

Public Sphere as an Effective Strategy of Deliberative Democracy in Local Governance, A Study Based on Indian Social Work Context

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Abstract

The concept of Public Sphere is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common issues, problems and is an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. Discussions in the public sphere would increase a democratic involvement of people especially young population and that can be contributed to grass root level planning of Local Government Institutions. Contribution from Young population in the participatory democracy can give fruitful and fresh thoughts to the whole system of governance. The study will be an analysis based on the prevailing social worker's intervention in the proposed area in terms of effective governance. Along with that, researcher would examine unfilled gaps which can be utilized productively by using social work techniques. The paper will also examine the practice of Public Sphere as an institution of deliberative democracy among youth, which accentuate to identify the existing linkage of public sphere with Participatory democracy.

Keywords: Participatory Democracy, Public Sphere, Youth Participation, Local Governance

1. Introduction

As we all know, Youth is a tremendous and vibrant group in our society they are generally considered as an asset of the future. Every nation's prime concern is to bring up an efficient youth group. Ages ago, even before the advent of democracy, great masters all over the world had acknowledged the potentially of the youth in shaping the destiny of a nation. These masters, within their respective social and cultured back ground, very carefully sow the seeds of wisdoms in the mind of children to nourish them with their experience, and Herculean efforts. Along with that an active involvement of youth in participatory democracy or ensuring participation in civic discussions are to be considered with a long term view. The idea of democracy depends on physical space in various ways runs counter to the current orthodoxy in democratic theory and wider political science. Issues of physical space are almost entirely off the radar of scholars of politics. Those very few political theorists who use the term 'public space' use it interchangeably with 'public sphere' or 'public realm'. They generally take it to be a metaphor that refers to the myriad ways in which citizens separated in time and space can participate in collective deliberation, decision-making, and action. From the standpoint of normative democratic theory, the issues are scale and complexity: the members of large-scale, complex societies cannot all gather together in a physical forum to argue, deliberate, and decide; yet they need to participate in public debate in some way if that society is to be called democratic, even if only to debate their choice of representatives.

In Habermasian language, deliberative democracy procedure constitutes the heart of democratic process. The public sphere, in its turn, is the key normative category of Habermasian deliberative political process. The public sphere is an "intermediate structure" which makes the mediation among State, political system and private sectors of life world. A communicative structure, a potential centre of public communication, which reveals a ratiocination of public nature, of political opinion and will formation, fixed in life world through civil society. In fact the concept and its practice can ensure a participatory form of governance in the existing democratic scenario. Hence the contribution from Young population in the participatory democracy can give fruitful and fresh thoughts to the whole system of governance. So, the status of participation level and its productivity need to be studied and analyzed in its best level to ensure effective governance.

1.1. Public Sphere

The concept of Public Sphere existed in different parts of the world in different forms and which were even called in different names. Different forms of Public Sphere or discussion groups are still active in almost all the communities in our country. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common issues, findings, views, arguments problems etc. and which is an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. The idea of Public Sphere has had a long and distinguished conceptual history. Since the time of Aristotle, political philosophers have contemplated the relationship between citizens and political society as a whole and between

citizen and state. Aristotle constituted a major breakthrough for a conceptual innovation towards Public Sphere.

Public sphere in Indian context has unique nature and holding a prolific scope to make our governance more active and participatory. As a democratic country as well as a country having a good Local Governance system, Public Sphere can play effectively and contribute much better output for its better function. In fact a space for public discussion for common good would be a better platform for each citizen to ensure his/her cleans participation in the governance. Which also stood as a place to mobilize public opinion on civic issues in a society and that would be an effective strategy to make its population active and participatory to the governance. Discussions in these spaces will make a local level impact and that will reflect widely for a common good. Actually these kinds of discussions are still occurring in all societies in different forms and names. People from different age, cast and religion are participating in those discussions actively and contributing their ideas, suggestions and views for public good. In this means a common will would arise in a society.

1.2. Habermas and Public Sphere

Discussions in different places will make a local level output and that will reflect widely for the wellbeing of common people. Actually these sorts of talks are still occurring in all communities but in different forms and names. Habermas, a German sociologist, in his studies clearly termed and interpreted this Public Sphere concept in different perspective, in a Bourgeois society where people sit together in markets, streets and other open places for discussion and that leads to a common opinion. Here in India this practice can be found in all societies, but with different names or different structures. These common discussions are usually arising from common places where people usually sit together for their recreation like parks, tea shops, clubs and other related seating structures. As a result these discussions gradually take up the social issues, problems, political changes around them and lead to a common opinion. An active and contributively participation is an essential factor in a governance system, where people can ensure their space positively.

1.3. Public Sphere and Democracy

Several theories argue that democracy depends to astonishing degree on the accessibility of physical, public space, even in our purportedly digital world. It also argues that in numerous respects the availability of space for democratic act is under risk and that by overlooking the requirement for such space or at variance against that need we run the risk of under mining some significant circumstances of democracy in the modern world. The thought that democracy depends on material space in a variety of ways runs oppose to the existing convention in democratic theory and wider political science. Problems of physical space are roughly completely off the radar of scholars of politics. Those very few political theorists who use the term 'public space' use it interchangeably with 'public sphere' or 'public realm'. They normally take it to be a metaphor that refers to the countless ways in which citizens unconnected in time and space can participate in combined deliberation, decision making, and action.

1.4. Deliberative Democracy And Public Sphere

In Habermasian language, deliberative democracy process establishes the core of democratic procedure. The public sphere, in its try, is the key normative sort of Habermasian deliberative political process. The public sphere is an intermediate structure which brands the arbitration among State, political system and private sectors of life world. A communicative structure, a potential centre of public communication, which discloses a ratiocination of public nature, of political opinion and will formation, fixed in life world over civil society. The public sphere has to do with social space from where a broad formation of political view and will can appear. On its central, the fights strike around communicative fluidities control which goes over the verge among life world, civil society and political and administrative system. The public sphere establishes a resonance box, with a complex sensors system to the realm of all society, and has as purpose sifting and creating themes, advices and contributions, and conveying them to established procedures level of resolve and choice, presenting on political system the existed struggles on civil society, with the drive of applying influence and guiding regulation and power flow processes of political system, through an operational, delicate and porous initial, fastened on life world.

1.5. Different Practices Of Public Spheres In Different Countries

1.5.1. Speakers' Corner in London

One of the strongest code of the democratic model and the function of public place in sustaining public life and discourse is that of Speakers' Corner, on the border of London's Hyde Park. It was established by an Act of Parliament in 1872, which authorised its use as a place for free speech. It had been a platform of assembly for those struggling for their rights since the middle of the 19th Century. Speakers' Corner symbolises the type of medium for debate sought for today's post-industrial, extremely mediated cities, cheering face to face communication and real life discussion, recorded by shooting and uploading video on YouTube, reported on

twitter or documented on face book.

1.5.2. Street Life Project in North America

In North America William Whyte established the “street life project”, mainly for observing how city spaces work. It is the motivation behind Project for Public Space, a foundation dedicated for creating people centred spaces and educating people about public space. Like Gehl, Whyte thinks that designing successful public spaces begins with observing people. Nevertheless, he also emphasises the need to speak to the people who use those spaces. Designers have to find out not only how city dwellers use the space but also how they wish to use the space. Whyte’s work has served as an encouragement for Dan Biederman who is liable for the regeneration of Bryant Park in New York City.

1.6. CABE in UK

In UK, CABE Space has been set up to work with national, regional and local bodies to transform parks and public spaces in response to shifts in contemporary culture. Interestingly, although public spaces designed on the basis of theories by Gehl, Whyte and others have proven successful in that they are well used and have also increased value and business in and around them by offering access to commodities, experiences and knowledge, these theorists and practitioners seldom discuss developing public space as a platform for engaged civic debate. The challenge of fostering and imbedding public debate in public space still needs to be addressed more widely.

1.6.1. Athens

There are also cases of citizens themselves in fact regaining deserted city spaces as a space for discuss. For instance, a group of citizens took over the Municipal Market of Kipseli, and discarded market place in one of Athens’ most tightly populated neighbourhoods. They cleaned it and opened it up to the public as a secure breathing space where people could get together liberally to articulate their views and feelings and attach with fellow citizens. This is a space shaped by people for people. It is not prearranged along business lines.

1.7. Methodology

In the light of proposed assumptions and existing study feasibilities the study had carried out in Kerala preferably among two communities, Coastal and Tribal communities as these communities by considering their existing suitable social structure in terms of Public Sphere and other informal structure. The researcher has conducted a pilot study in these communities to make sure the possibilities of conducting a qualitative study on Public Sphere. That study gave an overall picture about the tribal and coastal communities and their existing informal social structures. Kerala has 9 districts with coastal belt and divided in to three parts based on the region. According to the 2001 census of India, the Tribal population in Kerala is 3,64,189. Wayanad has the highest number of tribals and idukki and Palakkad districts are the next two that make the lion portion of the native tribal people groups in the state. As the study requires more qualitative data base researcher chose this study as a Qualitative one. In-depth qualitative information needed to be explored from both informal structures (Public Spheres) and formal structures (Grama Sabhas or other formal Structures). For this, preferably researcher has gone through with case studies based on tribal groups and community based in case of coastal group.

Here the researcher found that, for having comprehensive information regarding each aspects of Public Sphere practice among the proposed groups, qualitative data would be more effective. So the research could proceed with qualitative type preferable case study tool can be adopted for collecting data. Another thing has added with is that, case study has done both among informal structures (Public Spheres) and formal Structures (Grama Sabha and other formal discussion platforms) equally chose from same region. Then only researcher could be able to measure the real reflection of Public Sphere in formal Structures like Grama Sabhas and other formal discussions. Ultimately the researcher needed to be examined whether the discussions and concerns are making any public opinions and does it reflect in the formal discussions. So a simultaneous study carried out to analyze the above said concern.

Qualitative data for the study has collected from selected Public Spheres and its associated grama sabhas. That means when the researcher takes a group of youth having regular civic discussion in a particular public space (Public Sphere) the Grama Sabha in that area will also have to be taken as a single unit. That means a unit for case study was consist of one Public Sphere and one Grama Sabha from the same village.

The samples for the study have taken from two categories, Tribal and Coastal. Where, the researcher collected 7 units from coastal communities and 7 units from tribal communities. In case of coastal communities equal geographical representation was ensured and in case of tribal communities each sample has taken from 7 unique tribal groups.

Three research techniques were used by the researcher to collect qualitative data from the selected samples. Participatory Observation, Focussed group discussion with key players of both Public Spheres and Grama Sabhas, and an in-depth interview with elected representatives of concerned village Panchayat will be the three techniques have used as the techniques of data collection in the study. All the data collected from 14 samples have analyzed as a case presentation and the data collected from elected representatives were analyzed and

presented separately.

2. Discussion

The study mainly looks forward to bridge an existing gap between Public Sphere's conceptual existence and its practical deployment for better governance. The notion of Public sphere since its ideal emergence stands as an abstract and it is not been used for any prolific rationale. Habermassian view on this Public Sphere also denotes the same, which is, the practice of Public Sphere is able to be seen in all societies but yet to explore the same practice for its fruitful deployment. Being a democratic welfare state and having a good local governance system, our country needs to facilitate and preserve the practice of Public Spheres for an effective mobilisation of public opinion. In a democratic country, the authority should ensure the will of people and should address their views while formulating different policies. Recently our leading political parties made an attempt to reframe and promote Public Spheres and public discussions to make democratic live. These all discussions were carried out with different names in each and every corner of our country to ensure a deliberative civic discussion to make aware all people with democratic ideas. Chai Pe Charcha, Mohalla, Khaat Pe charcha are the leading examples of our popular political parties in the country. These strategies made solid results in their recent elections and those discussions helped them to reach out unreached with their political ideologies. Major points in these strategies claim that, these discussions will ensure active participation of common people and bring the rural people to limelight to be a part of our existing democratic system. Thus, this study would be an attempt to examine the concept and practice of Public Sphere as an instrument for effective deliberative democracy and to identify the existing practices in different communities, preferably among tribal and coastal communities. The research can also to be keen on the possible linkages of Public sphere with existing local government put forward suggestions for strengthen Public Sphere from all perspective.

3. Conclusion

This study attempted to assess the practice of Public Sphere among Youngsters in the proposed study community. As i mentioned in the introduction, the intervention through this study will analyse the social status of targeted group and their involvement in public sphere. As the respondent youth were from a selected coastal community, the results from this study should not be over generalized.

Public Sphere is a unique social structure and that can be found in every society in different forms among different groups as well. Even though the traditional form of Public Sphere are transforming to modern forms like digital spheres and other online spheres. An attempt will also be put forward to extract the real discussed output from Public Sphere's into lime light to make reflect in the bottom up planning processes in the existing governance system. Philosophers and thinkers are still approaching this structure as an untouchable one as this structure seeks a pure informal nature to keep its uniqueness. Public Sphere as such is an informal structure, then only it can ensure the real role to have an open and frank discussions from common people without any hesitation.

This study chiefly attempts to weigh up the practice of Public Sphere among Youth population in Coastal and tribal communities and its possibility to have a clear reflection in the deliberative platforms of governance like Grama Sabhas/Village Sabhas. As mentioned in the introduction, the intervention through this study will analyse the social status of targeted group and their involvement in public sphere in terms of their civic responsibility and civic participation. This study would be an innovative effort in this direction to fill the existing research gap.

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