

## Chapter

# 9

## GLOBALIZATION, CIVIL SOCIETY AND NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

Any prolonged phenomenon, event, happening or activity that is contested on the ground of its nature, characteristics and implications happens to be a striking feature of the society. This holds true in the case of globalization as well. It is, indeed, one of the defining features of the twenty first century. We are living in a world where message from one hemisphere passes to other instantaneously and people move within and between countries with ease and comfort by various modes without facing barriers and constraints. Goods reach the market after being processed and assembled at various locations across the globe, transportation of which is reliable and safer through advanced and electronically devised means. Capital and commerce moves electronically.

Amidst all these developments, increasingly integrated and inter-connected world is facing new challenges such as, climate change, terrorism, poverty and economic crisis. These challenges cannot be effectively, timely and appropriately addressed by the nation-states for two reasons. Firstly, globalization is altering the general position of the state. The rise of supra territoriality has broken the state's effective monopoly on governance, which has shifted into the hands of corporate powers and private markets that further their own personal interests at the expense of the poor. Secondly, state exercised its authority and sovereignty within a well defined geographical boundary and addressed all sorts of issues of diverse nature but with the emergence of globalism, the issues that a nation state confronts are transnational in nature i.e., they have no borders and cannot be solved by any country alone. To combat such issues concerted and co-ordinated efforts and participation of both, formal and informal institutions of governance is required. So, the global civil society is assuming importance because of its role in analysing the asymmetrical power relations and addressing the undesirable consequences of globalization.

### 9.2 DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society, in the most general sense, is understood as the social world beyond the state, a world that is certainly encompassing more than private enterprise. Civil society stands in between the individual and the state and is a bed-rock of civil liberties and prevents the citizens from the excesses of the state



and also performs the function of a shock absorber in the event of growing tension between the individual and the state.

*J. A. Scholte* mentions that the civil society comes in to existence when "people make combined efforts through voluntary associations to mould rules, official, formal and legal arrangements and informal social constructs. In terms of membership, it encompasses enormous diversity. It includes academic institutions, business associations, development cooperation groups, environmental campaigns, farmers' groups, human rights advocates, relief organizations, peace activists, professional bodies, women's networks, youth campaigns and more".

*The World Bank* defines civil society as, "the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations.

*The United Nations* acknowledges civil society as the 'third sector' of society, along with government and business and recognises the importance of partnering with civil society as the institution stresses that CSOs can advance the organization's ideal, and help to support its work.

Civil society organizations refer to a wide array of organizations including community groups, NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations and foundations. So, the civil society is a vibrant, diverse and an evolving space, which is increasingly innovative in its attempts to solve societal challenges and is effectively supporting local, national and global governance as it enables a wide array of people or groups organised to put in concerted efforts to mould rules, official, formal and legal arrangements and informal social constructs.

### 9.3 FEATURES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Diversity is a main feature of the civil society. The academic and research institutes, community based organizations, consumer protection bodies, criminal syndicates, development cooperation groups, environmental campaigns, ethnic lobbies, foundations, farmers' groups, human rights advocates, labour unions, relief organizations, peace activists, professional bodies, religious institutions, women's networks, youth campaigns and many more that are constituted to address problems of socio-economic injustice, human right abuse, environmental protection and many other such challenges fall within the purview of the civil society.

Based on their organizational form, the civil society organizations are formally constituted and registered groups and also, informal unregistered groups. According to Jan Aart Scholte these may include unitary, centralised entities like, the Ford Foundation and the Roman Catholic Church as well as the civic bodies that work as federation through branches across the globe enjoying considerable autonomy from the Central Secretariat. Some civic bodies that work through loose networks are also a constituent of civil society like, the Slum Dwellers International, which arranges periodic exchange visits between community leaders of poor neighbourhoods in major cities of Africa and Asia.

Civil society includes the civic bodies that have a very good resource base, have an effective leadership, motivated members and well trained staff that makes effective use of scientific developments and technology by means of which it maintains a good data bank. It may also include civic bodies that survive on minimal resources and personnels including leader, staff and members and have scarce



material means like, office space or have little or no access to technology. Some establish, maintain and exploit links with the power centres, while others may completely be disconnected from the established power centres.

They use various means and tactics to pursue their ends. It includes campaigning and mobilising public, using various media sources to internet, etc. Their tactics range from peaceful agitation to confrontational discussion. To achieve their objectives, they resort to co-operation with the public authorities and the market agents or even complete disengagement with the established power centres.

In terms of pursuance of its objectives, civil society organizations may be conformists, reformists or radicals. *Conformists* are those that work to uphold and strengthen the existing norms and practices for example, business lobbies, professional associations etc. *Reformists* are those that aspire to modify the flaws in the existing regimes and norms without disturbing the underlying social structure for example, consumer right groups, human rights associations etc. The *Radicals* take an extreme step towards the existing norms and practices and aspire to overhaul the system for its ill-effects and flaws and therefore, aim to comprehensively transform the social order. For example, feminists aspire to end patriarchal social set-up, anarchists aim to end state and its control, religious revivalists firmly oppose secularism and environmentalist oppose industrialization.

It is, however, important to mention that a research/academic institute peacefully engaged with the government authorities are conformists and in the similar vein, radicals involved in the street protests and non-involvement with the government bodies and agencies, necessarily do not highlight the civic body's radical vision. Thus, the civil society despite its wide range of constituencies, institutional forms, capacities and objectives serve the broader goal of social order and economic parity through a wide range of means.

## 9.4 GLOBALIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Over the last few decades, there has been an enormous growth in the number of civil society organizations which vary in terms of objectives, capacity, scope, outreach activities, influence etc. They address challenges emerging due to globalization through various means. This has been rightly termed as 'global associational revolution', which is driven with the same forces that have been responsible for driving globalization viz., integration of economies in diverse ways, spread of technology, spread of democracy and liberal ideology.

Mary Kaldor defines, "global civil society is about 'civilising' or democratising globalization, about the process through which groups, movements and individuals somewhat can demand a global rule of law, global justice and global empowerment. The global civil society feeds on as well as reacts to globalization as the concerns of the global civil society addresses transnational issues that are not bound or limited by the nation-states or local societies. This movement is labelled as an 'anti-globalization movement' and is one of the most globalised movement of the contemporary times. This is the relationship between globalization and civil society.

Globalization is, however, marked with harsh contradictions. Its unevenness and cruelty is compelling people to come together and put in collective efforts to discuss and debate ways to harness the forces of globalization for common good. Interestingly, the benign characteristics of globalization have made possible gatherings like, the World Social Forum (WSF), where thousands of people from large number



of countries organise themselves at a chosen destination at a given time, co-ordinate with distant partners and friends using email and internet to coordinate things like, the programme schedule and travel arrangements, exchange of discussion papers etc.

## 9.5 GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS ROLE IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

The end of Cold War has brought a drastic change in the international relations. The presence of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the international affairs has become relevant and assumed varied roles of advocacy, service providers, knowledge brokers or simply watchdogs and monitors of state and intergovernmental actions. They have gradually gained support from the national and international decision-making bodies. In the post 1990, there has been a tremendous rise in the global civil society that has been instrumental in highlighting the issues of various groups and communities affected by globalization.

The scope of civil society is gradually intensifying as globalization leaves its impact on every aspect of human life that were earlier controlled and regulated through state. As the power and control of state shrinks, CSOs that were initially involved in providing important services to vulnerable communities in diverse areas like, health care, education and professional training, legal advice, humanitarian relief, women's empowerment, technical assistance in agriculture and environmental protection have gradually transformed to provide security to people and providing public services and fill the vacuum created due to the roll back of state, an implication of macro economic reforms. The civil society groups engaged in activities over the years have won the trust of people and emerging as a force that market must reckon and come in harmony with. The growing credibility of CSOs is unquestionable as many governments consistently engage with the CSOs and harness their expertise and knowledge while framing policies and planning for addressing various critical issues.

The civil society organizations play a vital role in empowering various groups and assist these groups of people to voice their concerns and present their issues. A wide range of associations stand in support of disabled persons, youth, lesbians and homosexuals and indigenous peoples. They articulate their grievances by providing them with legal support, information about the national and international laws, advocacy and also, support and motivate these groups to give their movement a transnational character. Environmental movements, consumer groups and human rights advocates make valuable contribution. They impart civic education to the affected groups and raise the concerns to the official authorities especially when various developmental projects jeopardise local communities or consumers or any particular section of the society. There are many civil society foundations with global operations like, Ford, MacArthur, Soros, etc. that provide resources to support grassroots democracy in dozens of countries and have enabled democratic decentralised governance possible in many nations across the globe. Globalization, undoubtedly, has made a detrimental impact on the economies across the globe especially the developing economies due to the biased policies of the United Nations, IMF and the World Bank. Civil society circles are playing a key role in highlighting the shortcomings of these organizations and are involved in activities with an objective to put pressure on these organisations to function on principles of democracy, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness.



### Criticism

Despite the growing relevance and scope of civil society organizations, they face internal and external challenges towards its role in establishing peaceful world order. Some of these are :

Civil society comprises of major transnational NGOs with multi-million dollar operating budgets and also, tiny citizen-based organizations with highly constrained resources, access to information and capacity. Highly structured groups such as, trade unions as well as loose issue-based social movements are a part of CSOs. Although this diversity gives richness and vibrancy to the CSOs, it raises concern whether the less influential constituents in terms of capacity and resources have equal say in the deliberations and debates.

Civil society faces challenge with respect to harmonising of the narrow interests with the broader goals. The constituents of CSOs are diverse and it is difficult to organize them. They focus on the varied specific issues, like, the protection of rain forests, securing the rights of the tribals or indigenous communities or for the rights of women. As a result, CSOs are not effective towards working for the common goals, which often becomes challenging and difficult.

Global civic associations also demonstrate 'democratic deficits' in respect of transparency. Many legal business associations, community groups, labor movements, NGOs, religious bodies and think tanks do not give clarity of their purpose, objectives, funds and how they reach the policy decisions, which questions their credibility.

Many of the CSOs are not registered with the relevant authorities of the countries in which they operate. Further, many global interest keep the public uninformed of their agendas and activities. They, sometimes, function in an undemocratic manner and do not hold regular and independently monitored elections of their officers.

## 9.6 WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

The *World Social Forum* is an open space-movement or mass assemblies of NGOs where contestation take place. WSF, as a representative of world civil society is non-partisan and plural and is a suitable platform that discusses and reflects possible alternatives to the neoliberal globalization model. The supporters of alternative globalization movement in these meetings make efforts for building bridges and dialogues with the political actors, formal national and international politics through networking and learning. They organize strategies and discuss the developments of various movements around the world. It stands in contrast to the formalist representative democracy and traditional international relations.

The annual meeting of WSF is generally held at Porto Alegre, South Brazilian city and also convenes at other places. The WSF as such passes no resolutions and organises no political activities. Organisationally, it has hardly a set of officers and has no official spokesperson. It has a Secretariat in Brazil and a Brazilian Organising Committee composed of eight popular organizations. The meetings of the WSF range from large assemblage of meetings like, the plenary sessions attended by thousands of people and activists. It also conducts medium sized thematic sessions in small rooms attended by limited participants. Within a short span, its influence has grown in terms of its active participation that attributes to its growth numerically and geographically.