

Contemporary Discourse of Civil Society : The Gandhian Perspective

Dr. Jitendra Kumar Lalvani

Assistant Professor, Vasanta College for Women, (Rajghat), Banaras Hindu University

Abstract

Civil society is a multipolar concept that is still developing conceptually. This notion should incorporate representations of Indian philosophy of thought as well, as they have not yet been included. In the framework of civil society, the current study will attempt to offer substitutes based on Gandhi's philosophy. While discussing the origin and evolution of civil society, a small attempt has been made to present a comparative study of western civil society and Gandhian value based civil society. Along with this, while discussing the idea of civil society based on Gandhian value, an attempt has been made to present new concept of civil society in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Civil Society, India, Gandhi

Introduction

The development of democratic values and social justice has been greatly aided by civil society, an arena for citizen engagement outside of the public and private spheres. Mahatma Gandhi made a significant contribution to civil society; his ideology of nonviolence and civil disobedience mobilized millions in the fight for India's freedom. Global civil rights movement was sparked by Gandhi's emphasis on truth, independence, and harmony within the community. But the emergence of bigotry, divisiveness, and state repression in today's society frequently runs counter to Gandhi's principles. Reviving his ideas to stop the degradation of civil liberties and promote an inclusive society is the challenge.

Objectives

- To identify the necessary model for civil society in Mahatma Gandhi's thinking
- Prevent civil society from becoming a market tool. Gandhian value based civil society can overcome the shortcoming by the market based capitalist economy.
- Suggest ways to make civil society more democratic, inclusive, competitive and promote ideological diversity..
- Civil society based on Gandhian value incorporates integrity, accountability and transparency in politics.
- Describe Gandhi's idea of civil society in the context of establishing an equitable, exploitation-free society.
- Gandhian value based civil society is helpful in promoting collaborative enterprise.

Contemporary relevance of research paper

The provided research article has contemporary relevance. The state's role in deliberative democracy is changing in the modern era, and this also affects civil society. The study offered here will attempt to shed light on the relationship between civil society and the state, as well as its rationale. Now days in the scope of deliberative democracy, the role of state as well as the functions of civil society is being adjusted.

Justification for the presented research paper in terms of social necessity

India is a multicultural nation with a strong modern influence. Giving civic groups freedom in such a society is a difficult decision. Because socioeconomic political change and advancement are issues of state in such a society. Dispersion in integrated efforts might result from direct civil society participation in these topics. However, it is impossible to overlook the diversity of interests and the limitation of state capability. In this regard, the study that is being provided will guarantee that the public expectations of the state and civil society in India are outlined.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been at the forefront of scholarly thought with a fresh perspective thanks to their activities in the areas of development, good governance, and participation since the 1970s. Looking attentively at the western background of the concept of civil society is required to grasp it from its full perspective. While defining civil society, it can be said that - "Civil society is such decentralized interest groups that play the role of mediator between the state and the public" - despite ideological differences among western thinkers themselves regarding the definition of civil group and its utility and scope. From this vantage point, it appears that these mediators are supported by anarchist and western pluralist thought. Their definition and analysis, however, focused mostly on defining "power" and identifying how other groups fit into it.

Evolution of western civil society:

According to Charles Taylor, there are two fundamental concepts from which the idea of Western civil society originates. The first ideology is based on the theories of Locke, while the second is based on the theories of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, his pupil. Locke believed that in his natural form, man had a tranquil existence. Natural laws guided and controlled the human community in its natural state. Nevertheless, there was a deficiency in a robust administrative division that might offer the person autonomy and a chance to grow as a person. As a result, despite the natural condition being peaceful and cooperative, the necessity for an administrative system that could remove the confusion and construct a proper system in order to safeguard citizens against antisocial elements in addition to safeguarding public property and lives. Therefore, the people came with two agreements in order to escape this chaotic natural state. 'Social agreement' was the term used for the first agreement. The emergence of civil society was facilitated by the public coming together and reaching a consensus among themselves through this social accord. In the second accord, the people and the king came to a political understanding. As a result, the ruler was part to the accord as

well. As a result, the monarch must carry out his responsibilities effectively. Civil society is entitled to challenge the monarch and remove him from office if he is unable to carry out his obligations.

In this approach, civil society will use its inherent opposition to defend citizens' rights and freedoms whenever the government acts in violation of the agreement. The ideas of French philosopher Montesquieu and his follower Tocqueville form the second ideology of the notion of civil society. A robust constitution and law and order are necessary to avert the autocrat of power, according to Montesquieu and Tocqueville. In this sense, the primary role of civil society is to satisfy citizen demands through an autonomous organization rather than to undermine the government.

Thus, based on the first and second principles, we can conclude that civil society is a self-governing organization for Locke, whereas public education, self-reliance, and mutual collaboration are central to Montesquieu's definition. As a result, a new, extremely comprehensive ideology that combines the concepts of Locke and Montesquieu arises from the blending of the two ideologies¹.

For a considerable amount of time, people believed that the world was divided into two sectors. This understanding is important in order to comprehend the shifts that have occurred in the western conception of civil society in the last several decades. Wherein the state or government is represented in one sector and the market or economy in the other. However, the outdated notion of a two-sector world—which persisted for the previous many years—was repudiated by contemporary sociologists. Instead of seeing the two sectors as separate entities, modern thinkers have identified a new notion that places civil society in the space between them and describes our world as a three Sector World. Accordingly, the idea of a two-sector world practically vanished from the global arena once the idea of the three Sector World emerged. These days, civil society can be viewed as a third sector existing in between the public and private spheres, distinct from both. As a result, it can be referred to as an intermediary organization that supports public engagement in the democratic process, offers citizens a voice, and advocates for their rights in a number of areas.

Civil Society: From Ideological Roots to Modern Practical Applications

A field known as "civil society" is one in which people work together in the absence of force to pursue shared goals, values, and interests. The idea of civil society has changed from an ideological to an executive perspective in the modern era. Such a shift in the idea of civil society can be attributed to three primary factors. Firstly, the application of systems approach to the analysis of social and political events has established numerous essential connections. In addition, the study of political, social, and economic processes as well as the underlying cultures and ideologies has begun to employ the systems approach. The expanding advantages of affluent businesses in the non-governmental sector, as opposed to the interests

¹Taylor, Charles, 2003, 'Modes of civil society and democracy' in Carolyn M. Elliot, civil society and democracy: A reader, New Delhi: Oxford university Press. p457

of communities and other agencies, are the second cause. Thirdly, a lot of international institutions and organizations are currently working on third-world development projects, and they heavily rely on civil society to make the most use of the money they have saved up. In addition, they are enlisting the aid of civic society to accomplish their objectives. Establishing a clear definition of civil society that would allow non-governmental organizations' capacity to be evaluated was the major goal of a 1988 conference between the Council of Europe and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. At this meeting, civil society was described as the third sector—between the state and the market—that is organized and managed by the government, consists of laypeople, and represents the interests of the broader public.

Because civil society is so diverse in terms of organization and function in the modern world, it seeks to avoid any implicit definition. Civil society in modern world tends to escape any blanket definition because of its organisational and functional diversity. Modern civil society originated from charitable organizations that strive to safeguard citizens' rights to freedom. Although some organizations in the current situation suffer from caste, political corruption, factionalism, and religious fanaticism, these organizations cannot be granted the status of civil society despite being more powerful than earlier civil societies. Two schools of thinking on civil society are revealed by contemporary assessments of civil society: Political Ideology: The foundation of civil society, according to this ideology, is the heritage of Anglo-American liberal democratic philosophy, which recognizes political actions and civil institutions as the creation of fundamental components of a specific social structure. It aids the development of a specific sort of political society based on rights, citizenship, democratic representation, and the rule of law. Social ideology: Civil society's social ideology acknowledges civil society as a transitional community area and is a very pragmatic worldview. Furthermore, it is limited by the extent of self-governance and voluntary involvement of social organization members. In parallel to the Western tradition stated before, Gandhian vision has been used to conceptualize civil society. Although many scholars have acknowledged democracy as a prerequisite for civil society, Mahatma Gandhi believed that the democracy of the West, where civil society is vibrant today and serves as an inspiration for civil society in the eastern countries, is not genuinely democratic at all.

Contrasting Ideologies: Gandhian Civil Society vs. Modern Western Perspectives

The Gandhian definition of civil society is as follows: "Associations or communities formed by the collective efforts of the people are civil society; they voluntarily understand the importance of justice, are initiated into the rules of Satyagraha, and conduct various social programs for the fulfillment of social welfare with a selfless spirit." The Civil Society notion based on Gandhianism and the World Bank's Western definition of civil society diverge significantly in many important ways. The following is a way to display these distinctions.

- The idea of modern civil society is a follower of liberal democracy, capitalism as a form of production, and society, all of which include the idea of the selfish man as a central source of motivation that drives people to continuously pursue their rights. In

contrast to Hobbes and Locke, Mahatma Gandhi believes that man is not a "lonely being or a creature cut off from society." He is a being who knows who he is. He is therefore obligated by obligation. The duty of "Gandhi's way" is to attain the fundamental rights or human rights that modern civil society strives for. According to him, "A person who carries out their duties effectively is automatically granted rights." The fact is that a man should live and die for his right to carry out his obligations. It encompasses all lawful rights; anything else is akin to a transient kidnapping, with violent seeds concealed within.

- Public participation in state power is crucial in civil society, as it serves as a tool to hold power accountable and provide people with the benefits of development (liberal democratic perspective). Mahatma Gandhi, however, believed that power was not a goal in and of itself. "Political power, in my opinion, is not an end, but a means for people to improve their condition in every aspect of life," the author writes. The ability to govern a country through its representatives is known as political power. There won't be a need for representation if national life becomes so complete that it governs itself. There's an enlightened anarchy at that point. Everybody is their own king in such circumstances. His self-discipline ensures that he never causes trouble for his neighbors. Consequently, because there is no state in the perfect state, there is no political authority.
- The idea of diverse interest groups being represented is a key motivation in the contemporary definition of civil society. While its primary goal is to ensure that no group is left out of the stream of representation and development, and that all groups benefit adequately, the concept's indirect but effective goal is to ensure that no group is left out of market forces. Though his reasoning extends beyond this, Mahatma Gandhi is not opposed to the representation of diverse interests. He believes that every individual in a democracy represents the diverse interests that comprise the country. This is the soul of democracy. True, representatives of special interests should not be barred from being represented; but, such representation is not its criterion; rather, it is a sign of its incompleteness.
- The contemporary notion of civil society is predicated on a concomitant perspective of globalization. It serves as a vehicle for foreign capital investments in the social and cultural domains as well. It also allows industrialized countries' agendas to be promoted in poor countries via the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. On the other hand, Swadeshi is the object of civil society's devotion according to Mahatma Gandhi's vision. The civic society of today wants us to change to reflect the values brought about by globalization and makes us dependent on it. According to Swadeshi's core tenet, neither of these components exists in civil society. While discussing Swadeshi, Mahatma Gandhi stated that mass production will cease if it is linked to needs. There is no incentive to raise production indefinitely or at any cost when it occurs in a restricted area for both production and consumption. Many of the challenges and issues brought on by the state of our current economy also vanish under that circumstance.

Is the civil society of today not an agent, an enabler, in the consumption or reallocation of excess production? Is modern civil society not a regression toward modest living standards and lofty ideals? Are today's many civil groups' interests not in conflict with one another? Such inquiries can arise frequently, and the answer is usually not yes. From the Gandhian perspective, it would be reasonable to describe today's civil society as incomplete in such a circumstance. Following independence, Mahatma Gandhi pushed for the Indian National Congress to be reorganized as a civil society and to become an organization dedicated to social welfare rather than a political party.

Anarchist philosopher Mahatma Gandhi envisioned a civilization called Swarajya, in which the state is superseded by civil society. Nevertheless, in Hindi Swaraj, he stated that his efforts are divided into two categories: his immediate objective is to establish Swarajya, which is based on parliamentary democracy and is akin to Britain; his long-term objective is to establish Ram Rajya. Mahatma Gandhi may have made some arguments in support of the idea of the modern civil society during this period of transition. In this transitional period, when man's consciousness has not advanced to the point where he may act in the interests of society without external control, Mahatma Gandhi can offer civil society with the principles of truth and nonviolence found in the Centre World.

VinobaJi clarified two basic characteristics of civil society. Firstly, in the idea of civil society, no power in the world remains above a person. Secondly, no person uses his power over others. No one's power will prevail and we will not exercise power over others. Both these things together make Swaraj². In this concept of civil society, power is obtained from within the person. In reality, power is not obtained by someone giving it to you, rather power should be obtained from within³.

In Mahatma Gandhi's view, the concept of civil society is not about capturing power but about controlling power by the people. Jayaprakash Narayan said that I am not interested in the capture of power but in the control of power by the people⁴.

The idea of civil society is based on Gandhiji's principle of 'pure means' according to which the means to achieve the end should also be good.⁵

Whatever Gandhiji did was completely for the establishment of civil society. We believe that Gandhiji had a hold on politics, but his hold was on public policy⁶. What kind of politics was the politics in which Gandhiji participated? In what sense was the movement he started political? Its goal was national independence of India, but it was not a movement for power for any particular party. Gandhiji presented the idea of civil society and not politics⁷.

²Gandhi, M.K. 1960, India of my dreams, Navjeevan Publication House, Ahmadabad p43

³Ibid p.27

⁴Narayan, Jaiprakash, Total revolution, Sarvsewasangh publication Rajghat, p 44

⁵Majumdar, Direndra, 1957, Shasanmuktsamajkiaour, sarvsewasanghprakashan, Rajghat, p15

⁶Bhave, vinoba, 1961, 'Lokniti' Sarvsewasanghprakashan, Rajghat, p91

⁷ Narayan, Jaiprakash, 1973, MeriVicharYatra, Sarvsewasangh Prakashan,p17

According to Gandhiji, it is necessary for the government to be accountable to the people. Along with this, the field of work of voluntary organizations of any nation should be constructive. The main objective of constructive work is to awaken and organize public power so that it can cooperate respectfully with the state power and it can become an alternative to the state power in the field of common people's life. He asked constructive workers to keep themselves away from the politics of power. Take all the active organizations with you, do not let the thoughts of attaining power come to your mind⁸.

Gandhiji emphasized on the priority and appropriateness of public policy instead of politics. It is clear in his thinking that if politics is based on governance then public policy is based on discipline, if politics is centered on power then public policy is based on freedom and autonomy, if political is based on competition for sovereignty and acquisition of rights then public policy is based on duty and awareness. Gandhiji's thoughts on public policy are relevant from the point of view of public welfare⁹.

Peace Building, But is it?

The process of averting conflicts, settling disagreements, and establishing enduring peace in societies impacted by violence or instability is known as peace building. It includes a variety of initiatives, such as resolving the underlying causes of disputes, restoring communities, and encouraging peace between parties involved in conflict.

The key features:

- Locating the root causes of dispute and resolving them before violence breaks out. This could entail resolving political grievances, historical tensions, or socioeconomic inequalities.
- Intervening in ongoing disputes to help disputing parties communicate, negotiate, and mediate their differences. This may entail official peace conferences, unofficial agreements, and diplomatic initiatives to identify points of agreement.
- Fostering the restoration of trust and the promotion of healing among impacted individuals and communities. Truth and reconciliation commissions, community conversations, and initiatives promoting forgiveness and understanding are common components of reconciliation efforts.
- Repairing damaged communities, institutions, and infrastructure and providing basic services, promoting economic development, and restoring governance are all part of this.

Building peace necessitates a thorough, multi-year strategy involving a wide range of parties, including local communities, governments, non-governmental organizations, international

⁸Tendulkar, D.G, Vol-5, Mahatma: life of M.K. Gandhi, PrakashanVibhag, Govt of India, New Delhi, p283

⁹The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, 1963, publication Division, Delhi, p16

organizations, and private citizens. In areas afflicted by violence, achieving long-term peace and stability is a difficult process that calls for constant dedication, resources, and collaboration at all levels.

India's path to independence was shaped in large part by the many peacebuilding initiatives that were undertaken during the country's independence process. Although opposition to British colonial rule was a defining feature of the independence movement, it also included a range of nonviolent movements and tactics meant to bring about social change and self-governance.

- **Gandhi's Nonviolent Resistance:** Mahatma Gandhi was a key figure in promoting nonviolent resistance, which included campaigns like the Salt March and the Non-Cooperation Movement. These movements demonstrated the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance against colonial control by emphasizing civil disobedience, noncooperation with unjust laws, and nonviolent protests.
- **Unity in Diversity:** Diverse communities came together to celebrate India's independence. In order to create a free and unified India, leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi, and others stressed the value of unity across various languages, cultures, and religions. The Indian people's sense of solidarity and peace building were aided by this emphasis on oneness.
- **Promotion of Social peace:** The leaders of the Indian independence movement addressed issues of economic inequality, religious conflicts, and caste prejudice in addition to working to foster social peace. There was an attempt to heal divisions and build a society that was more just and inclusive.
- **Community Empowerment and Grassroots Movements:** Numerous grassroots movements and leaders collaborated locally to empower communities, inform the public, and encourage self-reliance, in addition to well-known national leaders. Self-determination and community resilience were greatly enhanced by these movements.
- **International Advocacy for Peace:** Indian leaders, such as Nehru, Gandhi, and others, participated in international forum and promoted international harmony. They emphasized the significance of nonviolence and peace, not only for India but for the entire world.

Mahatma Gandhi is a towering figure in the realm of peace building, recognized globally for his profound impact on advocating nonviolence, civil disobedience, and peaceful resistance as potent tools for social and political change. His worldview was based on the idea of ahimsa, or nonviolence. He supported using peaceful methods to oppose injustice and oppression rather than using force. This idea evolved into a tenet of several global nonviolent movements. Gandhi's idea of Satyagraha, or "Truth Force," highlighted the strength of moral bravery and honesty in opposing injustice. It included aggressive, albeit nonviolent,

opposition to unfair laws and structures, as well as civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance.

He promoted the idea of using discussion, empathy, and understanding to resolve disputes as an alternative to using force or confrontation. Finding common ground with opponents through respectful engagement was his belief. He prioritized giving people the tools they need to take charge of their own lives and communities. His focus on independence, self-control, and productive labor was intended to create civilizations that were more robust and resilient. He made a concerted effort to heal divisions by highlighting the value of harmony between many ethnic groups, faiths, and cultural traditions. In addition to promoting inclusivity, he worked to abolish inequity and discrimination.

He demonstrated how to put these ideas into practice by participating in a number of movements, including the Salt March, the Quit India Movement, and his support for non-violently achieving Indian independence.

Leaders, activists, and peace builders all throughout the world are still motivated by his legacy. In order to address conflicts, advance social justice, and promote peace in varied societies, modern peace building initiatives often draw inspiration from and adapt Gandhi's techniques and beliefs. His teachings place a strong emphasis on the ability of nonviolence to transform as well as the value of morally sound and sympathetic dispute resolution.

The question of world peace.

The situation in Gaza, particularly during periods of conflict and attacks, highlights the immense challenges in achieving peace in the region. Tragically, these conflicts often result in loss of life, destruction, and immense suffering for civilians on all sides. The Gaza-Israel conflict has seen devastating consequences marked by loss of life, destruction, and on going tensions. Israel and Gaza have both lost people during times of violence. Women and children have died as a result of the attacks, and Gaza's infrastructure has been severely damaged. Rocket assaults from Gaza have also caused damage and casualties in Israel. The humanitarian situation in Gaza are already poor, and it has been made worse by the on-going battles. Due to infrastructural loss, the populace lacks access to basic resources like electricity, clean water, healthcare, and housing. Due to the violence, many families have lost their houses, resulting in widespread displacement. Both sides' civilian populations experience trauma and psychological suffering, especially the children who are raised in an environment of constant fear and uncertainty.

Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and peace building can offer insights, though applying them in the context of such deeply entrenched conflicts is complex. Gandhi's teachings place a strong emphasis on peaceful resistance and the amicable settlement of disputes via communication, comprehension, and empathy. Regarding the Gaza conflict, his beliefs could support:

Encouraging all parties to avoid using violence and look for peaceful solutions to disagreements and grievances. This includes speaking out against any kind of violence that injures or destroys property used by civilians.

Stressing the value of these processes in resolving disputes and addressing the underlying causes of conflict. Finding long-term solutions may start with bringing opposing sides together for thoughtful dialogue. Demanding that humanitarian relief be allowed to areas immediately affected by the fighting in order to assist and support civilian victims. In the midst of the chaos of conflict, protecting innocent lives and guaranteeing access to vital resources are critical.

Encouraging the participation of the international community—this consists of countries and organizations—in order to support efforts to advance stability and security in the area and to mediate amicable agreements. It is difficult to apply Gandhi's teachings in a conflict that is so deeply ingrained and involves complicated geopolitical, historical, and religious factors. Genuine willingness on the part of all parties to communicate, make concessions, and look for peaceful solutions are necessary to bring about peace.

Gandhi's teachings provide a moral framework for settling disputes, but in order to put his ideas into practice, all parties to the conflict must be willing, empathetic, and committed to working toward a durable and sustainable peace. This requires wider international backing as well.

At the time of COVID-19

During the Covid times, the lakhs of workers who were going home in such adverse conditions and without resources, were Lenin and Marx relevant or Gandhi relevant. The specialty of Gandhi's path is that it inspires to fight the contradictions and move forward. The cleanliness that was established as the only weapon during this pandemic was earlier established as an essential requirement by Gandhiji. Today, the labour that Gandhiji said was essential for a healthy body and life is being directly given a proper place in its life by the whole world. The immunity and diet that is being said to be necessary to fight this pandemic is linked to Gandhiji's lifestyle. the whole world is fighting a pandemic like coronavirus. This pandemic can be considered the result of factors like environmental protection, lack of cleanliness, consumerist lifestyle. Gandhians always emphasized on environmental protection, cleanliness, consumption as per need, self-reliant rural economy. In this crisis, the need for Gandhiji's ideas was once again established. This pandemic has provided an opportunity that we need to adopt Gandhian principles while changing the food chain. The contribution made by many educational organizations, ashrams, self helpgroups, volunteer groups and NGOs in the form of food grains and essential items during this pandemic is all based on Gandhian values based civil society.

Conclusion

Today, the increasing distance between civilization and culture has distanced human from human value, today to establish the priority of civil society in the contemporary world, it is

necessary to adopt the idea and value of Gandhi ji because the defects created in civil society can be removed on through gandhian path and civil society can re-establish its relevance. Democracy without civil society remains an empty shell. Good governance, proper development demands a strong civil society and this requires democracy in the broadest sense. The role of civil society is valuable because its absence would indicate the absence of democracy. There should be spaces and values for people to discuss, negotiate, initiate and challenge state projects and to act primarily on the democratic and developmental agenda and compel the state to conform to it. If civil society succeeds in this task then the common man will realize democracy. it become possible when Gandhian value based civil society are nurtured in world

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