

CIVIL SOCIETY AND MASS MOVEMENT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND LINKAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the historical development of civil society and its connection to mass movements, with a particular focus on Nepal. Civil society, often regarded as an intermediary between the state and citizens, has played a critical role in advocating for democracy and social justice. The aim of the study is to analyze how civil society organizations (CSOs) have influenced socio-political transformations, particularly during Nepal's People's Movements of 1990 and 2006, which were pivotal in restoring democracy and reshaping governance structures. The research employs qualitative and historical methods, relying on secondary data from books, journal articles, and archival records. The study finds that CSOs significantly contributed to mass mobilization by facilitating collective action, amplifying marginalized voices, and advocating for democratic reforms.

Keywords: Civil society, history, mass movement, revolution

1. INTRODUCTION

Discussions surrounding civil society often portray it as an objective reality, distinct from the state, with NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and other citizen-led groups at its core (Kutay 2021; 2014). Embracing this picture without question ignores the close relationship that exists between power relations and civil society discourse. In order to comprehend the current discourse on civil society, it is necessary to analyze it through the lens of governance practices and rationalities. The concept of civil society is closely related to the way governments control and direct society. One common understanding of civil society is that it is made up of intermediate groups, mostly CSOs and NGOs, that frequently take on leadership positions. Because it is consistent with contemporary governance models and neoliberal rationalities, this view has become more popular (Commins 1990; Rose 2018; Al-Akiti and Hellyer 2016). We may

understand how knowledge of civil society and governance impacts power relations and societal views by referring to Michel Foucault's concepts. The relationship between political power and scientific knowledge in the management of people and states, involving both state and non-state actors, is highlighted by Foucault's theory. Applying Foucault's theory to civil society means looking at it as a notion that is molded by shifting scientific theories' depictions of it. The objective is to demonstrate how knowledge and political power interact through sovereignty, discipline, and governmental practices rather than just characterizing civil society in various historical times (Kant et al. 2008).

There is no standard definition of civil society in Nepal and the outside world. Nonetheless, the definition provided by the Center for Civil Society at the London School of Economics is regarded as appropriate in this study. Civil society can be called a certain collective effort of individuals with common interests, objectives and beliefs without being pressured by anyone else. In theory, its structural forms are distinct from the state, family, and market, although in practice the boundaries of the state, family, and market are often complex, blurry, and 'negotiated' (Kant et al. 2008). Civil society generally has diversity in place, activists, and institutional structures, as well as differences in formality, autonomy, and power. Charities, development NGOs, community organizations, women's organizations, religious organizations, business organizations, religious organizations, social movements, business organizations, support groups and their networks, advocacy groups, etc. can be called civil society organizations.

The concept of civil society has been historically defined in various ways by different scholars. Aristotle saw civil society as formalized institutions forming an autonomous social sphere (Edwards 2009), while Rosenblum and Post (2001) described it as a freedom zone where individuals could freely associate. Young (2000) on the other hand, emphasized civil society's role in promoting trust, choice, and democratic virtues, particularly under liberal constitutionalist regimes where it is seen as essential for democracy and social welfare. Despite these differing interpretations, civil society remains a subject of debate among researchers. Young's article introduced several key concepts related to civil society, including its role in promoting democracy and justice, the idea of self-organizing civil society, and the importance of the public sphere in democratic processes. However, critics argue that his arguments lack sufficient evidence and examples to support his claims.

For example, while Young suggests that civil society fosters trust, choice, and democratic virtues, some argue that this is not always the case. Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Premier, contested the promotion of civil society and democracy, fearing it could lead to disorderly conduct detrimental to development (Bhagwati 1995). Similarly, civil society's relationship with the government is complex in many developing countries, requiring collaboration for effective governance. Moreover, Young's notion of civil society as a free self-organization may not universally apply, especially in developing countries where government support is crucial for civil society initiatives. Additionally, the public sphere's role in promoting democracy and justice is nuanced and context-dependent.

Mass movements, as analyzed in disciplines like sociology, psychology, and political science, are social phenomena involving the active participation of large groups of individuals

in political actions. Sociological research traditionally emphasizes the social dynamics within these movements, studying collective behavior, the organization of social mobilization, and the creation of shared group identities. However, a newer perspective emerging in the study of movements suggests that mass movements also embody the aspirations and political involvement of ordinary people (Hobsbawm, 2009). According to the author, such movements, sometimes referred to as popular or people's movements, arise from a collective sense of grievance, desire for change, or the drive to achieve social, political, or economic reforms. These movements typically involve significant numbers of participants who come together to challenge the status quo, demand their rights, and push for transformative changes in society. They can take various forms, including protests, strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience.

The 2006 mass movement in Nepal marked a significant turning point, leading to the end of King Gyanendra's autocratic rule and the restoration of democratic governance. Civil society organizations played a crucial role in mobilizing the masses and advocating for democratic reforms. The literature on civil society in Nepal exhibits critical gaps, particularly concerning the linkage of civil society in the mass movements. This research aims to address these gaps by providing the historical context of both civil society and mass movement and brief explore the connection of civil society with the mass movement.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative and historical approach to explore the role of civil society in mass movements, with a particular focus in Nepal. Secondary data sources were utilized, including books, journal articles, government reports, and archival records, to trace the historical development of civil society and its linkage to key mass movements. It's a review based paper and explore the history of civil society and mass movement. The research specifically examines historical events, such as Nepal's People's Movements of 1990 and 2006, as case studies to highlight the contributions of civil society organizations in driving socio-political transformations. Only Key events, actions, and strategies of civil society during these periods were identified and analyzed to understand their role in mobilizing people and advocating for democratic change.

3. DISCUSSION

History of Civil Society

In response to fraudulent elections, thousands of Belarusians came to the streets in August 2020, demanding freedom Similar rallies in Sudan and Armenia recently resulted in political change but did not achieve substantial effects in Lebanon or Hong Kong. (Grinin and Grinin 2022). At the same time, residents have taken to the streets in support of dictatorships, such as in North Korea, Syria, or Venezuela, or in favour of reforms that undermine democratic governance, such as in Brazil or Turkey What role does mass mobilization play in the

stabilization or change of a political regime? A previous comparative study has yielded contradictory responses to this question. Some researchers believe that civil society involvement is essential to democratization ("Bratton, M., & van de Walle, N. (1992). Popular Protest... - Google Scholar," n.d.; Porta 2022), whilst others believe that it is not (Berman 1997; Ahmad Razimi, Romle, and Muhamad Erdris 2016). However, in the context of Nepal, the role of civil society in mass movement and democracy is an issue that needs further exploration.

Civil society has historically been understood in two distinct ways. First, it is seen as a 'political community where the state is inseparable from society (Ellis 2013). In this view, civil society and the state are closely linked, with power dynamics governed by laws and institutions designed to maintain social order. The second interpretation of civil society positions it as an autonomous, self-regulating entity, often in opposition to the state. In ancient Greek and Roman political thought, civil society was not confined to the legal definition of citizenship. Aristotle highlighted that people lived within different social realms, where their positions were influenced by property, skills, and capacities, shaping their roles in political society. He defined a citizen as someone who participated in public affairs and held office to administer justice (Hashas 2018; Crisp and Saunders 1999). Thus, citizenship in Athens encompassed both moral and legal dimensions (Ehrenberg 1999).

For Cicero and Roman legal theorists, civil society was similar to the commonwealth which is a collection of individuals with common goal (Cicero 1998). The division between the state and civil society was anticipated in Natural Law theory, particularly the contrast between *status ciilis* and *status naturalis* (Tribe 1988). The latter, described by philosopher Thomas , represented a state of constant conflict in a society where individuals formed contracts with each other for self-interest, which he called *bellum omnium contra omnes* (Hobbes, 1949). Hobbes believed that the state of nature was overcome by the establishment of a civil union, forming the basis for civil society. John Locke associated the contentious issue of property formation with this natural state.

Adam Smith, defined a civilized society as a self-regulating network of economic interactions, where individuals make decisions based on the forces of supply and demand in the marketplace. According to Smith, these economic processes required sociability and mutual empathy among people for societal harmony (Trentmann 2000). However, by the late 18th century, with revolutionary movements against absolutist rulers, the terms bourgeois Gesellschaft and civil society came to be associated with the negative aspects of bourgeois society, symbolizing decadence, poverty, and moral decline (Hegel 1991; Juška et al. 2000) . Hegel responded to these critiques by developing the idea of the universal state, which sought to reconcile the political and economic spheres. While he acknowledged civil society as a collection of economic interests, Hegel did not share Smith's optimism regarding the self-sustaining function of the market. Revolutionary upheavals had exposed the disconnect between the idealized, orderly economic systems and the chaotic realities of modern society, questioning whether civil society could generate the order and progress it promised.

Karl Marx aligned with Hegel's criticism of political economics, viewing civil society as a divisive and self-destructive arena driven by self-interest (Bottomore and Goode 1983). However, Marx did not focus on regulating the destructive tendencies of bourgeois society as

Hegel did. Instead, Marx focused on the potential for revolutionary transformation within civil society's economic ties, believing that change could emerge through the mobilization of class conflicts. For Marx, the state was a formal and negative force, largely shaped by civil society, which preceded and influenced the state's actions. Civil society was governed not by control but by the shifting dynamics of class struggle.

The concept of civil society in Nepal is relatively recent, evolving significantly through various political struggles for democracy starting in the 1950s when the Nepalese sought to overthrow the Rana regime. This idea fully took shape with the restoration of democracy in 1990, when civil society organizations became more prominent. The notion gained further significance as civil society played a leading role in negotiating between the Maoists and the government during the Maoist insurgency, and later during the April 2006 uprising (Bhatta 2007). It is asserted that Nepal's civil society has been able to cover up its 1990s transgressions because of the success of the People's Movement in 2006. It's because the People's Movement in 2006 was only successful. After all, agitated seven-party alliances (SPA) received overwhelmingly positive support from civil society organizations. As a result, there is now more faith in civil society. Civic society organizations in Nepal since then, have been interpreting the promise of complete democracy (Ioktantra) made throughout the revolution, which has been essential to the democratization process (Bhatta 2007).

History of Mass Movement

The history of mass movements shows that the slave revolt led by Spartacus between 73 and 71 BC was a manifestation of the broader social unrest that was shaking the Roman Empire (Gill, 2014). Several historians point different revolutions in history: the Haitian Revolution, the Iranian Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Young Turk Revolution, the Taiping Revolution, the Russian October Revolution, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution. Starting in the late 1980s, multi-class alliances in movements such as the Iranian and Nicaraguan revolutions of 1979, the People Power movement in the Philippines, and the Autumn of Nations in Europe in 1989 successfully toppled seemingly invincible regimes through widespread protests and mass strikes in nonviolent revolutions.

In the context of South Africa, when political stalemate and repression were prevalent in South Africa, the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) first appeared on the scene. The apartheid regime's efforts to stifle the freedom movements were overextended. The apartheid regime became more and more isolated due to declining foreign backing. The hold of apartheid on the opposition was progressively relaxed. A number of townships were designated as "no-go" zones for the security forces, while some segments of the white society rejected apartheid practices. Four states of emergency were proclaimed in South Africa during the 1980s, leading to the incarceration of thousands of activists and the killings of several people as a result of covert operations both inside and outside the nation. The result was a political impasse. The possibility of engaging in negotiations as an alternative to the cycle of resistance emerged. Following the declaration of a state of emergency in June 1988, the United Democratic Front (UDF), which had been in charge of the internal conflict since 1983 through widespread mobilization, appeared to have been thoroughly defeated. There was a gap in the novel quest

for independence. It took comprehensive strategies to oppose and ultimately overthrow apartheid. The leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) met with NGOs and people in a number of occasions, many of which were held in secrecy. In 1989, the MDM was created to support the political campaign to end apartheid rule (Makau and Liebenberg 2021).

In Indian context, the struggle of democracy and republic in India was supported by peoples movement. From 1920, influential activists like Mohandas Gandhi launched massive, usually nonviolent rallies to protest the British Raj. Others embraced a militant stance and engaged in revolutionary activities across the Indian subcontinent in opposition to British rule, hoping to topple it through armed conflict. Gandhi spearheaded the independence movement, which resisted British control via nonviolent means such economic resistance, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation. Last British Governor-General of India, Viscount Louis Mountbatten, proclaimed the division of British India into India and Pakistan on June 3, 1947. In June 1948, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari took his place (Ghosal 1961) .

In the context of Nepal, there are different social movement being held. The wave of social movements has been led by women, Dalits, Madhesis, and Janajatis. These organizations took part in the 1990 First People's Movement, which restored democracy and created a framework for planned, coordinated group action. Social movements had been fragmented before that, when the autocratic monarchy was firmly in place and harshly repressing opposition. However, their agendas against enduring grievances and their tactics of mobilization became more robust after 1990. The burgeoning aspirations of these movements were mostly ignored or dismissed at the time by mainstream political parties. They mainly concentrated on regime changes. The People's Movement of 1990, also known as the Jana Andolan, was a popular uprising against the autocratic rule of King Birendra of Nepal. The movement, led by various political parties, civil society organizations, and student groups, demanded the restoration of democracy and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The movement reached its peak in April 1990 when a series of mass protests, strikes, and civil disobedience campaigns paralyzed the country. Eventually, King Birendra agreed to the protesters' demands and announced the reinstatement of multi-party democracy. The movement resulted in the promulgation of a new constitution, the formation of an interim government, and the holding of democratic elections in 1991.

The People's Movement of 2007, also known as the April Revolution or the Second Jana Andolan, was a widespread mass movement against the autocratic rule of King Gyanendra of Nepal. The movement was triggered by the King's decision to seize direct control of the government in February 2005, dismissing the elected government and suspending civil liberties. The movement gained momentum in April 2006, with mass protests, general strikes, and acts of civil disobedience taking place across the country. The protesters demanded the restoration of democracy, the formation of an interim government, and the convening of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. Under immense pressure from the protests and international diplomatic efforts, King Gyanendra was compelled to reinstate the dissolved parliament, and an interim government was formed. The constituent assembly elections were subsequently held in 2008, leading to the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal democratic republic in Nepal (Vogl et al. 2017).

Connection of Civil Society and Mass Movement

The relationship between civil society and mass movements is deeply intertwined and has historical roots that demonstrate their interconnectedness. Civil society, including non-governmental organizations, community groups, and grassroots initiatives, has consistently provided the space for dissent, advocacy, and collective action. Historical instances like the civil rights movement in the United States and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa highlight the crucial role of civil society in shaping mass movements that challenge oppressive norms and advocate for justice (Badal 2025; Bhandari 2014).

The relationship between civil society and people's movements is intertwined. Civil society organizations frequently play instrumental roles in initiating, supporting, and sustaining people's movements. They provide platforms for organizing, mobilizing resources, facilitating collective action, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Civil society organizations often contribute to raising awareness, conducting advocacy, building networks, and promoting solidarity among diverse stakeholders, which strengthens people's movements and enhances their effectiveness (Keck and Sikkink 2014). All these facts revealed that there is a strong connection between civil society and mass movement, particularly in the context of Nepal.

It is asserted that Nepal's civil society has been able to cover up its 1990s transgressions because of the success of the People's Movement in 2006. It's because the People's Movement in 2006 was only successful. After all, agitated seven-party alliances (SPA) received overwhelmingly positive support from civil society organizations. As a result, there is now more faith in civil society. Civic society organizations in Nepal since then, have been interpreting the promise of complete democracy made throughout the revolution, which has been essential to the democratization process (Bhatta 2007).

The Pokhara valley, located at the foot of the Annapurna Himal, is a 125 km² broad plain in Nepal's western region. It features a striking Himalayan environment with a varying elevation of 1,200 to 3,000 m. The Annapurna Himal, standing at 8,091 m, towers above it. The valley is surrounded by the Seti Khola and its tributaries, and is surrounded by the peaks of Macchapuchare and Annapurna (Fort 2009). Civil society organizations in Pokhara began addressing a wide range of issues, including education, health, environmental conservation, tourism, women's empowerment, and rural development. The picturesque landscape of Pokhara attracted attention to environmental issues and sustainable tourism, leading to the formation of NGOs focused on conservation and responsible tourism practices. Civil society played a crucial role during this movement, including in Pokhara. Professional Alliance for Peace and Democracy (PAPAD), a civil society group comprising of Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Professors and other professional groups actively participated in the movement (Aryal & Poudel, 2006). The Pokhareli battle, a historic movement in Nepal, began in the Rana Regime and was initiated by the Praja Parishad organization in 1938. Locals in Pokhara joined Congress and started a movement from Bindhyabasini temple. In 2006, a fire broke in Pokhara, but it also provided an opportunity for political workers to expand their roles in public. The 2006 Democracy Movement was initiated by seven political parties and supported by the Maoist party. Civil society rallied people of all professions and classes to join the movement,

carrying the people's battle forward on the streets with slogans, speeches, processions, plays, songs, poetry, essays, compositions, flyers, and pamphlets (Gyanwali, 2006).

Pokhara became a place of disputes in every region, street, and plaza. On April 10, 2006, four people were injured when security personnel opened fire on a peaceful parade. Foreign tourists led a candlelight parade in front of the king's residence, leading to police intervention and arrests of 57 persons. The movement included people from all levels, sections, classes, and communities, including professors, teachers, doctors, businessmen, employees, workers, farmers, women, human rights workers, journalists, retired soldiers, and other members of civil society (Gyanwali 2006; Dhimal et al. 2022).

These studies reveal that civil society organizations possess strategic capabilities to mobilize large-scale participation, disseminate information, and coordinate events, thereby contributing to the momentum of mass movements. Moreover, civil society is shown to amplify the voices of marginalized communities, shedding light on their concerns and framing them within broader societal contexts. This connection between historical precedent and empirical evidence emphasizes the recurring pattern of civil society acting as a catalyst for mass mobilization (Berman, 1997). The historical trajectory of movements emphasizes civil society's role in shaping societal discourse and influencing policy change. Empirical studies validate how civil society contributes to the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of mass movements. Berman (1997) further validates that the civil society have an important role for the collapse of regime.

4. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the deep interconnection between civil society and mass movements, particularly in the context of Nepal. It emphasizes that civil society organizations play instrumental roles in initiating, supporting, and sustaining people's movements. These organizations mobilize resources, facilitate collective action, and amplify the voices of marginalized communities, thereby strengthening the effectiveness and impact of movements. The research underscores the historical role of civil society in shaping societal discourse, advocating for justice, and influencing policy changes, as evidenced by Nepal's socio-political transformations, including the pivotal movements in 1990 and 2006. The findings affirm the strategic capabilities of civil society in fostering collective participation and driving transformative changes in society.

Limitations and Further Research Directions

The study has different limitations. First, it is highly context-specific, focusing on Nepal, particularly the Pokhara region. While this provides a detailed understanding of the role of civil society in this specific socio-political environment, it cannot be generalized in other political and social contexts. Second, the research primarily emphasizes historical mass movements, such as those in 1990 and 2006, without delving into the dynamics of contemporary movements. This limits the study's relevance in understanding how civil society operates in the modern era, especially given the rise of digital tools and platforms. Another limitation is the lack of quantitative analysis. The study relies heavily on historical and qualitative perspectives, which,

while rich in context, do not provide measurable evidence of the specific contributions or impacts of civil society organizations. Additionally, the study draws mainly on secondary sources, limiting its engagement with firsthand perspectives of stakeholders such as movement participants and civil society leaders. This reliance on existing literature may overlook nuanced experiences and motivations. Lastly, the study does not explore the long-term effects of civil society's involvement in mass movements, such as sustained democratization processes or structural changes in governance.

To address these limitations, future research could adopt several promising directions. Comparative analysis across countries, particularly in South Asia or regions with similar socio-political histories, would provide a broader understanding of civil society's roles in mass movements. Such studies could identify patterns and differences in how these organizations influence political and social transformations in diverse settings. Furthermore, examining contemporary dynamics is crucial, particularly how digital technologies and social media have transformed the mobilization strategies and advocacy approaches of civil society organizations in recent years. Quantitative approaches would also add value to future research. Measuring the direct impact of civil society on the success or failure of mass movements through statistical analyses could provide a more robust evidence base. Engaging directly with stakeholders, such as conducting interviews, focus groups, or surveys with participants and leaders, would enrich the understanding of civil society's contributions by providing primary data and unique insights. Longitudinal studies could explore the lasting effects of civil society's involvement in mass movements, particularly on political stability, governance structures, and societal transformations. Additionally, research on the role of gender and diversity within civil society organizations could shed light on how these factors influence mobilization and advocacy efforts. Finally, future studies could focus on the policy implications of civil society's engagement in mass movements, offering insights into how such experiences can guide democratic practices and address the needs of marginalized communities more effectively.

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