

The Role of Civil Society in Social Mobilization: A Case Study of Pakistan

Political Science

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Abstract

This study analysis the role of civil society in a community or a state, it plays a pivotal role in a democratic culture, ideas and ethos to be inculcated in order to create a judicious and conscious political system. It mainly concentrates how to measure the concept of civil society, why civil society has failed to play its genuine and true role in Pakistan. The study has found that due to the nature of the society as well as the lethargic attitudes of the responsible quarters of higher echelon and the lacks of political will it has not taken the true place in our political system.

Keywords: Civil society, Democratic culture, Liberal ideas, Social mobilization

Introduction

Change and transformations are hallmark of an alive society. A community can be judged by dint of its dynamic and vibrant characteristic in a region or a structure of the state. So revamping and re-organization of a community in a high powered and passionate way require accurate thinking. In contemporary social and political movements in the world, civil society organizations take this daunting task to lead them in a straightforward and right directions. In the same way, the Pakistani society has almost relying this aspect of transmutation from the active and enthusiastic groups within the responsive quarter civil society "The Pakistani society is undergoing an enormous change in almost all areas of its existence" (Shaheen, 2012). Hence, change must be accepted with positive mindsets by all sections of Pakistani community. The civil society can play this leading role in a sustained and principled based approach without any pre conceived planning. Pakistan, a state, where most

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people cherish democratic principles, not some circles of higher echelon. “Pakistan is a country where democracy has been idealized, despite the fact that it has been mostly governed by un-democratic and dictatorial regimes” (Shaheen, 2012). It is, therefore, a clear fact that civil society can play a vibrant and a systematic strategy to promote peoples participations in decisions making process. Social mobilization by the civil society is considered a genuine and true movement, not directed towards parochial approach, rather with liberal objectives and goals.

The Term Civil Society

The term civil society has different meaning in the history of political thought. For the Greek, who lived within the city state, were called civil with the passage of time, its sense of meaning transformed, the term civil was coined only for those, who were considered civilized. However, in modern contemporary political thought, its meaning is, that groups and organizations which work collectively to achieve their objectives within the assigned parameters of the constitution. Therefore, “for some of its advocates, the achievement of an independent civil society is a necessary pre-condition for a healthy democracy” (Kenny, 2006). So, it connotes absence and decay of this group may cause many socio-political complexities within the state circle. The term civil emerged from the European thought, but it has spread almost all over the democratic countries democratic, since, totalitarian and dictatorial structure does not allow its existence. So, civil society is contemplated part and parcel of a modern democratic state. The role of a civil society has no doubt widely augmented for the last two decades and it might expand its area in succeeding years also.

Evolution and Development of Civil Society

By civil society, most of the people, liberal ideas of the society. However, it is not the clear picture of the phenomenon. According to Cicero, the Roman thinker, even in Greek society, such a group was there, where it demanded equal rights for all society and also supported the concept of rule of law for community urbanity. “This kind of society was understood in contrast to non-civilized or barbarian peoples” (Kenny, 2006). However, this type of thinking changed with the passage of time by the European concepts of the term. Hobbes gave the name of civil to those who came under the rule of leviathan. On the other hand, Locke claimed the civic sense existed even before the state of nature. So every society has given various dimensions to the term civil in their conceptions. “In nineteenth century German thought. Separated

civil society from state in both ethical and analytical terms and regarded the two as separable and perhaps as opposite” (Kenny, 2006). But the term civil society remains even today as resourceful and powerful as it was in the past. It is considered the conscious voice of the society, which makes efforts to promote equality and rule of law in a community. “A civil society is typically seen as a superior alternative to a barbarian, natural, despotic, traditional, or pre-modern societal order” (Kenny, 2006).

Furthermore, for the last two decades, civil society has gained much importance to the political process of any society. Since, it grasps the intellectuals, Social workers, political workers and other social groups to give practical shapes to any movements. So, it owes its origin from the European soil and now spreads almost all parts of the democratic states of the world.

Definition of Civil Society

Richard Holloway defines civil society in this way, “citizens, associating neither for power nor for profit, are their sector of society, complementing government and business, and they are the people who constitute civil society organizations” (Halloway, 2001). So, according to the aforementioned definition, civil society does not fight for its own power and advantages, rather it seeks to work for the betterment of the society. However, by civil society it does not connote that it invariably criticizes government actions; rather it also appreciates in view of Holloway the positive work of government. Furthermore, civil society makes concerted efforts to incorporate all the active organizations of the society, which are working in different sectors for various purposes and objectives as Haynes aptly remarks, “civil society encompasses “The collectivities of non state organizations, interest groups and associations such as trade unions, professional associations. Further and higher education students and religious bodies, and the media which collectively help maintain a check on the power and totalizing tendency of the state” (Haynes, 1997).

It is, therefore, categorically clear that civil society grasps all other associations which are functioning as pressure groups to evaluate and check the unfettered and unbridled power of a government so, government takes meticulous steps toward undertaking any decisions, which might affect social fabric of a society. Civil society plays its significant role in contemporary political system of a state. Hence, it is a major concern for a social scientist to analyze the social and political change occurring in that time without any predetermined and pre-supposed view. “When a social or political scientist studies human and social behavior he tries to be scientifically precise,

observing changes in social and political phenomena in different periods of time, or noting differences in institutions and practices in different societies” (ALmand, Powell, Storm, & Dalton). So, a change can be mobilized by civil society organizations in contemporary world generally, since, they are considered the proclaimed voice of aggrieved parties.

The Term Social Mobilization

By social mobilization, we mean a process, where civil society mobilizes the civil population in a systematized and regularized manner to make demands to the government regarding any social, political and economic sphere of society. This type of movement mostly takes root at the grass-root level. Some time, such a movement might generate a revolutionary movement, such as, Arab spring. However, some time such movement also utilize by the elites of the society, the case of Nazi Germany is one of the prime example of it. Social movement organizers may use large public gatherings, such as mass meetings, demonstrations and processions. The said methods are considered a demonstrative way of protest agitation politics.

Definition of Social Mobilization

One may define the social mobilization, a methodological and theatrical system, where civil population is organized and motivated by the pressure groups to exert extreme pressure on government to accept their possible demands.

“Mass mobilization is a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through face-to-face dialogue” (http://www.unicef.org/index_42347.html).

It is, therefore, clear from the above mentioned definition, that social mobilization undertakes a wide range of groups, members of political parties, intellectuals, civic and religious groups of the community. So, it is a coordinated program launched by the different sections of the society in an interrelated way. It facilitates the change of progress and tries to uproot and eradicate the mindset of status quo in a conservative society.

An Over All View of Civil Society in Social Mobilization

It is not necessary that social mobilization is invariably launched by the civil groups of the society. Some times, it is carried and started by the government itself to promote its agendas. Even many governments themselves try to convince and mobilize the masses to participate in election process and activity engage in political parties election campaigns. “It is important for political parties in any country to be able to mobilize voters in order to gain support for their parties, which affects voter turnout in general” (Winders, 1999). In the same way, the government of Nazi Germany applied mass mobilization techniques to gain favor for their parochial agendas. “Such events appealed to the people’s emotions to cause patriotic fanaticism for the fascist cause” ([http://www.britannica.com/Ebchecked/topic/202210/fascism/21937/mass mobilization.](http://www.britannica.com/Ebchecked/topic/202210/fascism/21937/mass%20mobilization))

On the other hand, civil society makes coordinated efforts and orchestrates well-thought out plans to mobilize people. Apply media group is considered one of the most pervasive and powerful tool used by the social mobilization organizers. They are truly aware about its significance for the promotion of their cause and strategy.

Even in contemporary world, such media techniques, internet sources have brought revolutions for any such movements, since, they disseminate ideas.

“The internet has grown in political importance, and has played a significant role in many mass mobilization efforts” (Best & Kruege, 2005). So, its major role can not be overlooked and ignored keeping in view the scope of media.

Furthermore, the meaning of civil society in social mobilization has tremendously gone to different dimensions. In the past, political, social and economic aspects were separated, however, now, they are inexplicably interlinked and interwoven to one another. “The shifting meaning of the concept of civil society indicates changing theoretical attitudes towards the relationship between economy, society and state” (Mirza, 2002). So, the nature of the civil society is becoming complex with the each passing days. Society’s relationships are chemging and transforming swiftly. But one thing is categorically clear that only democracy can permit and allow civil society to flourish and nurture itself within its jurisdiction.

A controlled and guided civil society does not work independently and freely, which is considered one of the basic requirements of its grooming and development.

Evolution of Civil Society in Pakistan

Civil society takes roots, where the state structure system encourages the liberal thinking and education. In Pakistan, particularly civil society emerged during the 1990s. Because in that time, NGOs were embolden to spread new thinking within the circle of the society. As Zaidi explains it “Governance, democracy, and devolution form a critical union to make development sustainable, and are said to manifest the key pre-requisites for progress” (Zaidi, 1999). From the above view, it is crystal clear that government support and democratic principles are sine qua non for the emergence of civil society. Since, devolution as Zaidi described plays a significant role for fostering this principle. Decentralization of power would enable to the common masses at the gross root level to solve their problems. Awareness and issue resolving strategy embolden them to actively participate in any matter. So, the role of NGOs enhanced with the passage of time from 1980s to 1990s. The decades of 1980s and the 1990s, saw an unprecedented growth and increasing role of the non governmental sector in development and planning. However, the true face of civil society came in Pakistan, against Mushraf regime, when he ousted the sitting chief justice of Pakistan. The lawyer’s community mobilized the conscious sections of the society and initiated a wide range of agitations and demonstrations throughout the country in the protest against such step. People supported them in this regard, “Pakistani Lawyers that denounced Musharraf’s action as illegal and demanded chaudry’s reinstatement” (Zaidi S. A., 2008). Therefore, it can be / might be argued that lawyers movement paved the true path of emergence of civil society in Pakistan.

Civil Society and Social Mobilization in Pakistan

A vibrant and energetic civil society undeniably plays an enduring and long lasting role in Pakistan, if it is directed in a right path without any ulterior motives of any group. In Pakistan, civil society did not play its true and genuine role, until, the last period of Musharaff era. Before, it was proverbially inactive, as compare to other countries of world “zaidi, explicitly highlights this view, when he said, “once apparently nonexistent, Pakistan’s civil society now dominates much of the discussion about politics in that country today” (Zaidi S. A., 2008).

The true and real picture of civil society in the role of social mobilization came, when General Mushraff ousted, then the chief justice iftikhar Muhammad chaudry. The lawyers community refused to comply, with this decree, so resulted, a wide range of demonstrations and agitations in the

jurisdiction of Pakistan. They organized and systematized all the processes and progress with the thought out strategy orchestrated all walks of lives to raise their voices against the disfiguring the basic tenets of constitutional supremacy in the state.

However, in Pakistan, the phenomenon is not as easy as someone comprehends it, because the nature of the society is not susceptible to any wide range social movement. Initially, the NGOs started different initiatives to mobilize people in order to make possible the participation of the masses. "The old is certainly dwindling to give way to the new. The process seems to be a complex one and thus the comprehension of this phenomenon is also not so simple" (Shaheen, 2012).

On the other hand, due to the inactive role of civil society, it created a wide fissure for the democratic principles and values within the society. Since, democracy does not only mean to change government, but also social transformations must be practiced in letter and spirit from all walks of life nevertheless, in our state, such pragmatism has not been practiced yet. "Democracy has not been fully realized yet, and achievements of Pakistan in democratic governance are also not satisfactory" (Team, 2008).

The emergence of civil society is considered to be an excellent step towards the practice of democracy. However, in Pakistan, the complex problem is that many magnitude of society consider democracy, as a form of westernization.

As S. Akbar Zaid remarks, "for Pakistani civil society, whether westernized or Islamized, the issue in short was not democracy versus non-democracy, but rather liberalism versus some variously interpreted set of Islamic symbols and values" (Zaidi S. A., 2008).

The existence of civil society in a state means, the state is ready to give some powers to them. Since, it plays the role of a watchdog. They criticize the harsh steps of a government and also appreciate the positive initiatives of it. The new set of relations, also called co-governance meant the power is no longer concentrated in the state. The state and its instruments of government remain of central importance: but it is no longer the sole actor in determining the direction of society. However, in Pakistan, the case is diametrically opposite. The civil society's organizations and institutions have not received advantageous support from the responsible quarters of the government, that's why their active participation in governmental section is minimum.

Civil society's mobilization means, giving equal rights to all citizens living within the jurisdiction of the state. It reflects and upholds the dignity of all citizens. In Pakistan, the emergences of civil society's organizations owe their existence due to the vibrant role of human rights groups in our society. They are playing their pivotal role in this regard. "Civil society organizations

grew in number, and they particularly took up the task of advocacy for human rights” (Shaheen, 2012). Since, the civil society works within the defined parameters of constitutional framework. They fight for the true and genuine human rights. So, civil society holds everyone accountable for his / her actions. So, pursuing common good is the hallmark of social mobilization launched by the civil society organizations.

However, it does not mean that civil society organizations only work within the state, rather they try to gain the support and favor from all over the world. Since they are fully aware about the concerted efforts in world wide level. The Arab spring was one of prime example in this regard. Today, the civil society organizations are not only limited to classical theory of communications. The utilized and applied different means to achieve the goal objective oriented conference.

“National groups meet at international conferences and policy forums, and the network of social relations as well as internet connections, extends across national borders” (ALmand, Powell, Storm, & Dalton).

So, the civil society’s organizations establish and formulate policies at national and international level for the mobilization of masses; the citizens of different states come together to give one another favour for the positive programmes, like people in different regions looking for the promotion of democratic process. “The process of building new independent associational groups to articulate the specialized interest of different citizen is underway and will be important to the democratic process” (ALmand, Powell, Storm, & Dalton).

However, in Pakistan, the problem underlying within the civil society’s organizations, because they have not been working in a sustained and vigorous way. Therefore, social mobilization in Pakistan has been limited within the circle of some pressure groups. A civil society can be energetic and dynamic when it is given political shape as Akbar said, “Civil society is critical but political society matters as much, if not more” (Zaidi S. A., 2008). So political society is regarded as the captain of the ship, without to it, ship would flout aimlessly.

For the mobilization of civil society political society is crucial, because they work for the formulation of public opinion. Without strong public opinion, transformation and changes in the status quo would be a daunting task. “Public opinion can help bring about various reforms by putting pressure on government leaders”. Therefore, it goes without any saying that the public opinion is one of the strongest tool and instrument for the formation of social behavior in the contemporary world. The civil society should whole heartedly in Pakistan work to formulate a vibrant public opinion regarding important

issues of country political, social, economic and particularly constitutional aspect.

Problems Facing Civil Society in Pakistan to Social Mobilization

In today's Pakistan, the civil society has been facing problems from its inception. The nature of the state and nature of the society have not been conducive to this sphere. Therefore, the civil society is said to be still under developed.

“The civil society in Pakistan has also been under-developed” (Shaheen, 2012). If civil society has been developed, there would have not been any of human rights violations in the country especially regarding the rights of women.

“The worth mentioning achievements of the civil society have been in the domain of women's rights, and to some extent children's rights” (Shaheen, 2012).

On the other hand, civil society has been struggling to achieve political rights for all sections of the society without any distinctions. However, this area has not been utilized in real sense of the term. Different political parties have not supported this cause of the civil society so far. No doubt, the civil society have demonstrated in most of the part of the political history of the country, whenever, seen by the conscious voice of the society. “There have been movements for upholding political rights as well, when the state was out right. Violating them” (Shaheen, 2012). So, the role of the civil society undeniable, even, so guided and checks and balances in our system. “Civil society has been asserting its character as a guardian of democracy at various times” (Shaheen, 2012).

However, it is not necessary that people should follow any movement without realizing its potential consequences. People should be fully aware about the nature of their demands, agitations and demonstrations. No doubt, that civil society promotes democratic ideas and principles, but it does not require and essential that all programs and agitations would bring possible positive results.

As Pasha refers “the expansion of civil society means democratic advance, but also states the view that blind faith might also take its root there” (Pasha, 1997)

The civil society has not developed, because state has not allocated sufficient funds for their development. Without the support of government, it is not an easy task to develop the concept of tolerance and accommodative views. However, in Pakistan, The nature of the society is still in complex form, regarding the nature of the society Iftikar, H. Malik comments, “It is inherently centralized, denying participatory politics owing to its colonial heritage”

(Malik, 1997). Hence, in centralized system where Biradari system runs and considered the sole motive of people, the concept of civil society can not take tools easily.

Furthermore, in social sector government concern has not been remarkable. Civil society not only works in a simple democratic environment but also requires conducive and congenial system. However, this seems to be absent in Pakistan, where funds are allocated for non development sector a lot but not for social sector. “This state has characteristics of a typical third world state, because it generously allocates to non development sectors, leaves the vital social sectors in doldrums, hence damages the basis of the civil society” (Malik, 1997).

Moreover, society and state is more diversified common masses have not been able to achieve their true and genuine status. They have not been awarded true place in polity of Pakistan. Most of the time, only feudal lords and industrialists have ruled the country. So, the share of common masses in terms of government affairs is minimum. “Regarding its function, The state here faces the challenge of creating harmony and maintaining a social order which could fulfill the aspirations of peoples, who belong to different ethnicities, are in different social structures, at different levels of development, and follow different socio political norms” (Shaheen, 2012).

Thus, such structure and environment have unabled a true civil society to emerge. A viable civil society can play wide role in this regard to mobilize masses regarding the rights bestowed upon to them through constitutional guarantee. Constitution of the Pakistan has given every citizen of this country to take part in political activities (within the parameters of constitution) social and economic spheres.

However the state polity has ignored this vital aspect. “To a greater degree, the recurring dilemma of Pakistan’s govern ability is rooted in the dichotomous relationship between an all power full ever transcendent, and vetoing state structure and a feeble, ill organized, and vulnerable civil society” (Shaheen, 2012).

It is, therefore, deplorable fact that civil society is still considered feeble in Pakistan.

Conclusion

It is clear from the afore-mentioned point that civil society’s role is undeniable in modern socio-political movements. It holds accountable every one for his / her actions, promotes democratic ethos and values, protect human rights and foster the accommodative views of other. Initially, NGOs worked under the setup of the state and other civil society’s organizations.

Nevertheless, now the phenomenon has changed in Pakistan, civil society's organizations and groups criticize the government policies openly without any fear and favour lawyer's movement against Mushrraf government. To day's politics the human rights groups often reprimand government actions the human right activist are considered the vibrant voice of the civil society's organizations. Therefore, they mobilize huge gatherings in such times, whenever required. The role of civil society is enhancing day by day in Pakistan. It makes aware people regarding their place in the state. People are becoming conscious, due to the active role of civil society in our country. However, the civil society should incorporate the true mindset of the society within its own sphere not from outside of its structure, as Ashfaq Saleem Mirza remarked, "In Pakistan, we are trying to introduce the concept of civil society from outside" (Mirza, 2002). So, the structure of class system should be removed and democratic principles and ethos be promoted in order that the mobilization of any movement should be directed in an objective oriented destiny by the civil society.

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