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Rethinking Civil Society and the Public Spheres: Pathways of Indian Modernities in Global Conversations¹

Abstract: Civil society today is a globally valorized discourse but its fundamental terms come from the European discourses which need to be brought to cross-cultural conversations and dialogues. The essay makes such an effort by rethinking civil society and the conjoint concept of public sphere. It argues that civil society consist of overlapping and interpenetrative circles of society, religion, state, market, social movements / voluntary organizations and self. It explores pathways of Indian modernities and its implication for rethinking civil society and public sphere globally.

Keywords: civil society and ontological epistemology of participation, Indian modernities, creative public spheres, life worlds and livings words.

Introduction and Invitation

It is Jurgen Habermas (1981) himself who quite some time ago had challenged us that now we need a new philosophy of science which is not scientific. It is worth asking Habermas and all of us sociologists for whom sociological engagement is nothing more than an elaboration of the agenda of modernity whether we need an understanding of and relationship with modernity which is not modernistic. This inquiry is at the core of understanding paths of civil society and experiments with modernities not only in India but also in Europe, East Asia, Africa, Latin America and around the world. Both conceptions of civil society and modernity suffer from a profound modernistic bias and is part of the post-traditional telos of modernistic sociological theorizing² and here though the recent discourse of multiple modernities initiated by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (cf. Sachsenmaier et al. 2002) has suggested some new possibilities the approach of multiple modernities as that of universalistic modernity of Habermas suffers from a modernistic bias when it comes to understanding tradition.³

¹ This essay builds upon my work on civil society, literature and public sphere over last fifteen years especially the following three essays, “Rethinking Civil Society,” “Civil Society and the Calling of Self-Development” and “Literature, Society and the Calling of a Creative Public Sphere: Towards a New Art of Cross-Fertilization.”

² For Giddens (1994), sociology is part of the post-traditional telos of modernity and for Beteille (2002), sociology is a modern, neither a postmodern nor a traditional discipline.

³ For example, following Max Weber, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, a key proponent of the multiple modernities approach, defines the core of modernity as the deconstruction of a God-ordained worldview held by all

Prefiguring my argument I wish to submit that appreciating the significance of Indian modernities from Buddha to Gandhi challenges us to understand the relationship between modernity and tradition, state and society, religion and secularism in a new way through a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration rather than through the dualistic logic of modernity. Such a dualistic logic has impoverished our understanding of civil society and modernity in the West itself what to speak of illuminating our historical paths and trust with modernities in India.

The subject of Indian modernities is quite vast and here I just wish to state that Indian modernities have emerged out of processes of criticism, creativity and struggles through history as in the revolt of Buddha, the rise of Upanishadic spirituality, Bhakti movements in medieval India, movement for a new renaissance in 19th century, and the multi-dimensional anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles for freedom.⁴ Trust with modernities in India have involved a transformative dialogue between reason and tradition, tradition and modernity, and rationality and spirituality which has shaped their paths, contents and visions. These modernities have generated their own public spaces of coming together, dialogues and public deliberations which bear parallels to what we speak of civil society in the modern West. Civil society is not only an epistemic project, it is also an ontological project; in fact it is a project of ontological epistemology of participation going beyond the modernistic privileging of epistemology and dualism between ontology and epistemology. Taking inspiration from Bhakti movements, Kabir, Nanak, Mira Bai, Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi, we can realize that the significance of Indian modernities lies in bringing to the fore strivings for multi-dimensional self-development where self-transformation contributes to world transformation and where an aesthetics and ethics of servanthood is an important mark of being modern rather than the will to power.

But such an open-ended approach to civil society and paths of Indian modernities seems to be missing from certain dominant sociological theorizing in India. For scholars such as Andre Beteille (2001) and Dipankar Gupta (1997), civil society is a modernist category of thought and practice guaranteed by state. Beteille writes: “[...] I will not try to give a definition of civil society but instead sketch out the context in which it may be meaningfully described. While doing so, I would like to repeat that civil society is a feature of the modern world, and it will serve little purpose to look for alternative forms of it in the medieval or ancient world” (Beteille 2001: 294). For Dipankar Gupta, “[...] if tradition is allowed to gain the upper hand then it is not civil society and with it the concomitant growth of freedom that develops” (Gupta 1997: 141). In discussing the potential for formation of civil society that the social

axial civilizations. “Since modern societies are no longer embedded in meaningful transcendental orders, they are in principle open to continuous transformation and adaptation” (Eisenstadt 2002: 10).

⁴ For Uberoi, “The struggle to define and establish civil society in India during the modern period runs parallel to the rise, development and recognition of the vernaculars and vernacularism everywhere in language, labour and culture; and it is the story of religion and politics proceeding from Kabir (1440–1518) to the martyrdom of Mahatma Gandhi” (Uberoi 2003: 123). Uberoi himself says that civil society is not only a modernistic category and we can explore struggles for Indian modernities and civil societies from the strivings of Buddha and his social struggles to build new critical spaces.

mobilization of Bharatiya Kisan Union of Mahendra Singh Tikait of Uttar Pradesh, Gupta says:

When it comes to the laudable objective of curbing liquor and drug addiction, here too methods are traditional and repressive. Even if some one gives some one the legitimate contract to vend liquor, the outlet should be forcibly closed (ibid: 145).

But Gupta does not look into the repressive apparatus of the state itself in flooding villages with liquor. While talking about Mahendra Singh Tikait, Gupta writes the following, among others: “[...] many of his followers have told me that on several occasions the BKU chief leaves a meeting and goes to his prayer room where he is not to be disturbed” (Gupta 1997: 60). But Gupta does not ask what significance prayer has in this movement leader’s personal life as well as in his conduct in the public sphere. Such a derisive attitude is an instance of a modernistic bias and disdainful attitude towards tradition. Understanding civil society and paths of modernities in India challenges us to overcome this.

Towards a Multi-Dimensional and Multi-Valued Understanding of Civil Society

We need a multi-dimensional understanding of and realization of the sphere of civil society and its multiple activities but for this we need to overcome the dualism between tradition and modernity, right and good (cf. Habermas 1990), civil society and good society (cf. Beteille 2001) and institutionalization and mobilization. I suggest that the field of civil society consists of an autonomous space but interpenetrated by overlapping and interpenetrative circles of society, religion, state, market, social movements / voluntary organizations and self. Civil society is not only a space of “mediating institutions” (cf. Beteille 2001) but also of mobilization where mobilization refers not only to socio-political mobilizations but also socio-spiritual mobilizations including reflective mobilization of self (cf. Giri 2004a).⁵ In the same vein, state and civil society are not to be conflated with each other. Society and civil society are not co-terminous—civil society refers to that conscious and mobilized aspect of society which strives to create a space of critical self-reflections and public deliberations. Despite contentions and struggles, state and civil society are related again in a logic of autonomy and interpenetration and here social movements, different mediating institutions, and voluntary organizations play an important role. Civil society is also nourished by the support from market. Contributions from actors from market such as corporate leaders and other market leaders contribute to the resource base of civil society. In so far as the relationship between religion and civil society is concerned,

⁵ For Neera Chandhoke, “Civil society is not an institution; it is, rather, a process whereby the inhabitants of the sphere [i.e. civil society] constantly monitor both the state and monopoly of power within itself” (Chandhoke 2003a: 57). Chandhoke approaches civil society from the vantage point of continued mobilization though she seems to be stressing more political mobilization and less on reflective mobilization of self. Similarly Oommen (2001a) has a mobilizational approach to civil society while Beteille (2001) a predominantly institutional approach. This dualism between mobilization and institutionalization needs to be overcome for a fuller understanding of civil society.

one great challenge here is to overcome the dualism of religion and secularism. While for Beteille (2001), civil society is mainly a secular space, for Uberoi (1996) and Oommen (2001a) civil society is a space where religious associations and critical spiritual movements are also at work.⁶ Finally, civil society is also a space of work of self, in fact self is an actor in all the intersecting and interpenetrating dimensions of civil society—society, state, market and religion. The quality of work of self and its mobilization in civil society and its above intersecting dimensions determines the quality of civil society.

Critical spiritual movements such as Bhakti movements in Indian history have been important actors in articulating paths of Indian modernities and generating a space of autonomy, self-realization, social transformation and world transformation. Bhakti movements created a new social space of caste and to some extent gender equality and they embodied inter-religious dialogue. For Chitta Ranjan Das (1997), the Sant tradition is a product of creative and transformative dialogue and encounter between Hinduism and Islam.⁷ The participants of Sant tradition and Bhakti movements challenged people to go beyond accepted boundaries and generate a new space of togetherness.⁸ The leaders of Bhakti movements wrote in people's language, not in Sanskrit. Their literature has been one of love, protest and affirmation and for understanding paths of modernities in India we need to understand the public sphere of creativity in language, religion and society that the Bhakti movement created. This is not possible as long as we are bounded to an *apriori* dualistic logic of modernity and civil society which puts religion and civil society in two separate boxes.

Such an approach to civil society has a wider global significance, for example, understanding the relationship between Islam and civil society. As Nikamura Mitsuo writes urging us to take Gellner's views on the impossibility of civil society and Islam only with a pinch of salt: "[...] for centuries Islamic civilizations have developed their own versions of civility and civil society which are different from the West. These have included the independence of Muslim communities (*umamah*) from the state under the spiritual leadership of the *ulama* (Islamic scholars), rule of law to protect personal life and property, religious and ethnic pluralism, consultative and consensus methods of decision-making. In short, there has been civility and public sphere in Islamic world in its own ways including mechanism to control the arbitrariness of state power

⁶ Beteille asks: "How far do religious movements and assemblies for moral, ethical and spiritual discourses contribute to the formation of civil society?" and answers: "They may contribute a very great deal to the formation of the good society, depending, of course, on what one means by that phrase [...]. I remain skeptical about what religious assemblies and movements can contribute directly to the formation of civil society, although there indirect contribution may be extremely valuable" (Beteille 2001: 307). But for Oommen, "...religious organizations were very much part of civil society in pre-independent India" (Oommen 2001a: 229). It is interesting to note here that both Uberoi and Oommen are not following any universalizing conception of modernity. Oommen (2001b) follows a "multiple modernities" perspective in his work while Uberoi (2002) is one of the few proponents of Indian modernity.

⁷ This is similar to Uberoi's (1996) argument about Sikhism that it is a product of dialogue between Hinduism and Islam.

⁸ As John S. Hawley writes of Bhakti poets: "These poets' intimate involvement with their audiences—in their own life times, doubtless, but certainly down the generation as subsequent performers and their audiences—have taken up these roles—is the real democracy of *bhakti*" (Hawley 2005: 332).

and to guarantee the autonomy of diversified associational life” (Mitsuo 2001: 5). According to Madjid, “[...] the notion of civil society or civilized society coined in the constitution of Medina by Prophet Muhammed makes a genuine part of the common heritage of mankind” (quoted in Mitsuo 2001: 5). Giving the examples of voluntary organizations and political movements such as Nahdaltul Ulama and Muhamadiya, Mitsuo urges us to understand the religious resources for Muslim voluntarism in Indonesia. In his work on civil Islam in Indonesia, Robert Hefner (1998) also urges us to understand its role in democratization of politics and society in Indonesia. But Hefner makes a larger point that calls for consideration from those of us who are bonded to a “post-traditional telos”:

Viewed from the ground of everyday practice rather than the dizzying height of official canons, the normative diversity of traditional societies is far greater than most sociological models imply. As in China, Romania, and Islamic Indonesia, there are always ‘underdeveloped possibilities’—values and practices that hover closer to the social ground and carry unamplified possibilities. These low-lying precedents may not appear in high-flying discourse. Nevertheless, they are in some sense ‘available’ for engagement and reflection, even if they have long been overlooked in public formulations. Under conditions of cultural globalization or cross-regional transfer, some legal actors may seize on exogamous idioms to legitimate and elevate principles of social action (such as equality, participation etc.) already present in social life, if in an underdeveloped, subordinated, or politically bracketed manner (Hefner 1998: 20).

Here Hefner may have to consider that there are underdeveloped possibilities not only in so-called traditional societies but also in so-called modern societies. As there is underdeveloped possibility for participatory politics in the so-called traditional societies there are underdeveloped possibilities for reflective mobilization of self in contemporary modern and post-modern societies as well.

While civil society and reflective mobilizations of self have manifested themselves in varieties of societies some of the unique features of their manifestation must not be lost sight of. This calls for a non-judgmental global comparative engagement with various manifestations of civil society, reflective mobilizations of self and spiritual movements in societies and histories. In India socio-religious and socio-spiritual movements such as Bhakti movements generated new spaces of self and societal realization but it did not offer a direct political confrontation of governing regimes. In India public spheres and civil societies have not manifested themselves primarily in political terms though in the public sphere itself participants had access to political rulers.⁹ For Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (2005), this contrasts with the Islamic public sphere which was driven by a primacy of the political. In Islamic public spheres and civil societies a notion of political community was quite at the center but this community though autonomous was still much more tightly controlled by the ruling political formation compared to the case of state and civil society in the modern West. But what is striking is that though in Islamic civil society political community and its autonomy was a key concern, in actual terms in India without sharing this key preoccupation with the political people had a “relatively widespread access to the political arena”

⁹ In this context what Eisenstadt writes about Bhakti movements is insightful: “Many of the visions promulgated by those movements emphasized equality, but it was above all equality in the cultural or religious arena, with respect to access to worship, and only to some extent in the definition of membership in the political community” (Eisenstadt 2005: 23).

(ibid: 21) which makes the situation “very close to the ideal model of European civil society” (ibid: 19).

But unlike both the modern European and the Islamic case, in Indian engagement with civil society politics was not at the core. For Eisenstadt,

The political arena, the arena of rulership, did not constitute in ‘historical India’—as it did in monolithic civilizations or in Confucianism—a major arena of the implementation of the transcendental visions predominant in this civilization” (ibid: 20).

Such a conception of the political was closely related to the theory and practice of sovereignty that developed in India. It emphasized

the multiple rights—usually defined in terms of various duties—of different groups and sectors of society rather than a unitary, quasi-ontological conception—real or ideal—of ‘the state’ or of ‘society’—giving rise to what can be defined as fractured sovereignty” (ibid: 21).

In the pregnant phase of Eisenstadt, this was a condition of “non-ontologization of the political arena” (ibid: 22).

The non-ontologization of the political and work of fractured sovereignty in Indian engagement with civil societies challenges us to rethink the primacy of the political and cult of sovereignty in our dominant conceptions of state and civil society. Instead of looking at the Indian case as an aberration this challenges us to make our conceptions of civil society a multiverse. It also challenges us to rethink our bondage to a cult of sovereignty that dominates European modernity. Transforming Eisenstadt’s perspective of fractured sovereignty we can say that civil society is not only a place of fractured sovereignties but also of shared sovereignties and sacred “non-sovereignty.” (cf. Giri 2007b; Dallmayr 2005). In order that civil society can be helpful in being a space of self-development and social transformation, the cult of absolute sovereignty at the level of state, society and self have to be transformed to a condition of shared sovereignties where all the interacting parties are interested to learn from each other in a spirit of mutual listening, co-laboring experiments, mutual interrogations and transformations. In this space, the interacting parties do not want to dominate each other with a will to power and mastery, they wish to serve each other for mutual growth and transformation. This second aspiration and activity makes this space a space of “sacred non-sovereignty” (cf. Dallmayr 2005) animated by a will to serve, nurture, share and co-create rather than a will to dominate.

Towards a New Understanding of the Activities and Aspirations of Civil Society

If civil society is a multi-dimensional space of autonomy and interpenetration what are some of its activities, works and aspirations? I suggest that these are: love, labor, language, rules / law.¹⁰ To begin with the work of love in the sphere of civil society,

¹⁰ This four dimensional conceptualization can be compared with four dimensions of civil society articulated by Cohen & Arato (1992)—publicity, plurality, legality, and privacy. There are no references to love and labor in this framework though the theme of privacy may touch upon the theme of love to some extent. But the theme of love in the present model also refers to socially transforming love.

Uberoi (1996) urges us to realize how loving self-sacrifice of the martyrs is crucial to the work of civil society.¹¹ For Uberoi, it is the martyr, rather than either the heroes or the victims, who constitute the universal foundation of civil society. Though Uberoi has not discussed the barbaric misuse of ideology of martyrdom for annihilating men and women in religious traditions such as Sikhism and Islam, his emphasis on “loving self-sacrifice” is an important contribution to rethinking the modernist emasculation of civil society. For instance, one cannot understand the work of martyrs like Shankar Singh Guha Niyogi of Chatisgarh Mukti Morcha¹² without understanding the dimension of loving self-sacrifice in civil society not only as a space of association and mediation but also as a site of struggle. As Chandhoke writes about *Chatisgarh Mukti Morcha*,

Despite the fact that CMM used only non-violent means of protest, such as peaceful demonstrations, *dharmas*, strikes, *morchas* and petitions—all of which are permissible in civil society—their protests were savagely put down. During a conversation with one of the CMM’s leaders, I wondered whether it was not legitimate to use violence in a society where the regime virtually used violence against its own people. His answer was an emphatic no; violence, he argued, would impoverish the movement and denude it of any spirit of commitment” (Chandhoke 2003b: 206).

Here the struggle is both a political struggle of democratization of state and society and the spiritual struggle of realizing “power free” existence (cf. Dallmayr 2001), i.e., not being a slave to the logic of power and using the instruments of power to oppress other people. This struggle is animated by a hope that the subaltern would embody a different subjectivity and intersubjectivity and would not try to imbibe the same logic of dominant hegemony (Chakraborty 2002). It is no wonder then that Chatisgarh Mukti Morcha strives for a new meaning of “what it means to be a Chatisgarhi citizen. According to CMM, a Chatisgarhi citizen is one who works in the region and who does not exploit either the resources or the people for his or her personal benefit” (Chandhoke 2003b: 238).¹³

The relationship between the work of love and work of civil society becomes clearer in an interesting essay by Veena Das (2003) entitled, “The small community of love.” For Das, “One cannot base the little community of love on an appeal to law—you cannot wait, as Cavell says, for the perfect larger community before you form the smaller communities of love. Thus the constitutional promise about life,

¹¹ In his reflections on civil society, Uberoi (1996) is not within the modernist trap. He neither considers civil society as a product of modernist transition in history (though he would not discount its significance in understanding the contour that civil society has taken in modern past and present) nor does he look at it through the dominant logic of power.

¹² Chatisgarh Mukti Morcha is a multi-dimensional social movement of tribals and workers in the Chatisgarh region of India fighting for dignity and rights and its leader Shankar Singh Guha Niyogi was gunned down at the behest of the contractors and industrialists of the region.

¹³ A critic had raised the question of how appropriate it is to use this notion of “Chatisgarhi citizen.” Chandhoke uses the word but the way I understand the significance of such words is that it challenges us to realize a multi-layered conception of citizenship. We are not only citizens of our nation-states, we are also citizens of our significant communities of belonging including citizens of the world. Today the rise of transnational civic movements and emergent discourse and practice of cosmopolitanism challenges us to realize the limits of nation-state centered discourse and practice of citizenship. This also challenges us to go beyond a purely *etic* use and understanding of categories such as citizenship and have an *emic* perspective which emerges from dialogues with people in conversations.

liberty, and pursuit of happiness has the public face of what it is to claim this in law and the private face of what it is to ask that human society contain the room for these small communities to be built.” Elaborating this Das further writes: “In a conference I attended recently, someone asked if a song like, “*Tu Hindu banega na Musalman banega—Insaan ki aulad hai insaan banega* from *Dhul ka Phul* was still possible. I thought of Mr. Insaniyat [humanity] and how he learnt that the claims of building small communities of love was also a way of learning to be Indian.” In his article, “Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal,” Dipesh Chakrabarty (2004: 682) also writes:

[...] What politics can we reconstitute out of our romantic investment in language? The politics I have in mind, however, is not programmatic. The making of a romantic literary legacy into a political archive is not something we can call into being. Romantic thoughts no longer furnish our analytical frameworks, but the inheritance of romanticism is built into the Bengali language. Our everyday and unavoidable transactions with the poetry of language may thus be compared to the practice of vigilant waiting. This vigilant and active waiting can itself be political—listen to the romantic voice of a Bengali communist poet who captures its spirit:

[...] When the rains depart
 We will put out in the sun
 Everything that is wet
 Woodchips and all
 Put out in the sun
 We shall
 Even our hearts

Continuing our exploration of the relationship between the work of love and work of civil society, from a philosophical and theological perspective, Giani Vattimo (1999) tells us that we are all in need of forgiveness not because we have fallen in love but because we have failed in love. Such a recognition of failure in love helps us to be repentant for our lack of inability to transform situations of conflicts and avert many social tragedies. Given the significance of the work of reconciliation and forgiveness in many societies such as South Africa or India after the violence of apartheid or communal conflicts, the work of love is quite central in civil society organizations working on post-conflict reconciliation.

From the aspiration and work of love in the sphere of civil society let us come to the work of labor. Civil society is not only a sphere of public deliberations and discursive argumentations it is also a sphere of labor where laboring bodies come together and build new spaces of habitations and hopes. Gandhi’s conception of bread labor helps us in understanding this link between the work of labor and work of civil society so does Swadhyaya’s (a socio-spiritual movement in contemporary India) vision and practice of *shramabhakti*—devotional labor (cf. Giri 2008). In Swadhyaya participants come together and build foundations of collective well-being such as digging village wells through shared devotional labor. Similar is also the work of Habitat for Humanity, a Christian socio-religious movement in the US, which is working in many countries around the world, where volunteers of Habitat build houses together with prospective homeowners (Giri 2002a).

As civil society is also a sphere of institutions, rules and laws are quite central here though it is important to acknowledge that civil society as a space of mobilization may challenge many of rules and laws within which civil society institutions may function.

Now to come to theme of language in the work of civil society, in many ways it is quite central as has been attested by theorists of civil society and public sphere such as Habermas (1989). A Habermasian perspective on civil society helps us understand the key importance of communication, especially communicative action, in the work of civil society. In history of India we find struggle for people's languages beyond the language of the elites and the *pundits*. Movements such as Bhakti movements as well as contemporary Dalit movements (cf. Narayan 2001, 2011; Pandian 1998) have played an important role in creating people's languages and literatures which contributed to a new self-awareness among people as well as new themes and spaces of discursive deliberations about self, society and polity. For example in Orissa Sarala Das wrote the epic Mahabharata in Oriya and the Panchasakshas or the five friends such as Achyutananda Das and Jagannatha Das in 16th centuries not only translated epics such as Ramayana into Oriya but also created life-elevating literature. They also contributed to building study centers known as *Bhagabata Ghara* for studying these works in villages (cf. Das 1997). These reading spaces though limited by caste and gender inequality contributed to the generation of new spaces of conviviality and conversations. But while understanding the relationship between language and civil society in these manifold ways, it is helpful at the same time to acknowledge the limits of language in the work of civil society. The language of civil society may be a heritage to a dominant language of class and culture and here overcoming the limits of the dominant language calls for multi-dimensional cultural, political and social transformations.¹⁴ While civil society is a sphere of critical deliberations this very work itself calls for listening on the part of participating actors, and this in turn calls for the ability to cultivate silence in discursive argumentations. Listening calls for meditation and thus civil society and public spheres are not only spaces of argumentations but also of listening and meditations.

Rethinking Public Spheres

This issue of listening can be taken as a starting point for rethinking the concept of public sphere coming from the Western tradition which gives much more importance to discursive argumentation than listening and meditation. It is important to note that Habermas himself writes: “[...] within the boundaries of public sphere, or at least, of a liberal public sphere, actors can acquire influence, not political power” (Habermas 1996: 371). Listening helps in understanding the other better and thus

¹⁴ In her essay, “Language, Translation and Domination,” Neera Chandhoke (2003c) speaks about the condition of tribals and their languages in the discourse of civil society in modern India. For a tribal, a particular piece of land belongs to him because the bones of his ancestors are buried there. But this language is not easily comprehensible in the dominant language of property rights that dominate state and civil society in modern India. The agents of state and civil society may negotiate with these subaltern languages but they do so from the perspective of the dominant language. For Chandhoke (2003c: 195), “[...] the more powerful language in civil society does not even have to practice savageness to bludgeon, club or hammer the less powerful language into insensibility, which is something that Habermas fears, and the he attempts to ward off through discourse ethics. The deliberative space of civil society has already been colonized, already saturated with power that privileges certain ideas of land proprietorship.”

have more influence on the other rather than just asserting one's point of view. Habermas goes beyond a strict sociologism in his conception of the public sphere¹⁵ which helps us to rethink civil society as well and it vibrates with the multi-dimensional conceptualization of the civil society presented in this essay. The work of language in the dynamics of civil society discussed earlier finds a correspondence in Habermas's (1989) discussion the role of literary public sphere in the rise of modern public spheres in Europe.

But it is one thing to talk about literary public sphere as a type of public sphere or even as a segment of public sphere and it is another thing to realize the integral literary dimension of public sphere itself. In later conceptualizations and realizations, literature becomes an integral part of public sphere through work of rhetoric, language, style of argumentation and mutual co-presence in such modes as co-walking, co-labouring and confrontations.¹⁶ In their vision and practices, writers such as Chitta Ranjan Das, U.R. Ananthamurthy and Mahesweta Devi from India embody this later realization of public sphere. They are tireless participants in public discourses and public spaces through speech, writing and, in case of Das, regular columns in newspapers (cf. Giri 2011). They not only help us realize the literary dimension of public sphere but also recreate public sphere through creative and critical literary interventions. As their works exemplify, which is not sufficiently explored in thinkers such as Habermas and Touraine, it is by cultivating the literary field on the part of self and society one can realize the post-conventional dimension of society, have the capacity to say "no" in the face of an overwhelming compulsion for "yes," and go beyond the logic of an *apriori* social.¹⁷ What Touraine and Habermas have not explored is how practice of creative literature can contribute to co-creating public sphere as a field of creative expression, co-realizations and confrontation.

To understand the role of creative and critical literature in the rise and continued work of public spheres, we can explore a bit more the relationship between literature and society. Literature is not only a mirror of society but also a field of creative expressions and confrontations which breaks existing mirrors of society and creates new languages of self and social realizations and new landscapes of imaginations. Literature is not only a field of murmuring but of grumbling and a field of contestation and confrontations of the existing grammar of society based upon a higher grumbling of self and awakened social groups and movements. Both literature and society are not only fields of adaptation but also fields of transcendence and transformations in which individuals and groups strive to go beyond adaptation and create new conditions of self, co and social realizations. These are fields in which there is interrogation and confrontation of the existing logic of literature and society.

¹⁵ For Habermas, the public sphere is not a social order, nor is it a social institution and "certainly not an organization" (Habermas 1996: 341).

¹⁶ While Habermasian public sphere is mainly one of sphere of argumentation I make it plural by bringing such activities as love and labor in to it. Cf Giri 2008.

¹⁷ For Touraine (2007), becoming a subject is integrally linked to have the ability to say "no" to the existing logic if this does not allow creative self-realization. Habermas (1990) similarly talks about the need for developing "post-conventional" morality which goes beyond the existing morality of society. Creative and critical participation in public sphere can help in such a realization.

And in such transformative co-realizations the nature of “and” plays an important role. If we conceptualize “and” in a logic of juxtaposition, the terms and fields on both sides of “and” do not get mutually interpenetrated and transformed. “And” becomes a helpless presence repeating the logic of “end” (which simultaneously means end of the meaning of as well as ultimate end or purpose). But if our conception and realization of “and” is one of mutual interrogation, transmutation and mothering bridge then our inhabitation, meditation, dance, walk and work in the space of the “and,” the space of the middle, becomes a work of transformation, transforming a one-sided conceptualization, realization and organization of fields. “And” is a space of quest for infinity from the actors and fields on its two sides rather than a reiteration of the totalizing logic of totality of either of them.¹⁸ “And” is a mothering ground and bridge of quest for and embodiment of responsibility. For example, in his work, *Sahitya O* [Literature and...] Chitta Ranjan Das (1923–2011), a creative seeker, writer and experimenter from Odisha, who has written more than two hundred books on different aspects of literature, society, education, literary and social criticism suggests such a transformative, interrogative and mothering meaning and realization of “and” (Das 1989a; also see Giri 2011). This also comes out in a joint work of co-creation in which the poetic critic and essayist Chitta Ranjan and poet Srinivas Udgata co-create poems and reflections on poetry together in the work *Ebam* which also means “and” (Das 1989b).¹⁹

Public sphere helps us in realizing such a meaning of “and” beyond the adaptive, already determined and ultimate logic of “end.” Literature helps us to express ourselves to ourselves as well as to the others and the public. Expression in the field of literature is simultaneously self, mutual and public and helps in the creation of public spheres in societies.

The Calling of Creative Public Spheres

We usually look at literary creativity in an individualized way but now we need to link both to fields of creative public spaces and spheres. For our *tapasya* of creativity in literature and society, we need the spheres of the creative self, intimate groups of mutuality as well as public spheres. But in each of these spheres, we continue the modernist logic of linearity. Despite the language of sphere in public sphere our conceptualization and organization of it is linear. It is hardly a sphere where the spherical nature of our being is at work or finds an expression.²⁰

The concept and organization of public sphere in modernity is also bound to a logic of double contingency and dualism. For example, we look at self, other and

¹⁸ This resonates with the thoughts of Emmanuel Levinas. Franson Manjali (2001) also explores such pathways in his *Literature and Infinity*. We can also note here what Deleuze tells us: “It is not the elements or the sets which define multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND—stammering” (Deleuze & Parnet 2002).

¹⁹ So does poet and novelist Rabi Narayan Dash (2008) in his book of poems, *Ebam Kadha* (and buds).

²⁰ Philosopher Peter Sloterdijk urges us to realize the distinction between a spherical approach and a linear approach.

society through the logic of what Strydom (2009) calls “double contingency” of self and the other. This double contingency is also imprisoned within dualism. But now we need to bring the concept of “triple contingency” to each of these spheres. In triple contingency, along with self and other, there is also a public (Strydom 2009). But this public is not fixed, it is emergent, it is not only observing but also participating. Triple contingency does not lie only outside but also works inside. Triple contingency also is a bearer of transcendence as it transcends the dualistic logic of double contingency of self and the other.

In literature, spiritual traditions and creative imaginations we are familiar with the concept and reality of third eye. This third eye exists not only in Shiva, the meditative *tapaswee* and dancer, but also in all of us (see Organ 1987). Triple contingency can be linked to the work of third eye. Literature and creative public spheres can help us realize and cultivate not only the triple contingency of life thus going beyond the arrogance and exclusionary assertion of either self or other but also develop and realize our third eyes, a challenge missing in contemporary theorization of society. Public sphere and creative meditation can help us realize both triple contingency and third eye and then move it further to the fourth, fifth and further dimensions of our contingencies, aspirations and struggles.²¹

Life Worlds and Living Words

But for this we would have to recreate the link between what is called life worlds and system worlds through the categories of lived worlds and living words. Our lived worlds every where are multiplex and plural but the language of life worlds and system worlds as it comes in sociology and in the works of critical theorists such as Habermas usually present a one-dimensional logic and rationality such as the primacy of rational in modernity and hierarchy in traditional societies. Life worlds every where are also subjected to dominant logic of the system world such as market, state, caste and gender. In this context to cultivate lived worlds with their creativity, courage, transcendence and multidimensionality is a challenge which calls for us to go beyond the existing logic of life worlds and system worlds. The challenge of creativity is simultaneous: simultaneously nurturing lived worlds of vibrancy, energy, soulful togetherness and meditative solitude and living words which move us not to hatred and annihilation but to mutual blossoming and co-realization. Both lived worlds and

²¹ This calls for cross-cultural dialogue and border-crossing dialogue between critical theory and religious and spiritual ways of thinking. It would be interesting to explore further dialogue between the concept of triple contingency in critical theory and trinity in Christian religious and spiritual tradition. For Raimundo Panikkar, an inspiring spiritual seeker and thinker, “Trinity is not a number but the depth and unfolding of the riches of reality, which is a living relationship” (Pikaza 2010: 119). “Panikkar thereby seeks to move beyond a form of dualism, following the best *advaita* experience (of non-dualism), opening a way to dialogue [...]” (ibid). In the same way we can realize triple contingency not as a number but as the depth and creativity of relationship beyond the dualistic logic of self and other. But triple contingency also urges us to realize that Trinity whether it is in Christian tradition or Hindu tradition is also confronted with the challenges of public—an observant and meditative public.

living words do *tapasya* for and with beauty, dignity and dialogues in the face of and in the midst of ugliness, indignity and violence.²²

Living words work as new *mantras* of life, to put in the words of Sri Aurobindo and embody what Martin Heidegger (1994) calls “way making movement.” They just do not mirror “forms of life” but create new ways of life. They just do not reproduce existing language but create new languages of self and social realizations.²³ They just do not reproduce the rationality of either tradition or modernity but possibly embody strivings towards what Latin American thinker Enrique Dussel calls “transmodernity.”²⁴ They are not just part of either the logic of transcendental awe in

²² In this context, what Margaret Chatterjee tells us about different lifeworlds that we inhabit is touching:

On this side of the wall children have milk to drink at least once a day. On the other side, one *pawa* of milk has to stretch for glasses of tea for five adults plus children. As six year old girl told me this. Near the milk stall there are three *mithai* [sweet] shops. This is where the bulk of the milk goes. Consciousness cries out for transformation, a consciousness imbued with conscience. Such a consciousness would grow laterally, horizontally, turning the search light of attention on the endless anomalies around us, the endless injustices, the lack of any sense of priorities (Chatterjee 2005: 16).
In the above paragraph, Chatterjee talks about the growth of consciousness horizontally and this resonates with Husserl’s emphasis on horizontal ontology (see Mohanty 2002).

²³ As expressed in the following poem:

Oh friend
You said
We need a new language
A new *sadhana* of words and *tapasya* of worlds
This is not a language of victory
Nor is one of self-advertisement and aggrandizement
Neither is it a language of doomsday
This is a language of walking our ways together
Walking our dreams, *sadhana* and struggle

II

In our co-habitations of affection
Of compassion and confrontation
Words become *mantras*
Of a new life, a new responsibility
Of wiping tears from our eyes and
Again taking each other into our laps
Renewing our strength from embrace
We create new paths by walking
We create new language
Our language is the language of walking
Stars of *mantras* leap from our lap

(a poem originally written by the author in Oriya and then translated).

²⁴ The following quotation from Dussel (2010) helps us to understand transmodernity:

Europe began to function as the “center” of the world market (and therefore to extend the “world system” throughout the world) with the advent of the industrial revolution; on the cultural plane, this produced the phenomenon of the Enlightenment, the origins of which, in the long run, we should look for (according to the hypothesis of Moroccan philosopher Al-Yabri, who we will discuss later) in the Averroist philosophy of the caliphate of Córdoba. Europe’s crucial and enlightened hegemony scarcely lasted two centuries (1789–1989). Only two centuries! Too short-term to profoundly transform the “ethico-mythical nucleus” (to use Ricoeur’s expression) of ancient and universal cultures like the Chinese and others of the Far East (like the Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.), the Hindustanic, the Islamic, the Russian-Byzantine, and even the Bantu or the Latin American (though with a different

tradition or “linguistification of the sacred” in modernity.²⁵ While they seek to make the Divine and Nature part of the communicative field of humans and express it in ways understandable to modern rational mind, it nonetheless does not reduce either of them only to what is comprehensible in the language of modern rationality. It seeks to cultivate the ineffable in both lived worlds and living words while at the same time making them part of our everyday conversations. Both lived worlds and living words become sites of courage, creativity and transcendence working in between and in the margins of fear, drudgery and pull towards an imprisonment in closed walls which is justified in the name of immanence.

structural composition). These cultures have been partly *colonized* (included through negation in the totality, as aspect A of Diagram 1), but most of the structure of their values has been excluded—*scorned, negated and ignored*—rather than annihilated. The economic and political system has been dominated in order to exert colonial power and to accumulate massive riches, but those cultures were deemed to be unworthy, insignificant, unimportant, and useless. The tendency to disparage those cultures, however, has allowed them to survive in silence, in the shadows, simultaneously scorned by their own modernized and westernized elites. That negated “exterior,” that alterity—always extant and latent—indicates the existence of an unsuspected cultural richness, which is slowly revived like the flames of the fire of those fathoms buried under the sea of ashes from hundreds of years of colonialism. That cultural exteriority is not merely a substantive, uncontaminated, and eternal “identity.” It has been evolving in the face of Modernity itself; what is at stake is “identity” in the sense of process and growth, but always as an exteriority.

These cultures, asymmetrical in terms of their economic, political, scientific, technological, and military conditions, therefore maintain an alterity with respect to European Modernity, with which they have coexisted and have learned to respond in their own way to its challenges. They are not dead but alive, and presently in the midst of a process of rebirth, searching for new paths for future development (and inevitably at times taking the wrong paths). Since they are not modern, these cultures cannot be “post”-modern either. They are simultaneously pre-modern (older than modernity), contemporary to Modernity, and soon, to Transmodernity as well. Postmodernism is a final stage in modern European/North American culture, the “core” of Modernity. Chinese or Vedic cultures could never be European post-modern, but rather are something very different as a result of their distinct roots. Thus, the strict concept of the “*trans*-modern” attempts to indicate the radical novelty of the irruption—as if from nothing—from the transformative exteriority of that which is always Distinct, those cultures in the process of development which assume the challenges of Modernity, and even European/North American Post-modernity, but which respond *from another place, another location*. They respond from the perspective of their own cultural experiences, which are distinct from those of Europeans/North Americans, and therefore have the capacity to respond with solutions which would be absolutely impossible for an exclusively modern culture. A future trans-modern culture—which assumes the positive moments of Modernity (as evaluated through criteria distinct from the perspective of the other ancient cultures)—will have a rich pluriversity and would be the fruit of an authentic intercultural dialogue, that would need to bear clearly in mind existing asymmetries (to be an “imperial-core” or part of the semi-peripheral “central chorus”—like Europe today, and even more so since the 2003 Iraq War—is not the same as to be part of the postcolonial and peripheral world). But a post-colonial and peripheral world like that of India, in a position of abysmal asymmetry with respect to the metropolitan core of the colonial era, does not for this reason cease to be a creative nucleus of ancient cultural renewal which is decisively distinct from all of the others, with the capacity to propose novel and necessary answers for the anguishing challenges that the Planet throws upon us at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

“*Trans*-modernity” points toward all of those aspects that are situated “beyond” (and also “prior to”) the structures valorized by modern European/North American culture, and which are present in the great non-European universal cultures and have begun to move toward a pluriversal project.

²⁵ Habermas (1990) talks about “linguistification of the sacred.”

By Way of Conclusion

In this essay, we have explored a multi-dimensional and multi-valued understanding of civil society and public sphere going beyond many modernistic dualisms such as private and public, tradition and modernity, civil society and good society, religion and secularism, and life world and system world. In the process we have rethought some of the foundational assumptions of civil society, public sphere, life worlds and systems worlds in modernity by bringing cross-cultural considerations and putting Indian and European perspectives in dialogues as part of global conversations. Such a multi-valued understanding not only helps us in a new understanding of civil society but also paths of Indian modernities in particular and global modernities in general in societies and histories.

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