

Civil Societies in Governance

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In India, or for that matter all over the world, there are organizations, which undertake responsibility by providing support to not only under privileged, but, also for other causes such as education, health, sanitation and the likes. Government appreciates them and provides them with fiscal (tax reliefs) & financial support. First of all, let us understand why Civil Societies or NGOs came in existence, and what was expected of them. It is not possible for any Government to reach people in grass root level as people live in remote pockets, facing different problem, which may not be of national level, but, at domestic/regional level and different nuances peculiar to ethnic culture, language etc. At the same time, there are kind hearted people, who may not have ability to give cheque donations, but, are willing to give time donation. Therefore, these people become a bridge between Government, donors and beneficiaries, and are able to address and attend to the needs of the society. For example, there may be people suffering from leukemia or blindness, and require help both emotional and financial. Some people might be able to give financial assistance, Government may be willing to extend infrastructure and financial assistance, but, emotional assistance can only be provided by human touch, who have desire to serve the society. Government recognizes this, and therefore, encourage people to set up CSOs/NGOs, and would provide financial assistance to reach the needy. It sounds a great concept, and in fact, it is!! To draw a corollary, primary education in India should be promoted through societies and/or charitable trusts, basically with the intent not to make

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profit for the operators/promoters of these societies and trusts. In Indian context, this was a good model, but, in the modern times this should undergo a change.

The principle behind setting up of CSOs/NGOs is to ensure that the funds received from Government and/or private donors are strictly utilized for the benefit of people, and purpose for which CSOs/NGOs is set up, and NOT for personal gains and benefit of the organizers/operators of NGO. But, unfortunately not all CSOs/NGOs follow the governance of the charter of incorporation.

There is no formal statute for CSOs/NGOs as is in case of companies, which are regulated under Companies Act, where "Dos" and "Don'ts" are very well defined. Likewise, there is no central body, other than Income Tax Department, where these NGOs need to file their regular financial statement, thus providing transparency of the state of affairs. Governance issue has become more relevant after economic melt down, which world is going through. It has surfaced that one of the major causes of economic commotion has been result of improper governance. Therefore, there is need to have well defined and structured statute to regulate the functioning of CSOs/NGOs.

Since CSOs/NGOs are formed with the basic objective to provide social support to the community, therefore, they should be regulated more by self-discipline rather than only by external regulations. The ultimate test of wisdom, is not knowing what is right, but, knowing what is wrong. Unfortunately, most of these CSOs and NGOs have become vehicles of

personal gains, misusing fiscal benefits extended by the Government and public donations, rather than the purpose for which they have been set up.

In my view, the lessons of governance should start in the family, and if the parents will ensure and inculcate value system at home, the children and the generations to come will not have to address the issues of moralities, governance. Unfortunately, in today's times human race has, in fact, indulged into rat-race, and therefore, very visibly we see disintegration of families, the major constituent of the society. Likewise, Government will also have to think more liberally. For example, Primary Education, which has to be set up as non-profit entity, should be opened up for the corporate sector. This will bring quality money in the system and benefit the entire society.

In order to ensure better governance of CSOs/NGOs, it will be relevant that Government should re-address this sector and make stringent regulations for violators, including severe punishment. Let people not make business out of charity, and those who do should be suitably punished. To sum it up, for better governance, there is need for self-compliance, self-monitoring, so that we can march towards better value system in all the walks of life.