

Caste and Civil Society in India

Introduction to Sociology

This lecture

What is civil society? What is the relationship between democracy and civil society?

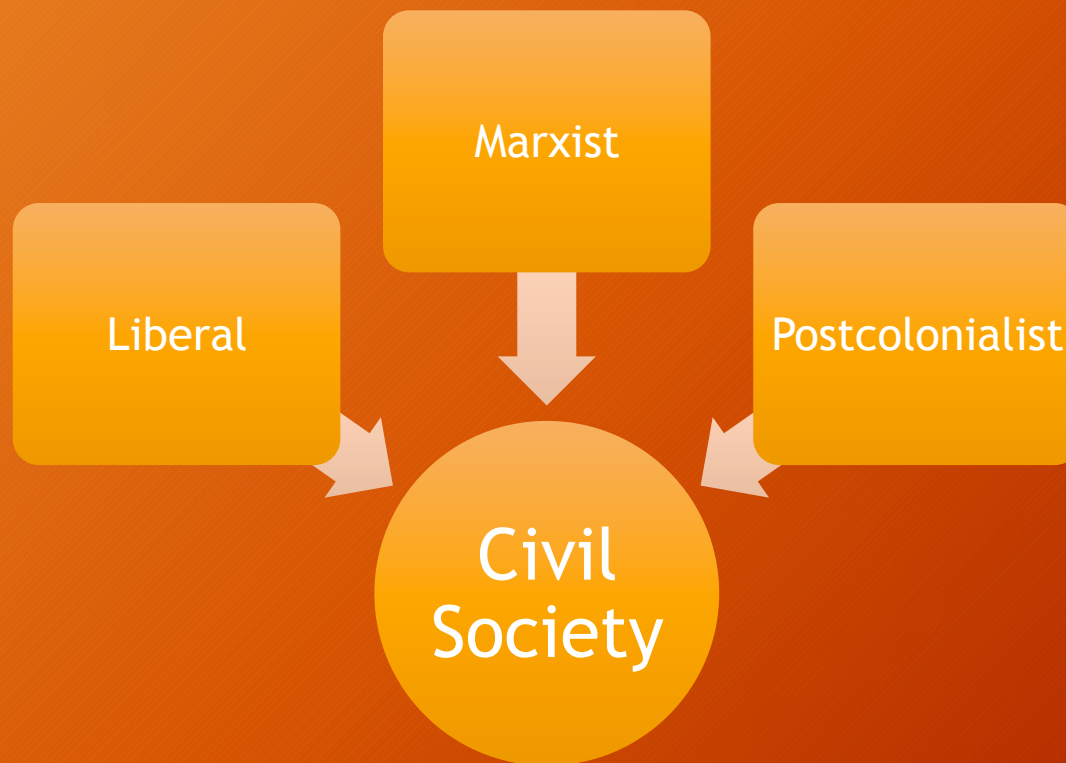
Is civil society intrinsically linked to liberal western thought and societies?

Is there a civil society in India? How do caste and civil society intersect?

What is civil society?

- Civil Society is a space between family and state which does not include the economy.
- Civil society could in concrete form could refer to organisations and associations formed through individuals who join such associations voluntarily
- Central to the idea of civil society is citizenship (autonomous individual)
- The role, form and outcomes of civil society is however debated.

Approaches to Civil Society



Liberal Ideas of Civil Society

- Intermediate associations between state and family – enjoy autonomy in relation to state, formed voluntarily
- Linked to democracy and growth of strong middle classes
- Important to have a public sphere that is Modular as opposed to Segmental
- Civil society key constituent of democratisation and democratic processes

Challenges for liberals

- Failure to consider uncivil tendencies
- Historic teleology
- A vibrant civil society leads to accountable state?
- For Marxists it is almost the opposite – Civil Society as an arena in which state perpetuates its power through hegemonic rather than coercive means.

Marxist and Gramscian Perspectives

- Civil society stands between economic structure and state
- Civil society as primary vehicle of state hegemony
- Intellectuals → state legitimate
- Hegemonic influence → private organisations church, trade unions, schools.
- Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser)

State, hegemony and counter hegemony

- The ideology that a class in power makes the ruling ideology is indeed realised in those ISA's (form of realising ideology).
- Gramsci believed in the counter-hegemonic potential of civil society but focused on hegemony
- State can be more progressive than Civil society- CS can be site of oppression and exclusion (Laclau and Mouffe)

Postcolonialist

- Civil society introduced to discipline colonial subjects → Civilising Mission
- Colonial rule made caste into civil society (Nicholas Dirks)
- In India Civil Society is about Elites (Masses have political Society)

Civil Society and Public Sphere in India

- No civil society in India before colonial rule (Beteille)
- If there was a public sphere it belonged to elites not open to women and downtrodden (Hasan)
- Civil society came with colonial rule and so did “communal politics”
- Between *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (civil society) -> Local civil societies

Current Indian Debates

- Some Liberals Suggests that India is a democracy without civil society/associations (?)
- Even political parties are civil society (Varshney) and associations curb ethnic violence
- CS however is localised in its interaction with caste, and has retained both ascriptive and non-ascriptive features in post colonial period – *Gemeinschaft* version of *Gesellschaft* a local necessity.
- Substantialisation of caste (Caste become solid block and cooperate and compete with other castes)

Caste and Civil Society - together?

THE
LIBERAL
AMBEDKAR?

The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste.

Dr. B.R Ambedkar(1987: 48)

Civil Society - Colonial

- Gandhian Nationalism
- Hindu Nationalist Movement- From reform to revival. Muslims and Christianity as *Other*.
- Lower caste subaltern social movements- *oppressed past as other*. - Namashudra movement, Phule-Ambedkarite movement, Ad-dharm movement (mobilising against caste dominance) .

Civil society- the postcolonial

- Constitution facilitated evolution of specific nature of civil society - SC/ST, political party based associationalism (Jenkins).
- Hindu nationalist movement moved from volunteerism to party politics (Bhartiya Janata Party).
- Most low caste mobilisation have shown a tendency to actively engage in electoral politics (Bahujan Samaj Party).

Civil Society- what happens to caste?

- Modularity as a function of democratic politics and ideology based mobilisation.
- Caste thrives across parties and party politics.
- Non party- associations may be caste free (like RSS) but still have caste currents.
- BAMCEF, BSP, JDS – Modular organisations emerging from below.
- Finally, Civil Society is about associations that diminish caste hierarchy and consolidate equality

