

between civil society and the state. Yet, despite these difficulties, it is important to understand civil society and its relationship to the state in order to enhance democratic governance.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become significant actors within the international system and are usually considered to be part of civil society. Over the last few decades, their numbers and influence have greatly increased in India. Their interaction with the state has also increased and will be the basis of analysis within this paper.

One of the areas in which growing numbers of NGOs are working is the role of women and natural resource management. Gender disparities in rural India are notable. Specifically, women in rural Gujarat have had tremendous difficulty with regards to accessing safe drinking water. Thus, various NGOs have attempted to overcome these concerns in Gujarat, with the help of the state. One of these is PRAVAH which is an issue-based network of NGO representatives, academics and advocacy workers whose main objective is to ensure drinking water to all people in Gujarat. It has recently begun to work with the state to promote bottom-up, community led drinking water development initiatives in Gujarat.

Despite the difficulties in categorising civil society/NGO-state relationships, it is nevertheless important to discern the connections and divisions between state and civil society in order to understand the possibilities for creating effective welfare strategies. This paper will demonstrate that Indian NGOs, as active members of civil society, can prompt the state to fulfil its welfare responsibilities, not only through direct confrontation but also through co-operative processes. Theoretical issues involving NGO-state relations will be explained by an examination at the empirical level of the drinking water crisis in rural Gujarat. The specific subtleties that exist within this relationship as well as the relationship between PRAVAH and the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board will also demonstrate the elements and impact of co-operation that arise within NGO-state partnerships.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY**

Civil society has become a widely used term among academics, practitioners and donors within the development discourse. However, this term is problematic because it has yet to be defined in a concise manner (Van Rooy 1997). Finding a single definition that can be universally or even widely agreed upon is a major concern. Van Rooy states: "The problem has been 'solved' in large part by being avoided, and aid watchers have entered into the practical tasks of identifying and analysing civil society rather than understanding what it is, why it is, or what it is for" (1997: 4). Liberal literature indicates that in the remnants of the definition remains a distinct feature of civil society--specifically civil society is posited as being outside the state while still retaining a feeling of potential opposition (Allen 1997). Callaghy states that civil society consists of "autonomous societal groups that interact with the state but delimit and constrain its action: here associational life is seen as the core of civil society" (Callaghy cited in Allen: 1997:234).

Several academics maintain that civil society is often used to mean that it is in fact opposed to the state (White 1996, Chabal 1986, Bayart 1986). Chabal concludes that civil