

Chapter-7

Summary and Conclusion

Civil society is a popular concept among academicians, activists, policy-makers, politicians etc. They do use it in everyday conversations, public speeches, academic gatherings etc. Its popularity has drawn academic attention. The concept of civil society is used in post-colonial context with variety of nuances. It is invoked in contexts radically different from one another. The concept of civil society has a determinate usage in European philosophical tradition. There are different well constituted traditions. Each tradition invokes it in a specific sense.

In Indian contexts with the introduction of colonial state and its institutions, there has emerged a kind of public life in India. It brought in to existence new spaces of public reflection and activism. However the question is that the European form of civil society did not emerge with similar normative connotations in India. Colonialism came with the declared aim of civilizing the masses. The civilizing mission aimed at transforming the ways of life of the colonized in the image of the master. Thus colonialism aimed at instituting European form of state and public culture in India. Thus colonialism aimed at transforming native society in the image of the west. In the process it re-describes life, institutions, beliefs etc. as inferior. It projects them as in need of transformation. Elite also advocate similar kind of transformation i.e. modernization. Elite take pride in modernizing institutions of local life along modernist western lines. They would want to institute western form of nation-state and transform different realms of life to meet its needs. This has been a continuation from colonial times onwards to institute western forms of nation state and civil society.

It has been shown as a normative ideal for all societies to modernize themselves on the lines of the west. Establishing European form of civil society unleashes an ideological project of imposing colonial power in terms of knowledge and culture. In the process of realizing the normativity of European form of civil society, it destroys the continuity with values of tradition. Hence, what is the form of civil society that can critically question the imposition of European form of civil

society and can meet the theoretical demands of an alternative to it? This question drove the work.

There are challenges to this kind of work. . The challenge comes from Manichean divide imagined to exist between the West and the East. There are different conceptions of civil society in western philosophical traditions. All of them are practically irrelevant to contexts other than in which they are practically constituted. There are pure social forms untainted by western modernity in the East. They should be recovered and reinstated. This is ideological Manichaeism. There are several problems with this conception. There are no pure social forms even in non-western contexts. There had been interaction between cultural systems of the west and the non-west. They have interpenetrated in to each other's signification systems. They have altered the meaning of certain practices in the course of interpenetration. More specifically the influence of the west on the non-west is more telling than the other way round. It complicates the process of making a critique of European forms of civil society as they have altered the meaning of local practices.

Secondly, the alternatives to be imagined to the western forms are not available in pure form. The alternative forms recovered from the life of these societies are also constituted by values and institutions inimical to free human existence. The alternative forms are not readily available which serve free human existence. They also need to be critically evaluated. One way of critically looking at them requires evaluation from a colonial point of view which involves a strong element of power operative between cultures. The other form of critical evaluation is an internal critique. The protocols of internal critique have not evolved clearly. Going beyond the Manichean divide in thinking about civil society in Indian context is a challenge.

The objective of the work was to develop a culturally informed conception of civil society rooted in tradition and simultaneously account for the role of re imagined state in its institutional aspects and other ideals of democracy in consonance with it. Approaching it by conceptual recuperation of tradition may lead to essentialising tradition and miss the dynamism that includes emancipation as well. The thematic of the civil society discourse from the standpoint of the west undergoes a serious alternation from this point of view and it gathers a problematic dimension. This

thematic-problematic tension can be contributive towards formation of a viable philosophy of civil society in Indian context.

In pursuit of this basic objective, the work has undertaken a particular course. It has never been a well treaded path. There are several course corrections along the way. When the work began, the idea was to arrived at a decolonized version of civil society. But this task has to be achieved by thinking through the existing theorizations with in India, how so ever inadequate they may be.

The work took a specific path. In the beginning a critical discussion of specific contours of the problematic of civil society has been undertaken. It was intended to lay out the terrain of existing work on civil society in India. It was followed by a digging exercise in to literature in various fields which might yield rich resources to think about constitutive ideas of civil society. It involved a critical discussion of various dimensions of these fields. If one brings out these dimensions, it can be used to further meditate on how it can lead to constitutive ideas of civil society. Those fields covered are social movements, Neo-liberal ideas on governance agenda and civil society, Civil society/Political society distinction, Revisionist liberal views on civil society and the theme of citizen virtue and good governance. It was followed by a brief description of conceptions of civil society in the history of western intellectual tradition. The next chapter dealt with a deeper critical analysis of selective thinkers to show how there was complicity between western liberal thinkers and the mission of justifying colonialism. It critically examined universalist claims of liberal thinkers regarding the liberal values and conceptions of civil society. Later on, it attempted looking at resources within the traditions of thinking of the nationalist movement. It used resources available in Tagore and Gandhi to critically evaluate western forms of life in its various dimensions. Both Gandhi and Tagore are deeply critical of westernized modernity. The last chapter tried integrating the resources available within Indian thinking with the contemporary theorizing of civil society in India. It argued for overcoming the limits of existing theories and to travel to normative theory as a form for articulating the concerns of nationalist leaders in to the theory of civil society even in post-colonial contexts.

It is essential to mention that the plane of work is not empirical in the sense that the veracity of the argument does not depend on empirical verifiability. It is not

an empirical argument at all. Secondly, most of the thinking on civil society takes place on a plane that it is social structure or an entity of social or political kind. This is to say that civil society is purely a practice anchored in a social architecture. This study treats civil society as a realm of ideas concerning what it should be. It treats question like how liberal tradition conceives and treats civil society or how a critical tradition does. The work is an exercise purely in the realm of normative theory with emphasis on how civil society should be imagined.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter-1 titled *Ideas of Civil society: The Problematique* discussed two different issues in depth. Firstly, it did set up a debate between two different academic traditions of thinking on civil society in Indian context: Liberal and Critical modern. Revised liberal tradition¹ is represented by Gurpreet Mahajan while Critical modernist position is represented by Rajni Kothari.² They take diagonally opposite stances on each issue significant to the idea of civil society. Kothari essentially looks at state as violence in itself. State as an institutional realm failed to incorporate organic aspirations of the masses because state, by its very nature is centralizing and bureaucratizing the process of governance. The modern state as a condensation of centralized power has a tendency to centralize all the processes. In doing so, people become mere objects because decisions concerning all aspects of life are handed over to experts. Kothari uses the term Non-party Formations to various initiatives that include communities, networks, voluntary associations that express organic aspirations of the people.

Mahajan articulates a view of the state in which it is a necessary condition for realizing freedom as community is viewed as superstition, inequality and hierarchy. Hence, she argues that state functioning under a democratic constitution has the task of building a democratic and egalitarian civil society. Both of them represent contrary positions on characterizing state and civil society. Kothari is largely inspired by Gandhian ideas Mahajan responds with resources from renewed liberalism. Her

¹ Mahajan Gurpreet, Civil Society and its Avatars, What happened to Freedom and Democracy in *EPW*, May, 15, 1999.

² Kothari Rajni, *Transformation and Survival: In search of Humane World Order*, Delhi, Ajanta, 1988.

characterization of society as hierarchical undermines the agency of the society while Kothari recovers it by describing society as people's arena unaffected by modernizing processes. She did not discuss how she evaluates the processes of dominant trend of modernization. She advocates a complementarity between state and civil society in sharing a common ethic while Kothari lays hope on communal morality as source of overcoming modern alienation.

It dealt with various aspects of democracy in India from different vantage points. It has dealt with democracy from the angle of social movements, libertarian governance, critical traditions of scholarship and revised liberal approach. It has critically excavated these fields to understand how such a literature organized the field. Some social movements viewed themselves as operating outside institutional politics while Dalit movement was banking on engaging with institutional aspects. Voluntary organizations performed the function of conscientisation of the people through transforming their knowledge's. Neo-liberal agendas of governance bring in a new space of voluntary activity ideologically serving the agenda of global agencies. It empties political content out of public activism and reduces civil society to voluntarism guided by experts. It also discussed civil society/political society distinction to theoretically articulate a space of contradiction between modernity and democracy. Revisionist liberalism does not see possibility of such a contradiction and argues that both the spheres can be viewed as space of rights and bourgeoisie legality. Thus the first chapter brings out different conceptions of civil society articulated by variety of academic and public discourses. There are four such discourses: Neo-liberal, Liberal, Critical Modernist and Subaltern.

The second chapter titled *Ideas of Civil society: The Western Philosophical Tradition* has outlined conceptions of civil society underlying entire western political thought. It went beyond the familiar position that civil society is merely a modern idea. It can be interpreted to stretch it back to Plato. There is a significant contribution of ancient thinkers. They theorized each form of life as informed by ethical reflection while modern thinkers separated political and economic questions from ethics. The first conception of civil society refers to institutions and social understandings that sustain good life. There is a tradition of civil society which views it as autonomous from the state and as a private sphere. The third conception goes with Hegel. It view state and civil society as firmly interlocked and interpenetrated entitles. Civil society

acts as a training ground for citizenship. It helps people to overcome particularisms and become members of universal community, state.

The third chapter titled *Relation between Civil society and Western Liberalism: A Critique* interrogates liberal thought critically. Four thinkers have been chosen and critically analyzed. The attempt here is to show how the conceptions of civil society carved out by thinkers are Euro-centric in nature in the sense of justifying the imposition of European conceptions concerning morals, politics and culture and enlightenment ideas on people's conceptions in other parts of the world. These liberal thinkers justified property rights, modern representative governments, right etc. at home while they did not mind taking exception to application of these principles in the context of colonial societies. These thinkers invoked the idea of reason to justify free governments at home and imperialism elsewhere. Each of them justified empire in their own specific way and the conceptual armoury of each of them is different. Locke invokes the idea of reason to justify a specific form of civilized govt. He could not think that reason could be invoked in variety of ways to justify different practices. Locke uses rationality in a very narrow sense that the specific use of land for cultivation is only rational, while other uses of land as irrational.

Thus Locke invokes the specific conception of reason as universal, thereby ignoring other forms of life as irrational. Locke's use of reason justifies free governments at home and legitimizes oppressive governments in the colonies. Kant thought contains a tension between developmental and moral standpoints built in his account of historical development. From the moral point of view, war, oppression and injustice cannot be justified particularly from the view of rational principles. But from the historical development point of view, they are necessary for fuller realization of rational capacities of humans in reaching the final purposes of the world. This underlines the contradiction in Kantian philosophy, so is the case with Hegel and Tocqueville. This chapter unpacks the specific rational schemes of different thinkers in justifying colonialism, though they are liberals in their theoretical articulation. Thus liberalism itself has to be rethought and should be purged of its imperialist bias.

The chapter -4 titled *Nationalism and Civil society: The Indian Standpoint* discusses critically the idea of nation as articulated by Tagore in his literary writings and in his reflections on nationalist movement of his times. His engagement with

modern ideas like nation and state develops from his creative reinterpretation of ancient Indian traditions to resist the onslaught of forces inimical to freedom stemming from modern knowledge's, individualization and rationalization of life worlds. He had been an uncompromising critic of nation as a form of life altering age old existence and unleashing violence in variety of forms. Nation for him is not a 'natural' 'spontaneous' union of the people. In a spontaneous connection, they come together out of undistorted human craving for love and cooperation. In a nation form, they come together in the aggressive pursuit of collective self-interest of enhancing national power. It leads to violence in inter personal relationships as well as international relations. It destroyed the civility based on love borne out of cooperative activity; while in international arena; it leads to war, aggression and imperialism. He analyses nationalist movement in India. He had shown how the psyche of a nationalist activist militates against the idea of creativity. With modern education, even in politics, he internalizes a culture of instrumental rationality. It leads to conflict between self and the other and between communities. Thus, he sees violence being produced by a vicious nexus between reason, wealth and politics of aggressive competition. He views alternatives to this as a form of life rooted in love and cooperation. It is not a utopia for him. It does not involve going back to the past-ages. It involves sustaining a form of life rooted in local traditions which needs to be evolved in harmonious relationship with others. This is a kind of modernity in which self and the world does not develop a conflictual relationship but sustain a harmonious relationship. In this context reason does not serve power, but reason is employed in service of others.

Chater-5 titled *Civic Community and Civil society in Indian context* discussed Gandhi's alternative to the form of modern community coming into existence in India in the name of modernization and as nation state. He suggests an alternative form of community i.e. which is not a nation. It is a community which should be constitutive of local communities sustaining virtues of such a communal living. This chapter discussed Gandhi's critique of modern civilization and alternatives he had experimented with. Gandhi chided modern civilization because it is constituted by violence. Violence is produced by destroying harmony and integrity of local forms of life. The core constitutive feature of modern life is instrumental rationally. It brings in to existence separation of ethics and practical aspects of life. Thus, he invented

alternative principles Swaraj, Satyagraha and Non-violence that should inform all aspects of life. For Gandhi, a civic community is not a nation consisting of individuals who are equal, and who are equally free to pursue private goals of life. Gandhian alternative to this is a life of local communities that can sustain unity of ethics and practical aspects of life. It has to be sustained by public action devoted to self-transcendence but not self aggrandizement by the principle of satyagraha. Thus for him, civic community is constitutive of civic engagement at local levels that ever expands into higher levels in the spirit of self transcendence by which one can move away from conflictual self other relationship.

Chapter-6 titled as *Idea of Civil society: An Alternative View* thinks through existing theoretical articulations on civil society and moves on to a new formulation of ideas of civil society. There are accounts of civil society which do not consider state and state led modernization drives. They would view civil society as asserting itself against such modernizing tendencies. They view civil society as processes starting from Bhakti movement to movements for recognition of states on the basis of language. They are inspired by local rhythms. They were not initiated by western modernity. The values underpinning such processes are self transformation, self reform and self transcendence. This view erases the line between religion and politics, rationality and spirituality etc. This chapter goes beyond civil society/political society distinction. This conceptualizing has not considered the possibility of imagined futures for societies of global south. It considered critique of modernity as its main plank and did not think of alternative futures. It was a limited view because of its naïve view of human subjectivity. Its conception of sub-altern as resisting subject does not consider her like being grounded in the moral ends determining the anchoring of subject in a specific culturally constituted form of life. It proposes an alternative conception of civil society with a combination of republican and communitarian ideas. This view emphasizes on local communal life lived in harmony with others and other communities. In this version good life is constituted by living within the community. The pursuit of good life requires consistent practice of virtues. These communities are to be constituted together and integrated in to political life by law. It should also include various social movements, caste associations etc. and all those associations be integrated in to polity through law. The internal form guiding these associations is deliberation. Thus civil society be decentralized to various

communities, movements, associations with variety of principles governing them and be integrated by law. Thus at local levels, participation be the norm of communal life.

The argument:

The idea of the work has been to offer versions of civil society alternative to western conceptions of civil society. The need for alternative is not moved by the idea that the values of the East and the west are totally different: cultural essentialism. Its guiding concern has been the question the hegemony of ideas of the western political tradition over the East. This hegemony had been institutionalized by the colonialism to justify itself. The discourse of liberalism could sit pretty with the atrocities and injustices of the colonialism during its heydays. Liberalism saw a perfect match between the colonialism and civilizing needs of the colonial subjects. Thus is a questions of power associated with hegemonic knowledge. It is necessary to offer alternatives to the western conception precisely to dislodge the continuing colonial images in the realm of ideas which would distort the self-image of colonial subjects.

Western ideas of Civil society

The ideas of civil society in the west flow in different streams. Each stream is distinct. There is a Lockean stream, Hegelian stream, and the Ancient one. Though they come in different streams, they share common framework of knowledge and values. They share a belief in rationality, science, affirmation of this world etc. Critics of European versions of civil society focus on the unity of European enlightenment ideas. And, the critics of Euro-centric versions of civil society assumed anti-enlightenment stance.

The ideas of civil society in the west were initially expressed as emerging in opposition to the state. The language of social contract views civil society as different from state of nature on the one hand and the state on the other. Civil society is equated with civil condition as distinct from the state of nature. The civil conditioned is instituted in opposition to the state of nature. This condition requires active role of the state in sustaining this civil condition. The core features of this civil condition are rules of private property and natural rights. These core features are products of human reason. Lockean invocation of reason justifies the idea of private property and the natural rights as core features of civil society. This order faces threat either from the

intervention in the private life of property or one of the parties violating the order of property. State needs to protect this order of property and prevent it from crumbling in to anarchy. There is another version of civil society with in the west coming from Hegel. It contrasts civil society from the unindividuated family. Civil society is a sphere of individualization or modernization. It is a sphere of individual self-realization through labour and property. Property is an institutional form of individual self expression. It is a sphere marked by individual competition. This sphere is transcended by the state; the objective embodiment of the reason. Individuals, through their inter-subjective understanding would also realize reason. State objectively unifies particular interests located in civil society. Civil society is an intermediary sphere between family and the state. These are the western versions of civil society in schematic form.

Critique of European forms of Civil society

Recent scholarship critically analyzed the relationship between reason, private property and representative forms of government. In case of Locke, he is actively engaged in the colonial mission. He justified English occupation of New England. For him, as it has been established civilized rule is equated with the existence of private property, reason, natural rights and representative governments. He has vehemently criticized the local forms of Government existing among Amerindians as irrational and backward and hence fit for English occupation. Similarly, given semi theological nature of his philosophy he invokes dialectical conception of history to establish that European societies are more advanced in cultural terms than societies of the East. Hegel's logic of history places west as rationally and culturally superior while the East is still in the cradle of civilization. But, the inevitable goal of the societies of the East is to realize the same telos of western societies. The goal of the East is to similarly to realize the rationalisation of its life and politics of the East. Thus, the standards of European forms of life are subjected to critical analysis. The European forms of civil society and accountable governments are propagated as only rational and civil and are justified so. Any other forms of government ought to be transformed in to European mould.

For Locke and Hegel, the sphere of free individual action expressed in the realization of private property rights is the basis of civil society. The idea of natural

rights is the norm governing civil society. In case of Hegel, civil society is the institutional expression of bourgeoisie private right. It is to be transcended by the institution of the state. Post-colonial critics have shown the rootedness of the form of life in the specific culture of possessive individualism of Europe. They saw the universalizing role of reason as justifying the imposition of European culture on non-European life. The social and political institutions of non-western life are branded as uncivilized as they do not possess some of the characteristics of European life like the division between the private and the public and accountable governments.

Resources for Alternatives

Tagore and Gandhi altered the ground of critique of European forms of life. They offered a critique of modern European culture taking hold of public life in India. They did not respond from the epistemic grounding of rationality. They offered a critique of European institutions by essentially drawing from resources of theological and moral traditions of their own heritage Tagore has reinterpreted Upanishadic sources to suit to the practice of an artist and poet; while Gandhi tailored Advaita to his political practice. Both of them altered the terms of engagement with the colonial power. They did not respond in the language of European rationalism. They came with alternatives to European idiom.

Tagore was a vehement critic of nation as a form of life. He criticized the entire post enlightenment European political modernity including international relations that led to two world-wars. He criticized how nation is leading to aggression and violence. He has also criticized nationalist movements because of its similarities with the state form of the west. He criticized national modern -either state or modern- for being repetitive, imitative and bureaucratic. The idea of free human existence is being able to express one's inner self in the outer realm. This is called freedom. Freedom lies in human spontaneity, creativity and individuality. The three are essential for one another. Freedom cannot be realized in the collectivist institutions of the state or the nation or the identity based politics. Freedom has to be realized outside the institutional mechanisms of the state. The source of civility be drawn from inter personal cooperation outside the institutional channels of the state that overcome division across caste language and nation.

Gandhi did not go with the ideal of civic community propounded by European philosophers. The ideal of civic community is constitutive of rational individuals coming together for meeting private goals. The politic is privatized and delinked from ethical considerations. Gandhi proposed an alternative form of civic community for which he experimented throughout his life. The principles for operation of such a civic community are Swaraj, Satyagraha and Non violence. Gandhi is a kind of communitarian. The life lived within the community is the only valuable form of life. The life outside the community led as a n isolated individual is of absurdity because individuals' purpose of existence is meaningful only in relation to others. The virtuous life is possible only in a community. Only in a virtuous life, individual can find fulfillment in. he did not support a life of atomic individualism. He was not in favour of life of nation state. He argued for community life at local levels and to be integrated with the life of the country through ever expanding circles. He was critical of larger communities because they produce division, conflict, violence and victimhood.

So, Tagore and Gandhi articulated alternatives to western form of nation-state. Tagore articulated the ideal state of a citizen is ananda or joy of a dancer while Gandhi's ideal is a Satyagrahi, who attained control over his senses. The institutional forms that each of them suggested for such a life is different. Tagore emphasized on a modern university of cosmopolitan kind, Gandhi emphasized on reconstruction of communities from the village level. Thus Gandhi and Tagore offer resources to think about alternatives to western ideas of civil society.

Ideas of Civil society: Alternative view

There are alternatives attempted in Indian context. The present work attempts to incorporate resources made available by nationalist thinkers. There are four strands of civil society in Indian context: Liberatarian, Liberal, Subaltern and Critical modernist. This work attempted going beyond the subaltern school's ideas of civil society and restate critical modernist version of civil society as a combination of communitarian and republican version. The alternative has many tasks to achieve. (a) It should in corporate Indians values. (b) It should respond to social emptiness of liberalism. (c) It should also respond to the lacunae of society centric notions of civil society.

The alternative version proposed emphasizes on participation as different from subaltern resistance as being critical of modernity. Subaltern school articulates subaltern resistance as locus of democracy which is critical of modernity. If the gravity is shifted towards participation, it alters theoretical plane and brings in a new colour. Sub altern subject is being theoretically conceived as merely a subject of resistance. But bringing in participation at local levels as an ideal of civil society, the subaltern becomes a participant in the local community. He becomes a moral subject with specific ends integral to that form of life. By participating in that specific form of life, he/she develops virtues essential to live in that community life by which he becomes a virtuous member of that community. The participation in community should not be viewed as empty of politics. The notion of participation should encompass public political dimension of a community. It encompasses the possibility of including the resources of the people in the process of participation. Theoretically, this is the better way of bringing in the resources of Gandhi and Tagore in to ideas of civil society.

Civil society does not merely be constitutive of local participation in the communal life. It includes many other associations, social movements, networks that constitute public life. It may include non-voluntary associations. Patriotic conversation should be the norm guiding internal life of these associations. The existence of these associations should be legally sanctioned by the law. Mere civic acknowledgement of those associations cannot be the sufficient safeguard. This is a republican element in it.

According to this conception, civil society performs the function of promoting civic virtue. For the successful functioning of democratic institutions and to fight social atomism, it is necessary to have virtuous citizenry. Participation in the local life of the community makes virtuous citizens.

This conception of civil society overcomes the predominant idea that civil society is primarily a site of reason. By privileging the ideal of participation, it overcomes the predominance of rationalist epistemology and allows space for non-rationalist epistemologies as well.

Limitations:

There is a weak ground in the study. There is no well laid out path to translate experiences and practices of nationalist movement in to concepts of political philosophy and social sciences. Social science concepts have emerged from the empirical theory. The practices of nationalist movement have to be interpreted from literature and writings of nationalist writings. There is a chasm between the two. This study suffers from the weakness mentioned.