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Vibha Kumari
Research Scholar,
Department of Political
Science, Meerut College,
Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India

Dr. Manoj Tiwari
Department of Political
Science, Meerut College,
Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:
Vibha Kumari
Research Scholar,
Department of Political
Science, Meerut College,
Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India

Civil society and democratization in the GCC states

Vibha Kumari and Manoj Tiwari

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Abstract

Civil society, as a theoretical and political construct, has been a cornerstone of discourse since the 17th century, with major contributions from thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Hegel. While each philosopher offered distinct interpretations of the relationship between the state and civil society, the modern understanding recognizes their interdependence and blurred boundaries. Civil society encompasses the network of social institutions and voluntary associations that exist outside formal political authority but significantly influence governance, economy, and culture. This study explores both classical perspectives and contemporary manifestations of civil society, focusing on its role in democratization, human rights protection, and socio-political participation. Methodologically, the paper employs qualitative content analysis of scholarly writings and policy documents, with case studies of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations specifically Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar to evaluate the structure, status, and impact of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The results reveal wide variations across the region: Bahrain's civil society remains active but constrained by legal and political repression; Kuwait exhibits a more vibrant civic environment, particularly through women's activism; Oman maintains limited CSO autonomy under state control; and Qatar's civil space, though expanding through partnerships, continues to face restrictions on independent human rights advocacy. The study concludes that while civil society in GCC states has made incremental progress, its transformative potential remains curtailed by state-centric governance and regulatory barriers. Strengthening CSOs through legal reform, civic education, and participatory governance mechanisms is essential to fostering democratic legitimacy and sustainable social development in the region.

Keywords: NGOs, Civil society, GCC, democratization, human rights, political participation, social movements, state-society relations

Introduction Civil Society

Some of the most influential figures or political thinkers from the 17th century onwards are based their writings on civil society. Hobbes ^[1], Locke ^[2] and even Hegel ^[3] provided explanations regarding the distinction between state and civil society, though the validity of these distinctions can be challenged, as the state itself falls within the purview of civil society. Nevertheless, it is evident and known fact that, along with political institutions which have formal authority and political control, there also exist an amalgam of stable social institutions which have larger control and influence on human lives. This distinction and the attached importance to civil society towards human lives have been directly associated with theorists like Hobbes and Locke who are originators of state of nature theory. According to the political authority it was at least hypothetically dispensable and there was a need to describe the other institutions. Civil Society is that space where those with no political authority rest, where the economic relationship is lived by people, family, religious institutions and kinship structures.

¹ Thomas Hobbes an English philosopher, regarded as one of the founders of modern political philosophy. Best known for his 1651 book Leviathan, which established the social contract theory, serving as the foundation for later Western political philosophy.

² John Locke was an English philosopher and physician, regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers and commonly known as the "Father of Liberalism".

³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher and an important figure of German idealism. He achieved wide renown in his day and, while primarily influential within the continental tradition of philosophy, has become increasingly influential in the analytic tradition as well.

Here, it is to be noted that civil society's existence is not independent of political authority or vice-versa as there needs to be a deep analysis of it. It is also believed one cannot exist without the other (state and civil society), thus the boundaries between the two are blurred and no clear distinction can be made. There have been, though, neglect of the civil society in the last few decades, and consequently, there have been repercussions. Firstly, the notion of "state" itself has been neglected quite often and has been in many aspects replaced by notions such as "the political system". Second, political thinking in present times has been associated with sociological models and this has narrowed the gap between social and political activity, where both are treated as results of underlying patterns of economics, and culture of the given region or space.

In fact, state and society's interpenetration in this regard can be taken as an empirical question to be answered in each specific case. Here, the use of civil society as a concept is to signify that it is morally superior to political systems if not sociologically. They are also reflections of voluntary human relations. This point too would be discarded by some, especially those under the influence of the classical^[4].

Hegel provided the distinction between civil society and the state in his "Elements of the Philosophy of Right". Hegel's perceived opposites in the form of state's micro- community and the family's micro-community and the occurrence of the dialectical relationship between them set a platform for the emergence of Civil Society. Initially, this term was divided into similar to the lines of followers of Hegel i.e. political left and right. The left signified Karl Marx's Civil Society and laid a foundation of his thoughts, to the right, it depicted all aspects of non-state activities of the society, which includes culture and politics.

The next person to follow the distinction between Civil Society and Political Society was Alexis de Tocqueville^[5]. Though Hegel is unclear in his distinctions of civil society, for example, while describing his society, i.e. the German Civil Society, which he perceived as a dialectic movement, he propagated for crushing of other types of Civil Society, which were, "lesser" and other types, citing the reason that these types of Civil Societies not completely conscious of the lack of progress in their respective societies. Thus, he justified and legitimized the destruction of society by conquerors such as Napoleon which he thought was not fully realized^[6].

Civil Society involves all relations that are social, outside the purview of the state, however, it forms a crucial part in influencing the state. Marxist tradition relates Civil Society to the economic structure of the society. Civil Society is mainly dominated by the economically stronger class, which is true, however, there should be a clear distinction of Civil Society from the people and the State. The formation of Civil Society is through the people, but it is the political weight each member has in the society which is viable. The state's power is derived from the people, people forms the Civil Society, it is only when people have a democratic

stage that Civil Society can exert its power over the state. This can only be possible in its true sense when Civil Society is increasingly identified with the people^[7].

The term „Civil Society“ has now become such an increasingly used notion that any activity and organization working for the cause of society or social work is related with directly or indirectly promoting democracy and democratization. The term Civil Society, though still is ambiguous to many. Some call it the space between the state and the intellectual, while some have explained it as a space between the government and the governed. However, in general sense, there exists a consensus that it is a

“Socio-Political Institution”, voluntary associations and a sphere for public debate, discussion, and act, where people can come together to face the state. It is a crucial space which is like a „necessary evil“ for the smooth functioning of a democracy, a playfield for both the public and the private where they play the game of civic action.

There are many lessons for the individuals and organizations within “Civil Society” they can face the state and hold it accountable, promote their interests, learn to share their individual and organizational experiences and also learn the principles of values and civility. The membership of such groups or organizations is voluntary, out of free will and there is no coercion or pressurization of any nature. The very natures of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) are a reflection of their environment and as such, they display the social and cultural dimensions of the settings in which they function^[8].

Types of civil society organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) are diverse and different and can evolve into various shapes and sizes. There are mainly five types of Civil Society organizations. They are; religious based, Community based, philanthropic, expert groups and trade unions. There are also hybrid organizations which are basically of two types, they are business oriented CSO's and government-oriented CSO's. Though this classification is for the clarification of the purpose of scholars, it is also needed to note that this classification of CSO's is not exclusive. The religious CSO's which are of the first types of CSO's, neither promote any religious deity or spend regular time promoting religion, rather they are merely linked to (e.g. Christian charity). The primary fields which they tend to explore and intervene are health, education, emergency relief, and basic needs of life like, food, shelter, and clothing etc. The Red Cross society is one such example of a CSO. The second type of CSO's are the community-based CSO's. These types of CSO's are basically based on the sharing of resources, community building and receipt of solidarity. Their major focus is on development, social services, child welfare, housing, youth welfare, family services and for the elderly, social, legal and cultural assistance. The third type of the CSO's are called philanthropic CSO's which do not

⁴ Robertson, David (2003) *The Routledge Dictionary of Politics*, p. 25, Routledge

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville was a French diplomat, political scientist, and historian. He was best known for his works *Democracy in America* (appearing in two volumes: 1835 and 1840) and *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856)".

⁶ Hegel's view on Civil society

⁷ Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira, state, civil society and democratic legitimacy. p.5, <http://www.bresserpereira.org.br/papers/1995/99-StateCivilSocietyandDemocraticLegitimacy.pdf>, Non-published Portuguese version of the paper "State, Civil Society and Democratic Legitimacy" "published in *Lua Nova-Revista de Cultura e Política*, no. 34, 1995. visited on 13/03/2018"

⁸ Shahid Jamal Ansari, *Civil Society in the Gulf Monarchies* this is from, Dr. Cheema, Sujata Ashwarya (Eds.), 2010, *West Civil, Democracy and states*, New century publications, New Delhi, India

depend on any kind of religious affiliation and guided by values and principles, especially humanism and generosity. The list of philanthropic organizations includes private and business foundations and other NGO's like Amnesty International or DWB or "Doctors without Borders" (Medicines Sans Frontieres).

The next level or the fourth type of CSO's are called the expert CSO's. These types of CSO's are relatively new as they function in "new fields" which require precise knowledge and expertise on one or many subjects or topics like science, environment, and finance. They may not exclusively have a composition of scientists and experts but they at least have some units of experts who help them technically and also assist them with report publishing. The best example of one such organization is Greenpeace International or ATTAC. Finally, there are trade unions which are mainly comprised of labourers and workers where they form the "labour unions and workers associations to achieve their aims and promote their interests"^[9].

Civil Society consists of members who are engaged in forms of public participation and work around shared and mutual interests, values and purposes which are centered on the goals of the United Nations Organization. A civil Society which works for the protection and promotion of human rights, for instance, consists of the following:-

- Human rights organizations (NGOs, associations, victim groups);
- Coalitions and networks (women's rights, children's rights, environmental rights); Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations;
- Community-based groups (indigenous peoples, minorities);
- Faith-based groups (churches, religious groups);
- Unions (trade unions as well as professional associations such as journalist
- Associations Bar associations, magistrate associations, and student unions);
- Social movements (peace movements, student movements, pro-democracy Movements);
- Professionals contributing directly to the enjoyment of human rights (humanitarian
- Workers, lawyers, doctors, and medical workers);
- Public institutions that carry out activities aimed at promoting human rights (schools, Universities, research bodies).

The most key element in terms of securing sustainable human rights protection at the national level is the existence of a strong, autonomous and vibrant Civil Society. A Civil Society which has operational freedom has knowledge and skills and consideration for human rights and values^[10].

Status of Civil Society in the GCC States

Civil Society in Bahrain

The creation and operation of the non-governmental organizations and associations in Bahrain are regulated by

Law No 21 of 1989. It is related to the formation of political, cultural and educational organizations or associations with limited restrictions being imposed on them. With this, a number of advocacy associations were formed which included some focusing on human rights. The year 2002 saw the creation of sixty-five new associations, of them eleven belonged to the political groups and thirteen to the professional groups. There was a call from the Emir of Bahrain to decide to change Bahrain into a constitutional monarchy through a referendum, wherein he would be the king. With this, there was a promise by him for greater political participation. This call also prompted the authorities to abolish state security courts and a number of political prisoners were provided amnesty. Since that period around 300 new civil associations have been established, amongst them, sixteen were related to the political group. Political activism which was restricted to human rights groups has been granted to them. The year 2002 was historic as it is in this year that a law was enacted which gave the permission to form independent labour unions without government permission. This law provided space and right to the workers to demand justice if in case their „direct economic interests are violated.“ Thus these ensured banning politically motivated strikes and de-politicize the unions^[11].

Though the constitution guarantees freedom to assemble, however, the government imposes restrictions by making it obligatory to seek a permit to host any public event, which rarely gets approved. An unauthorized public gathering of more than five persons is prohibited by law. The government also limits and controls political meetings periodically^[12].

The history of women's organizations in Bahrain can be traced back to as early as 1950. It was in 1953 that the first Bahrain women's group emerged which later became the motherhood and childcare society. Some other prominent groups formed were the Nahdit Fatah al Bahrain society which promotes women's education. Some of the most active groups in present times are the Bahrain Businesswomen Society or BBS, established in 2000. Other groups are the Bahrain Women's Society and the Mustaqbal society^[13].

The Bahrain society combating domestic violence also became an officially recognized organization in 2005. Within a month of setting up a hotline for abused women, the society received complaints from about 70 women, most of the women alleged to have been physically abused by their husbands. The group aims to raise awareness about domestic violence, reduce physical, psychological and sexual abuse, and complain about the amendment of laws for protecting women^[14].

There are currently fourteen women's societies in Bahrain. The government supports these groups through the ministry of labor and social affairs which, in 1998, provided them

⁹ The Role and Structure of Civil Society Organizations in National and Global Governance Evolution and outlook between now and 2030. Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Seventh Framework Programme (2007-2013). AUGUR Challenges for Europe in the world in 2030.

¹⁰ A Handbook for Civil Society, 2008, Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme, New York and Geneva

¹¹ Zaki, Moheb (2007). Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World: annual report. Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies

¹² Ibid p.45

¹³ Singh, Gunmeen (2008). Lifting the veil: position of women in the Gulf Council Cooperation. New Delhi: Samskriti. P. 12.

¹⁴ Ansari, shahid J. (2010). Civil society in the Gulf Monarchies. Cheema, Sujata A. (Ed.), West Asia: civil society, Democracy and state. (pp. 203-204). New Delhi: New Century publications

with a fund of 74,000 dinars ^[15].

Attempts to establish the Bahrain women's union have been consistently blocked by labor ministry, which insists that the name is altered to the "unions of women's society." A demand rejected by the activists. The members of the preparatory committee believe that changing the name to the government's liking would drastically modify the union's entire purpose. They maintain that the government is merely trying to restrict the membership of the union to existing women's groups while, in fact, the group's intention is to extend membership to cover all Bahrain's women. In 2004, the women activists filed a civil suit against the government and after waiting for over a period of four years, permission was granted to set up the union. The group has now christened itself as the Bahrain Ladies Union (BLU). It has around fourteen women's organization and more than 1,000 members under its umbrella ^[16].

In 2014, the government of Bahrain took strong measures to ensure that human rights are safeguarded and through this, it also ensured its political reform agenda. However, there still existed concerns related to civil and political rights. There was also constant support from the UK in terms of technical assistance to boost human rights and the rule of law, this was similar to the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN. The year 2013 was crucial because it ensured the registration of contacts between foreign parties and political societies for the first time. Over the course of time in 2014, many were arrested for inciting violence, illegal activities, insulting elected ministers and propagating false information ^[17].

It was in November 2014 that Bahrain conducted its fourth parliamentary elections, first since the 2011 unrest. The first round saw a positive turnout of 52% on 22nd November, while the second round held on 29th November did not have any figures publicly released. The international community and the UK were not too happy with the opposition parties who boycotted the elections and asked their supporters to abstain from the elections. The political dialogue which was to ensue with the government of Bahrain broke down immediately. The election period witnessed acts of intimidation, violence towards candidates and voters, however, as per some estimates, the process was transparent ^[18].

Since the uprising of February 2011, no serious progress has been made towards reaching a political resolution to the political crisis in Bahrain, a crisis that belies the common claim that the turbulence of the Arab uprisings did not reach the Gulf. Yet it should be far simpler to meet the challenges in Bahrain than to resolve the conflicts raging in other parts of the region. Bahrain's civil society is traditionally very active, though now weakened through harassment by the authorities and by the polarization of society as a whole it is

a valuable source of ideas for dealing with the country's political crisis. Not only does it have better knowledge of local conditions than the foreign governments that might seek to find a settlement; it also has more legitimacy among the local population. At present, however, it cannot play such a role, not least because the authorities are placing heavy restrictions on activities that they deem too political or important; such restrictions include the recent threat to suspend the activities of the country's largest legally recognized opposition group, the Al Wefaq National Islamic Society, and the expulsion of the most senior US human rights official, Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski. At the same time, many locals feel disempowered by what they presume are the machinations of larger international powers in Bahrain ^[19].

Civil-society groups can potentially play an important role here if they are allowed to debate these issues more openly. The current restrictions on political activity do not prevent Bahrain from having a determined and committed opposition movement that is still able to hold protests frequently. Indeed, wide-ranging repression tends to produce an opposition dominated by the most committed, ambitious and, often, radical activists, and to make civil society cynical about the prospects of contributing to constructive reform. A less repressed civil society would be a valuable resource when it comes to imagining the possibilities for Bahrain's future involving not only changes to the structure of the parliament but also ways to develop the economy, deal with the various economic and security dependencies and determine the nature of the country's national identity ^[20].

Present-Day Bahrain is a Cosmopolitan and composite society with an active and vibrant population aiming for a larger role and participation in society and politics. "Ethnic and religious groups have united to enhance and support common causes. The movements constructed and led since 1938 is a testimony to this fact. However, the ruling establishment which was tribally controlled, clashed with this tendency, there is occurs a different conception altogether, i.e. "state" and "popular participation" are understood differently here. The rulers had a different idea and view as far as popular participation is concerned, citing the appointment of a consultative council. This type of participation may not stand against the dominant nature and the excesses of the state. The exact counter to this view was the popular participation, which seemed the most appropriate and viable option for encountering the challenges of the modern times. Bahrain's pro-democracy movement has based its ideas and views on modern concepts from the 1973 constitution, suspended in the year 1975" ^[21].

The constitution specifies the political rights with stated articles. "The citizens shall have the rights to participate in the public affairs of the State and enjoy political rights, beginning with the right to vote" ^[22].

The government of Bahrain ignores all articles which

¹⁵ Singh, Gunmeen (2008). *Lifting the veil: position of women in the Gulf Council Cooperation*. (p. 13). New Delhi: Samskriti

¹⁶ Ansari, Shahid J. (2010). *Civil society in the Gulf Monarchies*. Cheema, Sujata A. (Ed.), West Asia: civil society, Democracy and state. (p. 205). New Delhi: New Century publications

¹⁷ Human Rights and Democracy: The 2014 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report (March 2015).

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Open Government Licence.

UK. www.gov.uk/government/publications

¹⁸ Ibid p. 46

¹⁹ Kinninmont, Jane & Sirri, Omar (Oct., 2014). *Bahrain: Civil Society and Political Imagination*. The Royal Institute of International Affairs. London: Chatham House

²⁰ Ibid p. 33

²¹ Jamri, Mansoor Al (6 December 1998). *State and Civil Society in Bahrain*. USA: Middle East Studies Association

²² Ibid p. 4

specify freedoms and public rights. Examples of such rights are as follows. Article 18 states, "People are equal in human dignity, and citizens shall be equal in public rights and duties before the law, without discrimination as to race, origin, language, religion or belief". Article 22 states "Freedom of conscience is absolute. The State shall guarantee the inviolability of places of worship and the freedom to perform religious rites and to hold religious processions and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country". Article 27 states "Freedom to form associations and trade unions on a national basis and for lawful objectives and by peaceful means shall be guaranteed". The government does not give any respect to these and other articles ^[23].

There is also the existence of the challenges to empower women in Bahrain to lie in their cultural and social inheritance, which have deep roots in the traditions of Bahrain. This is enshrined in the constitution and framework of the parliament. Women's role in society, economy, and politics are still not provided with any mechanism by the Bahraini government, more so when Civil Society associations and political organizations are raising their voices for equal rights. There may occur some kind of reluctance on part of the womenfolk themselves, this dilemma may become the sole reason for slowing down of their progress and their goal of employment and political activity may also be affected. Solution to this cannot be attributed to just one group or source, in fact, education, especially about political processes, could be the key for both men and women's emancipation. Second, religious leaders and common men could re-think about the traditional roles of women and changes in the legal system of Bahrain, which would reform the country, socially, politically and economically ^[24].

Civil Society in Kuwait

Kuwaiti women have been strong defenders of their rights. After the rejection of the 1999 Emiri decree in favor of women suffrage, female activist filed six courts cases against the ministry of interior, all of which they lost. Kuwait women are well known for their aggressiveness in the region as depicted in 1961 when through a joint effort they managed to reverse the rule for women to veil or wear the "abyas" ^[25] by making the government allow women to work unveiled ^[26].

"The government contributes towards the creation of women's organizations and there are about fifty-five such associations that are supported by the ministry of social affairs and labour. Among them is the women's rights committee that works in affiliation with the Kuwaiti lawyers association and the committee of association of public fund. Other organizations involved in social and voluntary work include the Kuwaiti Federation of Women established in

1994 is permitted by the government to represent Kuwaiti women internationally, though this group said to have four members who are Islamist and conservative women, they participated equally in the fight for political empowerment, and association even revived it as the women's political committee for this cause" ^[27].

Among private groups, the women's affairs committee and Kuwaiti's union of women are actively involved in promoting issues, especially those related to political standing. The concept of forming women's association is not new in Kuwait, and both the women's cultural and social society (WCSS) and the Arab Women's Development (later dissolved in 1980) were the first organization to be formed as early as in 1963, right after the enactment of the constitution. The WCSS stands to be the most active organization and has lobbied hard for Kuwaiti women to gain political rights by conducting silent demonstrations outside the national assembly as well as mobilizing liberal members of parliament to lead a discussion on women's issues. "The Kuwaiti women's movement, although active since 1962, only gained wide support after the Gulf war, whereby the Emiri gave a public pledge to enhance the position of women." However, these women have had to wait until the Emiri's pledge was finally executed in 2005. Women are not predominant in religious organizations, with the top positions assigned to men. In 1998, 93% of all board members of various associations were men with only 7% of position left to women ^[28].

Civil Society in Oman

Non-governmental organizations (NGO): There are very less number of NGOs in Oman. This is because it is quite difficult to form one. It takes at least two years to get approval from the government. It is only after it gets approved, though the chances are grim, that there will follow a recognition by the government and there is more freedom for the NGO. Organizations which go against the nation or would influence its citizens are forbidden. However, despite this strictness, there are organizations in Omani history which have stood the test of time and faced obstacles.¹²⁰ The Arab spring in 2011 also affected Oman, however, government was able to repress the movement just within a span of two months. People were demanding increases in salary, lowering of living costs, and tab on corruption. The ruler of Oman, Sultan Qaboos reacted quite swiftly to the movement and dismissed nearly a third of his cabinet and took personal steps to meet the demands of the people. Oman has not seen anything as big as the Arab Spring, few local protests were an exception. Compared to the neighboring Middle Eastern states, there has been peace in Oman, this could be due to its location in the Gulf and the distance from countries in the Middle East where there had been turmoil ^[29].

Freedom of association was limited by the Council of Ministers by banning associations, whose actions or activities were deemed "inimical to the social order" or not

²³ Gharaibeh, Fakir Al (March, 2011). Women's Empowerment in Bahrain. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 12(3), 96-113. <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol12/iss3/7>.

²⁴ Abaya is a simple, loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by some women in parts of the Muslim world. Traditional abayat are black and may be either a large square of fabric draped from the shoulders or head or a long caftan. The abaya covers the whole body except the head, feet, and hands

²⁵ Ibid p. 205

²⁶ Singh, Gunmeen (2008). *Lifting the veil: position of women in the Gulf Council Cooperation*. (p.26). New Delhi: Samskriti

²⁷ Ansari, Shahid J. (2010). *Civil society in the Gulf Monarchies*. Cheema, Sujata A. (Ed.), West Asia: civil society, Democracy and state. (p. 206). New Delhi: New Century publications.

²⁸ Hgozcu (April 8, 2016). *Civil society and social movements in Oman*. <https://sultanoman.wordpress.com/2016/04/08/civil-society-and-social-movements-in-oman>

²⁹ Ibid p.3

fitting to the social order. A royal decree was passed in August 2014, promulgating a new law related to nationality, which stipulated that any person or citizen joining groups harmful to national interests would be liable to revocation of their citizenship. There was formed a pre-condition to register associations with the Ministry of Social Development which gives approvals to all associations, by-laws and it decides whether a group is suitable to serve the interests of the country. There is of course variation in the approval time and is related to the mission, vision, and leadership of the organization. The duration of the approval time was longer if a group or organization required significant help from the concerned ministry to formalize its shape and structure. Nationality based associations and their registration were limited, i.e. one association per nationality [30].

The ruler of Oman has not given any permission for the existence or establishment of human rights organizations in the country. There is a ban on trade unions and other industry related associations too. Overall the ruler has authorized forty-two women associations in the country [31].

The public-private partnership in Oman got a boost when the culture media and tourism committee helped in enhancing the role Civil Society organizations in the sustainable development, this was also hailed by the state council.¹²⁴ At the same time the remarks of members of the council and the formation of the Technical Drafting Committee, to include the visions of the members were also included in the proposal [32].

Civil Society in Qatar

Though there are a plethora of Civil Society organizations working towards a wide range of societies and issues, however, they lack the space and teeth to challenge the unelected government [33].

Qatar prohibits any private human rights from operating in the country. The same is true for women's groups. However, in 2002 the government established a national human rights group with members from government and Civil Society that advises the states on matters related to human rights. "As women are not allowed to form groups to work on issues concerning their own cause, they have chosen to take part in other forms of voluntary and charity work, including those conducted by organizations such as the Qatar Red Crescent society" [34].

There is a distinct lack of oppositional civil society and a dearth of human rights activism in the country. As for civil society organizations in Qatar, they mainly represent "traditional, non-democratic forms of societal involvement. They are often heavily prevented from having opportunities to work outside the country, thus without any chances to learn about and practice democracy or to deploy the needed support for particular issues, such as human rights in this

context [35]. This section looks at four particular areas where this lack of civil society has negative effects on the work of human rights defenders in the country. The areas are the treatment of migrant workers, which has the effect of hindering and indeed prohibiting the organization of labour; women's experience in Qatari society; freedom of expression; and access to justice. Each of these topics demonstrates some of the problems faced by civil society in Qatar. Furthermore, it shows the challenges faced by human rights defenders, such as trade unionists, women's rights advocates, journalists, and lawyers, in conducting their work [36].

As for the government of Qatar is concerned, it claims that Qatar is actively participating in human rights efforts, economic, social and developmental efforts, thus marking full participation and support to Civil Society organizations. HE the Minister for Administrative Development Labour and Social Affairs Dr. Issa Saad al-Juffali al-Nuaimi said, [37] the "Sustainable Development Agenda 2030-prospects of implementation," which are as part of the Arab Conference on "The role of civil society in the Arab region in implementing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development", began in Doha. "This shows good association and partnership between the Qatari government and the Civil Society organizations", said Al-Nuaimi. He further said government and civil society partnerships are crucial in strategic development goals. For this, he reiterated, there is a need to empower Civil Society organizations so that they can freely carry out their roles. The most prominent challenges which the Arab countries face are poor healthcare, education, poverty, the inability of the donor countries to fulfill their commitments and obligations towards the poor and developing countries, also stressing on peace and stability without which nothing can be achieved [38].

For many a decade, these are the methods which the western countries have been using to promote Civil Society and strengthening and stimulating civic engagement to bring about a democratic political culture. The situation in Qatar and its civic participation is associated with reduced participation and support for democracy and also the absence of those values and behavior which is essential for the promotion of a democratic space, which includes positivity and confidence for government institutions and social tolerance. As per one study (Qatar World Value Survey, QWVS), the groups or organizations which value democracy less are actually involved in civil Society activities more. Participating in civil Society activities does not guarantee any greater admiration for democracy, or towards a democratic political culture. In fact, men and women in Qatar have negative views and tolerance, less attached to democracy and have lesser confidence in democratic institutions [39].

³⁰ Ibid pp. 9-10

³¹ Ansari, Shahid J. (2010). Civil society in the Gulf Monarchies. Cheema, Sujata A. (Ed.), West Asia: civil society, Democracy and state. (p. 206). New Delhi: New Century publications

³² Ona (2016). State Council hails role of civil society in Oman. Oman Government. Mascut

³³ Ibid p. 2.

³⁴ Qatar, civil society and human rights: Lack of civil society space hinders work of human rights defenders (March 2016). Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) Mission Report. <http://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/39>

³⁵ Singh, Gunmeen (2008). Lifting the veil: position of women in the Gulf Council Cooperation. (p.38). New Delhi: Samskriti

³⁶ Qatar, civil society and human rights: Lack of civil society space hinders work of human rights defenders. P.7

³⁷ Ibid p. 8

³⁸ His Excellency Dr Issa Al Jafali Al Nuaimi was appointed Minister of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs in January 2016. He was initially appointed Minister of Administrative Development in June 2013

³⁹ QNA/Doha (April 21, 2016). Qatar is supporting civil society groups: minister. Dr Issa Saad al-Juffali al-Nuaimi

Civil Society in United States Emirates

“Apart from the general women’s union, there are no other societies involved in women’s work in the country. Recently, in 2006, the ministry of social affairs announced the formation of the Emirates human rights society to be based in Abu Dhabi which all have jurisdiction over the entire Emirates. The society will cover all issues related to human rights, civil liberties, as well as matters that are socio-economic and political nature”^[40].

His Highness “Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum”^[41], Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, in his capacity as the Ruler of Dubai, issued a law regulating civil organizations in the emirate to activate the role of civil society and achieve social development^[42]. As per law No.12 for 2017, a civil establishment is a non-profit organization in social, health, educational, cultural, scientific, occupational, creative, art and humanitarian fields as stipulated in the legislation. The Community Development Authority (CDA) is the official body mandated to oversee the implementation of the law and ensure the realization of its goals. This authority is entrusted with issuing of licenses for civil institutions and their branches across the emirate^[43].

Organizations are barred from any prescribed activities without a license from the authority concerned i.e. CDA. It is the law which decides and defines the term of establishing a civil organization. Some criteria are that the member founders should be less than ten members, which should include two Emirati. The statute which the organization must possess should be concurrent with the legislation and its bylaws. It should include the name of the organization or institution, purpose, and geographical range, activities, target population, nationalities, residences, and professions^[44].

Those who want to establish a civil institution should fill in the application form and submit it along with required documents to CDA to obtain the approval and get the license to practice a certain activity. The authority will issue its decision regarding the application for the license within thirty-days from the date of submission. The civil organization should complete all licensing procedures after getting the initial approval and finish the final procedures within six months of getting the final approval. The initial approval is considered canceled if the civil organization fails to fulfill all requirements for final licensing. The validity of the license from one to three-years and it is a must for the organization to renew the license thirty-days from the expiry as per the procedures which will be defined through a resolution issued by the Director General of CDA^[45].

Civil organizations must not interfere in politics or in

sectarian and racial strife or instigate hatred in ethnic or religious matters affecting the state security and ruling system. They are not allowed to conclude any agreement or cooperate and coordinate with organizations from outside the country. Civil institutions are prohibited from collecting donations or launching fundraising campaigns via audio-visual and print media or through social media platforms but can do so after obtaining written approval from the authority or the relevant body^[46].

Civil Society in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia bans the formation of associations although permission can be acquired to form professional associations. Any demonstration or gathering to discuss or pursue a political issue is also prohibited. Consent was given by King Abdullah in 2005 for the creation of a government human right agency in accordance with the provision of Islamic law. A year earlier, in 2004, permission was granted to set up the national human rights body. Under the family and child committee, as part of the human rights association, certain activities are devoted to the status of women. Amidst restrictive policies and regulation and women have, albeit silently, involved themselves in the struggle for change. In 2003, some fifty women gave a petition to the king, called in defense of the nation and sought reforms. Generally, women are not permitted to conduct a public meeting on their own, and all other public meetings are required to be sex-segregated. Women have been making inroads in the field of a professional association, and recently have been selected to be a part of the board of directors, and also associations such as Saudi Engineers Council and Saudi Journalist Association.

“In January 2015 Saudi Arabia handled the political succession from King Abdullah to King Salman smoothly and seamlessly. For the first time, the new king appointed a member of the younger generation as the third in line to the throne. This is all beneficial to the kingdom’s likely political stability, but the wider issues of political inclusion, especially of young people, remain largely unaddressed. The Al Saud is keeping the country relatively stable, with a variety of development and modernization in place. Underlying this, however, is a level of discontent, especially from young people, women, and minorities. Some discontent is inevitable in a country that has developed as fast in such a short time as has Saudi Arabia, but some of it could be mitigated. Saudi Arabia appears to have considerable pent-up and frustrated social energy, both among young people and in their parents “generation. The desire of Saudi Arabia’s youth to participate more actively in civil society, as well as in the workforce, could be harnessed with a view to building a more open, generous and inclusive society”^[47].

Civil Society can act as an asset for a nation. It can be used as an instrument to mediate between Society and the government, a tool to build inclusive communities, producing new ideas, integration and earning respect for the minorities of a country.

“It is a general fact that nations which have vibrant civil-society, have had a record of integrating better with the

⁴⁰ Gengler, Justin J & Emadi, Darwish Al (2013). “Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab Gulf: Findings from the First Qatar World Values Survey.Social and Economic Survey Research Institute, Qatar University, Doha, Qatar”.

⁴¹ Ibid p.59.

⁴² Wam (July 1, 2017). Shaikh Mohammad issues new law on setting up civil organizations. Dubai. Gulf News. <https://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/shaikh-mohammad-issues-new-law-on-setting-up-civil-organisations-1.2051662>

⁴³ Wam (July 1, 2017). Shaikh Mohammad issues new law on setting up civil organizations. Dubai

⁴⁴ Ibid p.2

⁴⁵ Ibid p.2

⁴⁶ Ibid p.3

⁴⁷ Ansari, Shahid J. (2010). Civil society in the Gulf Monarchies. Cheema, Sujata A. (Ed.). West Asia: civil society, Democracy and state. (p. 206-207). New Delhi: New Century publications

international human rights organizations and thus achieve better results. Civil Societies which are developing need a strong Civil Society law, which has been delayed by the governments for decades. These laws can draw on rules and laws related to international best practices, which facilitate, rather than repress an active civil society. The state's dilemma over associational life indicates that traditional interests amongst the authorities are difficult at its possibilities and there is a fear that the status quo could be challenged. These types of conservative forces, however, have not adapted or adjusted to the developments which have allowed society and individuals to connect with each other.

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