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Civil Society and Good Governance in India and Bangladesh

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- **Civil society and tolerance:** According to Professor Neera Chandhoke, all states are authoritarian; we cannot expect the state to practice tolerance. Instead, she argued that it is civil society, which will practice tolerance and civility. Tolerance must be a social virtue. Secularism and tolerance are part of democracy. In contexts where society is polarized on the basis of caste, ethnicity and gender, it is the duty of different forces within civil society to work together. While the state project is to divide, the only way out of divisiveness is to talk/engage/dialogue with each other. The choice facing civil society is clear: it can be complicit with the state and become hegemonic – or, it can also act as a counter-hegemonic force. Civil society is a space for struggle and contestation. In a sense, civil society has to be 'Janus faced' – with one face towards the state holding it to account, and the other towards itself in order to address discrimination, inequality, and intolerance.

- **Civil society as defender of citizenship rights:** According to Professor Paul Chaney, civil society plays a key role in upholding minority rights and freedoms by acting as a democratic check on ruling elites. Contemporary analyses show how states have not been able to keep their international promises and violations of minority rights. Several indicators reveal the low-ranking of states such as India and Bangladesh. In both countries civil society organizations' (CSOs) accounts show how the civil space is continuously shrinking in the face of political constraints. Notably, CSOs in Bangladesh

highlight how the state has not been able to protect LGBT rights. There have been instances of violence and discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual orientation. Based on reports submitted to the Third Cycle of UPR 2012-17, we see that civil society organizations have identified several pathologies - such as police failure to protect rights defenders, threats and incitement, discrimination, inequality and oppression. In order to address these, (1) the government should on the one hand take stronger action against violators of citizenship rights and strengthen law and order mechanisms, and (2) it should enhance the autonomy and freedom of CSOs.

- **Civil society and the women's movement:** Dr Seuty Sabur discussed how hetero-patriarchal norms shaped imaginations of the Bangladeshi nation. Although the women's question was not discussed, women have actively participated in nationalist movement and liberation movement. In order to understand civil society and the women's movement, what is important is to situate the leaders in national and international context – embeddedness within the political context. Contrary to the general notion of 'subservient women' of the developing world, Bangladeshi women have participated actively in protest movements. They are setting their own agendas and their agency in their own political way. However, it should be noted that the political field and the civil society is fragmented; it is the elites and the middle class who play a hegemonic role in the political field. The state has also been trying to act as the 'anti-politics machine' and de-radicalize the women's movement. Civil society therefore needs to be inclusive and take on board the diverse groups and forces and women's movement must expand beyond the middle classes to include to rural women and their issues and concerns.

- **Populism, illiberal civil society and tolerance in post-liberal world:** Professor Vedi Hadiz discussed the Gramscian notion of civil society as the site of contestation – civil society as both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. For Hadiz, although civil society acts as a site of hegemony, that hegemony is never completely achieved. There will be dominant interests and subordinated interests. The question is what kind of civil society prevails and what kind of state is in power? These questions are important to understand the rise of religious populism. According to Hadiz, right wing populism has risen not because of illiberal states but because of illiberal civil society. We are producing a kind of civil society and citizenry that is amenable to logics of the market. We are entering into post-liberal and post-social world where the conflict is not between liberalism and socialism but between competing forms of populism. The question is why do we have a post-liberal world? The reasons could be because: (1) neo-liberal world produces particular kind of marginalization and dislocations, (2) the fall of the welfare state – it ceases to be a reality and is no longer a model to aspire for, (3) crisis of liberal democracy - it has been hijacked by capital, and (4) failure of the Left in challenging the neo-liberal order – language of the Left no longer resonates. Liberalism, socialism and left politics have failed/stagnated and it is in this context the language of religion, ethnicity and race has been advanced by elements of civil society. Hadiz further noted that states have generally retreated from welfare activities because of austerity policies and it is in this kind of context that the Muslim Brotherhood and other illiberal civil society groups have come to dominate the sphere of civil society and everyday life in some cases. If one wants to bind the marginalized in a populist project, it is difficult because society is complex and heterogeneous. One way to transcend caste, class and other hierarchies is

to target a common denominator – religion. Religion as a homogenizing influence becomes the new language for elites to mobilize the marginalized. And in democratic societies, this mobilization happens in times of elections and for this you will need to have "the other", which will eventually produce a polarized society ('us' versus 'them'). The question remains if civil society is polarized and if liberalism is in coma, where would the language of tolerance now come from?

- **Civil society's role in advancing gender rights:** Dr B. Rajeshwari provided a feminist reading of civil society and asked what is the role of women in civil society/public spaces. For her, there is a constant tussle between the private and the public. How do we project the rights of women in public sphere? According to her, there are two issues: (1) the public-private divide that has been constantly spoken about, and (2) can we include everyone in the women's movement. There are plural strands within women's movement, but how do we bring them together? There are several challenges: (1) civil society organizations find it difficult to talk to women as individuals because the family and community always come in. How do you then talk to women as individuals? (2) Is pluralism always a value? Pluralism is not always helping women. What are the kinds of responses that are going to work? The concept of civil society itself excludes women from its domain. There is the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private as well as the question of women's agency.

- **Civil society and humiliation:** Dr Yashpal Jogdand shed light on the psychological aspects of persecution of minorities. In this regard, he discussed responses to humiliation among Dalits in India. For him, humiliation is a self-conscious emotion; it is associated with being or perceiving oneself as being unjustly treated. It is not exactly shame. Shame does not have the similar power dimension as humiliation. He asked how humiliation affects minority communities? He highlighted that humiliation does not only damage by creating violence but can also demobilize social groups by breaking the solidarity and damaging grit. Resilience under such humiliating conditions is facilitated by a sense of social identity, which is the self-definition, emotion and value one draws from a group membership. Civil society could play an important role in addressing experiences of humiliation of minority groups and communities by fostering sense of social identity.

- **Religious freedom, state and civil society:** Rita Manchanda argued that the contemporary assault on religious freedoms in India needs to be strategically repositioned within the larger struggle for democratic rights and citizenship rights. At a time of ascendancy of Hindu majoritarianism as a dominant force in Indian democracy, the civil society led struggle against the assault on religious freedoms needs to be widened from a narrow focus on the protection of the socio-religious rights of minorities and be conjoined with the broad based struggle for constitutional values, enshrining secularism, non discrimination and equal citizenship rights. In reflecting on the evolution of civil society responses, she focused on the reluctance of left-liberal CSOs to take on board the freedom of religion agenda as part of the larger struggle for protection of constitutional values, non-discrimination and equality.

- **Gender rights, civil society and law:** Professor Anindita Chakrabarti discussed the question of gender rights and personal law in India, especially in the context of campaign against triple *talaq.* Drawing on from a historical perspective, she discussed

the Muslim women's rights at three historical moments: the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage 1939, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986, and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Ordinance 2018. She argued for rethinking the categories through which Muslim women rights have been framed in India and pointed out that understanding how law actually works in the everyday lives of ordinary women provides a nuanced view of articulating the relationship between gender rights and religious freedom.

- **Religious identity and (Il)liberal democracy:** Inaya Rakhmani discussed the rise of conservative political narratives in Indonesia—materialising in the form of religious sentiments—as an expression of unrequited aspirations of the Muslim middle class towards the political elite. By focusing on the mobilisation of the narrative of the *ummah* during Jakarta's mass rally against Christian Chinese former governor Ahok in 2016, Rakhmani illustrated how the political participation of civilians asserting their Islamic identity in a plural democracy betray the failures of institutionalised Muslim organisations in maintaining their congregation. Using survey data and interviews, Rakhmani agreed with Karakoç's work that understands how elements of authoritarianism can remain in democratic social contexts—and furthermore political participation of ordinary people can problematically prolong its elements. This assessment understands how authoritarian patterns can be reproduced through social practices—particularly in the lack of a civil society that contests and limits state power—despite regime change. Rakhmani's work was very relevant in understanding ethno-religious identity in the South Asian context.

- **Illiberal civil society and violence:** Dr Sarbeswar Sahoo argued that civil society refers to a 'non-state sphere of associations', which includes both civil as well as uncivil or good as well as bad forces. Given that there are uncivil groups within civil society, it cannot be expected of always contributing towards positive political change or democratic governance. The deepening of democracy and citizenship rights will depend on which of the forces (civil or uncivil) dominate the civil society sphere at a given point of time. It is observed that uncivil forces are increasingly becoming dominant and undermining the democracy, citizenship and freedom. As a result, civil society is also increasingly becoming polarized and fragmented. In order to overcome this fragmentation and polarization, it is important that the power of the uncivil forces are checked and civil society plays a constructive role in deepening democratic rights of citizens.

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Contributor Biographies

Professor Neera Chandhoke is former Professor of Political Science from University of Delhi, India. She has published widely on civil society, secularism and minority rights. Her publications include: *Rethinking Pluralism, Secularism and Tolerance* (Sage, 2019), *The Conceits of Civil Society* (Oxford University Press, 2003), *Beyond Secularism* (Oxford University Press, 1999), *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (Sage, 1995) and others.

Professor Paul Chaney is Professor of Politics and Policy at Cardiff University. He is Co-Director of Wales Institute of Social, Economic Research and Data (WISERD). He has authored and edited 14 books and written over sixty papers in international peer-reviewed journals. His research and teaching interests include: territorial politics, public policy-making, civil society, and equality and human rights.

Dr Seuty Sabur is Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Economics and Social Sciences at BRAC University. She received her PhD from the National University of Singapore. She has published in several peer reviewed international journals on gender and middle class identity. One of her major publications is: "Marital Mobility in the Bangladeshi Middle Class" (*South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies,* 2014).

Professor Vedi R. Hadiz is Director and Professor of Asian Studies at the Asia Institute and an Assistant Deputy Vice Chancellor International, University of Melbourne. He was an Australian Research Council Future Fellow in 2010-2014. He has published widely on civil society, populism and political change in Southeast Asia. His recent books are: *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), *Localizing Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

Dr B. Rajeshwari is currently engaged in a collaborative post-doctoral fellowship with Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and the Wageningen University (Netherlands). Her research interests include gender studies, civil society, inter-religious conflict and post-conflict justice mechanisms. Her research "Feminist Perspectives on post-riot judicial inquiry commissions" has appeared in the special Issue titled, *Gender, Security and Conflict in South Asia* in the *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* (JASIA, 2018).

Dr Yashpal Jogdand is Assistant Professor of Psychology at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, India. He received his PhD from University of St. Andrews, Scotland, UK. His research interest includes studying how disadvantaged groups in society experience and manage/challenge issues of identity, status, morality and emotion. He has published his research on humiliation in several international peer reviewed journals and books.

Rita Manchanda is currently a research consultant with the Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands. She has over 15 years of experience as a Senior Executive and Research Director with the regional NGO "South Asia Forum for Human Rights" (SAFHR). She has published widely, including edited volumes such as: *Women and Politics of Peace* (Sage, 2017), *States in Conflict with their Minorities* (Sage, 2013) and several others.

Professor Anindita Chakrabarti is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India. She has been a fellow with the Humanities Centre for Advanced Studies at Leipzig University, Germany. Her research interests include: sociology of religion, movements, work and law. She is the author of *Faith and Social Movements: An Ethnography of Religious Reform in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Dr. Inaya Rakhmani is Lecturer and Head of the International Undergraduate Class at the Department of Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia, as well as the Indonesian Young Academy of Sciences' (ALMI) Director of Communications. She is a media sociologist who has had 15 years' experience in applied research for communication

and media development in the Indonesian context. She has a specific interest in critical cultural political economy—or the way culture is instrumental in hindering and enabling the structural redistribution of wealth among the people.

Dr Sarbeswar Sahoo is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, India. He was Charles Wallace Fellow at Queen's University Belfast, UK and Humboldt Fellow at the University of Erfurt, Germany. His research interests include civil society and state relationship and sociology of religion in the South Asian context. He is the author of: *Civil Society and Democratisation in India: Institutions, Ideologies and Interests* (Rout ledge, 2013) and *Pentecostalism and Politics of Conversion in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).