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Q5(b)

How is civil society useful in deepening the roots of democracy?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Sociological theories of power; Power elite, bureaucracy, pressure groups, and political parties; Nation, state, citizenship, democracy, civil society, ideology; Protest, agitation, social movements, collective action, revolution.

Core demand of the question

- How is civil society useful in deepening the roots of democracy?
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Civil society is associations and public talk between family, market, and state.

It deepens democracy through civic skill, oversight, and the conversion of injury into agenda.

Tocqueville, Putnam, Habermas, and Gramsci supply the classical map.

MKSS and the RTI Act, 2005, are Indian illustrations.

Oligarchy and communal associations show that the sphere is not automatically democratic.

Introduction

Civil society is the sphere of associations, movements, and public talk that stands between family, market, and the state. Democracy is deepened when that sphere trains citizens, watches power, and brings excluded groups into public claim. It is not automatically democratic, because associations can also organise exclusion.

Body**What it does for democracy**

- Alexis de Tocqueville treated voluntary associations as schools of self-rule. Robert Putnam later measured trust and networks as social capital that makes institutions work.
- Jurgen Habermas placed the public sphere as the space where arguments, not only votes, test authority.
- Antonio Gramsci treated civil society as the field of hegemony, where consent for rule is organised, and therefore also where counter-hegemony can be built.
- The MKSS campaign in Rajasthan and the Right to Information Act, 2005, show associations turning secrecy into a citizen's file.
- Social movements of farmers, women, and Dalits convert private injury into public agenda, which elections alone may not do.

How roots deepen

- Associations produce skills of meeting, accounting, and compromise that a vote every five years does not teach.

- They pluralise power so that a parliamentary majority is not the only voice.
- They document exclusion that official statistics miss, which is **Weber's** status order made visible in practice.

Cautions

- Michels's oligarchy appears inside NGOs and parties of civil society as well.
- Communal associations can deepen a majority's grip rather than democracy.
- Donor-funded professional NGOs may replace membership organisations, which **Putnam** would count as thinner capital.
- Usefulness is therefore conditional on internal democracy, plurality, and a legal space to organise.

Flow diagram

Civil society -> Associations movements

Associations movements -> Public sphere

Public sphere -> Deeper democracy

State -> Watch and claim

Watch and claim -> Deeper democracy

Oligarchy communal capture -> Thin or hostile civil society

Conclusion

Civil society deepens democracy by training citizens, watching the state, and opening the public sphere to excluded groups, as RTI and social movements show. **Gramsci** and **Putnam** explain consent and trust. The same sphere can organise oligarchy or communal closure, so the use is real and conditional.

Facts & figures

Tocqueville

Saw voluntary associations in the United States as training grounds of self-rule.

Putnam

Linked civic networks and trust to the performance of democratic institutions.

Habermas

Theorised the public sphere as argument among private people as a public.

Gramsci

Located hegemony and counter-hegemony in civil society, not only in the coercive state.

RTI Act, 2005

Indian law that grew from civil-society campaigns for the citizen's right to official records.

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