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Q5(c)

What is civil society ? Present a note on civil society engagement with science and technology policy in India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Social Change in Modern Society

Social Change in Modern Society: Sociological theories of social change; Development and dependency; Agents of social change; Education and social change; Science, technology and social change.

Core demand of the question

- What is civil society? Present a note on civil society engagement with science and technology policy in India
- Keep the note within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Civil society:** associations and publics between family and state.

Gramsci, Tocqueville, and Habermas are the frame.

- **Indian S&T engagement:** people's science, Bhopal, dams, GM, trials, RTI.

Unequal scientific capital limits who sits on committees.

Consultation is not yet co-decision.

Introduction

- **Civil society is associative life between family and state:** unions, movements, professional bodies, and publics that argue. Antonio Gramsci placed hegemony there. In India it has also knocked on the laboratory door.

Body

Civil society

- Alexis de Tocqueville saw associations as schools of democracy. Jürgen Habermas pictured a public sphere of critical talk.
- It is not only NGOs. Uncivil groups also organise. The test is public argument, not a registration certificate.

Engagement with S&T policy

- People's science movements, the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad, and later right-to-information work asked that expertise be accountable.
- Campaigns on Bhopal, big dams, GM crops, nuclear siting, and drug trials forced environmental and ethical review.
- Patient groups and disability networks entered medical technology debates. Farmers' groups contested seed law.

Limits

- Donor-led NGOs can thin into project talk. The state may consult and still decide.

- Scientific capital, as Bourdieu would say, is unequally held. Informal labour rarely sits on expert committees.

Note

- Engagement is real in EIA hearings, PILs, and open-data fights. It is uneven in who speaks for "the people".

Flow diagram

Civil society -> Public argument
Civil society -> S and T policy
S and T policy -> Bhopal dams GM trials
Expert closure -> S and T policy

Conclusion

Civil society is organised public life outside office and kin. In Indian S&T policy it has forced accountability on disaster, dams, seeds, and trials. Gramsci and Habermas frame the hope. Capture and expert closure frame the limit.

Facts & figures

Gramsci

Hegemony is organised in civil society, including claims about science.

Bhopal 1984

Disaster that made industrial technology a lasting civil-society case.

KSSP

Kerala people's science movement linking literacy, critique, and public expertise.

Right to Information Act (RTI)

A legal tool movements used to open files on projects and trials.