UNIT 19   THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Structure

19.0   LEARNING OUTCOME

After regarding this Unit, you will be able to :

- Understand the concept of civil society

- Throw light on the relationship among the State, market and civil society

- Analyse the contemporary context of civil society

- Appreciate the role of civil society organisations in the globalisation context of 'governance' and 'development'

- Discuss the various challenges before the civil society; and

- Examine the changing role of the civil society

19.1   INTRODUCTION

The role of civil society in its many forms has assumed significance in recent times under the Neo-liberal doctrine of 'downsizing' the State and the World Bank touted 'governance' concept.   The present 'globalisation' discourse has also tended to reinforce the role of civil society in the management of many socio-economic areas that hitherto belonged to the State. The State is now being projected as a facilitator and coordinator of the private and non-government sectors involved in governance. Various new developments have given rise to different types of civil society associations that are beginning to influence policy decisions. These include a fundamental change in the State's commitment to welfare, reduction of social security provisions, and disenchantment of people with government policies.   Other contributing factors are the disintegration of East European States following the Velvet Revolution, global accent on State minimalism, growing role of multiple actors in governance; and success of voluntary initiatives as well as corporate ventures.   As a result, the civic sector or civil society sector is emerging as a viable proposition to supplement or complement the functions of the State and the market.

The contemporary meaning of civil society, as an integral part of society, and a kind of sphere outside and distinct from the political or market sphere, is slowly emerging in the globalisation context. Civil society organisations have a specific relevance in the present globalisation era , where market forces are trying to hijack the traditional State-owned areas. The growing emphasis on 'State minimalism' has created a space, which needs to be filled by the civic institutions that could function with welfare, social justice, economic equity and humane development as their goals. Civil society is steadily emerging to facilitate and promote non-state activities under the Neo-liberal doctrine of State roll-back. In the context of developing countries, the civil society is making its presence felt to promote and facilitate participative development projects and create conditions for people's empowerment and deepening of democracy.

The most crucial problem arises due to the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of civil society, which is sometimes contrasted with the State as well as the market, but sometimes the State itself is seen as comprising the civil society. The term 'civil society' is generally defined as a particular group of society with a clearly demarcated purpose, functions, organisation and means in pursuit of its agenda. It is, however, a rather broad concept that is hard to outline. The debate continues about what civil society means and this spills over into its relationship with the State and the market.

The civil society actors have come to be known as the civil society organisations or the institutions of civil society. They could be considered as a country's 'social capital', which refers to the capacity of the States or societies to establish a sense of community that leads a significant proportion of the society in voicing their concern , seeking active involvement in the affairs of the community, and also sharing the benefits of community action. Other terms used to describe civil society organisations are 'civic institutions 'social movements', 'non-governmental organisations', 'non-profit organisations', 'third party sector', 'private voluntary organisations', and 'independent advocacy groups'.

The civil society, thus in common parlance, refers to networks and relationships of those groups that are not organised or managed by the State. It is expected to identify major problems in society, articulate current issues, empower the disadvantaged, serve as an independent voice in strategic debates, and provide a constructive forum for exchange of ideas and information between the key actors in the policy process. The civil society encompasses enormous diversity. In terms of membership and constituents, it includes just about all types of associations. For example, academic institutes, community based organisations, consumer protection bodies, environmental campaigns, human rights' forums, labour unions, relief organisations, professional bodies, religious institutions, women's networks, youth campaigns and sometimes even business associations could fall under civil society. The viewpoints on the composition of civil society are varied and debatable in the absence of a consensus on its nature and scope.

The meaning of civil society organisations can be best understood in the light of the relationship of civil society with the State as well as the market. In the contemporary context, both State and the market determine the complexion of civil society. This Unit aims at addressing the issues pertaining to the role and domain of civil society organisations in the contemporary 'governance' and 'development' contexts. It throws light on the problems and constraints in conceptualising their role. The Unit also traces the evolution of the concept of civil society, and tries to give a perspective on the futuristic role of the civil society organisations.

19.2   EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Right from times of scholars like Aristotle and Cicero, until the appearance of John Locke and others on the political scene in the 17th century, the term civil society was used interchangeably with political society and the State. The self-conscious and self-confident bourgeois class was known as civil society. To these classical philosophers, as has been pointed out, "To be a member of a civil society was to be a citizen – a member of the State" (Karlson, 2002). Originally, civil society is a European phenomenon. The earliest development of civil society as a non-political identity is associated with complex social and economic forces at work in the 18th century, as the power devolved from monarchs to popular assemblies. The philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment first articulated the idea of civil society. These philosophers were able to bring out the universality of civil society as a solution to the particularity of the market sphere that was increasingly responsible for redefining the then estates system of feudal society (Baker, 2002).

Hegel was the first philosopher to develop a recognisably modern notion of civil society in his philosophy of rights. He sought to resolve the contradictions that existed in civil society as a result of its peculiarity by reference to the universal State. It is only at this point that the State and the civil society came to be regarded as separate spheres (*ibid.*). To Hegel, however, civil society was identical with the private and the particularistic, and characterised by the conflicting and avaricious striving of individuals and classes for largely materialistic ends, while the State was seen as the embodiment of universal ethical values and rational civilization (Karlson, *op.cit.*).

It was Antonio Gramsci, who isolated civil society as a category of importance in its own right. Gramsci characterised civil society as the realm of culture and ideology, or more concretely as the 'associational realm'. Gramsci rejected the dichotomous view in which the State is counterposed to civil society and in which the latter embraces all non-state and non-public relations. For Gramsci, civil society exists as a kind of intermediary, linked both with the economic structure and with the State (Cf Baker, *op.cit.*)

Various Schools of thought have added to the understanding of the concept of civil society. The Relative Autonomy approach of Neo-Marxists has underlined the limitations of State-centric theory that has led to a definitive shift from State to civil society. The other influences have come from Pluralists and Neo-pluralists.Robert Putnam's Social Capital approach, which will be discussed later in this Unit and the New Communitarian perspective of Amitai Etzioni and Vincent Ostrom have added immensely to the vast literature on civil society discourse. The New Communitarians seek to restore the ailing institutions by changing people's values, attitudes and behaviour, thereby rendering major structural reforms less necessary. They aim to develop a 'responsive community', by striking a balance between the community and autonomy, and empowering community structures. The New Communitarian concepts, as has been pointed out by Brathwaite (2001), are said to 'derive from grass roots activity providing local communist activists with conceptual horizons that reflect cumulative activist wisdom'.

The evolution of the concept of civil society encompassing various perspectives attempts to define its meaning and scope with relation to the State and the market. Therefore, any discussion on civil society without an analysis of the role of the State and the market and also their relationship with civil society is fraught with problems. They all define, limit and complement each other. We have briefly discussed this aspect in Units 2, 8 and 14 of this course. This Unit examines this issues further. The

historical growth of civil society, as we have seen, has outlined the functions of civil society institutions in terms of its association with the State and private associations. The modern meaning of civil society has to take off from here and locate itself broadly within the relationship among the State, market and civil society in the and 'governance', 'development' contexts in the backdrop of globalisaiton.

19.3   RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE STATE, MARKET AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The contemporary relationship between the State and civil society originates from classical Liberalism. Liberal theory considers civil society to be a necessary condition for democratic States. Central to Liberalism, it has been observed, is the distinction between the public and the private spheres. The public sphere is based on representative government and the Rule of Law. The private sphere is that area of individual action, contract, and market exchange, which is protected by and yet independent of the State (Barber, 1996).

A highly articulated civil society with cross-cutting cleavages, overlapping memberships of groups, and social mobility is the presupposition for a stable democratic polity, a guarantee against permanent domination by any one group and against the emergence of fundamentalist mass movements and anti-democratic ideologies. As Joel Migdal (2001) observes the State is hemmed in – indeed transformed- by these internal forces, just as it is by international forces. He adds that the society is also transformed by the State. Social organisations, and the structure of society as a whole, are moulded by the opportunities and impediments that the State presents, just as they are affected by other social organisations and by the openings and limitations posed by the world economy.

It has been observed by Neera Chandhoke (1995) that the site at which society enters into a relationship with the State can de defined as civil society. It is accordingly conceptualised as a space or public sphere where people can pursue self-defined ends in an associational area of common concerns. A space, which nurtures and sustains its inhabitants through discussion rather than controls them and their relationships. The other implication is that it is desirable that this discussion is public in the sense of being accessible to all. The third implication is that a space should exist outside officially prescribed channels of communication provided by the State, where this 'free' public discussion and debate can take place. The inhabitants of this space are linked together by social bonds created out of new identities and new institutions.

Civil society comprises the social realm in which the creation of norms, identities, institutions, and social relations of domination and resistance are located (Cohen and Arato, 1994). The contemporary civil society, however, is more in tandem with the State. Even the concept of civil society generated by new social movements, as has been rightly observed, does not necessarily deny or undermine the validity of modern State apparatuses. The new social movements have no desire to question the legitimacy of the State or directly take over the State (Gupta, 1999).

What is noticeable about civil society is its supposed interchangeability with the NGOs. Even though the NGOs are the major constituents of civil society, they still do not make for the entire gamut of civil society organisations. As NGOs constitute a major part of civil society organisations, their organisation needs to be looked into. In the globalisation scenario, we should know how these NGOs operate at the local, regional and international levels.   Julie Fisher(1998) talks of two major types of

NGOs: i) Locally based Grass Roots Organisations (GROs), and ii) Nationally or regionally based development assistance organisations called Grass Roots Support organisations (GRSOs). GRSOs are usually staffed by professionals who channel international funds to GROs and help communities other than their own to develop.

In addition to these vertical connections between GROs and GRSOs, there are two other types of NGOs in the Third World defined by their horizontal connections with each other-GRO networks linking local communities to one another, and networks of GRSOs. The two most common types of GROs are local development associations, such as village councils or neighbourhood associations that represent an entire community, and interest associations that represent particular groups within a community. A third type of GRO includes borrowers groups, pre-cooperatives, and cooperatives, which may or may not make profits (*ibid.*).

In recent years, the NGOs have begun to look beyond their local and regional roles and have become increasingly adept at bonding together in common purpose. By pooling resources and co-ordinating their actions, they have even strengthened their presence in international deliberations on a range of global issues. Thus, there is now what we can term an emerging 'International civil society' (Callahan , 2002, *op.cit.*). The concept of global civil society is hardly new, although the term has come into widespread circulation recently. Over the past few years, efforts to strengthen cross-border links among NGOs have run parallel to the far more visible crusade to create International Government Organisations (IGOs) that could bring the Rule of Law to global affairs. The early 1990s have produced attempts to institutionalise global civil society, especially in the United States and Europe.

Some scholars, feel that globalisation has contributed to the weakening of the abilities of the States and inter-governmental organisations to govern, especially in the economic sphere, while strengthening civil society in many countries in the world and planting the seeds for an evolving global civil society (Schechter, 1999). The democratising function of civil society has assumed a higher profile, and NGOs have been identified as a possible point of contact with its building blocks, namely civil associations. Coupled with these changes has been an increasing awareness among NGOs of their own potential role in the wider development picture, which as we will discuss later, has come to denote the most conspicuous face of civil society.

The process has been spurred on by the United Nations (UN), which has moved to the fore in promoting civil society as a development issue. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) have introduced procedures to provide voluntary associations with greater access to their systems. Assumptions about the nature of NGOs have allowed the issue of 'access' by the voluntary sector to dominate discussions about civil society within the UN (Whaites, 2000).

While discussing the relationship between the State, market and civil society, in the globalisation context, one of the important questions that crops up relates to just what exactly should civil society constitute. Should markets be included in the notion of civil society? Classic Liberals tend to regard markets as crucial institutions of civil society, and contemporary Liberals see productive and commercial associations and networks as part of civil society. By contrast, the Left emphasises equality and democratic control over the market economy. Many are wary of the dangers of markets and separate them from civil society in their tripartite model, which incorporates the civil society, the State and the market sector. As a corollary, it is

also debatable whether multinational firms can be regarded as part of the emerging global civil society (Baogang, 2002).

Sometimes, civil society is referred to as the third sector. The third sector concept has been developed to help distinguish non-profit NGOs from the State sector and private profit sector or to characterise what has been described as "The space that is neither government nor business, occupied by citizens who take actions responsive to their needs" (McGann and Weaver, 2000). The Civil society comprises collectivity of those social organisations that enjoy autonomy from the State and have as one important goal among others to influence the State on behalf of their members. A strong civil society directly supports democratic participation, ensures the rights and probity of the citizenry, and contributes towards the deepening of accountability for policy decisions.

Based on freedom of association, civil society provides a check on and a balance to the other two sectors (government and the market) via citizen societies, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), and other associations (Callahan, 2002, *op.cit.*). Clearly, the precise boundaries of non-governmental activity are a matter of debate. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that civil society lies outside the public sector of official governance. Second, civil society is not the market, it is a non-commercial realm. No doubt, there are borderline cases, but it is generally agreed that civil society lies outside the private sector of market economy. But again anything that is non-governmental or non-commercial cannot be called civil society (Scholte, 2000).

There is, thus, no agreement on the constitution of the civil society. It has been stated that the definition of civil society depends on the 'philosophical vantage points'. The structure, relationships, activities and environment of civil society all qualify as the parameters of its definition (Rahman *et al.,* 2000). In the globalisation context, its domain still remains hazy. The present day civil society has to be different from its earlier counterparts, as it does not have to so much deal with only the national and regional problems. It has to now adjust itself to the global influences that come not in the form of 'choices' but 'diktats'. The overlapping of market, State and civil society boundaries may conflate the purpose of civil society, which appears to have reemerged with a defined agenda of an enabler and a facilitator.

19.4   CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The contemporary meaning of civil society, as we just read, regards it as a non-commercial sphere that works in tandem with the market and the State. Its aim is not to dislodge the State or the market, but better their condition through applying pressure on the State and the market in the form of protests, participation, mediation and information. The current meaning of civil society, it has been felt, is more in tune with the Cosmopolitan rather than the Pluralist or Elitist view of democracy that does not curb the State or restrict the civil society. In fact, it talks of enhancement of non-state and non-market solutions in the organisation of civil society as well as increasing the role of global civil society. It is believed that civil society can constructively contribute toward building a positive relationship between the State and the market.

The recent reemergence of civil society has been more of a response to excessive Statism in East European nations. The social movements in Poland were characterised as the rise of 'civil society against the State'. And the Polish movement was defined as the 'rebirth of civil society'. It is being seen as the salvation of both socialist and capitalist societies suffering from an overdose of bureaucratic rationality (Chandhoke,

1995, *op.cit.*). The concept of reconstruction of civil society has also been revived in the West. In the former West Germany, the Welfare State is seen as a mechanism by which to repoliticise the economy and dissolve the sharp boundaries between the State and the society. In France, there has been a totalitarian expansion of capitalism, which engulfs all spheres of social activity under single dimension of economic activity (Baogang, *op.cit.*).

Robert Putnam's 'Social Capital' has brought the age-old issue of civil society to the forefront. Rahman Sobhan (1998) feels that Putnam actually attacks the social science tradition that views "The actors of the State and society locked in a zero-sum game and argues that highly active civic associations are strongly associated with effective public institutions. Norms and networks of civil engagement have actually promoted economic growth instead of inhibiting it". Robert Putnam, as has been pointed out, shows that the regions of Italy that have both flourished economically and suffered less corruption are those that have fostered social capital formation. These are regions where citizens are more trusting of one another in civil society (Brathwaite and Strang, 2001).

Rahman Sobhan *(op.cit.)* also adds that Putnam's approach is essentially society-centred. The nature of distribution of power in the society and the quality of civicness will determine whether a vicious or virtuous circle dominates the governance structure. The role of the State is seen as a dependent variable. Putnam emphasises a symbiotic relationship between the State and the community. The State's action or policy contributes to the development of trust and networks of civic engagement among members of the community and they in turn become sources of discipline and information for the public agencies as well as dependable agencies for implementation of public projects.

There are many other reasons for the renewed interest in civil society. The civil society, it has been put forth, has become a theme of compelling interest throughout the world, as citizen activism and democratisation encounter post-cold war realignment of religious fundamentalism, economic development and other forces. Public fatigue with tired party systems has sparked interest in civil society as a means of social renewal. Especially, in the developing world, privatisation and other market reforms offer civil society the chance to step in wherever the governments have retracted their reach. Finally, the Information and Technology revolution has provided new tools for forging connections and empowering citizens (Callahan, 2002, *op.cit.*).

In the globalisation context, the growing role of the NGOs and the global civil society has also characterised the reeemergence of civil society. Bilateral and multilateral aid donors have switched significant fractions of their budgets from national governments to NGOs (Pearce, 2000). The 1990s has seen a surge in civil society as well as global society organisations. The proliferation of NGOs throughout the world has spurred interest in what has been called "the space of uncoerced human association" (Fisher, *op.cit.*).

In recent years, the social capital concept appears to have been caught on with the influential global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The idea of civil society has now taken on a political dimension as some donors have become preoccupied with 'Good Governance' about which you have read in Unit 17 of this Course. This tendency has acquired an economic as well as moral rationale with the World Bank in its 1991Report, democracy projecting as not only ethically desirable but also more efficient (Whaites, *op.cit.).* The World Bank is beginning to recognise that civil society plays a critical role in helping to

amplify the voices of the poorest people in the decisions that affect their lives, improve development effectiveness and sustainability, and hold governments and policymakers publicly accountable. The success stories of the sustained voluntary efforts need to be taken note of in order to strengthen the civil society.

19.5 RELEVANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY FOR GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

In the globalisation context, 'governance' is not just confined to either State or market. Instead these two actors are collaborating with each other to provide goods and services. With the reappearance of a vibrant civil society, this process has now become mltiple actor- centric with NGOs, CBOs, Self-help groups acting as responsible stakeholders with the State and market in the process of governance and development. The two ways of governance – Keynesian Welfare State and Neo-liberalism have not produced the desired results, points out Anthony Giddens (2001), as he observes "A fundamental theme of third way politics is rediscovering an activist role for government, restoring and refurbishing public institutions. Reforming the State is far from easy in practice, but the aim should be to make government and State agencies transparent, customer-oriented and quick on their feet".

Reform of government and the State is the first priority. The State should not dominate either markets or civil society, only regulate the both. The core role of the civil society has to be realised. Without a developed civil society there cannot be an effective market system or well-functioning government (*ibid.*). Let us now look at the various endeavours in the area of civil society and see how these can be tapped to facilitate development and governance.

There is an urgent need for the government, civil society and private sector to work as partners in crucial areas of participatory development. Without a civil society to nourish engaged citizens, it has been observed, politicians turn into 'professionals', out of touch with their constituencies; while citizens are reduced to mere antagonists or turn into ungrateful clients of government services that they readily consume without being willing to pay for (Barber, *op.cit.*).

Market-State endeavours have overwhelmed the economy in the recent past with many public sector enterprises divesting and opening up to private enterpreneurs. There have been successful ventures between the State and civil society, especially in the areas of Information Technology and resource management. It has to be seen how market can fruitfully associate with the State as well as civil society in the future. The convergence between NGOs and informal profit-oriented enterprises, as has been observed, offer some promise for building a different model of society. Since profits generated within this new 'non-profit-for profit' nexus are invested in public as well as private goods and services (Fisher, *op.cit.*).

Recent decades, points out Scholte (2000), have brought a general retreat from centralised governance with trends toward devolution, regionalisation and globalisation. Governance has shifted from a unidimentionality of Statism to a multidimentionality of local, national, regional and global layers of regulation. Although large-scale globalisation has not dissolved Nation States, this form of collective identity is slowly loosing its previous position of primacy. In the late 20th century, world politics is also being deeply shaped by sub-state solidarities like ethno-nations and by non-territorial, transborder communities based on class, gender, race and religion.

There is a strong emphasis on community not as a social or geographical construct, but as a virtual space of shared cultural and moral affinities that express the ethics of self-governance. As per the Human Development Report (1999), the focus is on the fair, rights-based, practical shaping of daily institutional practices in each sphere of individual life. Informal community initiatives are now being organised all over South Asia, with or without government help, and they have often succeeded in serving those vulnerable sections of society that governments find quite difficult to reach. By opening spaces for civic engagement, Civil Society Organisations, households, businesses and the media can contribute to governance processes for human development in general and an improvement in the lives of local communities in particular. The emergence of the self-instituted civil society as an independent social partner alongside formal political and economic structures has a potential for thoroughly modifying governance systems.

In July 2002, the World Civil Society Forum met in Geneva to discuss issues that would help in strengthening international cooperation between civil society and international organisations (Callahan, 2002, *op.cit.*). The implications of this type of global civil society are not so clear but encouraging nevertheless. Some ponderables could be: (i) Will huge networks and coalitions of citizen activists come to rival international governmental organisations (IGOs) in the next century as leading vehicles of transnational cooperation, (ii) Will new democratic processes arise at the worldwide level that can offset the clout of global capital, and (iii) Will national public policy debates increasingly be influenced by social and economic norms that hold sway globally (Callahan, 1999).

NGO's and social movements must keep in mind that their influence on the process of global governance will remain quite limited unless they succeed in effectively channelling their national governments' action as well as influencing the allocation of resources mobilised by governments and multilateral institutions. The new trends in globalisation cannot be a remedy for all ills. Socio-economic development has to be indigenous, contextual and innovative. Especially, in the developing countries, where community plays a pertinent role in production of goods and services; more so, at the micro-level, the solution lies in what has been called 'glocalisation'. There is a need for more research in the areas of community building, democracy and citizenship, role of global civil society and collaborative networking among the NGOs. It has been pointed out that Village Councils in which women and dalits have a central place will be a genuine indigenous institutional innovation. They can give a new lease of life to democracy in India (Beteille, 2002).

An alternative paradigm that treats citizens as equal partners in development with due regard to goals of equity and social justice is therefore needed. The retention of high levels of autonomy and self-organisation will be important if these agencies are not to be flooded by distorting State power. Established traditions of participative planning and community development can be complemented by experience in direct democracy (Ferlie and Fitzgerald, 2002). With the recent formation of the Confederation of NGOs in rural India, several hundreds of NGOs working in the remote areas can now express their ideas, suggestions and grievances on institutionalised lines. The Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) is playing the role of facilitator in this regard with emphasis on transparency, expeditious disposal, flexible and innovative approach towards projects for the poor in rural areas through NGOs. These NGOs will have representation at the district, state and national levels. In a number of countries, we can witness strong political efforts to reaffirm the position of the citizen in relationship to public administration such as Citizens' Charters in Britain, Charter for

Right and Freedom in Canada and new Chapter in Constitution on Human Rights in Sweden. We have discussed various Civil society endeavours earlier in Unit 14 of this Course. These are important efforts in the areas of participatory governance.

In a sincere bid to open up a new democratic terrain, it has been rightly pointed out that the core justificatory principle is that major arenas of social, economic and political power (power over people's lives and power that shapes the life of society itself) should be harnessed to a doctrine of democratic responsibility. This is a responsibility that acknowledges a framework of obligations and accountability, recognises a range of legitimate stakeholders and seeks ways in which these stakeholders can have an effective voice. An approach of this kind will not be serve the purpose if attempts to construct iron walls between 'public' and 'private' centres of power, are made instead want to apply the doctrine of responsibility should be applied to both (Barber, *op.cit.*).

This new thinking should not be seen as a shift in power from the State to civil society, but rather as the natural evolution of the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed. Couched in positive terms, governments are learning to govern better through heeding the popular voice; and citizens are learning to be better citizens through exposure to the regular rules and disciplined practices of associations of civil society. The private sector has a large stake in the expansion of civil society because civil order fosters economic growth. The synergies arising out of the emerging relations between the State, private sector, and civil society must thus be put to practical use (Rahman, *et al*, *op.cit*). This is a relevant but difficult goal to achieve. Civil society organisations are necessary in the present context to ensure effective, responsive and efficient governance based on viable State-society and Society-market partnerships. But, there are many constraints and challenges that it must face to deliver the desired results.

19.6 CHALLENGES BEFORE THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The growing importance of civil society has also brought with it a variety of constraints and pressures. In reiteration of some of the maladies that have inflicted civil society, it can be pointed out that the civil society has not been conceptualised tightly, that is why varied perspectives on its meaning, nature and composition have come to camouflage its very essence. It has been observed by Neera Chandhoke (1995, *op.cit.*) that just as the attention paid to the State has failed to account for civil society, the focus on civil society fails to comprehend its complex relationship with the State. For instance, in India, civil society is seen by most theorists as a volatile association of social groupings, which are based on caste and kinship linkages, or on religious mobilisation as much as on voluntary social associations. The problem with this kind of formulation, she maintains, is that it fails to distinguish between counter-civil society movements. Society, in this perspective, is collapsed into civil society. The civil society is thus being treated as a residual category, as an authentic collection of everything that is not the State. It has become a conceptual ragbag, consisting of households, religious denominations, and each and every activity, which is unconnected with the State.

Community identities, as has been observed, have always been fluid in India. This fluidity gives considerable scope for political enterpreneurs to reshape the boundary and the concerns of the identity of a community. In recent years, the process of modernisation and participatory politics and access to media, and other technological devices have actually increased the mobilisation potential and sharpened the self-

image of splinter ethnic groups and sub-national identities, quite contrary to homogenising efforts of modernising elite (Bardhan, 1999).

When civil society is seen as tradition, the internal contradictions between communities and within communities are completely overlooked. Andre Beteilli (2000) argues that the well-being of modern institutions can be guaranteed only if civil societies are understood as comprising truly autonomous bodies. In the view of Dipankar Gupta (1999), there is a need to be wary of giving in to traditional solidarities and associations, as they are unfavourable to the modern institutions.

Civil society by itself therefore, observes Neera Chandhoke(2004), has no teleological virtue, unless it is accompanied both by an interrogation of the sphere of civil society itself and a project for democratising civil society. And a call for rolling back the State has no particular virtue, unless it is accompanied by a determination that the oppressions of civil society will be dismantled. The ability of civil society to prevent the State from exercising absolute control is an essential but not a sufficient condition for democracy. The existence of civil society as a sphere of participation, deliberation, dialogue and contestation is no indication of the capacities of individuals to participate in all these activities.

Critics have even pointed out the various limitations of the idea of 'social capital' in explaining State-society interactions in the context of developing countries. It has been felt that there are a few potential problems associated with the development of civil society institutions that would nurture social capital. Looking at the State-civil society institutions develop in an authoritarian environment and what the State can do in enabling the growth and expansion of those institutions, the emphasis is on the 'recursive cycles' of interaction between the State and civil society actors. Putnam's work is derived from the historical experience of Italy that suggests that a country's stock of social capital is inherited. Social capital with Putnam's framework thus cannot be accumulated (Sobhan, *op.cit.*).

As we have read earlier on in this Unit, the civil society organisations are generally equated with NGOs. This tendency limits our understanding of a broad process of interaction among different types of organisations. The concept of civil society points out Alan Whaites (*op.cit.)* has been 'grabbed' by NGOs as one relating closely to their own natural strengths. On the surface, civil society is intimately connected with the role of local community associations or groups, and with the indigenous NGO sector. In the globalisation scenario, it needs to be kept in view that among the donor agencies, the interest in civil society has been associated with the evolution of the conditionality of aid in the 1980s. Donors have begun to re-appraise the role of civil society in providing a foundation for sustainable democracy. The combination of donor, NGO and UN interest provides the background to what has been termed as the civil society 'grab'.

The States, as has been observed by He Baogang *(op.cit.),* are adopting new strategies, using NGOs for their own purposes. Some critics see the recent quests for community control as little more than a State-orchestrated managerial reform to take over institutions. Other critics view it as an interpretation between the State and community spheres that is more than genuine community control. Still others portray it as an attempt to redress profound crises that is now confronting capitalist classes. Both State-centred and society-centred approaches are now proving problematic and inadequate. Importantly, it is believed that the civil society approach is itself problematic if it does not take cognisance of global civil society.

The idea of global civil society combines elements of both anti-state and anti-nation positions. The growing size, sophistication, and influence of the Global Civil Society Organisations (GCSOs), have been facilitated and actively encouraged by one major factor-the Neo-liberal consensus that emerges from the power centres in the West. Among other things, the consensus dictates: a) The State, particularly in third world countries, should withdraw from the social sector, b) The market should be freed from all constraints, and c) Communities in civil society should organise their own social and economic reproduction and well-being. The State has been liberated from its traditional responsibilities of providing the conditions of human flourishing (Chandhoke, 2002). This stance is particularly problematic in context of 'governance', as the State has to assume the role of facilitator and catalyst in bringing about just and egalitarian governance. We have already read in the earlier Units of this Course that the Neo-liberal State's roll back ideology is misplaced in the context of developing countries like India.

The vision of civil society *sans* a well-defined role of the State is thus replete with serious consequences, which not only weakens civil society, but also jeopardises the future of GCSOs. It has been pointed out that by drastically reducing the importance of proximity, the new technologies change people's perceptions of community. The potential for building global civil society might come at the expense of weakened identity with one's State and with the civil society within one's country (Schechter, *op.cit.*). In the absence of a global public space and an opportunity for dialogue, robust global community may remain a distant dream.

There is a need to look into the role of media too in building civil society. It has been seen that instead of a positive role, the media many a time camouflages important issues. The mediascape, for instance in India, seems to give its subscribers a sense of collective identity and participation in public affairs. At the same time, it also reduces the discussion of vital issues to simple caricature, leaving people interconnected but dangerously uninformed. The mediascape has the power games to displace the substantive with the symbolic (*The Hindu*, March 23, 2003).

The developments in administration such as Public Choice approach and now the New Public Management (NPM) make an endeavour to provide alternatives to bureaucratic hegemony. But while the Public Choice perspective seeks to reduce individuals to utility maximisers and focuses on individual interest, it does not provide the mechanism for arriving at a collective general interest. The NPM, on the other hand, treats the citizens as mere clients and consumers. The Pluralistic, Communitarian, New Public Administration and Network Agency perspectives give due regard to community, non-bureaucratic institutions and values, but do not attempt to develop the idea of autonomous, self-reflective, humane and conscientious civil society with an accent on genuine public interest.

Francis Fukuyama in his original essay 'The End of History' (1989) offered a vision of a world purged of ideology, in which history has come to an end because there are no alternatives to the institutions of the present representative democracy and the market. The future would, be the endless repetition of more of the same, with politics centred in bureaucratic problem-solving, limited social engineering and liberal compromise (Cf Hirst, 1994).

This indeed is a very pessimistic projection of the socio-economic and political reality. If one goes by it, the alternatives to absolute State or market control over production and provision of goods seem almost elusive. A ray of hope could be democratic decentralisation, participative decision-making, and community

management of resources through different civil society organisations which can surely solve the problem to some extent. Voluntarism and associationalism have been a part of the culture in the developing countries, their pertinence needs to be harnessed, more so, in the globalisation context. The very fact that the number of community organisations, voluntary agencies, self-help groups, and non-public, non-market associations has grown tremendously in the last decade is a step in the right direction.

19.7 FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE

The reappearance of civil society institutions has historically heralded the advent of democracy. In fact, to a large extent how we conceptualise and evaluate civil society, as has been observed, depends on how we visualise democracy, the converse also holds true. Democratic political theory privileges civil society because it assumes that the existence of democracy is inextricably linked with the life of civil society (Cohen and Arato, *op.cit.*).

The increasing labelling of civil society as NGOs and vice versa needs to be addressed. For some NGOs, the labelling of all potential partner groups as 'civil society organisations' reflects the continued acceptance of a universalistic view of civil society. As has been pointed out, when civil society is referred to as 'sphere of public debate', its meaning goes beyong the synonymous treatment with NGOs that it receives. For instance, newspaper readership is used by Robert Putnam as one of the indicators for contrasting the strength of civil society in Northern Italy with its weakness in the South. Questions that need to be taken up are: How do NGOs separate beneficial from non-beneficial civil society, how do they maintain autonomy and accountability, what type of self-regulation do they follow; and how do they weave a strategy for nurturing civil society into a strategy for building the capacity of the State (Eade, 2002, *emphasis added*).

Given the importance that donors and NGOs attach to the concept of civil society, it matters a great deal, as cautioned by many, that NGOs do not slip into the divide over the meaning of civil society, particularly where societies are heterogeneous and divided. The ways in which NGOs perceive civil society, and consequently plan projects to facilitate the work of civil associations, can have a significant effect on the extent of devolution of civil society in the countries in which they work. The NGOs should try to explore the full theoretical implications of civil society and clearly articulate their own interpretations of its nuances (Whaites, *op.cit.*).

T.K. Oommen (2004) feeds that looking at civil society in India from the vantage point of religion, caste and language, it is clear that the associations and movements anchored to them are instruments of establishing equality between the privileged and the deprived groups. But mobilisation by the underprivileged social categories are geared to bring about dignity and emancipation for them. In contrast, mobilisations by the dominant categories are efforts to reinforce their hegemony. Both these tendencies should be recognised as different aspects of civil society.

The post-modern discourse, observes Neera Chandhoke (1995, *op.cit.*) has been helpful in understanding the role of local narratives and marginalised groups in civil society. It has been brought out that the political solution to the crisis of representation offered by post-modern politics has been to privilege difference over reductive unity and identification, historical plurality over political monism, and multiplicity of representations over collective projects. The collective projects based upon priorities and preferences have been rejected, and the argument that multiple

social struggles articulating specific, local and personal issues should be prioritised, has been promoted.

To be usable today, the category of civil society must be reconstructed. "Reconstruction," could be defined in the non-systematic sense, as "Taking a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set itself." (Cohen and Arato, *op.cit.*). The 'resurrection of civil society' that pushes the democratisation process forward is possible in either case, with or without surviving forms of recognised association, and with or without memories of earlier mass mobilisation. What is needed is a civil society, which is seriously engaged in self-reflection, is preoccupied with the means used to accomplish its tasks, and which brings about slow and incremental but substantial changes in the State (Chandhoke, 1995, *op.cit.*).

In the words of Neera Chandhoke (*ibid.)*, what is needed is a civil society that is accessible and responsive to the subalterns, marginal and the radical. A critical narrative of civil society has to include those features of the sphere, which make it vulnerable to class oppression. Critical theory has to look at the oppressions of civil society itself. It has to see how this sphere needs to be democratised by social movements before it can become the basis of supportive structures and communitarian self-help organisations. Political forms, John Urry (1981) opines, need to be understood in their relationship with the anatomy of civil society.

In the view of Jurgen Habermas the institutions of civil society must act to protect the autonomous development of public opinion in the public sphere from being undermined by State bureaucracy and economic power of the market. He observes that public opinion that is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power in civil society cannot rule itself, but it can certainly steer the use of administrative power in specific directions (Baker, 2002, *op.cit.*). In fact, this viewpoint <u>renders </u>the contemporary civil society different from its earlier counterpart.

Habermas makes a distinction between symbolic and system-integrating functions. The earlier symbolic aspects of family and interpersonal relations based on consensus have been taken over by the system-integrating functions that relate to political power and economy. The present day civil society is concerned more with rectifying the market and State through empowerment of the marginalised (Gupta. *op.cit.)*. Alexis de Tocqueville, the predecessor of the Pluralist approach, talks of civil society as a defensive counterbalance to the increased capabilities of the modern State. It provides a realm in which society interacts constructively with the State, not to subvert and destroy it, but to refine its actions and improve its efficiency. Unless a positive and complimentary relationship between State administration and society is conceived, civil society's role in governance and development will not produce constructive results.

19.8 CONCLUSION

Community endeavours have become more pertinent with the receding of the State from certain areas and the influx of market associations at the national and international levels. To understand the transformative role of the civil society, its undertones have to go beyond its interlinkages with NGOs and other CBOs. Various other indicators of civility, it has been pointed out, have to be sought. A well-informed and well-informing media could bring in the necessary change. All institutions in society, as has been put forth by many, cannot be called civil society organisations. They must have a specific purpose, a clear-cut agenda, an organised

modus operandi, an autonomous functioning mechanism and a self-reflective evaluation capacity.

Again, as Neera Chandhoke (1995, *op.cit.*.) rightly observes, what needs to be seen is that the civil society organisations do not assume anti-democratic, fundamentalist and oppressive proportions. Clarity on their boundaries, access, role and functions is a precondition for their success. A country rooted in strong civil society traditions could ensure all the prerequisites of Good Governance namely transparency, efficiency, accountability, participation and responsiveness are adhered to. This is possible only if conditions for a mutually advantageous existence of the State, market and community are nurtured and sustained in the present globalisation context. Civil society is relevant for public administration as the concept of governance has become multi-actor centric with civil society playing an important role along with State and market in governance and development. This Unit has tried to bring out the evolution of the concept of civil society, its present context, and its relationship with the other actors viz., State and the market. It has highlighted some of the factors that influence the delicate balance between these three actors and has discussed the role of civil society in the years to come.

19.9   KEY CONCEPTS

Social Capital

It refers to trust, networks and shared norms between individuals in a society. It means associational diversity. It includes the relationship, attitudes and values that govern the interactions among people. Social capital theory proposes that social connectedness has a strong impact on those societal outcomes which depend on coordination of action.

(Sussane Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph "The Coffee House and the Ashram" and Neera Chandhoke "The 'Civil' and 'Political' in Civil Society" Carolyn M. Elliott, 2003, *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader,* OUP, New Delhi).

Teleological

A system of morality in which the proper choice among two or more options is based on their practical consequences. Whichever choice has the best (or least worse) outcome is the moral decision. Antonym is deontological. www.religioustolerance.org/gl_t.htm

Velvet Revolution

The six week period between November 17 and December 29, 1989 is called Velvet Revolution. It brought about the bloodless overthrow of the Czechoslovak Communist regime. There were mass protests, led by play wright Vaclev Havel, that culminated in the fall of communism in that country. As one of the results of the Velvet Revolution, the first democratic elections since 1946 were held in Chzechoslavakia in June 1990. It brought the first completely non-communist government to power in over 40 years.

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19.11   ACTIVITIES

1.   Visit some nearby NGO or a Community Based Organisation or a Self-help Group. Pen down your observations on the nature of their interactions with the government or private organisations.

2.   Based on Activity One, make a list of the nature of activities that your organisation under study takes up independently or with the help of other government and non-government bodies, be it private or non-state.