.html>.

people themselves who decided what should be done or how a situation should be addressed. Most of the information were circulated via the social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter till 28th January when the internet was blocked by the government and which lasted for five days. During the five days of internet blockade information relating to the protest were circulated primarily through pamphlets and word of mouth.

Like its Tunisian counterpart the Egyptian Revolution also witnessed the emergence of a robust civil society in the form of a high degree of citizen participation in the public sphere which was dominated by the government. Following the call for the 25th January protest the Egyptian activists anticipated as usual a few hundred turn- out, with the typical scene being played out the protesters surrounded by a few thousand riot police followed by chanting, speeches and a few confrontations between the protesters and the police. However, there was also a hope amongst the activists that the turn out for the 25th January protest would be a little more than usual on account of the unprecedented numbers of people that had agreed to attend the Facebook 'event' as well as the success of the Tunisian Revolution. On the day of the protest thousands of Egyptians old and young came out on the streets chanting slogans against the Mubarak regime. The exclusion of the people from the public sphere coupled with the increasing economic, social and political problems played an important factor in the emergence of an active civic participation during the revolution. Following the Arab Spring a series of surveys were conducted by the Arab Barometer consisting of a set of nationally representative surveys which were conducted in eleven Arab countries pertaining to the political life, governance, and political, social, and cultural values prevalent in these countries. These surveys were carried out in Egypt in June 2011 and in Tunisia in October 2011.

According to the study the primary motivational basis for participation in the revolution by the citizens of both these two countries was economic grievances, which was then followed by corruption and the denial of civil and political freedoms. The study states that the levels of participation in Egypt were higher amongst the middle classes who were more educated than the non- participants. Since the revolution was mainly centered on Cairo and Alexandria the participation of the middle class was higher as compared to the participation of the other classes or the rural areas, a factor which may also account for the high social media usage prior and during the revolution.

While based on the age group participation levels a notable feature of the revolution was the active participation of the youth in the public sphere. Branded by many political analysts and scholars as a youth revolution or movement the Egyptian revolution saw the growing role of the youth as important catalysts of change, who employed multiple means to further and strengthen the revolution like passing on information through social media, forming neighbourhood protection committees, providing social services for demonstrators and spreading the message of the revolution through artistic expressions. As is central to every revolutionary movement maintaining effective lines of communication is a crucial factor prior and during the movement; the Egyptian youth and their collective creative efforts played an important role in maintaining and strengthening these lines of communication by passing on information through messages, banners and visual images which helped to draw in the different classes of Egyptians to the cause of the revolution. Alienation from the public sphere was a primary factor for the emergence of the active participation of the youth in the revolution. Citing the importance of the youth participation in public sphere Brazilian

educator Paulo Freire has stated: “civic participation opened a new space to frustrated youth enabling them to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation.”³² Prior the revolution, the exclusion of the youth from the public sphere had led to the formation of many youth organizations, prominent amongst them are Alashanek ya Balady (For You My Country), Al Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti Violence Studies and Nahdet El Mahrousa. These youth organizations were able to survive in the pre Mubarak era as they did not directly challenge the regime. In addition to these organizations the youth also created many Facebook groups as well as civic movements which played a crucial role during the initial build up of the revolution like the April 6 Movement, Kefaya Movement and We Are All Khaled Said. One notable feature of these youth organizations, groups and movements was their ability to move at ease from the virtual world to the real world which acted as an important factor in coordinating the revolution. It was these youth organizations and online groups and movements that played an important role in the revolution by providing social services bringing food and medical supplies to the people in the Square and also collaborating with the Egyptian army to protect the civilians from the attacks by thugs. While the We Are All Khaled Said and the Elbaradei Facebook pages helped in spreading the message of the protest across Egypt, the April 6 Movement played an important role amassing offline support for the protest offline by distributing leaflets to the people particularly in the poor areas and explaining to them why they should join the revolution. Other youth movements and parties also played a crucial role

³²See Paulo Freire as quoted by The American University in Cairo, John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, p. 13, <http://www.schools.aucegypt.edu>

in the revolution but the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood group in particular played an important role during the first days of the revolution, with their past experience in activism in university campuses and protests they proved to be highly useful in the early confrontations with the regime's security forces.

Aside from these youth organizations the CSOs also played an important role in the revolution, for instance, the professional organizations like the Judges Club, the Journalists Association, and the Lawyers Association; NGOs like the Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies and opposition groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. These different types of CSOs proved to be an essential platform to challenge the authority of the ruling regime by creating spaces for public participation. Lack of participation in the public sphere under Mubarak's regime prompted many of these CSOs to come together under a common goal and work towards a common action. Moreover social media enabled them to effectively coordinate their activities by providing effective lines of communication which was fast, easy and cheap. These CSOs proved to be highly effective as they were able to draw in different participants from various segments of the society from trade unions to youth associations. The Muslim Brotherhood which did not participate during the start of the revolution went on to play an important role later on. The group had received strong warnings from the state security not to support nor participate in the protests but the youth branch and some members of the Brotherhood participated early on in the protests. It was only on 28 January that the Brotherhood announced its formal participation in the protests. Being highly organized and popular it was able to mobilize a large number of its followers who were instrumental in confronting the security force as many of its members were at the frontlines during the

violent clashes between the protesters and the security force. While the Labour Unions supported the revolution by exerting pressure on the regime, for instance, on February 9, the workers carried out a series of strikes and protests in major cities and several provinces which threatened to shut down the country. Protests were reported in the Cairo airport, hospitals and some major industries.

In regard to the participatory levels of these CSOs in the revolution as per the report of the Arab Barometer surveys 2011 the participation of the professional groups were comparatively high in comparison to the other CSOs the study reveals that there were about thirteen different occupational categories, including groups outside the labour force. Four of the occupational categories contain segments of the urban middle class: professional; employer or director of an institution; government employee; and private sector employee.³³ Taken as a whole, these four categories comprised of about 55 percent of the total participants in the revolution. This factor indicates that economic problems constituted one of the primary discontentment amongst the participants in the revolution. However, other factors like corruption and denial of civic and political freedoms also helped to draw in supporters from the different CSOs particularly the civic movements and the various online groups and communities. Theoretically speaking each of these groups, in the pursuit of their own interests was able to merge these interests with the demands of the revolution. However, in spite of the individual self interests of the varied groups the Egyptian Revolution was on the whole a people's movement, a civil society movement. Citing the mass force of the revolution, one protester commented, "from the

³³ See Mark Beissinger, Amaney Jamal and Kevin Mazur (Princeton University), *Explaining Divergent Revolutionary Coalitions: Regime Strategies and the Structuring of Participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions*, *The Journal of Comparative Politics*, Volume 48, Number 1, October 2015, p.11, <http://www.jcp.gc.cuny.edu>.

very first day we felt we could win because of the huge numbers of people involved, the masses. When you're at a protest and you see small numbers, you panic and you are afraid. This was different. We could see right away that we might win. We felt more confident.”³⁴

The strength of the revolution lies in the massive participation from the different sections of the society whatever maybe their main motivational factor in participating in the revolution. This varied representation from the different sections of the society further accentuates the fact that it was indeed a people's movement. The youth of the middle and upper middle class called for and led the revolution and were then joined by the poor and marginalized the upper classes, workers, peasants, women, Copts, Muslims, young people, old people, urban residents, and rural residents.³⁵

The adoption of a non violent ideology along with broadly defined socio economic, political demands appealed to millions of Egyptians and helped to secure wide spread support to the revolution. What Egypt witnessed was the emergence of a vibrant civil society where Egyptians from all classes were bound together by common discontentment and goals that helped to foster in a spirit of social solidarity which was a crucial factor in strengthening and maintaining the revolution. The secular nature of the revolution cutting across gender, class and religion proved to be truly a popular civil society coup where everything was planned and executed by the people. The democratic

³⁴ See Emad El- Din Shahin, *The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square*, Journal of the Middle East and Africa, 3:46–69, 2012, p. 47, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21520844.2012.669452>. Accessed on 19th July, 2015.

³⁵ See Emad El- Din Shahin, *The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square*, Journal of the Middle East and Africa, 3:46–69, 2012, p. 48, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21520844.2012.669452>. Accessed on 19th July, 2015.

aspirations of the people were realized through the collective efforts of the various sections of the society after years of waiting for change. The 25 January revolution on the whole was a blatant demonstration of the power of the common people and showcases that when secular elements come to play even the toughest authoritarian regimes can be overthrown.

6.3. Impact of Social Media on Civil Society in Egypt

Since the 1990s the West have been struggling with stagnating democratic institutions, unresponsive to the needs of the people; while many Asia, Africa and Latin American countries have been struggling to make the transition from democratic to authoritarian regimes. However, in the 21st Century there has been a revival of the Liberal Democratic ideology owing due to the renewed emphasis on the old liberal concepts like civil society and citizen participation. The recent Arab Spring considered as one of the largest civil society movements in the 21st Century have been attributed as one of the primary causes for this renewed interest. The impact of the new ICTs on politics has been studied extensively in the past decade or so but it has been mainly centered on how these new communication technologies can aid the existing political institutions. However, in recent years the success of some global cyber protests and civil society movements like the Wall Street Protests and the Arab Spring has generated attention towards the transforming qualities of these new ICTs. The Egyptian revolution which was a part of the Arab Spring wave serves as a very good example of this interaction between the new ICTs and civil society.

Civil society broadly understood as the sphere which exists between the state and the market includes within its scope from citizen participation to CSOs. It operates as an

arena where the common good is pursued through collective action. Formation of identity and identification of common goals are thus considered as central elements in strengthening and maintaining a vibrant civil society. Since civil society represents an arena marked by different interests the amalgamation of these different interests into a common goal/ objective along with the creation of a strong social solidarity becomes the first primary task towards the growth of a robust civil society. And it is this mobilization phase that is highly dependent upon effective modes of communication. The advancement in communication technologies has introduced new tools which can be effectively employed in generating greater citizen participation hence thereby in the process strengthening civil society. The impact of these new ICTs on the civil society in Egypt will be analyzed by examining, firstly, the new mass mobilization tools of social media, secondly, the emergence of new forms of civic engagement and thirdly the rise of the virtual civil society.

New Mass Mobilization Tools and its Impact on Civil Society in Egypt

The new ICTs particularly social media and its social networking tools have become important means for the mobilization of collective action. These new advancements have created not only opportunities for cyber activism but have also changed the landscape of collective action. The social networking tools like Facebook, Twitter, blogging etc. have come to assume an important role in the formation of collective identities, identification of common goals and organization of collective activities. Aside from providing a platform for political expressions and sharing of information it has also been utilized in aiding some prominent political and social movements the 1999 World Trade

Organization protest, the Iraqi anti war movement, the Wall Street protests and the Arab Spring.

These new ICTs have come to assume an important role owing due to their mobilizing capacities which in turn has proved to be an important tool for civil society and its actors. Civil society operates upon a complex set of networks that are highly dependent on efficient communication system, consequently, these new communication technologies serves as highly important tools in the maintenance and strengthening of these set of networks. Communication networks forms an integral part of civil society and any disturbance in these networks is likely to hamper the growth of civil society. Egypt's civil society under President Mubarak existed merely as a tool of the political system; the regime imposed heavy restrictions on these communication networks by having strict control over traditional media, denying civil and political rights to the Egyptians, imposing multiple restrictive laws on CSOs which made it almost impossible for them to function properly, moreover it was quick to suppress of any form of opposition which led to numerous arrests, detention and torture of social activists or anyone who spoke against the regime. With these lines of communication cut off the civil society under President Mubarak existed only as a means for showing to the West that in spite of the Emergency Law with an all powerful President who seemed to be above the law, Egypt did allow certain freedoms to its people and even though numerous CSOs were registered with the government, yet, most existed only in name as only a handful operated as agents of the government. Moreover, in spite of the common hatred against the regime fear prevented most of the Egyptians to come forward and express their opinions owing due to the regime's rule of terror against any form of opposition while the

handful of CSOs that were in operation were either too pre occupied with their own interests as in the case of the Workers and Trade Unions or were quickly and easily suppressed like the few human rights organizations and social movements which crept up from time to time. Under these circumstances, it was almost impossible for the maintenance or growth of any real form of civil society in Egypt. However, with the development of ICTs by the government a virtual world was opened up to the Egyptians, free from censorship and restrictions, where they could express their opinions and views freely which in turn helped in building a common identity as well as helped set certain common goals which attributed to the growth of a vibrant civil society in Egypt. As Putnam puts it, the cyber world created space for real freedom of speech and freedom of association in Egypt.³⁶

The Egyptian activists were thus faced with the task of bringing together the different sections of the society under one common goal and in order to do this they carried out a relentless online campaign against the regime. This online campaign was carried out through Facebook, Twitter, blogs and chat rooms where the activists interacted ardently with the Egyptians home and abroad in order to debate and build a consensus on the common problems faced by all Egyptians under Mubarak's regime. Kefaya, April 6 Movement and We Are All Khaled Said were some of the prominent groups that helped in building a common consciousness amongst the Egyptians. These groups were highly dependent on social media during the initial stages of the mobilization phase as the reliance on effective modes of communication is higher particularly under those regimes where suppression of opposition is relatively high.

³⁶Bakry M. El Medni, "Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt: Premise and Promises" Note1, p. 23.

Earlier in the absence of civil and political freedoms along with the quick suppression of opposition had made it impossible for the activists to mobilize the Egyptians. However, they were able to overcome this obstacle with the help of social media that provided an alternative platform for the activists to come together and interact with the Egyptian masses particularly the youth who were dissatisfied and infuriated with the oppressing and unresponsive political system. The online discussions and debates led to common understanding of the prevalent problems and helped steered the Egyptians towards collective action which was to bring change to Egypt and this in turn accelerated the growth of a vibrant civil society in Egypt.

However, there are some, who are sceptical of the mobilizing aspect of social media on civil society, for instance, Malcolm Gladwell argues that, “the entry costs for using Twitter and Facebook are so low that they attract mainly users who are only loosely connected to one another by weak social ties and feeble commitment to a cause, such people may be sympathetic onlookers but are unlikely to become players in the high stakes game of political protest in authoritarian regimes by say taking part in demonstration.”³⁷

Nonetheless there are others like David Faris who in his paper, ‘We are All Revolutionaries Now: Social Media Networks and the Egyptian Revolution,’ contends that social media can act as an important mobilization tool in moulding common interests aimed at collective action, he argues that, digital tools also enable diffuse actors with common interests to collectively coordinate the production of ideas, the implementation

³⁷See Malcolm Gladwell as quoted by Robert Brym, Melissa Godbout, Andreas Hoffbauer, Gabe Menard and Tony Huiquan Zhang, *Social media in the 2011 Egyptian uprising*, The British Journal of Sociology, Volume 65, Issue 2, 2014, p. 269, <http://www.projects.chass.utoronto.ca/brym/bjs3>.

of best practices, and of course, the tactical coordination of protest activities themselves. By doing so, they produce the “frames” of collective action. To convince individuals to participate in any collective action, whether in democratic or non-democratic societies, organizers must provide the mobilizing rationales that “motivate and legitimate” collective action to convince individuals to engage in fundamentally risky behaviour like protests. Social Media Networks make it much easier for disparate groups of loosely-connected individuals to invent and agree upon these kinds of frames, all without ever necessarily meeting in person.”³⁸

Under authoritarian regimes collective actions can be quite difficult and at times impossible owing due to the presence of repressive laws and violent suppressions of opposition. Under President Mubarak protests and movements were brutally and violently suppressed and the activists were subjected to torture, arrests and detention and moreover many of the activists or any Egyptian citizen who showed any opposition to the regime were kept under strict surveillance by the state security. Mass mobilization or collective action was thus impossible under these prevalent circumstances. However, social media with its many to many communication capacity opened up a new platform for these activists in the form of cyber activism which enabled them to educate, organize and coordinate the protests.

Collective action which forms the main basis or element of civil society is being constantly shaped by the new tools of social media by facilitating and supporting offline collective action in terms of mobilization and organization while at the same time

³⁸ See David Faris as quoted by Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, *Social Media Revolutions: Hype or New Reality?*, , Princeton, New Jersey, Spring 2011, p.6, <http://www.wws.princeton.edu>

creating new modes of collective action. The greatest advantage of these new tools for civil society lies in the fact that “civic groups with little resources can mobilize support and public attention against a far more powerful competitor more easily and independently than in the past.”³⁹ Mainstream media, leaflets and word of mouth are still crucial for the mobilization process but under authoritarian regimes like Egypt where opposition is not tolerated and violently suppressed these new social tools serve as an important means for public mobilization crucial for the growth of civil society.

New Forms of Citizen Participation and Social Media

Civil society as an arena for citizen participation during the pre Mubarak era was very limited due to the domination of the public sphere by the state. Nonetheless, during the Egyptian revolution a myriad of events and actions that took place in the social media platform gave a boost to citizen participation. This virtual space triggered new forms of participation by opening up new spaces of free speech and assembly as well as providing a platform through which the activists could plan and organize the protests. With a public sphere kept strictly under surveillance by the state security the Egyptians created a new virtual space where they could participate freely without any fear.

The empowering capacity of ICTs is centered on their ability to permit previously marginalized individuals and groups who would otherwise be silent and invisible- to be heard and seen.⁴⁰ Participation commonly understood as the involvement of the ordinary citizens in the public sphere for the pursuit of the common good becomes more or less impossible under authoritarian regimes like Egypt. Nonetheless, with the development of

³⁹ See Jeroen Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst, *Cyber-protest and civil society: the Internet and Action repertoires in social movements*, p. 248, <http://www.eclass.uoa.gr/file.php/MEDIA118>.

⁴⁰ See Micheal, E. Millakovich, *The Internet and Increased Citizen Participation in Government*, E Journal of Democracy, JeDEM 2(1), 10-09, 2010, p.3, <http://www.jedem.org>.

ICTs, new forms of citizen participation has emerged giving rise to a new brand of empowered citizens by opening up virtual pathways for political discussions and sharing of information. Stressing upon the empowering tools of the new ICTs, Rasha A. Abdulla wrote: “the new generation of interactive applications that took over the internet has enabled and empowered the Internet user to do with the tools what was never possible before. This started with very simple tools, such as enabling readers to leave comments on a news story, and soon proliferated to include applications that changed the face of the internet through making it much easier to have user generated content.”⁴¹

The new ICTs proved to be especially beneficial for civil society which thrives on citizen participation. This has been proven more or less by the Egyptian revolution; with a civil society greatly limited by the Emergency Law along with a host of restrictive laws and regulations and an oppressive regime, active citizen participation in the public sphere during the Pre Mubarak era was nonexistent. However, with the development of the new social media tools, a virtual public sphere was created which helped in creating a new platform upon which the Egyptians could come together and deliberate on common issues and problems. Some movements and online groups played an important role in instigating citizen participation in this new cyber world, some of the important movements and online groups were the Kefaya Movement, April 6 movement, We Are All Khaled Said and the ElBaradei Facebook pages. These movements and groups posted a variety of information relating to the regime and also talked about the various crimes and injustices committed against the ordinary Egyptians. And it was through this that they were able to destroy the invincibility myth which the regime had successfully

⁴¹See Rasha A. Abdulla, *The Revolution will be Tweeted*, 2011, The Cairo Review of Global Affairs, p. 42, <http://www.thecaireview.com>.

created and imposed upon the people. With the destruction of the invincibility myth surrounding the regime citizen participation in the virtual world also began to grow; this was apparent more so with the high social media usage in Egypt which in actuality was encouraged by the regime in the hope that the new ICTs would usher in development. The social media sites provided platforms for online discussions and debates which were joined by millions of Egyptians from different walks of life. These different Facebook groups and communities helped in breaking the silence of the Egyptians and encouraged the growth of new forms of citizen participation. Activist Noha Atef, explains, it was a place where people could and did meet others who shared their opposition to the Mubarak regime and exchange information about protests: “to have a space, an online space, to write and talk to people, to give them messages which will increase their anger, this is my favourite way of online activism. This is the way online activism contributed to the revolution. When you asked people to go and demonstrate against the police, they were ready because you had already provided them with materials which made them angry.”⁴²

Furthermore, in order to promote citizen engagement and participation the activists encouraged and welcomed suggestions from the Egyptians. For instance, planning discussions also took place on Twitter, using the hash tag Jan25 to enable anyone to join the conversation, and activists talked to each other directly using the @ reply function.⁴³ While Facebook pages like We Are All Khaled Said posted on its page: we need ideas for Police Day on January 25th because these people work very hard at

⁴² See Noha Atef as quoted by Miriyam Aouragh, Anne Alexander, *The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution*, International Journal of Communication 5 (2011), Feature 1344-1358, p.5, <http://www.icjoc.org>.

⁴³ See Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle, *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as it Unfolded in the words of the People who made it*, Or Books, New York, 2011, p.2.

humiliating, torturing and sometimes killing Egyptian citizens, we should not pass up the opportunity on this day to let them know we will not forget please, everyone with an idea should send it forth.⁴⁴

The efforts of the activists aimed at promoting citizen participation did succeed as is shown by the increased number of members of the different online groups and communities. In addition to these online debates and discussions, social media also provided a platform through which the ordinary citizens could document their version of events. The new media avenues enabled an effective form of citizen journalism, through providing forums for ordinary citizens to document the protests; to spread the word about ongoing activities; to provide evidence of governmental brutality; and to disseminate their own words and images to each other, and, most importantly, to the outside through both regional and transnational media.⁴⁵ Social media helped the Egyptians to find a space which they could call their own; where they could pass out any source of information which was even against the regime. Through social media tools like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube the Egyptians actively participated in broadcasting not only their views and opinions but also pictures and videos which presented their side of the story. These user generated contents also proved to be rich sources of information which the activists could pass on to the outside world. Citing the importance of citizen participation particularly in gathering information activist Ramy Raouf states: “we built a media camp in Tahrir Square. It was two tents, and we were around five or six technical friends with their laptops, memory readers, hard disks. We had all physical means with us

⁴⁴ See Wael Ghonim, Note 22, p.131.

⁴⁵ See Dr. Sahar Khamis and Katherine Vaughn, *Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism Tilted the Balance*, Arab Media & Society, Issue 14, Summer 2011, p. 1, <http://www.arabmediasociety.com>.

and we hung a sign in Arabic and English on the tent itself saying, “Focal point to gather videos and pictures from people in the street.” And we received a huge amount of videos and pictures and then we go back online and keep posting them online. In the first few hours, I gathered 75 gigabytes of pictures and videos from people in the streets.”⁴⁶

Social media has acted as a real empowering tool by opening up new spaces for citizen participation. It has proven to be a particularly important tool for an authoritarian country like Egypt where participation was greatly limited to the extent that it was ineffective in influencing the decision making process. In the absence of any real civil and political rights along with a host of restrictive laws and regulations in operation the Egyptians were basically prevented from participating in the public sphere. Limited formal and informal participation in the public sphere led the Egyptians to seek out new virtual spaces where they could participate fully as concerned citizens. These new virtual spaces not only provided the Egyptians an escape from their restrictive environment but it also provided them with a platform where they could deliberate on common issues and work towards collective action. The virtual world was able to carve out new forms of citizen participation by enabling an environment where there was complete freedom of speech and expression and assembly. Social media offered to the Egyptians a much out sought out participative democracy which was lacking in their offline world. Social media tools like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube acted as important means for encouraging these new forms of participation by offering a platform through which the Egyptians could carve out their own virtual spaces and broadcast to the whole of Egypt and to the world their views and opinions away from the prying eyes of the regime.

⁴⁶See Ramy Raouf as quoted by Miriyam Aouragh, Anne Alexander, Note 42, p.9.

Virtual Civil Society

Egypt witnessed a thriving online community during the revolution which was made possible by the social networking sites. The active online participation which emerged during this period has led many scholars and academicians to contend that a virtual civil society was on the rise. Advancement in communication technologies have greatly altered the way human beings communicate with each other. With the development of the internet there are greater opportunities for interaction; the social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn etc have rapidly expanded cyber associations which in turn has given rise to a new form of online associational life.

Citizenship now ceases to be defined in terms of narrow geographical boundaries rather it is defined more in terms of networks and “these networks exists as arrangements of convenience in a world where dispersed groups of people have a common need to access and share specific types of knowledge.”⁴⁷ Operating at a level beyond the state and the market, these civic networks has enabled the citizens to be more active and resourceful. According to Manuel Castell these new forms of social organization has emerged as a result of the interaction between the new technologies and social organization at large. Citing the role of these new communication technologies on society Manuel Castell writes, “societies have moved from a mass media system to a customized and fragmented multimedia system, where audiences are increasingly segmented. Because the system is diversified and flexible, it is increasingly inclusive of every

⁴⁷See Stephen Coleman, *The Network- Empowered Citizen: How people share civic knowledge online*, University of Oxford, p.1 <http://www.ippr.org>

message sent in society digital communication becomes less centrally organized, but absorbs into its logic an increasing share of social communication.”⁴⁸

A consequent result of this interaction is the rise of new forms of associational life in the cyber world, which many scholars view as the virtual civil society. Virtual civil society is essentially based on social interactions over the internet and is characterized by heavy flow of information and ideas. Virtual associations forms the backbone of this new virtual society, however, there is a debate on the role of these cyber associations in social capital formation in regard to the norms of citizenship and political participation. The question is whether if these online associations can generate similar social capital formation as traditional social group activity. Many scholars are doubtful of the benefits of a virtual civil society, Putnam, for instance argue that social capital can be generated only through face to face interaction as it is only through direct contact and interaction that social capital can be developed. Face to face interactions in traditional social groups are viewed as crucial for building trust, tolerance and most of all political participation which forms the core components of social capital. According to some research, the internet plays a limited role in linking citizens; for instance, Krueger finds that interactions on the Internet build cyber skills that lead to online participation, but not traditional forms of participation. Among young people, social networking does not increase young adults’ political knowledge or participation in traditional channels of politics, but does enhance online forms of political participation.⁴⁹ While Margolis and Resnick, contends that “there is an extensive political life on the Net, but it is mostly an

⁴⁸See Manuel Castell and Gustavos Cardoso, eds., *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy*, (Center for Transatlantic Relations, Washington D.C, 2005), p.13.

⁴⁹ See Caul Miki kittilson, Russel J. Dalton, *The Internet and Virtual Civil Society: The New Frontier of Social Capital*, Center for the Study of Democracy, UC Irvine, 2008, p.5, <http://eprints.cdlib.org/uc/item/2cj1c67k>.

extension of political life off the Net.”⁵⁰ According to them, in spite of the major online campaigns, advocacy and lobbying, it doesn’t seem to have much impact on bringing about any constructive political change as it does not help in mobilizing citizens to participate.

However, contrary to these views, there are some researches which suggest that virtual associations do indeed encourage the flow of information and social interactions which in turn help in encouraging political participation. The cyber world facilitates the collection and exchange of information which helps in fostering civic discussions, for instance, according to some studies individuals are more likely to express their opinions more freely online than in face to face discussions. Virtual interactions allow multiple, flexible membership that are not bound by geographical limitations and the shared interests around which virtual interactions form may provide the bases for instilling the shared sense of community and expectations for the democratic process.⁵¹ Virtual associations in comparison to traditional social associations are more anonymous and less formal hence they have the capacity to go beyond socio economic and race barriers making it easier to join and exit these groups. Moreover, these groups encourage greater flow of information and social interactions which in turn helps in building strong group ties.

Based on these benefits of virtual society, the question is whether if these virtual associations will be possible to revitalize civil society. Fernback and Thompson have stated multiple arguments against the democratizing power of virtual associations.

⁵⁰ See Margolis and Resnick as quoted by Peter Dahlgren (2005) *The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation*, Political Communication, 2006, p. 154, [http:// dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933160](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933160).

⁵¹ See for details Caul Miki kittilson, Russel J. Dalton, Note 49, p.4.

According to them there is firstly the problem of technological divide- those who are in possession of the technology along with the necessary skills and knowledge and the rest of the population. Secondly, these communication technologies make face to face interaction less common and thirdly it allows a sense of being involved rather than allowing actual participation.

However, in spite of these drawbacks some scholars argue that these virtual associations are known to be effective particularly in authoritarian regimes. According to them in the absence of a robust conventional⁵² civil society, virtual civil society “injects a high degree of volatility into politics and presents autocratic regimes with new challenges on the street, at the same time as reinforcing weak political organization, fostering a false sense of representativeness among political oppositions, and fragmenting collective identities.”⁵³ Conventional civil society is generally weak under authoritarian regimes because of multiple reasons like oppressive and restrictive laws and regulations, suppression of basic civil and political rights. However, this has changed more or less owing due to the new advancements in communication technologies like the social media tools and its use particularly amongst the middle class. This has led to emergence of a new form of online civic activism which in turn has created more or less a robust virtual civil society. Yet, there are some who are still sceptical of the benefits of a virtual civil society in countering an authoritarian regime. According to them, in order to have any form of effective influence in the public sphere face to face interactions and strong social

⁵² Conventional civil society- Domain of civil society associations based on face- to- face interactions. Mark R. Beissinger, *“Conventional” and “Virtual” Civil Societies in Autocratic Regimes*, Princeton University, p.1, <http://www.princeton.edu>.

⁵³ Ibid.

ties are required as members of a society will not participate in risky actions unless these factors are present.

Nonetheless, the internet is essentially a society of networks, the internet users are not isolated individuals rather they are highly connected, for instance, social media tools like Facebook and Twitter offer platforms through which the users can openly participate in the online discussions and debates. As a consequent result of this free and open interaction, strong social ties are formed in the process. Civic discussions forms a vital part of conventional civil society and the cyber world offers ample opportunities for deliberative democracy to emerge. The online groups and communities offer to its members spaces where they can participate freely in political discussions without any form of restrictions whatsoever and this factor is particularly beneficial for citizens under authoritarian regimes. One of the primary goals of conventional civil society is the formation of collective goals and objectives crucial for collective action; the cyber world offers a platform through which the users can come together and deliberate over important issues and reach common consensus enabling the formation of strong social ties.

The Egyptian Revolution witnessed a vibrant online associational life up till the internet blockade by the government on 28 January. The internet blockade is viewed by many critics as the end of the role of the cyber world in the Egyptian Revolution, thereby, directly undermining the role of the virtual associations in the growth of a vibrant conventional civil society in Egypt. In order to get a better understanding of the role of virtual associations in revitalizing the conventional civil society in Egypt, it is pertinent that the question, whether if a virtual civil society did emerge in Egypt needs to be

examined. Egypt prior the revolution had an active blogging community largely spearheaded by the Kefaya Movement and the April 6 Movement along with an array of online groups like We Are All Khaled Said and the ElBaradei groups; these virtual associations played an important role in citizen education, civic engagement and participation. These virtual associations helped in the emergence of a virtual civil society in Egypt by firstly, breaking the fear barrier by posting information about and against the regime, secondly, helping bring together Egyptians from the different sections of the society by providing open membership to all which in turn helped in strengthening social solidarity, thirdly, promoting civic engagement by encouraging the members to give their inputs and suggestions prior and during the revolution, fourthly, providing a common ground through which the Egyptians could come together and deliberate on the prevalent common issues and problems, thereby, enabling the formation of common goals and objectives essential for collective action.

Based on these factors, a virtual civil society did emerge in Egypt as the core components of civil society like formation of collective identity, common goals and objectives, social solidarity and collective actions were present in the interaction amongst the different virtual associations. The 25 January protest which ultimately led to the downfall of President Mubarak's 30 years regime was organized online; it was called online by the Facebook group We Are All Khaled Said and supported by the other online groups and communities like the ElBaradei groups, April 6 Movement and the Kefaya Movement. The 25 January protest is primarily a testament to the presence of a vibrant civil in society.

While Egypt was witnessing a thriving virtual civil society, its conventional civil society was stagnating under President Mubarak's regime. Restrictive laws and an oppressive regime largely prevented the formation of any effective citizen participation in the public sphere. But with the development of social media, virtual associations began to grow as the cyber world provided a platform not only for freedom of expression but also association as well. These virtual associations played a crucial role in revitalizing Egypt's conventional civil society by opening up a space for wider citizen participation. The call for the 25 January protest was organized by the virtual associations but it was later joined by the other CSOs like the labour unions, professional associations and the Muslim Brotherhood, and as the protests continued so did citizen participation and all these factors primarily bears testament of a vibrant conventional civil society.