

【筆試試題】

共 2 頁

Carefully read the quoted passage and elaborate on your understanding of how it differentiates political society from civil society in terms of their relationship with the state and democracy. You may then consider drawing examples (literary, cultural, and socio-historical) to discuss how the differentiation between political society and civil society, derived from the historical context of India, can serve as a point of reference for a critical understanding of the perceived liberal democracy in inter and intra-regional contexts across Asia and the Pacific.

In illustrating what I mean by political society and how it works, I have earlier used the example of a squatter settlement in the city of Calcutta and the efforts of the members of this settlement to assert their presence in urban life. This they do through a body that has the form of a voluntary association but which uses a moral rhetoric of kinship and family loyalty. Since the settlement is premised on the illegal occupation of public land and therefore on the collective violation of property laws and civic regulations, the state authorities cannot treat it on the same footing as other civic associations following more legitimate social and cultural pursuits. Yet state agencies and non-governmental organizations cannot ignore it either, since it is but one of hundreds of similar bodies representing groups of population whose very livelihood or habitation involve violation of the law. These agencies therefore deal with the settlers' association not as a body of citizens but as a convenient instrument for the administration of welfare to a marginal and underprivileged population group.

The squatters on their part accept that their occupation of public land is both illegal and contrary to good civic behaviour, but they make a claim to a habitation and a livelihood as a matter of right. They profess a readiness to move out if they are given suitable alternative sites for resettlement. The state agencies recognize that these population groups do have some claim on the welfare programmes of the government, but those claims could not be regarded as justiciable rights since the state did not have the means to deliver those benefits to the entire population of the country. To treat those claims as rights would only invite further violation of public property and civic laws.

What happens then is a negotiation of these claims on a political terrain where, on the one hand, governmental agencies have a public obligation to look after the poor and

the underprivileged and, on the other, particular population groups receive attention from those agencies according to calculations of political expediency. The squatter community I talked about has to pick its way through this uncertain terrain by making a large array of connections outside the group with other groups in similar situations, with more privileged and influential groups, with government functionaries, with political parties and leaders, etc. In the course of its struggles over almost five decades, the squatters have managed to hold on to their settlement, but it is an extremely insecure hold since it is entirely dependent on their ability to operate within a field of strategic politics. I make the claim that this is the stuff of democratic politics as it takes place on the ground in India. It involves what appears to be a constantly shifting compromise between the normative values of modernity and the moral assertion of popular demands.

Civil society then, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, represents—in countries like India — the high ground of modernity. So does the constitutional model of the state. However, in practice, governmental agencies must descend from that high ground to the terrain of political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being and there to confront whatever is the current configuration of politically mobilized demands. In the process, one is liable to hear complaints from the protagonists of civil society and the constitutional state that modernity is facing an unexpected rival in the form of democracy.