

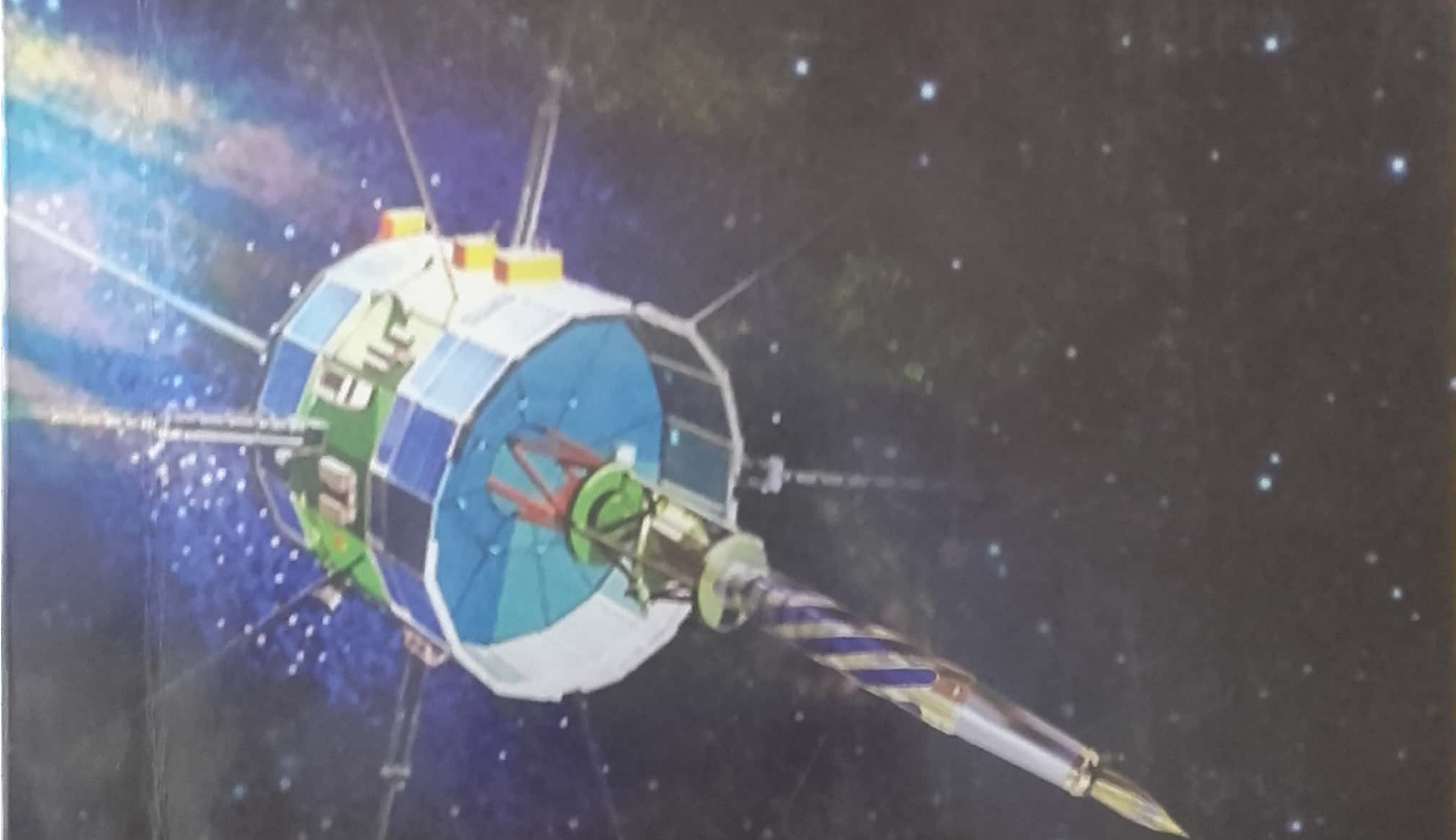
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Civil Society And Democratic Change In India

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Introduction:

The re-emerging of the term "civil society" has in time coincided with a strong dominance of liberal social theory and with the consolidation of a neo-liberal regime within politics and economics. In the new millennium the debate on civil society has lost some of its impetus, but in return the concept is now an important part of the dominating development models which are designed by the World Bank and the IMF. While being contested by academics and by NGOs all over the world, these policies are supported almost unanimously by democratically elected leaders all over the world. The World Bank has through the application of the concept "good governance" changed its neo-liberalism into a more complex economic and social theory influenced by institutionalism and civil society theory. Through its enormous direct and indirect influence the World Bank more or less forces its debtors and its member countries to accept "good governance" as a key component of both developed and developing economies, thereby also assigning importance to the role of the civil society as a facilitator of both democracy and market economy.

In 1947 when India gained her independence from colonial rule, the choice of parliamentary democracy and a universal franchise for such a poor, vast and largely illiterate nation was considered foolhardy by many observers, at home and abroad. Nevertheless the first general election was held with great rigour enthusiasm and success in 1952. In the meantime, a constitution reflecting the political and ideological goals of the new nation had been adopted. It was authored by the constituent Assembly made up of 299 members who represented the enormous class, religious and linguistic diversity of India's population and who after much debate and deliberation set out the framework for India's future as a republic and parliamentary democracy.

Enshrined within it were the principles of the separation of powers, universal Indian citizens with constitutional rights, equality before the law, the separation of civil and military powers, and the necessity for political competition. The press remains as free as any in the world and contributes to a lively and highly contested public sphere. So according to the democratic checklist of institutional arrangements, India's democratic system is in a reasonable shape.

CIVIL SOCIETY: -

The participation of citizens, rule of law, and the responsibility of the state in ensuring basic freedoms, material security and education. It is evident that India's heterodox policy of a mixed economy of planned

economic development and liberalization has put it at the high table of emergent powers in the world, but the positive effect of this are yet to reach the majority of Indians, in particular the poorest citizens.

Many of those in power have severely abused their position, transgressing trust and probity as scandals of corruption, bribes and kick backs are revealed daily. While some of this corruption is widely regarded as inevitable transactional costs the mere serious consequences have been felt by what has been called an "economy of influence" namely the nexus of corporations, politicians and the press who have collude to boaster entrenched interests and weaken institutions. ⁽¹⁾ The challenge of promoting direct participation is particularly acute in contexts where the authority of the modern rational-legal state is contested by various forms of social power. Under such conditions, even when representatives democratic institutions are well established, basic rights of association are distorted by pervasive vertical dependencies reutilized forms of social exclusion and the public legality. ⁽²⁾

The literature associative democracy has developed rich theoretical arguments for the role that civil society can play in improving the depth and scope of democracy. ⁽³⁾ At the most fundamental level, the argument boils down to creating the spaces in which associational autonomy can flourish and can shape public choices. Such spaces must be both differentiated from state control and from primary social structures; and they must also be linked to public authority. This is indeed the double meaning of what Avritzer (2002) has called "Participatory Publics." We have already examined the extent to which inputs that emerge from civil society are translated into policy outputs. In this final section we turn to the question of associational autonomy. To what extent has the campaign increased the space within which previously marginalized or excluded groups can meaningfully partake in public life?

One of the more intriguing claims made in favor of participatory governance is that it has positive spillover effects for civic engagement. ⁽⁴⁾

Civil society and Democratization:-

It easier for civil society to have an impact on public affairs, civil society actors face fewer costs and have greater incentives to organize. This crowding in effect has for example been documented in the case of participatory budgeting in Porto Alerge (Brazil) which has witnessed a significant increase in associational activity since (Baiocchi, 2003) in order to aggress what impact the campaign has had on civil society, we asked

our respondents to evaluate level of activity of different civil society sectors before and after the campaign. Their responses are summarized in below table. ⁽⁵⁾

Impact of the campaign on associational activity.

Type of association	Fraction of respondents who said levels of activists are				
	Much lower	Somewhat at lower	About the same	Somewhat at higher	Much higher
1 Religious Organizations	2.5	19.8	18.6	10.6	48.5
2 Labour unions and farmers association as based	2.3	20.6	31.3	12.5	33.3
3 Mass based development organizations	1.7	16.9	35.1	17.8	28.5
4 Party Affiliated women & youth organizations	2.5	17.9	34.0	14.1	31.6
5 Women's organization	1.1	8.0	13.9	29.1	48.0
6 Secular cultural association	0.6	8.6	26.0	24.0	48.8
7 Political parties	2.9	16.1	31.5	14.6	34.9

It is clear from these responses that there is a widespread perception that associational life has increased during the period of the campaign of course we have to be careful about attributing these trends to the campaign itself since it is not possible here to control for other factors at work. ⁽⁶⁾ Yet when we look at these results more carefully, the distribution of associational activity appears to match the campaigns goal of expanding nontraditional vehicles of participations. Thus while the civil society organizations that have historically played the most active role in Kerala labour unions, political parties and political party affiliated mass organizations and women's organizations, which traditionally have not been as central to political life in different states as unions and parties. ⁽⁷⁾

The increase in activity of women's organizations, would appear to be directly tied to sustained efforts by the SPB to encourage women's involvement in the campaign. On the other hand, when one considers that Kerala has a high density of NGO'S tied to the Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities and that these organizations have a long tract record of civic-minded activity, it is just as plausible that the campaign provided new opportunities for these groups to mobilize.

Local Democracy:

In the section we discussed the depth, quality and process of participation. The literature on participation has demonstrated that even in "Mature" democracies, participation rates are highly uneven across socio-economic groups (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995) cause studies and surveys in India have found that caste and gender present particularly significant barriers to participation (Agrawal, 2001; Chhibber, 2003, Jayal 2001; Seema and Mukherjee 2000). ⁽⁸⁾ Mechanisms of social exclusion include coercion intimidation, various forms of "social purdah" or deficit in the individual skills and self confidence to participate directly and openly in political life. Moreover even when ordinary citizen do participation, the selectivity of governance institutions intervenes between citizen

preferences and policy outputs.

Data collected by the state planning Board from all 1990 Panchayats for the first years of the campaign show that 10.3% of the electorate participated in the first annual Gram Sabha in 1996 and 10.6% in 1997. ⁽⁹⁾ The social composition of the campaign improved drastically in the SC/ST participation was well below the average rate (relative participation was 0.53 with 1:0 = participation rate of the general population) by the second year it was 1.44 meaning that SC/ST is were participating in greater proportions that non- SCs similarly women's relatives participation increased from 0.57 to 0.82 with women constituting 40% of all participants in 1997-98. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Success of Democracy:

India is a very plural country with much different social, religious cultural and linguistic expressions. In relation to this throughout its history and until today, India has suffered of constant religious, caste and regional tensions that have made it difficult both to administer and hold together. India has an immense diversity: India has at least 114 languages (Loc 20047) is a religiously plural society (Brown 1985:17) where even its main religions, Hinduism and Islam, have variations within themselves and is made up of many different castes and sub castes. ⁽¹¹⁾ In some cases this ethnic diversity and social structure has led to tensions and conflict throat the country. Example of this is the Hindu-Sikh problems in Punjab (varshney 1998:3) the violence related to caste in equalities in the Hindu heartland (Kohli 2001:15) the tribal insurgencies in Telangana and Maharashtra the increasing activism of the so called backward castes (Kohli 2001:15) the violent protests of the sons of the soil movements in Assam (Bhaumik, 2007:1) the presence of Maoists rebels in Chhattisgarh (Mohammed Ali 2006:1) and of course the Hindu- Muslim conflict marked by was with Pakistan, Muslim separatist group in Kashmir.

Democracy's challenge:

There are still a number of challenges for democracy and its consolidation. In particular, the analysis done above focuses on India at the national level; at the state level the some things can't be said about democracy.

Some states in India have had periods of authoritarianism where "the central government has taken over their administration, elections have been suspended, citizens have been denied their basic civil and political rights and independent associations and organizations were carefully watch and in some cases brutally suspended. ⁽¹²⁾

It is here where democracy stops working when

conflicts are not peacefully resolved and violent separatist movements and religious conflicts emerge. When the system is not excluded and people don't have the chance to express their demands and these are not dealt with, when their rights are trampled and pluralism is suffocated, they look for other alternatives for advancing their interest.

Civil society and democratic change in India:-

A casual trawl through the Indian newspapers in the opening years of the 21st century reveals that the acquisition of land by the government for private companies or for special economic zones is high on the agenda for public debate. While the investor mood is bullish (Timmons 2007), the numerous electronic list serves that flood one's inbox with 'progressive spam' provide a countervailing sense of siege at the takeover of people's means of livelihood and shelter. Reports of farmer suicides, urban slum demolitions, the introduction of Foreign Direct Investment in retail threatening to push out millions of small shopkeepers, the handing over of forest land to private companies, the privatization of rivers and so on, appear to add up to a growing attack on the poor. In many places, this onslaught is met with resistance, and pushed through with police force. News of the arrests, beatings and injuries suffered rarely finds its way into the local or national newspapers or television channels, except when deaths are involved, and even then, it barely makes the front page before disappearing into the oblivion of the Indian judicial system

Conclusion:

The impact of the reforms carries important lessons for our understanding of decentralization and even more importantly of democratic deepening. The research reported here aimed to provide broad and robust measure of the campaigns effect by collecting data directly from a sample of 72 Panchayats and interviews with 858 key respondents. Democracy in India has been a success since it has an inclusive citizenship, elected officials, holds free fair and frequent elections and allows freedom of information and associational autonomy.

India's experiments of democracy have taught the world a number of lessons. It remains to be seen whether India can redistribute the fruits of its economic growth to the wider society and thereby serve as a unique model among the rising powers of combining economic democracy with a robust political one.

The importance of the sphere "civil society" is recognized but defined more along the confrontational and ideological lines of Grams chi the connection

between civil society and democratization is not linear, as in the liberal version of the civil society theory, but depends on the respective strength of the Hindu nationalist forces and its adversaries within civil society. We recognize the Hindu nationalist groups as a part of civil society, despite their excluding character. As a consequence the link between civil society and democracy is not the activity per se, but rather the outcome of the process: the result of the battle between the Hindu nationalists and their opponents.

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