

## 1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 03 (Class XII)
Module Name/Title	Challenges of Cultural Diversity – Part 3
Module Id	lesy_10603
Pre-requisites	Concept of Cultural Diversity
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The meaning of authoritarian state</li><li>• The meaning and significance of civil society</li><li>• The meaning and emergence of the RTI i.e. Right to Information</li></ul>
Keywords	Authoritarian state, Civil society, Right to information, Emergency, State

## 2. Development Team

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## AUTHORITARIAN STATE

The state is indeed a very crucial institution when it comes to the management of cultural diversity in a nation. Although it claims to represent the nation, the state can also become somewhat independent of the nation and its people. To the extent that the state structure – the legislature, bureaucracy, judiciary, armed forces, police and other arms of the state – becomes insulated from the people, it also has the potential of turning authoritarian. An authoritarian state is the opposite of a democratic state. It is a state in which the people have no voice and those in power are not accountable to anyone. **Authoritarian states often limit or abolish civil liberties like freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of political activity, right to protection from wrongful use of authority, right to the due processes of the law, and so on.** Apart from authoritarianism, there is also the possibility that state institutions become unable or unwilling to respond to the needs of the people because of corruption, inefficiency, or lack of resources. In short, there are many reasons why a state may not be all that it should be. Non-state actors and institutions become important in this context, for they can keep a watch on the state, protest against its injustices or supplement its efforts.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

**Civil society is the name given to the broad arena which lies beyond the private domain of the family, but outside the domain of both state and market. Civil society is the non-state and non-market part of the public domain in which individuals get together voluntarily to create institutions and organisations. It is the sphere of active citizenship: here, individuals take up social issues, try to influence the state or make demands on it, pursue their collective interests or seek support for a variety of causes.** It consists of voluntary associations, organisations or institutions formed by groups of citizens. It includes political parties, media institutions, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious organisations, and other kinds of collective entities. The main criteria for inclusion in civil society are that the organisation should not be state-controlled, and it should not be a purely commercial profit-making entity.

What is civil society? (CSO)

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The IMF uses the term “civil society organization” to refer to the wide range of citizens’ associations that exists in virtually all member countries to provide benefits, services, or political influence to specific groups within society. CSOs include business forums, faith-based associations, labor unions, local community groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), philanthropic foundations, and think tanks. Branches of government (government agencies and legislators), individual businesses, political parties, and the media are usually excluded

Thus, Doordarshan is not part of civil society though private television channels are; a car manufacturing company is not part of civil society but the trade unions to which its workers belong are. Of course these criteria allow for a lot of grey areas.

For example, a newspaper may be run like a purely commercial enterprise, or an NGO may be supported by government funds. The Indian people had a brief experience of authoritarian rule during the ‘Emergency’ enforced between June 1975 and January 1977. Parliament was suspended and new laws were made directly by the government. Civil liberties were revoked and a large number of politically active people were arrested and jailed without trial. Censorship was imposed on the media and government officials could be dismissed without normal procedures. The government coerced lower level officials to implement its programmes and produce instant results. The most notorious was the forced sterilisation campaign in which large numbers died due to surgical complications. When elections were held unexpectedly in early 1977, the people voted overwhelmingly against the ruling Congress Party. The Emergency shocked people into active participation and helped energise the many civil society initiatives that emerged in the 1970s. This period saw the resurgence of a wide variety of social movements including the women’s, environmental, human rights and dalit movements. Today the activities of civil society organisations have an even wider range, including advocacy and lobbying activity with national and international agencies as well as active participation in various movements. The issues taken up are diverse, ranging from tribal struggles for land rights, devolution in urban governance, campaigns against rape and violence against women, rehabilitation of those displaced by dams and other developmental projects, fishermen’s struggles against mechanised fishing, rehabilitation of hawkers and pavement dwellers, campaigns against slum demolitions and for housing rights, primary

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education reform, distribution of land to dalits, and so on. Civil liberties organisations have been particularly important in keeping a watch on the state and forcing it to obey the law. The media, too, has taken an increasingly active role, specially its emergent visual and electronic segments. Among the most significant recent initiatives is the campaign for the Right to Information. Beginning with an agitation in rural Rajasthan for the release of information on government funds spent on village development, this effort grew into a nation-wide campaign. Despite the resistance of the bureaucracy, the government was forced to respond to the campaign and pass a new law formally acknowledging the citizens' right to information. Examples of this sort illustrate the crucial importance of civil society in ensuring that the state is accountable to the nation and its people.

### **Forcing the State to Respond to the People: The Right to Information Act**

The Right to Information Act 2005 (Act No. 22/ 2005) is a law enacted by the Parliament of India giving Indians (except those in the State of Jammu and Kashmir who have their own special law) access to Government records. Under the terms of the Act, any person may request information from a "public authority" (a body of Government or instrumentality of State) which is expected to reply expeditiously or within thirty days. The Act also requires every public authority to computerise their records for wide dissemination and to proactively publish certain categories of information so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request for information formally. This law was passed by Parliament on 15 June 2005 and came into force on 13 October 2005. Information disclosure in India was hitherto restricted by the Official Secrets Act 1923 and various other special laws, which the new RTI Act now overrides. The Act specifies that citizens have a right to:

-request any information (as defined)

-take copies of documents ÿ inspect documents, works and records

-take certified samples of materials of work.

**-obtain information in form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts.**