



26

Making Sense of Civil Society: The Experience of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal

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Introduction

Civil society and democracy are interrelated. The notion of 'civil society' is associated with the emergence of capitalist economy. Until the eighteenth century there was hardly any difference between state and civil society. John Locke was the first political philosopher who had clearly differentiated between state and civil society and also introduced the concept of 'political' and 'civil' society. In between 1750 and 1850 the idea of civil society had emerged in English, French and American political history. Hegel had modified the concept of civil society in a sophisticated manner. Karl Marx had interpreted civil society as nothing but a bourgeoisie society. After the end of the Second World War a number of Afro-Asian states had emerged in global politics with Western-model of democracy. Like other post-colonial states, South Asian States have also introduced Western democratic system without ensuring the separate

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space for the civil society. Pakistan has witnessed the ethno-political and religious violence over the decades. It has gone through the military regimes or mock elections in regular intervals. Voice of civil society is not satisfactory in Pakistan. In case of Afghanistan, the role of civil society is more vulnerable and alarming. In the Nepali case, it is not only complicated and unclear but unorganized too. The separate apolitical and responding identity of civil society is a pre-requisite for democratic vibrancy. This chapter intends to critically investigate the role of civil society. It also aims to identify the challenges of civil society in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal respectively.

A Conceptual Outline of Civil Society

The notion of ‘civil society’ has been an integral part of a democratic society. In their research paper R Islam-Fakhr-ul and Farmanullah have argued that “[c]ivil society does not include the state and public agencies even though, through its judiciary and regulatory function, the state upholds the rule of law, social order and other essential components of society and civility. The legal system and specific laws dealing with civil society institutions and organizations can be included. And finally, it does not include the family. *Cross-cultural family* forms vary significantly and tend to imply different demarcation lines between the private sphere of the family however defined and the public sphere of the wider society” (Islam-Fakhr-ul and Farmanullah 2015: 251). Civil society is a non-governmental forum where a wide range of apolitical citizens united for greater interests of the society. In a broad spectrum of social, economic and cultural fields, the conscious and responsive citizens form a civil society for various interests. According to Nikhat Sattar, “civil society is a combination of formal institutions, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, professional associations, philanthropies, academia, independent pressure groups, think tanks, and traditional informal formations, such as faith-based organisations, shrines, seminaries, and neighbourhood associations” (Sattar 2011: 5). Civil society can be classified into two categories—formal and voluntary.

The intellectual discourse of civil society had started in eighteenth-century Europe. Civil society is a specific forum within the greater society in which citizens of a country seek relief against the authority on contemporary issues which are very much relevant for the society. In earlier times, there was no space between the society and state. Basically, these two were synonymous. The voice of citizens was not allowed to reach the state authority as well as the bigger society. Noted Economist Adam Smith wanted to relate civil society with economy. According to Adam Smith, “trade and commerce among private citizens created not only wealth but also invisible connections among people—the bonds of trust and social capital in today’s terminology.” Political philosophers like John Locke and Alexis de Tocqueville established in their writings that civil society is much more related to the society rather than the economy. Friedrich Hegel is considered as one of the key exponents of civil society. He had given a clear-cut outline of the civil society, where it is described as a ‘self-organizing’ and ‘self-regulating’ unit of the society. Hegel also advocated the requisite of the state to regulate the society. He never wanted to delegate autonomy to the civil society which can freely exercise its role. He had given the interdependent relational model of society and state. The relation between state and society is complicated and subject of tension. He had suggested to make a balance between the two, but it is quite difficult. In the writing of Montesquieu and Von Stein, the state was given more emphasis than the civil society. Both of them had given stress on ‘rule of law’. According to them the regulating authority of the rule of law is the state. So civil society was not given any particular space to raise voice against the state. But they had mentioned the importance of the civil society.

In the twentieth century, the meaning of civil society had implied two things: (1) popular participation and (2) civic mindedness. C. D. Verba, Jürgen Habermas, George Putnam, Antonio Gramsci and Etzioni had elaborately researched on civil society through different dimensions and manners. They had viewed the civil society from different angles. They had shed light on social capital, the public sphere, social capital, culture and community respectively. There are various aspects and concepts and elements of civil society. The major aspects of civil society are values, norms, tolerance and so on. The role of the mass-media and intellectuals

are vital to run a civil society very well. The vibrancy of a civil society depends upon peoples' participation and civic engagement.

Apart from liberation struggles and movements for restoration of democracy, civilian movements on various socio-political and economic issues in South Asian countries have manifested itself in various forms. The nature of civil society and mode of activities are quite different from each other. The formation of civil society in this region is very complicated because of differences of nature of the states. If democracy is understood as evolving through social contestations and the battle of claims and counterclaims, readymade recipes of democratization are likely to falter at the threshold of authenticity. The civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are playing very significant role in few countries. In this chapter I will discuss about civil society of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal. I have chosen these three countries to understand the different nature of civil society.

Pakistan

The existence and role of civil society in South Asia are mixed in nature. Civil society movement in Pakistan is vibrant and active, but for few countries its role is questionable. Some South Asian Scholars rather interested to interpret the role of civil society for some particular countries as infant stage. Pakistan is a warrior state as described by T. V. Paul. He had observed that since its independence the basic tendency of Pakistan state is to spend much more money in military sector. The citizens of Pakistan have been ruled by the military for more than 30 years. Inter-religious riots, ethnic conflicts and continuous state-sponsored terrorism have collectively jeopardized the society. In the absence of democracy, human rights, accommodative policy and human security, the formation of civil society in Pakistan is a natural phenomenon. Nikhat Sattar, a Pakistani scholar, has rightly observed that in his working paper in 1980s, during Zia-ul-Haque's regime, some significant movements took place in different parts of Pakistan. The NGOs had played the key role in those movements. The basic demands of those movements were to ensure human rights. The 1990s had witnessed the impressive growth of NGOs. During

that time, most of the NGOs worked on the issue of development and community based-organizations. Due to the organization of massive civil movements on different issues, a number of civil activists, writers and intellectuals, journalists had been sentenced to different prisons. Sanction was imposed on free thinkers and media. The federal administration had taken several brutal policies with the help of corrupted police force (Sattar 2011: 7).

Pervez Musharraf, the former military President of Pakistan has stated in his memoir that “I ardently believe that no country can progress without democracy, but democracy has to be tailored in accordance with each nation’s peculiar environment. Only then it can be a functioning democracy that truly empowers the people and produces governments to address their needs. If it does not function, then it merely creates a façade without spirit or substance” (Musharraf 2008: 154). It is very positive statement and at the same time it is also puzzling to listen such type of statement from a military president. It is very difficult to play the active role by the civil society. The governmental non-democratic and perspective attitudes often make challenges to the civil society members. Being a disrupted democracy Pakistan faces lot of questions from world community. The economic vulnerability has been more acute for uneven and biased developmental policy. People of Pakistan are living with discontents.

In Pakistan, the elitist section of the civil society is very strong, but they rarely show their performance for greater interests of the society. Ayesha Siddiqi has explained the relationship between the military and civil society. She seemed that presence of active civil society and civilian institution is possible in stable democracies. It is expected the political environment should be controlled by the rational civil society. Political environment should not be controlled by army. She further said, “The military’s sense of professionalism and restriction to an external security role can be attributed to the strong civil society and democratic institutions such as the media, judiciary, human rights organizations, election commissions, political parties and government audit institutions. The media in particular are quite strong, which makes it imperative for the armed forces to operate in their well-defined area of operations” (Siddiqi 2007: 36–37).

Civil Society, Law and Media

Asim Sajjad Akhtar has described the Pakistani civil society from a new outlook in his article published in Pakistan's premier newspaper *Dawn*. He wrote that "notwithstanding the simplistic notion of 'civil society' propagated throughout the 1990s. Western social theorists from Hegel to Marx to Gramsci had developed complex philosophical treatises on the subject over the previous century and a half". He further explained that in Pakistan, 'civil society' had reached in a very good position layers' movement. The lawyers had raised their voice against dictatorial regime and anti-democratic stance of the Pak Federal government. Same thing had happened in Pakistan in August 2008 against General Parvez Musharraf regime (<https://www.dawn.com/news/1353803>). The lawyers of Lahore had shown agitation against Lahore police as a part of civil disobedience. The 'Lawyers' Movement' greatly popularized among the common masses as it was considered as the most significant 'civil society' movement in Pakistan. Until the early 2000s, the term 'civil society' was conceptualized and propagated among the urban, secular donors of the NGOs. Before the commencement of Lawyers' Movement, the role of civil society was confined within a small span. President Zardari, however, did not want to recognize the civil movement of lawyers. He had mentioned the Lawyers' Movement as the movement of political jokers. It is true that in the twentieth century, the flourishing of the concept of civil society was considered as the important measure of the growth of democracy. The social scientist could not agree to define 'civil society' in a single dimension (<https://nation.com.pk/10-Feb-2010/civil-society-in-pakistan>). In 2007, Pakistan had witnessed the Lawyers' Movement against the dictatorship of the government. In case of Pakistan, it was very positive reaction emanated by intellectual class. Undoubtedly, in Pakistan, corruption is a significant obstacle for good governance, supremacy of law and rational use of authority to run the affairs of state (Nandy 2017). The political leaders and head of the states often charged with corruptions and big scandals. The voice of media and lawyers are very essential to make a greater resistance against these illegal means.

Student Movements as a Part of Civil Society

Student movements as a part of civil society's struggle to achieve freedom and democratic ideals started before the creation of Pakistan. Muslim Students Federation played a very important role in mass mobilization for the creation of Pakistan. Quaid e Azam envisioned student's engagement in politics to be temporary and for achieving limited objectives. He thought that as a part of struggle for freedom students should participate in supporting the national ideal of freedom. Once this objective is achieved, they should continue their support for nation building by paying full attention to their studies as the young country badly needed educated minds to lead it through the years of adversity and grave challenges.

One of the strong civil society movements in Pakistan is students' movement. In South Asian perspective, student's movement is closely attached with a particular political party. In Pakistan, students' wings are backed by the political parties. A particular students' wing believes on a certain ideology. All political parties worked closely with their student wings. It can be stated that like other civil society fronts students' wing is not always apolitical. For Pakistan, there was an exception. There was a short-lived wing namely Student Own Power (SOP) in Punjab University. That wing was not attached with any political party. As a part of Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), Muhajir Student Organization (MSO) had started to move against the Sindh Provincial government as well as the central government. This students' movement was basically moved for their community interest rather than the student interest. After the separation of East Pakistan, many youth organizations carved space for expression of cultural and social identity through works of art, literature, theatre, poetry and music. In fact, student movements like mainstream political parties have been continuously struggling to grapple with the question of identity. After the separation of East Pakistan, many youth organizations carved space for expression of cultural and social identity through works of art, literature, theatre poetry and music.

Social Structure and Civil Society

It is only in Pakistan where elections have periodically been conducted under military rule, that public opinion matches the external impression: a majority of the people either keep silent about or regard elections as unfair. People's dissatisfaction with the working of democracy may be related to a common abhorrence for power mongering, the amoral approach of the political class, scandals and corruption, and other such negative factors. In Pakistan large section is dissatisfied because of lack of basic necessities. In Pakistan, the absence of equal rights and the absence of freedom of speech are more important factors that add to the dissatisfaction (State of Democracy in South Asia 2008: 138). Against this backdrop, a question naturally raises to the civil society of Pakistan that what it is doing for the protection of fundamental rights? There is no existence of a unified civil society in Pakistan. The ethnic conflicts, intra-religious sectarian cleavages and orthodox religious rule over the society have jointly made an obstacle in making of a vibrant civil society in Pakistan. The direct or indirect influence of army on state and society creates a clear-cut restriction in free functioning of the civil society. It is very stringing to imagine that in the era of globalization Pakistan is continuing its feudal system. Most of the ruling elites are from feudal background with a strong connection with military personnel and religious masters. They are collectively controlling the society without giving any free space to society. The governmental perspective rules and regulations have tactfully intended to restrict the free activism of the civil society.

Judiciary and Civil Society

The judiciary of a country is the protector of fundamental rights. It was expected that with proper implementation of 'separation of powers' Pakistan would ensure the people's rights, but unfortunately, it did not happen. Since the inception, the judiciary of Pakistan could not function freely. It was dominated and controlled by the executives. From Ayub Khan to Pervez Musharraf, the same things happened. On many

occasions, military coups exiled democratically elected governments. During these situations the judicial system was not only unsuccessful to crisscross unconstitutional regime modification, but also authorized and supported the amalgamation of illegitimately gained power. In November 2007, Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and several other Supreme Court judges had declined to sign Musharraf's decision to hang the constitution and rule by pronouncement. In most of the cases, the entire administration keeps silent. The members of the civil society usually play very nominal role in Pakistan. The voice of civil society is to be lauded in order to prevent governmental non-democratic decisions and executions. When voice of the civil society is mute, the judiciary can show activism for the sake of the common interest. The chief justice of Pakistan's Apex Court had rightly demanded far larger answerability from higher-level government personnel, police administration, detective agencies and other governmental agencies. It was quite unthinkable step in Pakistan before him. The chief justice had received support of Pakistan's lawyers. The lawyers have a good network and support-base across the country. When judiciary is the voice of the society, it is duty of the civil society to respond on the matter and make it stronger. The activism of the judiciary is not ever-active due to some compulsions of state controlled machineries. The civil society members feel insecure to move against the state authority. In rural Pakistan, orthodox and religious masters-led society is responsible for the creation of inadequate and invisible portrait of 'rural civil society'. On the other hand, the 'self-centric salaried urban civil society' has a common phobia about the state authority. Due to the differences between the two civil societies they could not be united on any greater issue related to the country's democratic interest.

Radical Islam and Army

Before the secession of East Pakistan from West Pakistan, the role of Dhaka-based civil society was clearly manifested as a protest movement by Bengali intellectuals against the forcible imposition of Urdu on East Pakistani Bengali ethnic group. Two major incidents had restricted the famishment of civil society—one is radical Islamic force and another is

Islamization of army. The process of Islamization in Pakistan was basically state-led. During that time that process was appreciated by a section of Westernized elite-class people. Farzana Shaikh has rightly made a comment in this connection, “the latter replied on a statist interpretation of Islam to oppose the populist policies favoured by Zia-ul-Haq” (Shaikh 2009: 107). Towards the end of the 1960s religion-based political parties propagated the concept of the ‘Ideology of Pakistan’ when radical movements emerged to threaten the social order in West and East Pakistan. This period witnessed the rise of the Jamat-i-Islami’s ideology among the intelligentsia. General Zia-ul-Haq had come into power through a coup in 1977. He stated that sovereignty lay with *Allah*, and as his representative, he was entitled to wield this power (Chengappa 2004: 24–25). He used Islam to legitimize his rule. Through the Islamization of army, he encouraged the jihadist to play an active role. In the absence of free space in society, civil society cannot not grow.

Civil Society and Media

The relation between civil society and mass-media is interrelated. The mass-media can take a significant role in active participation of civil society. Through the positive circulation of civil society’s activities, it can be popularized and justified in the society. The role of media in fostering civil society was not initially very low. Later on the role of media in Pakistan has been a bit different. Actually, Pakistan is not a safe place for free media. In Pakistan, anti-government, anti-army and anti-radical broadcasting is a matter of jeopardy for media persons. Beena Sarwar, editor of *Aman Ki Asha* of the Jang Group of newspapers, had remarked, “Journalists in Pakistan walk a tightrope between the military and the militants...” (Sarwar 2011). Writers and journalists are integral parts of the civil society. During General Zia-ul-Haq’s military rule, journalists were imprisoned and tortured and newspapers were subjected to censorship. Despite this daily repression, journalists fought a valiant battle against authoritarian controls. Beside protest meetings, demonstrations and processions, journalists had tried to make a novel way of protest by

leaving 'blank space' in newspapers (Mukhopadhyay 2016: 389). During the Nawaz Sharif's regime, the relations between Jang Group and government was hostile. Due to anti-governmental news broadcasting, the Government of Pakistan had stopped the supply of news print to the newspaper and the bank account of the Jang Group was frozen by the Sharif's government. During the regime of Pervez Musharraf, it was very difficult task for civil society to make any protest movement against the government. The harsh policies of the government were continuously imposed on civilians. The democratic and rational fronts of the society had to face lot of persecution during Musharraf's rule. Media autonomy was immensely threatened in November 2007 with the imposition of emergency. So many restrictions were imposed on democratic fronts, NGOs and social activist groups.

Issue-Based Civil Society Movements in Pakistan

Despite of shortcomings and challenges, Pakistan has witnessed significant civil society movements. One of the major movements was initiated by the NGOs. The *NGO movements* happened on the basis of various issues. The basic mottos of the NGO-led movements were to enable the people to raise their voice on social, economic and political issues and to develop a healthy-workable environment in the society. A number of NGOs in Pakistan have fabricated slack associations and linkages on several matters such as child rights, females' rights, the environment and more. NGOs are very active in underdeveloped areas and tribal areas, especially, terrorist-porn areas. They are very active child rights, women's rights and environmental issues. NGOs have been the voice of civil society due to the lack of activism of so-called structured urban civil society.

Women's movement is another significant civil society movement of Pakistan. Women in Pakistan are in a vulnerable position, and on an average, social security has been challenged by non-governmental apparatus. Several associations of womenfolk and related human rights organizations had formed in Pakistan since 1980s for the protection and

empowerment of women. *Environment movement* has been a more important movement demonstrated by the civil society. On the issue of deforestation, ecological destruction, and air and water pollution, the eco-friendly section of the civil society members appears in movements. Sustainable development is very emerging issue in Pakistan. The unplanned urbanization process and mass-destructive developmental projects are jointly hampering the eco-system. This movement is less political and free from religious control. This is very positive thing that the Nation-wide Preservation Policy procedure played a major role in associating and carrying together a number of dotted environmental and sustainable development issues under one umbrella.

Muhajir Qaumi Movement as a Part of Civil Society

Muhajir Qaumi Movement is one of the burning ethno-linguistic movements of Pakistan which manifested in a manner of civil society movement. Muhajir is a sect of Muslim refugee, during partition who were shifted from India and settled into Pakistan, especially, in urban Sindh. Ethnicity plays a vital role in politics of Pakistan. Korejo and Syed have opined that “the leading Sindhi nationalist leader, also fails to go beyond the rhetoric where Muhajir identity is concerned and brings no fresh evidence on the role of the Sindhi language in ethnic identity formation or assertion” (Korejo 2000). In March 1984, a new force emerged on Pakistan’s political stage; the Muhajir Qaumi Movement, championing the interests of the Urdu-speaking Muhajirs (migrated from India) settled in Sindh province. The MQM became a political force of a considerable magnitude in the post 1984 phase. In 1986 a violent ethno-communal riot took place at a time in Karachi and Hyderabad between MQM supporters and Pashtuns. The Pashtuns settlers in Karachi suddenly attacked MQM supporters. MQM supporters were also engaged in several communal riots with Sindhis. In 1988 general election, MQM became third majority block in National Assembly. It also got one-third majority in Sindh Assembly. In that election Benazir Bhutto came to power. MQM

leader Altaf Husain supported this government for fulfilling their demands. But not a single demand by MQM was fulfilled. After the general election of 1990 MQM came close to Nawaz Sharif's government but after a short while, MQM's honeymoon with the Sharif's government ended. The MQM party had gained momentum by the leadership of Altaf Husain. He had claimed to declare Muhajir as a different ethno-national group which has its own language (Urdu). On the eve of this turmoil, Sindh community also started a movement (*Jiye Sindh Movement*) against the central government of Pakistan on the issue of discrimination. The Sindhis claimed that they have been deprived and discriminated in all respects.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a lucrative place for the scholars and experts to endeavour to enigmatic socio-political and security-related issues. Afghanistan is a land of multi-ethnic groups and orthodoxies, which is struggling for a modern framework of statehood and values of modernity, the archaisms of tradition and the corruption of the state system. On a world map, Afghanistan appears as a somewhat marginal place that may alternatively be considered as a part of South Asia. Afghanistan has had a different experience of colonial domination than other South Asian regions. It was limited to the 40 years during which it maintained internal sovereignty but its foreign relations were under British rule. Throughout history, the sovereignty of the Afghanistan and its capacity to deliver services to the population have been shaped by external intervention that may limit state sovereignty but also enhance it (Monsutti 2014: 97–112). Unlike India and Pakistan, Afghanistan had no opportunity to inherit British culture to modernize its society through Western outlook. The societal outlook of Afghan society was immensely rigid and orthodox. The concept of civil society has not grown-up under the British rule. Later on, due to the lack of education and democratic deficiency, civil society could not take any proper shape. Afghanistan has witnessed a number of ethnic conflicts over the centuries. The radical Islam and incapable civil government is collectively responsible for non-formation of an iconic civil

society. It is also true that Afghanistan was socially and politically isolated in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that is why no external idea of civil society was inherited by Afghan people.

In Search of Historical Roots

Afghanistan, with its complex ethnography of Afghans, Tajiks, Hindukush Indo-Aryans, Turko-Mongolians and strong tribal affiliations, still locked in, what Ibn-Khaldun called, “the first or second stage of civilization”, is still in the throes of transformation towards a modern nation-state. Democracy and nationalism have never penetrated roots in this country (Gull 2008: 76). The Afghan state was established in the eighteenth century, when a tribal confederation developed into a dynastic state. In 1747, Ahmad Shah Abdali led an Abdali confederation, now known as the Durrani. This dynasty was followed in 1818 by another Durani Dynasty, the Muhammadzai clan of the Barakzai tribe, which held power until 1978. Through the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919, Afghanistan had gained its independence. Muhammad Nadir Shah had ruled in Afghanistan from 1929 to 1933. He wanted to make his own imperial regime by legitimate method. He had formed a Grand Assembly of the ethnic leaders, religious masters and native elites to endorse a fresh constitution. Islam got importance in formulating the new constitution.

Modern and secular outlook was not reflected due to absence of modern education and enlightenment. This constitution was a manifestation of vested interest of Pashtun community. Non-Pashtun people were excluded from educational, political and developmental facilities. Later on the Musahiban rulers (1929–1978) pursued ambivalent policies towards Islam, especially, in expanding modern educational system, which has a secular agenda and a Pashtun based nationalism (Gull 2008: 78–79). The modernization programmes were introduced in the form of new democracy. In practice, democratic institutions and cultures were not grown-up due to autocratic nature of government and radical religious societal structure. A number of movements happened in Afghanistan in ideological or religious manners, but all of those movements finally

turned into ethnic or sectarian lines. Most of those movements held between Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras.

Modern Afghanistan and Civil Society

In a true sense, a modern state can emerge by introducing modern education system, free press, constitutionalism, liberal secularism, nationalism and ensuring the citizens' rights with an outlook of ethnic and communal harmony. Afghanistan could do this. It had failed to implement the Islamic modernization, abolition of feudalism and abolition of kingship. In absence of these elements, Afghanistan has witnessed ethnic violence and revolutionary activities of the communist parties. Daud was the first president of Afghan republic. He remained in power from 1973–1978. He tried to propagate the notion of Pashtun state but did not succeed. He also prohibited the use of ethnic surnames. His dream was to establish a common cultural and linguistic identity on which Afghan people can be united by the sentiment of nationalism. The heterogenic nature of the Afghan society has been repeatedly puzzled by external powers also. After the Soviet invasion to Afghanistan in 1978, the growth of communism on the one hand and the America's intention to make Mujahedeen (a group of Afghan fighters) to fight against the Soviet forces on the other have jointly made the country a land of instability and uncertainty.

The traditional structure of the society has become gradually darker after the assassination of Najibullah. In the post-Najibullah era, the squabbling between power contenders resulted in widespread violence. Since the mid of 1990s under the regime of Taliban, the entire country had gone through a very lawless situation. In the name of *jihad*, Taliban had banned all of the democratic institutions along with mass-media. Public domain was irrationally closed-down. Women's were not allowed to go outside. The entire education system was run by *shariya law*. The right to protest movement was totally stopped. Actually, they wanted to propagate that the voice of Allah is the voice of the country; but they distorted the message of Islam. For Afghanistan, Islam could be used as a very popular and useful means of establishing a peaceful society, it was not properly used. Afghan rulers and religious masters of the country

could not able to understand the actual message of Islam. It is a message of harmony and peace with the philosophy of peaceful existence. Due to non-understanding of Islamic philosophy properly, Afghanistan has been witnessing religious intolerance and social instability. Afghanistan might have an active civil society for proper functioning of the democratic system.

The Responsibility of the USSR and the USA in Destroying of the Civil Society

After Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, its forces were very active in Afghan politics and society. Apart from political controls, persecution on civilians had crossed the limit. Moscow's tactful propaganda on communism across the country had led the country to go forward to communism. The civil society was confused during 1979–1990 due to the Soviet forces. The autonomy of Afghan civil society has been immensely hampered due to the USA's unexpected intervention. Afghanistan could not be able to show their indignity due to the external influences. At the end of the 2001, when the American forces had started to attack on Afghanistan to finish the Al Qaida and Taliban militants, then entire country once again had been started to control by the external power. State was not able to provide any space for the civil society. Due to the continuous aerial bombardments by the US Air Force, thousands of innocent peoples along with militants were killed and many were wounded. The civil society of Afghanistan in the post 9/11 era has rarely raised its voice against the American dominance. As the USA propagated that it is doing a lot for reconstruction in Afghanistan and trying to ensure the democratic environment for Afghans, that is why; civil society of Afghanistan is in dilemma about their view about the USA. A good number of civil society members were given special privileges by the US administration. So it is quite natural that those civil society members will not be interested to think about the greater society in lieu of their personal gains. This is a common method applied by the big powers during their direct or indirect intervention to any country. In this way big powers often like to control the civil society of the invaded country. The destructive means

were used by the American and British forces since 2001. The unfinished Afghan civil society was totally puzzled about their duties. In the name of combatting international terrorism and restoration of democracy, the US forces had started to intervene the entire state system. Today, Afghan civil society stands in between 'making and unmaking'. Naturally, a question has been raised by the South Asian scholars whether there is any existence of civil society in Afghanistan or not. Without arranging modern, rational and secular education system with restructured societal pattern it is very difficult to make a visible and responsible civil society.

Taliban and Civil Society

The Taliban leaders have made a deep burial land for open-minded civilians. The free space was totally abolished by the radical groups. The ironic rule and barbaric customs were jointly responsible for closing the doors of civil society. Although there were no remarkable pro-democratic civil society movements happened across the country. The scattered society has had experience of scarcity. Many innocent peoples had been arrested by the US forces and also had to face extra judicial tortures. The activism of civil society in stopping of attacks on common masses has not been shown yet. Civil society has a full range of issues in the social, cultural, religious, humanitarian and political life. Afghan leadership, civil society, particularly local and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are not actively projecting their roadmap regarding the responding role in society. Afghanistan has no sizable educated middle class.

In case of Afghanistan, it is very difficult to differentiate between the rational civil society and traditional civil society. Over the decades, Afghanistan is continuing the traditional pattern of civil society which is a combination of local councils (Shura/Jirga), religious institutions (mosques, madrasas etc.), religious masters and other. Like Western countries or even emerging post-colonial countries, Afghanistan has no secular and democratic civil society. These orthodox non-democratic medieval institutions are the pillars of civil society. These are very influential. Modern and rational intellectuals are unimaginable in Afghanistan. The so-called civil society is very active during the civil wars and sectarian

conflicts. Regarding the human rights and democratic movements they are less interested. This is very interesting thing that religion based civil society is not united. There is no homogeneous outlook among the civil society members. Due to the divergence of interests there are differences among the radical Islamist, pro-government moderates and reformists. Throughout the history, Afghanistan has witnessed the close relationship between the government and the clergy. It is true that entire society is covered with religious dogma. There is an undercurrent between 'the modern' and 'the traditional' and often they get in conflicts. Now, a diversity of various powers encounter each other, generating strains and clashes that frequently vent into vehement hostilities among the government, non-governmental organizations and spiritual players. The inheritances of the Afghan jihad—or divine war contrary to infidel socialists—and Taliban decree have had weighty things on the role of religion in culture and politics after 2001. Now, religion is extremely lobbied, and the connection between religion and the state is very challenged, as is the role of religion in the public domain. The majority of the religious leaders were highly critical of the foreign military presence in Afghanistan. *Mullahs* and *ulema* are supportive of neither the current Afghan government nor the external powers. Afghan spiritual players and organizations presently implement civic society roles that are backing the existing harmony, growth and state formation processes, but also work alongside these procedures (Religious Actors and Civil Society in Post-2001, November 2007: 0.8).

Women as a Part of Civil Society

One of the basic pre-requisites of formation of a civil society is to spread the education throughout the country. Without modern education system with a sizeable educated people, civil society can't take any proper shape. Women education is very essential for social mobility. Perter Marden has said, "The question of education for girls has inevitably raised questions over the potential role of women outside the home. It has provoked defensive reactions from men, concerned to protect the honour of women within their families and also ensure that the traditional roles of

women within the domestic sphere continues to be performed” (Marden 2010: 208). In Afghanistan, women are still neglected. No adequate policy for emancipation of the women has been taken by the government. During Taliban regime women were not allowed to go outside and take education and take entry in jobs. Due to the social pressure women’s movement could not be a part of civil society movement in Afghanistan.

Youth Civil Society Members and Protest Movements

Afghanistan is a **young country**: about 55 per cent are under the age of 20, and the vast majority are under the age of 40. It is also one that defines ‘youth’ in a slightly different way than most in Europe or the USA would expect: people as old as **35 still identify themselves** as a part of Afghanistan’s ‘youth’, thinking that youthfulness is reflected in one’s outlook and lifestyle rather than a number. First, for many engaged and young leaders, this was their first chance to vote or take part in a parliamentary election, and second, because it gave them a rare chance to alter Afghanistan’s politics, which is dominated by a powerful executive and a set of immovable tribal and ethnic leaders (<https://www.albawaba.com/news/are-afghanistan>). I would like to mention a barbaric incident which reflected the democratic urge of Afghan youth and at the same time the positive spark of the civil society. Despite receiving threats from the Taliban, 27-year-old Hafizullah went to his local polling station in Helmand in southern Afghanistan, to vote in his country’s parliamentary elections. When he left the station, he was found by militants who then cut off one of his fingers that had been dipped in blue dye to show he had voted: a punishment for taking part in Afghanistan’s fragile democratic process. There was a huge aspiration and excitation among the youth over the first parliamentary elections held in late November 2010. Afghan youth movement was shown just after the barbaric incident in a spontaneous manner. Afghanistan’s youth movements are a chaotic assemblage of parts, glued together by a cohesive desire for reconciliation and peace and foreign funding, while simultaneously being ripped apart by local

power brokers and warlords, who promise access to power and resources. They nonetheless represent the country's best hopes to reconcile itself and form a lasting peace.

Peace is a utopian concept in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has rarely witnessed societal harmony. Being a war-torn country it has experienced hunger, poverty and endless bloody war-fares. Recently, a group of youngsters has brought a ray of hope in peace-building as an integral part of the civil society. Sifatullah Zahidi has mentioned in his article, published in *Salaam Times* newspaper on 9 April 2018, that a non-violent demonstration initiated by a cluster of youngsters in Lashkargah, Helmand Province, is rapidly scattering cross-wise Afghanistan in an unparalleled movement that contains all sections of society. A large number of citizens of [Dozof Helmand Province had formed a shelter in Lashkargah](#) on March 24, a day after a car packed with explosives blew up outside of a stadium in the city, killing at least 17 civilians and wounding 55 (<http://afghanistan.asia-news.com>). Over the past few decades, thousands of Afghan citizens had lost their lives, thousands had been wounded and millions had lost their homes. Afghanistan is also witnessing contentious out-war migration. Being a vulnerable and war-porn country citizens feel insecure. For saving their lives and a better future, potential youth are frequently leaving the country. This is not good for the future of Afghanistan. If the educated youngsters can realize the actual necessities of the country and able to understand the deep-rooted reasons behind the national crises, then they can collectively fight against the all-oppressive forces.

However, demonstrators of the aforesaid movement called themselves the 'People's Peace Movement'. The positive side of this movement is incorporation of a large section of Afghan people. They have included tribal elders, civil society activists and relatives of victims killed in violence. This peace front got support from Afghan High Peace Council, and Afghan *Ulema* Council and local political leaders. This movement aimed to spread across the country through peaceful demonstrations. They used Twitter to propagate their visions and missions. Due to adequate communication system and restrictions on mass-media and social media, the wave of social movement could not reach across the country. Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai had tried to ensure some space

for the civil society members. He had to take lot of challenges to establish minimum democratic atmosphere for the Afghan citizens. The present President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani has been supported by the two major democracies of the world—the USA and India. The positive stances have been taken by the both countries in order to fostering democratic culture in Afghanistan. Pakistan played a very negative role in making of civil society in Afghanistan. The illegitimate Taliban government was blindly supported by Pakistan.

Nepal

The civil society in Nepal has evolved very slowly. The concept of civil society in Nepali discourse is contested and to some extent self-contradictory and confusing. A noted Nepali politics expert Ganga Thapa has stated that, “experiments with democracy in Nepal have often gone through difficult times largely due to political opportunism. Besides, due to overwhelming poverty or whatever, not all citizens are interested in democratic values” (Thapa 2016: 68). Nepal has gone through a number of social unrests and political crises. The Nepali people had to spend a long time under the Rana rule and oppressive Monarchical system. History of Nepali democracy is remarkable due to the long struggle of the people. In early 1990s, Nepal had gained the experience of parliamentary democracy. This experience was not so smooth. The thrust of democracy could be mitigated by the humanitarian and respective approaches of the King, but it was not happened. It was basically, Communist, in fortification of their argument of wider civil society periphery with those of outmoded civic association, proclaimed that convention of civility is not an unfamiliar notion in Nepal (Dahal 2001); and the history of indigenous volunteer organizations predates induced NGOs. In contrast, some tried to measure civil society of Nepal from the window of Western concept and made sceptic conclusions such as “absence of civil society” in Nepal (Shrestha 1998); and “genuine civil society is yet to evolve in Nepal” (Dahal 2001: 42). Minimalists viewed that traditional community associations are different from what we understand civil society and NGOs today (Gyawali 2001). NGOs are new innovation and outcome of the

expansion of the global multilateral assistance programmes and the expansion of the Northern INGOs into the South (Mishra 2001; Dilli Ram Dahal 2001).

Apart from democratic movements, there are a large number of issues on which Nepali people move against the state authority. Political violence, social insecurity and justice, pollution, human rights violation and women abuse are very common issues for civil society movement. Nepal is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country without equal representation in democratic system and without having democratic rights. To Ganga Thapa, “there are numerous popular movements today which are striving for long-term political and social changes”. Before the creation of parliamentary democratic system, Nepal had an unorganized civil society which fought for democracy. In Nepal, through the spring movement in 1990s civil society gave an effort for introducing democracy in the country. During that time, it was very difficult task to identify the non-political civil society members from political persons. That long-awaited democracy could not be introduced without generating momentum by Nepali Congress (NC) and communist parties. The members of the civil society were attached with a particular political party. The complex relationship between the political party and civil society often creates identity crisis of civil society as a non-political platform. As Nepal is a very backward state without experience of democratic practices that is why, overlapping nature of civil society is not unnatural. The civil society of Nepal has spent a long time for getting footing in the society and political arena. To create a stronger movement and the fight against the oppressive despotic authority, civil society has had to keep connections with political parties. Here a contradiction can be raised in order to compare with Western notions of civil society.

The Hindu monarchy in 2008 endorsed new socio-political and liberal construction to take shape and new forms of local governance defined by non-dominant ethnic communities to foster (Hangen 2010). However, ethno-based civil society movements took place in a number of times in Nepal. Nepali people expected that after the abolition of monarchical system in 2008, they will get a pure democratic atmosphere. It was not happened in practice. Its true Maoists came to power through huge

mandate. Within ten years a number of governments have been changed, but not a single acceptable draft of the constitution is prepared by the government yet. Some ethnic groups have been intentionally exempted from the constitutional rights. There is no provision for the refugees and *Mahdeshi* people also. Regarding the policy of exclusion, some civil society movements are going on across the country. Asis Mistry in his recent research work has rightly mentioned that ethno politics is often viewed as incompatible with democracy. In the age of globalization and technological advancement, especially in the sectors of e-communication, social and electronic media, the ethnic communities in various parts of the globe have been gradually but significantly becoming mobilized for the attainment of their political rights of self-rule or secession (Mistry 2018: 34). In fact, modernization can be extremely important for the development of nationalism, both civic nationalism and ethno-nationalism, by producing greater socio-political mobilization and increasing assimilation of those mobilized (Deutsch 1953). Against this backdrop, it can be said that in the Nepali case, it is an easier task for Nepali suppressed ethnic groups to convey their demands through civil society platforms. Thus the effectiveness of civil society has been reflected in Nepal today through various dissatisfied ethno-nationalist groups.

Saubhagya Shah had sharply analysed about the civil society movement of Nepal from 2006 to 2008. That period was so vital for Nepali society. Pro-democratic Nepali citizens had to fight against the military and oppressive rule of the King Gynendra. He said, “the role of civil society in the *janaandolan* (mass-movement) in April 2006 in Nepal, the popular movement that abolished Nepal’s Hindu monarchy” (Shah 2010: 75). He has mentioned that a major reason for the visibility and effectiveness of civil society during this political movement was the material and moral support from external agencies, mainly development partners. This is partly true. Civil institutions developed in response to local demands, and they operated largely at community levels. In Nepal, civil society movement got momentum due to the citizens’ huge aspirations for democracy. In case of Nepal, questions have been raised by Saubhagya Shah: is Nepal a civil or uncivil place? Is there any possibility to form and function of civil society in a pre-mature democratic country? In Nepal it was proven that civil society can be an important factor in political

change. The unimpeded force of civil society was succeeded to overthrow the autocratic and inhuman kingship of Nepal. There is a narrative about the flourishing of civil society in Nepal. According to this narrative civil society in Nepal was flourished after 1990 because donors believed that civil society was needed for development and thus provided ample funding. It's true that in introducing democracy and open market, external forces were so active. Since mid of 1990s a good number of NGOs were formed in Nepal as a part of civil society. Now question is that were the Nepali people mature enough to formulate a civil society like that in West? If answer is not, then it can be said that in a pre-matured society civil society can face lot of problems in making of decisions. After the abolition of Monarchical system in Nepal, Maoist influence has been spread across the country. Maoist President Prachanda, Babu Ram Bhatta Rai and Khadga Prasad Oli—none of those Nepali prime ministers—could able to establish the social and political stability in Nepal. The weak judicial system is also incapable to ensure social justice for the citizens through judicial activism.

Conclusion

In my write-up, I have given an outline of the civil society of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal. These three countries are different in nature. In Pakistan, a journey of democracy was started with euphoria by Jinnah. Later on, State itself created numerous problems with various targeted ethnic groups, religious sects and women. As an economically challenged state it has started to enhance its military budget in lieu of social welfare. It is quite painful to think that Pakistan has a good number of bonded labours with existing system of feudalism. The citizens of Pakistan have witnessed the oppressive rule of military and radical Islam. However, civil society of Pakistan has been formed properly, but it is unable to free functioning. South Asian civil society has a wide range of social actors. It includes lawyers, architects, journalists and students; NGOs; transnational civil society; media; and political parties. Being a war-torn state Afghanistan is passing through immense political, economic and social crises. The process of civil society making has not been completed yet.

Although some civil society movements cropped up across the country, they were largely unorganized. The democratic culture is yet to be developed properly in Afghanistan. The orthodox and medieval outlook of the Afghan society is to be removed immediately. There is a ray of hope in making of civil society that the country is moving gradually towards parliamentary democracy without caring radical forces. Nepali civil society is struggling with a number of problems. The democratization of Nepal with a policy of accommodation is the core objectives of pro-democratic civil society in Nepal.

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