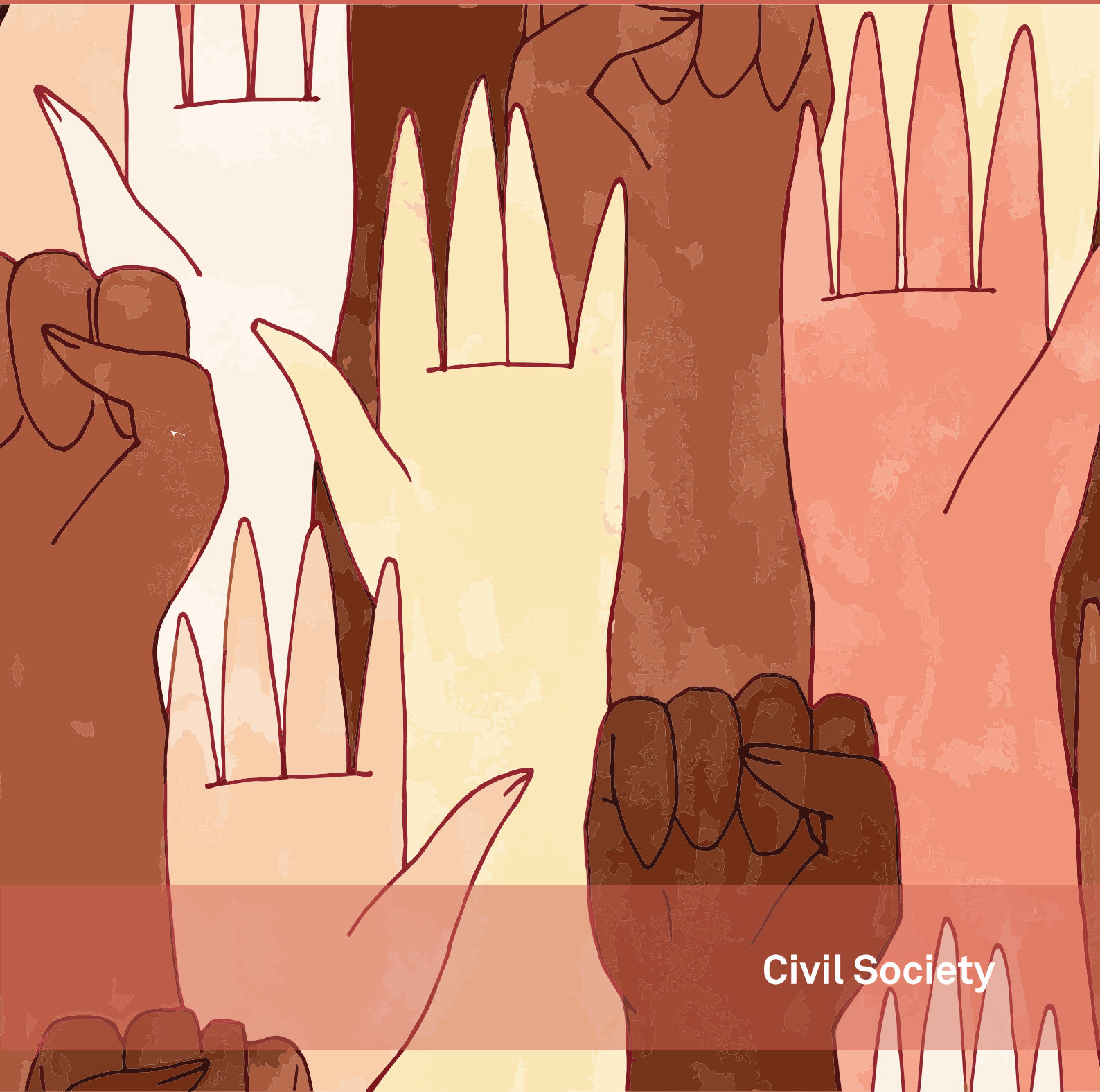


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Civil Society

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Civil Society and Education

A Post-Independence Trajectory

Rahul Mukhopadhyay

In post-Independence India, the expansion of civil society actors was primarily a response to the inability of the state to effectively deliver basic public services, including education, mainly to historically disadvantaged groups and the rural population. Development programs of the State, since the 1970s, reached out to civil society organizations (CSOs) to address its own supply-side constraints. These also tried to engage CSOs as outreach agencies that could undertake activities such as running community learning centres and mobilizing for adult education.

Many CSOs had been constituted in the colonial period and existed in various forms. These included identity-based (religion, caste, language) entities, philanthropies established by individuals and local notables, and social reforms oriented

organizations. Many new CSOs also came into being concurrently with the development programs of the post-independent State. All these together, thus, became the means through which both technical expertise and supplemental public resources could reach underserved geographies and communities in education.

As far as we know, there are no official estimates of these various types of CSOs at different times in history. However, many trace the origins of the idea of mass education to the schools for lower castes and girls set up by missionaries in the 19th century. Besides addressing regional and social disparities in terms of the reach of State institutions (i.e., government schools), CSOs played a significant role by marking their presence in remote and difficult areas. This at one level helped children,



Babasaheb Ambedkar with members of People's Education Society

who otherwise would have had no access to education, due to social, ethnic, cultural, and geographical barriers, to get education. At another level, this promoted community awareness and participation in demand-side factors affecting schooling.

One must also make a separate mention here of the People's Science Movement from the early 1950s. This played a distinctive role in the expansion of mass education. Under the aegis of this movement, many CSOs emerged with the primary goal of building scientific awareness among the larger populace.

At the same time, many of these organizations could work on social mobilization for both adult education and school education, with the contributions of Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), Tamil Nadu Science Forum, Marathi Vigyan Parishad, Assam Science Society and Paschim Banga Vigyan Manch, being especially notable.

The enduring work of these groups led to a coalition of peoples' science groups across the country, and the emergence of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) as a separate organization focused on promoting literacy in a campaign mode. The setting up of Eklavya in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, in the early 1980s, was also an outcome of this larger movement. The organization, thereafter, has become a prominent one in the domain of educational innovations and curriculum development.

While some CSOs remained small in terms of their outreach and domains of work, others expanded to work across multiple geographies and domains, and simultaneously also worked closely with the government system. A study, in 2001, focussed on six such CSOs. These included M. Venkatarangaiya (MV) Foundation, Pratham, Bodh Shiksha Samiti, Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre, Eklavya, and Centre for Educational Management and Development.

The study showed that the work of these CSOs, which worked at a relatively larger scale with the government, had supplemented the State's efforts. They had initiated innovative programs in various domains of education, extended outreach in areas that had poor government outreach, and strengthened the accountability of the government. The domains included child labour eradication, universalization of pre-primary and primary education in a metropolis, appropriate primary education for the urban poor, multigrade multi-level teaching learning model (a precursor to ABL), pedagogic innovations, and school improvement through management inputs.

The increased presence of CSOs from the early decades after Independence, till the 1990s, 'could be regarded as a response to a relatively conservative education sector program and/or the government's low capacity to ensure an acceptable delivery of education' (Fennell, 2007: 206).

However, the transition in the global North towards New Public Management (NPM) approaches in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by the same in the global South, including the processes of liberalization, privatization and globalization in India with the economic reforms of the early 1990s, saw a change in the CSO landscape. The State began to regard the private sector and its principles as a means of addressing its own failure at multiple levels – provisioning, financing, regulation, and monitoring and accountability in education.

At this juncture, we can bring into focus another important civil society actor, teachers and their unions, within the school education system. Studies have noted the widespread presence of teacher unions for schoolteachers in India, both registered and unregistered. Teacher Unions (TUs) have varying typologies depending on their presence at different levels of the federal government system, levels of schooling,

school type (management), teacher contract type and so on.

The NPM paradigm has been more inclined to regard teacher unions as a deterrent to educational reforms. This is because of the political linkages that these unions have and the challenges to administrative accountability mechanisms these linkages pose.

However, other studies have underscored the progressive role that teacher unions and teacher collectives can play in educational reform processes. These studies include research work done by organizations such as the Pratichi Trust in West Bengal, and that of Azim Premji Foundation undertaken across more than five states.

The shift towards a neoliberal State and NPM approaches in public administration showed up in a more explicit recognition of a larger role of non-State actors, including the private sector, in plan documents and policy discourses in education from the 12th Five Year Plan. This was evident in various forms, from an emphasis on public-private partnerships (PPPs), an expanded role and presence of non-State actors in a diverse range of education services (including textbooks and other curricular products, digital and multimedia solutions for teaching-learning, and teacher training), and mandatory corporate social responsibility policies for specific profitable businesses.

These non-State actors are considerably different from the earlier CSOs. These comprise a range of corporate social responsibility initiatives, large philanthropic trusts established by corporations, and entrepreneurial ventures in education.

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) (RTE), has also probably played a contradictory role vis-à-vis the earlier environment of CSOs. Many of the earlier CSOs were charitable trusts, NGOs, religious/social-identity based groups that provided

low/no-cost education for poor and marginal sections of the population. This education was provided through alternatives such as community schools, alternative schools, non-formal education centres and bridge programs. The regulatory framework of the RTE, with respect to school infrastructure, facilities and teacher qualifications, has been noted to have counterproductive effects on such initiatives. This is because these alternative initiatives were often run with limited resources, but could reach a large section of poor children of school-going age.

Finally, the global development policy environment targeting the fulfilment of SDG goals, has also reinforced the need and presence of philanthropic interventions in the education sector to meet financing and innovation challenges that the private sector is purportedly better equipped for. The interconnections between the scales of global and national non-State actors' interventions are growing tighter with emerging forms of multi-stakeholder, cross-national collaborations. Here we see international financing agencies investing in small and medium-level local education entrepreneurs drawing on a vocabulary of 'social impact investment' that considers as important both economic returns and measures of social benefit.

There is now a vast and disparate range of philanthropic categories. These include family philanthropies, corporate philanthropies, CSR arms of companies, and banks with philanthropic funding from HNWLs or donor-advised funds.

Besides these, there is also a new set of non-State actors in education through different global-local networks (e.g., the Teach for India fellows), and even national or sub-national fellowship programs of large CSRs (e.g., Wipro Foundation, Piramal Foundation, SBI Youth Fellowship) and the State (e.g., prime minister, and chief minister fellowships, instituted by different states).

A very different form of non-State actors is becoming visible in the context of rising privatization, withdrawal of the State in education delivery, and de facto deregulation of private actors operating in education. These are organically formed parents' groups among private school catchments that operate primarily in the protest-mode.

Though they currently have no legal standing, they exist across scales of school, locality, state as well as an umbrella pan-India organization. As they begin to collaborate and stabilize outside of the specific concern over rising fees over which they were formed, their agendas are expanding to issues of child safety, claims of corruption in public examinations, and so on.

Coming largely from middle-class sections of the population that access private schools, these groups are able to marshal social, political and cultural resources. These include media advocacy, local level political and bureaucratic support, digital access and legal support. All of these are beyond the reach of poorer disadvantaged groups.

The trajectory of CSOs in the context of the Indian school education system, has indeed undergone significant changes since the early decades of Independence. It is important to note that these transitions in the organizational forms, nature and approaches to educational reforms have been closely tied to questions of political economy, with changing relations between the State, the Market, and the citizenry shaping these transitions in specific directions.

It is also important to note that the nature of these changes, though reflecting broader patterns across the country, do differ from state to state, with the particular history of social movements, political will of the State to invest in public education, and a proactive bureaucracy often contributing to these differences across the states.

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Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad, Education and Civil Society in Kerala

K. K. Krishna Kumar

Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) was formed in 1962 as an association of science writers to propagate and popularize science in Malayalam, mother tongue of Keralites. Slowly it expanded into a people's science movement engaging with various sectors like education, health, environment, development, etc.

Initially science writers, mostly college teachers and academics, were members of the organization. As the movement grew, a large number of teachers and students joined the movement.

Building a Popular Base for Science

Interactions with students and teachers, and their demands, led to the first set of interventions by KSSP in the field of education. Science teachers were complaining that they had very little support material for science teaching. This discussion led to the initiation of science magazines in Malayalam for students. The first one was 'Sastragathy' (Path of Science), a popular science magazine. The second one was 'Sastrakeralam' (Science Kerala), a science monthly for high school students, followed by 'Eureka', a science magazine for upper primary level students.

Both students and teachers welcomed these magazines wholeheartedly. These science magazines have completed more than half a century of existence now. They have played an important role in discussing science and scientific attitude in the public domain, especially among students and teachers.

KSSP has initiated several interesting activities through these magazines. These magazines have persuaded many talented teachers and students to publish their articles and other creations. Sastrakeralam, for example, started publishing material for activating school science clubs way back in the 1970s. The magazine started affiliating science clubs as partners and published reports of science club activities with great importance. The science quiz program initiated by Sastrakeralam has also been very popular among students.

Eureka initiated a similar process among primary and upper primary students. One of the most successful programs initiated by Eureka was the 'Vigyan Utsav' or Science Festival. Science clubs and festivals have helped teachers and students to transact science in a much more creative, interactive and interesting manner. Science festivals or melas have also attracted parents and villagers to the schools. This has helped to involve the community in various academic activities in the schools.

Science melas, science clubs and many similar programs have now become part and parcel of school education. Today Science, Mathematics and Vocational Melas are organized at schools, and at the sub-district, district and state levels, every year. Thousands of students participate in these programs. Parents and the civil society provide support to these events. KSSP continues to provide support to these efforts whenever necessary.

KSSP's Civil Society Interventions

These are just a few examples of KSSP's interventions in the field of school education. Over the past sixty years, KSSP has made several civil society interventions with respect to education. Broadly these interventions can be divided into the categories listed below.

1. Creative educational experiments and programs outside the formal educational structures: Many of these experiments slowly catch the attention of the system and get mainstreamed. School Science Clubs and Science Melas are very good examples of these. There are several more such examples.

2. Agitprop campaigns and programs involving various sections of civil society: These are programs undertaken to criticize and oppose some of the government's policies. Depending upon the nature of the issue concerned, the structure of the agitprop campaign will also vary.

3. Educational programs, campaigns and trainings organized in collaboration with government departments: The Total Literacy Campaign of Kerala is an excellent example in this category.

KSSP has been taking up several locale-specific educational issues which require local solutions. These programs relate to backward areas where marginalized sections reside. We have undertaken several programs such as 'Akshara Vedis' (remedial teaching program for strengthening literacy skills of primary and upper primary school children in rural, backward areas), integrated science teaching programs (experimental teaching learning programs meant for integrating various classroom science lessons with day-to-day life experiences, e.g., 'Science in the Kitchen,' 'Science in Our Gardens,' etc.), Bal Melas and 'Balotsavs'.

These programs are conducted with the support of local communities, parents and

teachers. Thus, educational processes come out of the classroom and get entwined with the society at large. We have been involving the civil society in a big way in all these educational programs.

When community leaders step in, teachers feel more confident and get involved in the programs. The civil society, including parents, start realizing that they must not remain silent spectators to educational processes. Slowly all these interventions have helped to improve the quality of civil society participation in education.

Facilitating Civil Society Alternatives to Policy Making in Education

In 1982 we came out with an alternate policy document on education in Kerala. An expert committee constituted by KSSP, consisting of eminent scholars, came out with some scathing criticisms about the manner in which education was being conducted in the state.

The elitist character of education serving only the upper strata of society, unscrupulous promotion of privatization and commodification of education as against education as a public good, total neglect of public/government schools, absence of well-defined curricula, the undemocratic nature of classrooms, lack of systematic and scientific training for teachers, neglect of mother tongue as medium of instruction, were some of the issues highlighted in the Vidyabhyasa Reka (Education Policy Document).

This document was discussed in detail at a conference organized by KSSP. Then it was placed before the public at large, for wider discussions in society. The discussions were not limited just to experts and academics. KSSP conducted hundreds of village-level and street corner meetings to discuss the document. Thus, many of the educational issues that normally get discussed in isolated official or academic spaces were brought to people in the streets.



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An ESAF 'Sangam' Meeting in progress in Kerala

KSSP considers this process of undertaking public discussions and scrutiny of educational policies and issues among the people as a very important one. Such campaigns help to improve the ability of civil society to engage in public debates. Discussions have to be continuously nurtured through these processes.

KSSP used to bring out alternate five-year plan documents for public discussions. The alternate Eighth five-year plan document for Kerala, which KSSP prepared with the help of several eminent scholars and experts, underlined the necessity of changing priorities in all developmental sectors including education. These alternate plan documents were meant to explain to the government and the civil society that more effective and useful alternative proposals are feasible.

Though the governments in power did not accept the suggestions *per se*, they were compelled to consider many of them seriously. More than that, these documents were able to demystify processes like that of

the preparation of five-year plans. This has certainly helped to empower civil society processes with respect to education.

Peoples' Education Commissions: Civil Society in Action

Another method that KSSP has been using is the appointment of Peoples Education Commissions. The first commission was formed in the mid-1980s and the second one in the late 1990s. The first commission consisted of many eminent politicians, educationists and experts. One of our former chief ministers, Sri. C. Achutha Menon, a respected political leader, led this commission. The second commission was headed by eminent economist, and former education minister of West Bengal, Prof. Ashok Mitra.

Both these commissions travelled extensively across the state and gathered evidence from several stakeholders and the public. The process of evidence gathering was organized in a campaign mode and it gathered a lot of public attention. These

commissions attracted considerable interest from the media as well. Quite a number of people, including workers, ordinary women and people belonging to marginalized communities came out to file their views before these commissions.

Both the commissions came out with very important findings and suggestions. The state of education in the public sector (government schools) and rampant corruption in various fields, especially in the appointment of teachers and allotment of un-recognized schools in private sector, were pointed out with several concrete examples. These reports helped to focus on the sad plight of education.

Governments in power, and the bureaucracy, as expected, tried to deny the findings and recommendations of these people's commissions. However, their evidence gathering process and findings helped to generate very strong public opinion on various issues that were raised. One cannot expect immediate effect or impact in such campaigns. However, these issues remain in the public mind and would express itself at appropriate times.

The care and consideration that public education in Kerala (government schools) has received over the past few decades is the best example of this. During the past decade, definitive steps have been taken towards modernizing government schools in Kerala. This has helped to put a stop on the unfettered growth of commercial private interests in the field of education.

Culture, Education and Civil Society

KSSP strongly believes in creative public involvement in all developmental issues including education. It has been using art and cultural media in a big way for propagating our messages and ideas to the ordinary people. Since 1980, Kalajathas (cultural caravans that travel from one end of Kerala

to the other) have become one of the major programs of KSSP.

Every year from October 2 to November 7 (from Gandhi Jayanti to National Science Day), the Kalajatha travels across the state performing at hundreds of villages, towns and schools. Kalajatha performances include street dramas, folk performances, songs, traditional art forms etc. Several important issues related to education are powerfully presented in these programs.

These programs help to evoke serious civil society discussions about commercialization of education, medium of education, unscientific curriculum, and many other related issues. In fact, Kalajathas have helped to demystify several so called academic issues and have brought them down to the streets and villages where the real stakeholders live.

Education, Local Self-Government Bodies and Civil Society

KSSP has initiated several interesting educational models with the active support of the civil society and local self-government bodies. Normally many discussion take place on various issues. However, people may not get fully involved unless concrete examples are shown to them.

Way back in in the 1980s, KSSP created a very successful model of school complex in Sivapuram, Cannanore District. Here high schools, UP schools, and LP schools of a selected area started working as a complex. They helped and supported each other systematically in academic and pedagogic issues.

The local gram panchayat, and civil society in general, provided complete support. The school complex model was later expanded and implemented throughout the state. Models were tried out with respect to various specific issues like the teaching and learning of academic subjects such as mathematics

and English, integrating agriculture practices in education, etc. Such specific and decentralized educational experiments can resolve many issues.

The process of decentralization of governance and the resultant empowerment of local self-government bodies in the state facilitated this process very much. KSSP has supported several gram panchayats and municipalities to address many specific educational issues in their areas.

There were several locality specific issues in the coastal region, in the tribal areas and other socially backward places. Such issues, whether related to student dropout or quality issues, can be resolved only through specific and long-term interventions by gram panchayats, parents and teachers, and by the civil society in general. KSSP has been able to play the role of a catalyst by placing the problems in perspective and coordinating with the various agencies and individuals involved.

Total Literacy Program and Civil Society

The total literacy program in Kerala was perhaps the most successful and mass scale civil society intervention in recent times in the history of the state. This program

was implemented as a people's movement, where governmental and non-governmental agencies collaborated hand in hand on a single platform.

KSSP played a coordinator's role in the literacy program. The program clearly showed that creative people's participation can transform routine development programs into extremely successful exercises. Once people start owning the program, they come out with very effective and genuine solutions.

The success of the total literacy program was the result of the unrelenting support of thousands of volunteers who considered it as a patriotic work. The people's committees that were formed from bottom to top levels worked 24*7 for the success of the programs. All the usual bureaucratic procedures and methods were overturned.

KSSP and Contemporary Civil Society Interventions in Education

KSSP continues to make use of civil society platforms, and the people's movement mode of working, in all our activities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we undertook two major initiatives related to the field of education. One was a major study regarding the use of online media for education during the



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School children in Cochin, Kerala

covid period. Government of Kerala had very effectively implemented online education for all students in the state to continue their studies from their homes. This was a very bold and timely step, of course.

However, KSSP's study on online education showed that there were some serious lapses. A significant percentage of students, belonging to weaker sections of society, were finding it difficult to make use of the online education mechanisms. There were issues of connectivity, lack of support systems and some fundamental weaknesses of the online teaching learning systems. The study report drew the public's attention, as well as that of the authorities, and the education department took the issue seriously.

Our studies showed that a substantial number of children were suffering from serious mental tensions, stress and related health issues, due to continuous isolation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Parents were, naturally, very careful not to send their children out. But they did not realize that such isolation from friends and society was creating serious problems for children.

KSSP initiated a major interaction and counselling program for teachers and parents to deal with this situation. We took support from doctors and counselling experts, who trained hundreds of teachers and volunteers about dealing with children suffering from such issues. With the help of these volunteers, KSSP was able to conduct orientation programs for parents all over the state. This was organized in collaboration with the state's education department. This program was known as 'Makkalkkoppam' (Let us be with our children).

KSSP has been publishing books and leaflets dealing with educational theories and practices. We believe that exposure to new ideas and practices should reach out to various civil society forums, teachers' organizations and parents. This will enable them to contribute more effectively to various discussions.

Local self-government bodies, parent teacher organizations, mothers' committees and School Management Committees (SMCs) can play an important role in education. Therefore, KSSP has taken special care to interact with these organizations regularly.

The state government is now involved in a major effort to modify and overhaul the curricula of educational institutions. KSSP has undertaken a series of workshops and discussions to involve all sections of the society in these deliberations. We hope to organize at least one discussion (if possible more) in every local self-government body.

Apart from general discussions on future curricula, discussions relating to specific issues to be tackled in backward areas will be organized in such communities. Recently KSSP organized detailed discussions about problems faced by students in tribal areas with the help of tribal schools and parents belonging to tribal communities.

Conclusion

Over the past few years, issues related to education have attracted great public attention in Kerala. KSSP has been able to play a role in creating such a situation. Much more work has to be still done in this field.

Most of the discussions are taking place among the upper strata of the society. Policy discussions get limited to academic discussions. Ordinary people do not get enough opportunities to participate in such civil society processes. KSSP believes that people's participation can create wonders in all aspects of education. We continue to work towards this objective.

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Community Based Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations

Is the Difference Semantic or Substantive?

Anish Kumar

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A class in progress

Introduction

In recent times, in the evolving field of non-state development action, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have increasingly gained value. This article explores the basis for such value prominence and the critical dimensions this adds to democratizing development.

There is a point in contention that Indian society has always been very community/ locality-oriented. According to this view, the coming and going of rulers didn't change its culture much and this normative stranglehold kept large sections yoked to abject poverty.

NGOs and CBOs: Continuums and Complementarity

This article situates the NGO-CBO confusion, continuum and complementarity narrative in the evolving state-society relationship. This has to be seen in the context of the realization that deprivation, material or

otherwise, is deeply rooted in continuing structural issues of Indian society. These issues revolve around the axes of caste, class, gender and ethnicity, and the fact that large populations continue to be deprived of basic human dignity.

NGOs and CBOs are organizational formations attending to social purposes through a range of actions. These span from advocacy, service delivery, to capacity building etc. Often, in terms of legal structure, both could use the same statutory incorporations. Both CBOs and NGOs have fluidity of purposes and often carry passionate meanings for users. Therefore, they often defy clear definitions. The appellations – CBO and NGO – are often used interchangeably, and sometimes with high ambivalence, particularly when used in the context of community development.

Multiple sources of action can support community development. Explicit CBOs, because of the statutory requirements, would be Trade Unions and Cooperatives. A community seeking to improve itself is not limited to what is directly within its reach. While it may be the primary participant, very often, larger citizen action outside of the community comes to support it through new knowledge, linkages and investments.

'Locus of Control' as the Differentiator between CBOs and NGOs

For the purpose of this article, we will use the differentiator 'locus of control' to distinguish

between CBOs and NGOs. A CBO is driven by community residents in all aspects of its existence. These include purpose, program, governance and staff.

NGOs in this context would mean social purpose organizations where the non-residents in the community express their other-regarding concern, intent for the benefit of a community or society at large.

Organized development, the state's role, and philanthropic action the way we understand it today – all of these, in a large way, are shaped by the evolving understanding of welfare state. State-supported welfare, i.e., states caring for subjects/citizens has existed since antiquity.

Welfare's intertwining with the notion of the citizen is a largely post-World War II phenomenon. This process has co-evolved with emergent frameworks of state, with an agreement that state action can create positive-sum solutions and balance trade-offs between economic growth, military strength, social justice and social cohesion.

In India, the post-independence state was born with the mandate of delivering social justice. It organized a development bureaucracy outside of revenue administration. The development administration created after Independence is still evolving, toggling across three strands.

The first of these involves localism hard wired with corruption and embedded social and economic inequality. The second strand constitutes of backwardness and anti-modern mores and modes of socio-economic engagement. The third one is inspired by Gandhi's vision of an evolving, people-driven process of development.

Non-State Social Action and NGOs

The role of non-state action, its legitimacy and scope, including the role of philanthropy, corporate wealth (the Corporate Social

Responsibility Act), is reflective of one part of the continued trust-mistrust dilemma the Indian state has of citizen action. The other part to be kept in mind is its failure in delivering basic human development and social services, particularly to the marginalized and neglected sections of Indian society.

NGOs have made many innovations in the social sector and have shaped citizen-centric public policy initiatives. Therefore, no belabouring their significance and contribution is required.

However, despite 75 years of our exceptional success as a modern polity, we have failed in deepening the democratic ethos. We have also not been very effective in building civic spaces that foster development of capabilities that enable flourishing and dignity for all.

All this demands a closer look at how the 'external locus of control' has intermediated state-society relationship, and manifested in an emaciated sense of citizenship and elite capture of the civic space with public discourse of, for, and by the powerful 10%.

NGOs – as with any public institution in India, including public service, judiciary and the media – reflect the entrenched class-caste-gender-ethnicity demography. Enlightened worldview, talent and other-regarding concern is a poor substitute for weak governance and poor state capacity.

An emaciated citizenry is easily gratified as beneficiaries. However, we need to build a society that gives everyone a fair chance of expressing their potential in a democratic, republican, welfare nation-state of India that is Bharat.

It is now an inflexion moment for NGOs. Shifting societal perceptions are also impacting NGO credibility and impact. These are also flattening aspirations, even in languishing regions, with increasing demand



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Young women students from a working class neighborhood in suburban Kolkata

on tangible and high fluidity in the balance of responsibility and power that sarkar, bazaar and samaj exercise. There are thus strong conceptual and practical arguments in giving heed to the Tocquevillian ideal of community associations in taking charge of development that matters to them.

CBOs and the Promise of Local Democracy

CBOs are critical to empower communities to become the central vehicle of change in their localities around development processes that matter to them. NGO power needs to cede space to the community and the neighbourhood. Citizen associations, howsoever messy they may be, have a direct impact in combating poverty, inequality and other social issues and in forging a democratic compact between citizens and the state.

The state of our present polity does impact the development of local institutions. However, two tailwinds may encourage us as never before to look at CBOs afresh, and to situate a new role for NGOs. The first of these

is the evolving strength of panchayats. This is especially so given their constitutional empowerment, fiscal devolution and expanding space in development planning and delivery of local government services. The second constitutes the vibrant women's collectives across India's villages.

These two together provide institutional viability and spine for development of CBOs with 'locus of control' with local communities. Together these can help us in addressing developmental needs with democratic action. These can also help citizens shape their future with local initiatives, responsibility, accountability, and governance measures.

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The Dilemmas of NGOs Today

Reflecting from Eklavya's Experience

Arvind Sardana

There are various kinds of NGOs. One category of NGOs could be roughly classified as those experimenting with alternative development models. Then there are those who are focused on service delivery for regions or sections not reached by the state. There are also other kinds of NGOs that focus on advocacy, campaigns for human rights and other issues. Often NGOs combine mixed approaches.

The Liberal Phase: Encouraging NGOs and Governments Accepting Responsibility for Scale

One subset of NGOs has focused on providing alternative development models on the field

for specific areas. These domains could be water, education, health, livelihood etc. If you look at the initiatives of the 1970s in community health, watershed management or education, the purpose was to provide a different paradigm, and also to show this in practice on the ground.

Kishore Bharati and Friends Rural Center started the Hoshangabad Science Education Program (HSTP) in Madhya Pradesh (MP). The purpose was to demonstrate that meaningful and liberating science education could be practiced in ordinary government schools with the same set of teachers. The objective of the Jamkhed rural community health model in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, was



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to show how involving the community with empathy could impact health indicators.

The Pani Panchayat model, started in Purandhar Taluka of Maharashtra, strove to evolve a model of both conservation of water and equitable sharing of this common resource as a way to meet the challenges of recurring droughts. S.E.W.A. of Gujarat demonstrated that forming large trade unions in the unorganized sector was not only desirable but feasible; women would raise issues for better wages, working conditions and gender equality.

These are just a few examples, of a long list. There were many NGO groups with different political leanings, working at the ground level, with the purpose of demonstrating a more equitable and inclusive developmental model. These are not just for remote regions but for the mass of the population, whether rural or urban. This accepted role of NGOs is now being challenged and spaces for such efforts are shrinking.

A question that is often posed is the following. While these models can demonstrate proof of concept and offer learnings, can they be scaled? Most initiatives do try to answer this question in their own way. However, the common thread is that in a welfare state execution at scale is the responsibility of government departments.

NGOs are not meant to execute at scale. For example, when Eklavya was established in 1982 to take forward the HSTP program, its main project was a collaborative program with the government. This was titled 'From Micro to Macro'. HSTP started with 16 schools and then spread to the entire district.

When Eklavya was formed, the program was seeded for a cluster of schools in another 14 districts in MP. The goal was to eventually reach all of the state's schools. Similarly, scalability was intrinsic for planning the subsequent initiatives for the primary school and social science programs. All of

these were collaborative schemes with the government of MP. A far reaching amendment in the Madhya Pradesh Textbook Act of 1978 made possible this uniquely collaborative work.

What made it possible for earlier NGOs to strive for alternative development models in a largely indifferent and often feudal political and social climate? These groups were supported at the level of ideas by substantial liberal pockets in bureaucracy and academia. Moreover the government remarkably introduced schemes to fund innovative experiments in various sectors. This demonstrated an openness to acknowledge their own limitations and look for new ideas.

For example, Eklavya, for the first two decades, was financially supported by DST (Department of Science and Technology) and DoE (Department of Education), while the Government of MP collaborated in the execution. All running expenses at the school level were covered as a collaborative activity. However the real challenges, hurdles and hostility that NGO groups faced was at the level of field implementation, where social and political factors played out.

HSTP expanded to a medium term scale of more than a thousand schools across 14 districts, Prashika or the Prathmik Shiksha Karyakram to a block level but not to all the schools in the state. A colleague once asked: Were we naive to think that the state would take these collaborative education programs to scale, as envisaged in our ideal of micro to macro?

One would say, "Partly no." Because there were positive moves, and also invitations by different state governments to collaborate, that indicated a step ahead in the struggle for change. Governments at the center initiated programs such as the National Literacy Mission, District Primary Education Program (DPEP), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), NCF 2005, taking ideas and support of various groups in education.

We were partly naive. Because in many collaborative efforts with governments, the group was easily shunted out or disbanded by internal pressures on the government. Some years of work could evaporate with no institutional memories.

Did these groups rely only on the government to spread these ideas? No, since political hurdles were apparent in a few years of implementation. NGOs working on alternative models realized the social and political hurdles to execute a paradigm to scale that supports the rights of the marginalized.

Hence, many networks and advocacy groups were formed. The efforts of All India People Science Movement (AIPSM), Medico Friend Circle, Right to Food, Right to Education, Drug Action Forum, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, etc., are some examples from different sectors. Shankar Guha Niyogi's phrase, '*sangarsh aur nirman*,' clearly articulated this thinking.

What All Has Changed Since Then?

This atmosphere of openness has changed. The liberal support and rational debate on policies that could encourage NGOs to attempt ground level alternative models does not exist anymore. Government funding support for such experiments is no longer available. The state has undertaken a market oriented reform for industry and commerce. This thinking is reflected in other departments as well.

A large section within the bureaucracy, now view the many welfare departments such as health and education, as beyond reform. This was brought to our notice in a dramatic way during a meeting, two decades ago, with a senior official in education. He had just taken charge, coming from a different government department. At the end of our presentation, he asked in an almost innocent yet serious manner, "Why do you keep working in this area?"

It is around this time the dysfunctionality of the schools in MP had reached a really low

level. Curricular reforms would be useless if basic school structures and systems had collapsed. The real challenge today is that there's no self-belief in the administration and the political class of reorganizing or reforming these crucial sectors for human welfare.

The other view being encouraged is that NGOs' priority role is service delivery, and more importantly, to take over delivery at scale in lieu of the government. Government's failure in delivery is envisaged to be substituted by NGO efforts or through what is termed as public-private partnership (PPP). NGOs are considered as a parallel system for delivering welfare programs.

Typically, if the government initiates a large scheme, it looks for NGOs who can execute specific segments within this vision. Here large corporate style NGOs with layers of sub-contracts are preferred because of the belief that they can deliver to scale. Along with this, no policy questions or debates would be raised.

The government and the political class are changing the notion of the welfare state in many ways. The framework of rights - whether related to health, education, employment, food or water - is being modified or undone. Providing welfare is portrayed as charity, both by the state and the civil society. Within this, delivery of schemes is showcased as appropriate philanthropy.

Hence, those whose purpose is to explore alternative development models, or to pressurize governments for implementation of a rights-based approach, are labeled as inappropriate NGOs. This stance becomes adversarial and at times openly hostile.

What Are the Implications of This Changed Scenario for NGOs?

Funding sources have shrunk substantially for those working on alternative developmental models. Most government funding schemes have tapered off. More

importantly, the government thinks that they should both initiate and carry out these innovation exercises on their own.

Co-existence is difficult, when differences in views are not tolerated. Help is sought at times and in other situations NGOs are shunted out.

In the background of the closure of the Eklavya Programs was the debate within the Eklavya group regarding the 'game changing' possibility of the new EGS scheme at MP, initiated by the senior most bureaucrats.

It could not stand critiques, especially from those working on the ground. Eklavya programs were declared illegitimate and closed. Thus, the baby was thrown out with the bath water. (For more details, please read 'New Beginnings,' published by Eklavya in 2005).

Foundations and trusts are setting up their own execution teams. Hence, NGOs are not required. In the earlier phase, funding agencies supporting NGOs created both ideas and people for the next generation. However, the source of funds currently available for NGOs such as CSR and crowd funding can support only short-term programs. However,

these do not provide institutional support to nurture the new and for the young to venture out.

How Do NGOs Respond to These New Challenges?

For those still looking for alternative development models and a long-term view, the only funding recourse are some foundations. These are few and not growing in numbers. It would make a difference if advocacy efforts could convince CSR funds to set up independent foundations.

They would then come up with their vision documents, focus areas and the expected social change. This would allow NGOs to dialogue on issues and help create independent long-term forums. Funding would also improve. What we need are more independent foundations, as compared to a social exchange where donors and NGOs meet.

Many have accepted the format spelt out by the government and see their role as executing sections of the delivery mechanism. Funds are available here. However, these are routed through a process of subcontracts and bidding.



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A Seva Mandir learning camp

Even though dialogue or debate is not encouraged, cooperation and collaboration can still be sought on specific programs with the government where there is an alignment of objectives.

Hence, delivery goals may not always portray an acceptance of a regressive approach. It would be context specific. Among the older NGOs, BRAC from Bangladesh offers insights as to how one can work on delivery at scale through philanthropy funding and maintain meaningful independence.

Other NGOs think that a form of PPP could be an answer. At the moment this is a messy terrain. Many groups, for instance, provide additional inputs for schools. But often they undermine the school as an institution. They are held up as islands of their own.

A suitable framework that specifies roles and responsibilities like that for Eklavya curricular programs in MP hasn't evolved. They remain piecemeal and doubtful.

The realm of social marketing is growing. Funders are keen to support this space. This aligns well with their experiences in the corporate world. Accountability measures are more easily negotiated and agreed upon.

Seed capital and the learning phase is also funded with the crucial premise that long-term sustainability on one's own funds is the goal. This is how they look at new ventures in the corporate world. Hence this is one avenue that is growing.

Another set would argue that we need to seek a move towards advocacy, networks, courts and pressure through social movements. This is laudable, but difficult to do. In today's context, networks need to rethink and recreate. It is a difficult phase.

The overall situation on freedom of association, taking up a cause, voicing dissent, is hostile. This is not new. However,

the severity, deep messaging through arrests of human rights activists, and labeling of all forms of dissenters as anti-nationals, is not some aberration.

Advocacy and pressure to increase public systems is required even more today for another reason. With the state's neglect of welfare, the resulting fallout has been that private market forces and organizations have taken over governmental delivery mechanisms in providing access for the poor.

These could be in the form of low fee schools or registered medical practitioners providing immediate relief or private water markets with no conservation principles in sight. Regulation is ineffective. Private markets have many layers and promote inequity. However, they have a very substantial reach among the poor. There is a logjam here.

Increasing provisioning of public services, and making their systems more effective, are the only ways to challenge the role of these private markets. But that is neither acknowledged nor acted upon by the state. The challenges in this arena are the most difficult.

To stay alive in this situation is to battle for ideas of development and democracy. What makes the situation extremely complex is the state's reliance on private market forms to reach the poor. Keeping the ability to critique policy, and exploring alternative models, is an important function in the clash of ideas.

Note: All the views expressed in this essay are personal in nature.

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Beyond the State and the Market

The Need for a Vibrant Civil Society in India

Conversation with Hriday Kant Dewan

Hriday Kant Dewan works in the Translations Initiative team at Azim Premji University. He has been working in teacher development and in elementary education for the last 35 years. He continues to devote his energies for systemic improvement in our public education. He has a Ph.D. in Particle Physics from Delhi University.

Samuhik Pahal (SP): What is civil society? What are its elements? How is it different from the state and the market?

Hriday Kant Dewan (HD): The word civil society is used very differently in different contexts. However, in the past couple of decades, the word has acquired a specific meaning. In a sense, it has come to mean non-governmental/ social organizations that are doing something for social good.

If that is how one defines it, then the question arises whether political parties – because political parties are also supposed to do a lot of work with the people for some kind of ‘social good’ – would come under civil society?

You’ll then have to narrow civil society down to organizations that work on social issues that are non-political. Then the question of what is politics and what is not would arise and that picture also becomes more complicated. Therefore, civil society is not a very simple term to define.

It could include small groups at the mohalla or the hamlet level consisting of people who come together for a social activity. And the purpose of this social activity could be very

varied. It could also include trade unions and organizations that run schools and other public institutions. In a sense, it is quite a wide umbrella. In general conversations you refer to civil society as non-governmental organizations who are engaged in social activities. So would reporters and advocacy groups etc. be included in it or is it only people working in so-called constructive development who are a part of it?

“In education there is also a risk in being carried away by your own ideas, by the idea of what you think is good education, what you think is good society.”

Clearly, however, even though there is a diffused sense of what civil society organizations (CSOs) are, there is this common notion that they must serve a social purpose. The term social purpose has a wide scope. At one point of time, civil society meant people who were volunteering for doing some social activity, and whose involvement was non-monetary.

But given the last 30-40 years, since the emergence of what is called ‘professional development actors,’ the term civil society has acquired a different meaning. And it has also acquired some elements which are referred to negatively – that it’s basically a set of people who are largely looking after their own interests and well-being, and are pretending to be worried about the issues of society and the disempowered and the poor.

One of the definitive elements of civil society organizations is that they should not be directly responsible for the administrative execution and decision making in public structures. So civil society organizations should not then be directly responsible for the administrative activities of the government. However, they may work for the implementation of governmental schemes and decisions on the one hand, and on the other hand advocate or protest against governmental policies and schemes and their implementation.

It is, therefore, clear that civil society organizations (CSOs) are different from the government. They do not have the direct power to take decisions and implement them on their own in a policy framework. However, they can, of course, take their own decisions and implement them on as large a scale as they want. They may also exert a lot of influence on governmental policies and schemes and be on governmental committees, though apparently being outside the government. But CSOs with influence are few and their relationships that are of political or bureaucratic closeness wax and wane.

“Our role is not promoting the government’s agenda, unless it is aligned to the agenda that we think is appropriate.”

We may state this as an essential principle that civil society may be understood as something which is not directly involved in governmental administration. However, CSOs’ activities have to be with the concurrence of the government and conform to the legal and constitutional frameworks that the state adopts from time to time. Governments, can at any point of time, decide that a particular activity of a CSO is not conducive to the nation’s present interests and therefore

it should be stopped. Or that you can’t do this because this is not your domain. In this sense, the extent of the protest, its nature and the opposition to the policies can be regulated by the government. And this regulation and restriction can sometimes become extremely constraining.

Therefore, civil society organizations have to function with their own mandate. However, they exist with the acceptance and the non-interference of the government. They could also of course be actively promoted or supported by the government as well. But that does not make them a wing of the government as long as the decision makers in the organization are not really people who are in the administration. What complicates the picture, though, is the fact that many civil society organizations are funded by the government as well.

One of the key elements of civil society organizations and groups is perhaps their not-for-profit nature. They are different from the market in the essential fact that their primary motive is not profit. Again, how this term may be used, what will be interpreted as profit, all these can be debated. Their legal structure has over the last decade gone through a process of change due the nature of the laws and the changing socio-economic and politico-cultural climate.

From trusts and societies they have shifted to Section-25 companies, which are not-for-profit. Of course given the nature of the work required, some of them are in the social sector for ‘public good,’ but are for profit as well in their conception and functioning. I would not place these in the CSO category as that would diffuse the term even more and blur its distinction from the market.

So, any organization or group that is not-for-profit, has a social purpose and is not concerned with routine administration of the government should fit into the structure of civil society. Some companies may also do social work, and that particular work may not

be for profit. However, that does not make them into civil society organizations. They may support some civil society organizations for what they want to get done.

Both corporates and the government can work with civil society organizations, and get them to do something that they think is appropriate. But, for me, one broad definition of civil society organizations is that they are distinct from the state and the market in the essential sense of decision making and in the sense of relationship to profit and money for themselves.

“If you look at CSOs and their work from the lens of their function, one of them is that of advocacy, which is fighting for the rights of the people.”

SP: The regulatory framework under which CSOs function is created by the state. Are there some groups or initiatives that are not regulated by the state but are still important?

HD: What does state regulation mean? Each individual is in some sense regulated by the state. Eventually in some manner CSOs are also regulated. Though, the regulatory structure and framework on the surface may appear to be very specific and constraining. For example, even if you have a small group that is working in a *mohalla*, which is let's say tutoring children.

This is a community supported initiative. They are just coming together and getting children from around them to come and get tutored. And there is, in that sense, no regulatory framework that directly impinges on them.

However, within the larger umbrella of regulation they will fit in. They will be regulated in some way or the other by some system. The books they teach, the way they teach, and what they prepare the students

for, all of these would be as per the directions set by the broader structures that are regulated.

In a sense, the vendor on the roadside, *khomchewala*, is not regulated the same way as a shop is. But increasingly more and more of these *khomchewalas* are coming into some kind of regulation. These are visited by the sanitary and health inspectors. Their location cannot be arbitrary as per their choice. And now they all get paid digitally.

So, there is regulation at work. Even at the small village level also, they will have to engage with the local system, and conform to the regulations – whether formal or informal – that have been set up by the panchayats.

If they are interacting with organizations, they are doing a social function, they will have to engage with the local system, and conform to the regulations – whether formal or informal – that are prevalent there.

SP: Why is it important to have a vibrant civil society in a country like India? And what role can civil society organizations play?

HD: We have to first think about what is India and then what would the term vibrant civil society mean. You know India is a constitutional democracy. And we say in the preamble that we give this constitution to ourselves. So, in that sense, there is a commitment by each of us in the country that we are the creators, implementers, and beneficiaries of the constitution.

And that to me is reflected in what Gandhi said, that in democracies, the most important part is resistance. Anyone who is in power, is bound to make mis-judgements, is bound to miss out on things. And what you need is, therefore, a set of people who would resist injustices and wrong decisions.

Therefore, to my mind, careful watch, support for fulfilling constitutional goals, and resistance to the mis-judgements, constitute the role of civil society. Whatever

we include in it, whether we include the press in it, or not, what else out of the so many organizational forms we see do we include in it, their primary role is the implementation of the commitment to, and of, the democratic constitution. What we need to do is to declare that this is arising from the constitution and the role is to fulfill the need for ways and means of resisting oppression, injustice, and wrong directions of the administrative and governance forces.

This necessitates the need for a civil society which will be able to have its own mind, which may not be exactly aligned to each other but broadly is a collective mind, which will not work towards issues of personal benefit. Unfortunately, this is what many trade unions have succumbed to doing. This is also what many of the Societies in the country – which are caste groups and officers' groups etc. – have become. What we need is solidarity and empathy for the problems and challenges of others and to collectively work towards ensuring that the difficulties of each of us are resolved.

That will come only when civil society organizations are able to not just voice their own concerns but also concerns of the person next door, and of people distant to them – and then collectively resist the processes that are inflicting injustice on the other parts of the community as well.

I would define a vibrant civil society as one, which is aware of the responsibility that it is not just for sectional benefits. That we must protect the interests and commitments that have been made in the constitution for everyone else. This is an aspect to which many civil society organizations might not have given sufficient thought.

SP: If we adopt this criteria of defining success or vibrancy of the civil society space, then what are some of the key interventions and initiatives that you would see in the post-independence era that civil society organizations or collectives or networks

have undertaken? Specifically in the context of education, what are some of the key landmark civil society interventions in this period?

HD: Now that's a very difficult question, because I had not thought of it from that perspective. But let me start with a few with whom I have been associated with and which are therefore the uppermost in my mind. These may not be the key civil society initiatives. But they are certainly civil society initiatives.

Let me start with Vidushak Karkhana. It's a small group of scientists and engineers who thought that they will go and stay in a small village in Madhya Pradesh, in Shahdol district, that they will work with the people and try and see how they can benefit that particular community in which they live in. They also tried to figure out what kind of lessons they could draw that they could share with the wider public, to help them transform the country in a direction of more equality. They did raise many questions which have been important.

“I would define a vibrant civil society as one, which is aware of the responsibility that it is not just for sectional benefits.”

Then you can take the example of Kishore Bharati, which led to the formation of Eklavya. Again the attempt of Eklavya was to transform education in the country, to make it more democratic, to ensure that people in rural India also got good science education. But more importantly, it has tried to develop the ability to ask questions, to analyze one's own actions and the actions of the people around them and to ensure that there was conceptual development in the class. This was again an effort to ensure that all children got similar education, and an education that was a part of their environment. So that some

children did not end up getting an unfair advantage because others had to learn things that were unfamiliar to them. So that's the other kind of an example.

Then an institution like Vidya Bhavan in Udaipur comes to mind, which was set up to try and see to it that a new kind of school education reached people. And it branched into setting up many structures. Again the goal here was to make education democratic and to reach different kinds of people at all stages. This is just one name among a host of organizations that grew up in the two decades before independence, dispersed all over the country.

And you have the most recent example of the organizations set up by Azim Premji Foundation, the District Institutions across the country, which are functioning to try and work towards strengthening the public education system. They also started with the idea of trying to see where they could intervene in the entire development arena. But they have focused more on education.

These are different scales of institutions. And these are institutions about which I am speaking from personal experience. Some of them are a very distinct kind of institution. The idea in all of them is to make people aware of, and access, better ways of achieving their goals.

The purpose of all these is to benefit people who are deprived. Azim Premji Foundation in particular is also aware of the fact that they need to advocate and promote the ideas and values of the Indian Constitution.

Most of these organizations have fundamentally recognized the fact that we need equity and we need to embrace diversity and pluralism and not be sectarian.

There have been other interventions which have taken place outside the space of education as well. One can give the example of interventions like PRADAN and TRIF here. PRADAN has been a large intervention in the

development sector. It has tried to ensure that women become self-governed and help in the governance of local areas, in some sense economically. It has also worked with them on other interventions related to the community's development.

TRIF has been working with the idea of a coherent set of interventions in all aspects of people's lives and making them more responsible and capable of controlling their own lives. They collaborate with state governments, just like Azim Premji Foundation. This makes it possible for TRIF to interact with large communities and intervene for their welfare and development.

“What we need is solidarity and empathy for the problems and challenges of others and to collectively work towards ensuring that the difficulties of each of us is resolved.”

As you can see, there is a wide spectrum of initiatives that I have spoken about. But what is important is to recognize that all these initiatives are, broadly in the direction of equity and the establishment of the vision of the Indian Constitution. And we need many many more. In order to make any major dent into the system, these are not enough.

You could have initiatives that, basically, we could call as 'applying balm'. These try to ease the suffering and pain and improve the experiences of the people today. In one sense many of the interventions of the groups talked about above also contribute to that. Others could be more directly providing charity and they have their own place, particularly in areas like health.

Then there are institutions which are working towards a larger process, involving education and action, so that it leads to a greater upsurge at some point of time towards

change. They may do advocacy or just work with people over long periods and engage with them in multiple ways towards this goal.

There have been many initiatives of all these kinds. They have started, they have grown, they have got misdirected, and sometimes they have ebbed and closed down. But some of them have re-thrived as well.

SP: Apart from PRADAN and TRIF, most of the examples that you have given, they are around/in the education space. If you could please widen this with some more examples, to include other aspects of our social life, and some more key interventions?

HD: If you look at CSOs and their work from the lens of their function, one of them is that of advocacy, which is fighting for the rights of the people. One can give the example here of an organization like Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti (DSSSS – popularly called as DS4), which is kind of a social group that got converted into a political party – a large part of it. But DSSSS was itself an organization which was meant for promoting the well-being and issues of dalits and other exploited groups of Indian society. This is an example of a very large structure and big organization which was for an advocacy purpose.

“One of the definitive elements of civil society organizations is that they should not be directly responsible for the administrative execution and decision making in public structures.”

Then you have the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, a trade union which was set up to ensure that unorganized labor got reasonable compensation. And that organization has subsequently set up schools and hospitals

for that area. Again, this is an example of an organization that recognized that development is more than just about increasing incomes. Their vision of a better future entails opening up possibilities for the people, especially for the deprived. They see intervening in education and health as two important aspects of doing so.

And if you look at the issue comprehensively in the context of all aspects of people's lives, then the areas which you are thinking about are livelihood, education, health, and protection of human rights granted by the Indian Constitution. In all these four areas, there have been many organizations that have functioned.

For example, India has many Lawyers' Collectives which try to provide legal assistance to those who cannot find good lawyers for themselves. They represent people who they think deserve being represented in the courts. It is, therefore, an attempt to try and reduce inequity and injustice in some manner.

And then there are many of these organizations which do health programs. These programs are difficult to do because the government has a large health structure of its own. It requires a trained person to be able to do health. You are anyways looking at competing with the medical system as well as the uncertified doctors in the villages.

There are now many small voluntary organizations run by doctors in villages. They are working with people to try and provide them with healthcare by looking for local solutions to the problems. I know many of them. At least two of them are here, around me, in Udaipur. But I am sure that there are many more in the country. There is also Medico Friends Circle.

I am just saying that in each area there can be many organizations that one can think of. And all of them are trying to work in the areas and with the vision that I talked about. This

work involves easing immediate trouble as well as trying to look for long-term systemic processes of change. Both these are valid exercises for a country like ours.

SP: What are some of the learnings from these, for groups working on education in contemporary India?

HD: The learnings from these experiences has been varied. One of the experiences is that civil society in India comprises of two different kinds of groups. One category of groups has always tried to align with the government, and the political forces. The other kind has tried to challenge the governments and the political forces.

Many of the organizations that I have talked about are opposed to many of the things that the government is saying. They find many of the things that are around in the political arena very disturbing. But they have chosen to work in their own domains. And in those domains they find spaces which allow them to function.

It is also important to remember that the civil society, although distinct from the government, or the corporates, is supported by the corporates or the governments. There are very few groups and organizations that actually work on subscriptions and donations given by people who are as committed to the idea as the implementers themselves.

As a person who has worked in CSOs, I'd say that one of the things that one has to keep in mind is to keep recognizing the fact that you have a commitment to the constitution. And you have a commitment to the purpose you are set up for. One has to constantly ask oneself how far you can accommodate the pressures and the dangers that the system poses for you.

One has to also think about the best ways of avoiding these pressures, resisting what is being imposed and not falling a victim to the persuasions implied or directed. One has to

figure out ways of continuing to do what one thinks is appropriate as well.

It's a difficult task. But we may all have to remember that our role is of resistance, wherever it is needed, and of improvement. Our role is not promoting the government's agenda, unless it is aligned to the agenda that we think is appropriate. Which is likely to be rare in its entirety.

It is often a tight rope walk when collaborating with governments on an ostensibly common agenda. Governments sometimes might sound to mean the same while conceptualizing and planning. But at the level of implementation, they often don't interpret ideas in the manner that does justice to the earlier articulation.

At the same time we also need to recognize that there is a temporariness to the structures that are around, whether they are bureaucratic, political or governmental. Therefore, you must not act in a manner which will destroy the possibilities of long-term work.

Most CSO interventions involves processes that need a long time to bring about change. To what extent you want to challenge the system and how you can sidestep temporarily some of the issues and without being complicit continue to do your work... I think that's something we have to think about all the time.

“One of the key elements of civil society organizations and groups is perhaps their not-for-profit nature.”

In education there is also a risk in being carried away by your own ideas, by the idea of what you think is good education, what you think is good society. One always runs the danger of not considering what you see on the ground, and continuing to impose your



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Women making rotis for langar at a protest by farmers

ideas on people on the ground by negating their own learnings from their actions and thoughts.

We have to recognize that if we are working in education, we are dealing with an issue where the teachers at the moment are extremely under-confident of themselves. They have been completely disempowered by constant pressures on them to do what they are being told to do. So, if we are working on education, our task must be to empower the teacher and help her recover her agency and her insights.

We also have to make her feel responsible for the role she has to perform, and gradually, in that process, help her realize that she is a learner and a thinker and it's all right for her to make mistakes, like anyone else. We must not join the bandwagon of telling teachers what to do by assuming that teachers do not know what they do. So that is one of the biggest challenges we face.

The second challenge is related to dealing with the imposition that the government system has on teachers in terms of the materials, pedagogic methods, and assessment. We as civil society organizations must try and help alternative processes reach the schools. We must also negotiate with the government bodies so that they are alive and sensitive to some of the key issues that many of the documents like the NCF 2005 have said and what emanate from the constitution of the country.

I think that is something we will have to constantly think about, and be aware of, that as people working in the sphere of education, we need to continuously learn. We must not get swept by our own experiences, and what we have extracted from that, as the only way to go forward in the classrooms and in education.

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Civil Society

The Biggest Pillar of Democracy

Aastha Maggu

The state in India tends to claim the vanguard's role in facilitating radical social change through legal and administrative means. However, it is often the various oppressed social groups fighting for their rights that have demonstrated to the state, and the society at large, that there is nothing sectional about fighting for one's rights. That the struggles for the rights of each one of us, are about ensuring the rights of every one of us.

In this photo essay we try and tell the story of the India of a million mutinies, where claiming one's human and constitutional rights often becomes a revolutionary act. The archival images of this piece narrate many collective efforts of people across India in the post-independence era, in fights for not only rights, but also for dignity and constitutional values, and for realizing the vision of a more humane society.

Bhoodan Movement



Place Unknown, 1951 - Vinoba Bhave

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org

Dalit Rights Movement



📍 **Delhi, 1955 - Dr. B R Ambedkar**
Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org

Self-Respect Movement

📍 **Rangoon, 1955 - E V Ramasamy with B R Ambedkar**

Photo Credit:
commons.wikimedia.org



Chipko Movement



📍 **Uttarakhand, 1973**

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org



Trade Unions

📍 **Mumbai, 2004**

Photo Credit:
commons.wikimedia.org/Soman

People's Science Movement



Place Unknown, 2009

Photo Credit: [commons.wikimedia.org/Neon](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Telescope_in_Pune.jpg)

'India Against Corruption' Protest



Delhi, 2011

Photo Credit: [commons.wikimedia.org/HemantBanswal](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_Against_Corruption_Protest.jpg)



Queer Rights Movement



Bengaluru, 2009 – Bengaluru Pride March

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org/VinayakDas



Women's Rights Protest



Delhi, 2012

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org/NilanjanaRoy

Disability Rights Movement



Delhi, 2015

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org/
MinistryofSocialJusticeandEmpowerment

Narmada Bachao Andolan: Fighting for the Rights of the Displaced



Nandurbar District, Maharashtra, 2017

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org/Nnnamaharashtra

Farmers' Protests



Delhi, 2020

Photo Credit: commons.wikimedia.org/RandeepMaddoke



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