

Book Review: CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENSHIP IN INDIA AND BANGLADESH; Edited by: Sarbeswar Sahoo & Paul Chaney; Bloomsbury India, 2021: This book is a collection of five essays with an introduction and conclusion authored by the editors and foreword by Neera Chandhoke. In the foreword, Neera Chandhoke sets the context for the book and reflects upon the emergence of civil society as a dominant concept in the Eastern Europe in to hold democratic governments accountable and the varied experience and agenda of civil society, first in colonized India and later in the divided nations of India and Bangladesh. In the Introduction, the editors identify the three core areas of the book: gender rights, minority rights and state-civil society relations. They highlight that marginalization, intolerance, sex discrimination, gender oppression and restriction on citizens' rights and freedom faced in both nations also further complicate the nature of citizenship and conception of civil society. While elaborating upon various theories of civil society and citizenship, they follow the liberal De Tocquevillian view of civil society as non-state associational sphere, where civil society acts as a 'sphere of solidarity' and the vital role it plays in advancing the democratic project as well as in representing the rights and interests of the marginalized communities. The first chapter in this volume Civil Society, Gender and Citizenship Rights: Complexities and Challenges Facing the Women's Movement in Today's India, by B. Rajeshwari, complicates the inter-relationship of the three, in India and critically reflects on the role of women's movement in advancing the gender and citizenship rights while also questioning how the rise of right-wing groups led by women have posed a challenge to movements based in democratic values and liberal principles. The chapter also considers judicial activism undertaken by women's organizations and argues that on one hand, these movements indicate that on one hand issues of Muslim women have not been properly co-opted in the larger framework, such instances of activism have also raised challenges to the legitimacy of the women's organizations. The second chapter, Women's Rights and Social Movements in

Bangladesh: The Changing Political Field, authored by Seuty Sabur, takes further the issue of women's right and provides insights as to how women's movement were integral in Bengal to the freedom movement and remained instrumental in protesting against communal violence. Such participation ensured that when Bangladesh gained its independence, Constitution gave equal political rights and reserved seats for women. However, the era of autocratic regimes and their Islamic posturing made women's organizations look to the external forces such as United Nations and led to NGO-isation and rise of administrative feminist forces and consequent de-radicalisation of women's movements. In the third chapter, Political Failures and the Suffering of Stateless 'Non-Citizens': Civil Society Perspectives on the Rohingya Crisis, Paul Chaney explores the crisis faced by Rohingya Muslims, who were originally inhabitants of Rakhine, Myanmar and in face of violence, fled to Bangladesh. Presently housed at the Cox's Bazar, they are considered 'non-citizens' by both Myanmar and Bangladesh and are force to suffer inhuman treatment, to say nothing of the lack of access to health care, violence, intimidation, and sex trafficking, which puts Rohingya women and disabled people, in a particularly vulnerable position. While not discounting for the pressure put on the host community by the refugee crisis and the combined force of the crisis with issue of Islamic extremism, the author acknowledges that the sole blame for human and citizenship rights violation of the Rohingyas does not lie with the Government of Bangladesh. However, faced with the reality that Rohingyas cannot go back to Myanmar, it must end its mistrust and growing repression of civil society and engage with NGOs and, Rohingya people, in order to shape an effective crisis response that ends their inhumane treatment. Sarbeswar Sahoo in the next chapter, Cooperation or Conflict? Understanding State-Civil Society Relationship in Postcolonial India, reflects upon the restrictions placed on the civil society under the current Modi-led NDA government. However, this is nothing new and civil society and state in India have had a transitional and fluctuating relationship. While not the

only instrument to monitor civil society but a useful one, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), first instituted in 1976 when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister, has been amended several times by subsequent governments to throttle civil society organizations. While recognizing that presently the space for autonomous civil society organizations is shrinking, the author also hints at some ‘uncivil’ forces within the space and argues for greater discernment. The last article in the volume, *The State, NGOs and Civil Society in Bangladesh: Exploring Diverse Trajectories of Interaction*, authored by M. Saiful Islam and Md Fouad Hossain Sarker, explores how political changes in Bangladesh have determined state-civil society interaction. In the newly independent nation of Bangladesh, civil society was called upon to assist the government to promote development and overall public service provisions and in the military era, while some civil society organizations were suppressed others ensured popular support for the autocratic regimes and the state, in turn, co-opted intellectuals and academicians by honoring them with powerful positions. The return to democracy in the 1990s marked an uneasy relationship between the state and civil society where some became aligned with political parties while others faced repressive action. In recent years, NGOs in Bangladesh have become part of the ‘social-businesses’ and intimately involved in politics and business matters. In the concluding chapter, the editors examine the theoretical analysis of the issues picked up in the volume and reflect upon the future prospects of civil society and citizenship in South Asia and argue for a shift away from the ‘soft’ right exhortations of the governments to ‘hard’ rights that are legally enshrined and enforceable through incorporating international treaty obligations into domestic legal code. Though limited in the scope of issues it picks up, the volume is an excellent reader for students who seek to understand the theoretical grounding of civil society and its contentious relationship with the state in India and Bangladesh, since their independence.