

1. Evaluate the role of civil society in delivery of governance and analyze how in absence of accountability measures, the institution itself is in danger of losing credibility.

(250 Words)

Answer:

Governance is the process by which a society manages itself through the mechanism of the state. The core ingredients of good governance are: People's effective participation, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, the rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, and strategic vision. The presence of a healthy and vibrant civil society can help in improving the governance.

Governance has three levels - Level (a) internal systems and procedures; Level (b) cutting edge systems and procedures; and Level (c) check-and-balance systems. At level (a), civil society can influence policy and project formulation through membership of committees, submission of memoranda directly or through elected representatives, and interactive rule-making in the implementation of policies, projects and schemes affecting citizens. The maximum day-to-day interaction between the government and the citizens takes place and the popular image of governance is formed at level (b). Interactions of civil society with level (c), infrequent but important, will be more of an exposure of irregularities rather than steps for improvement in the quality of governance.

Thus, Civil society's functional contribution to good governance could be:

- **Watchdog** - against violation of human rights and governing deficiencies.
- **Advocate** - of the weaker sections' point of view.
- **Agitator** - on behalf of aggrieved citizens.
- **Educator** - of citizens on their rights, entitlements and responsibilities and the government about the pulse of the people.
- **Service provider** - to areas and people not reached by official efforts or as government's agent.
- **Mobiliser** - of public opinion for or against a programme or policy.

However, there is also a flip side to this phenomenon and the foremost aspect is that the civil society may not always look into public interest, and because of this reason the issue of their accountability to the government arises. Many of the civil societies have been found to accumulate huge disproportionate assets in the name of community service.

They very often become defaulters for not submitting grants utilization certificates. It is only expected that in the contemporary world, market-driven civil societies would prefer to sacrifice their ideology for prudence. While commenting on the functioning of human rights civil societies, has alleged that they cannot always be trusted in promoting human rights, as they have become market oriented. On the whole, many civil societies lack transparency, as they are not open to scrutiny by others. The leaders never disclose their balance sheet to the public or even to its employees though they talk about the current and future programmes of the organization.

The need for transparency in dealings, democratic accountability in transactions, and sensitivity to the concerns and aspirations of the people they serve has forced some to argue for a code of conduct for civil societies. It seems that civil societies often indulge in a double standard. Thus, on the one hand, they argue for transparency and democratic participation while criticizing the state/bureaucracy for their failure to do so. But, while discharging their duties, they themselves fail to observe such norms. It is worth mentioning here that authority structure of civil societies is highly idiosyncratic, paternalistic and authoritarian in nature and it is almost difficult, if not impossible, to penetrate into that structure.

Further, there are other weaknesses also viz. those organizations which depend on membership funding tend to become unviable over a period of time, the volunteers lose interest due to nonprofit orientation and consequently the working of the organization suffers. This phenomenon is clearly visible in the working of the voluntary organizations operating in the health sector in our country.

Thus, in order to ensure that the civil societies perform their role in the best of their spirits and in consonance with public interest, there has to be a mechanism of regulating them. For example, there have been suggestions regarding the auditing of the foreign funds received by the civil societies by a CA recognized by the government; however these are localized solutions which only address a small part of the bigger issue of regulation of the civil societies. What is needed is to create such a regulatory body that shall provide a holistic operating environment to the voluntary sector but at the same time also restrain itself from questioning the very nature of voluntarism as excessive governmental interference has the potential to dilute the very voluntary character of the organizations. Only then we can expect the voluntary organizations and interest groups to function alongside the government for protecting, upholding and proliferating public interest and alongside the people in extracting accountability from the government and administration.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Answer the following Questions

1. Pokhran-II and what followed has given India the right to claim the tag of a responsible power – a valuable diplomatic asset. Analyze. (250 words)
2. Critically analyze the health and environmental effects of using water and air purifiers. (250 words)