A review of ~80 CSOs, non-profits, and social enterprises working in the active citizenship space in India
RESEARCH QUESTIONS
› What is active citizenship, and how may it be understood?
› How do different stakeholders interact with the practice of active citizenship to shape the ecosystem?
› How can active citizenship be catalysed in the Indian context?

METHODOLOGY
› A review of seminal literature around citizen participation and democracy in action
› Detailed profiling of ~80 organisations doing purposeful work in the space.
› Primary interactions and consultations with close to 20 practitioners
WE FACE MANY CHALLENGES TODAY

- Climate change and an increase in natural disasters
- COVID-19 has claimed 4.5 million lives, and an estimated 150 Mn additional people have been driven back into extreme poverty (USD 1.9 per capita) over the last 18 months
- Structural economic inequality has worsened – the wealthiest 1% of the population captured ~16% of the total income in 1980 versus ~21% of the total income in 2016
- Public faith in democracy has weakened (see chart)

Source: https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/youthanddemocracy
Technology allows for rapid dissemination of information and mobilisation.

India Against Corruption
Nirbhaya
#metoo
Black Lives Matter
Hong Kong protests
CAA – NRC protests
Farmer agitation

One of the early examples of media-led mobilization was the reopening of the Jessica Lal case.

This has turbo charged movements on the ground.
Individual acts of charity are at their highest today – The India Giving Report 2021 said 85% of all respondents reported giving goods or money to a charity, community service or friends and family.

In response to the PM's appeal to give up LPG subsidy, 10 Mn households gave up their subsidy by early 2016.

The pandemic witnessed volunteering at a scale like never before.

But resistance/mobilization are not the only expressions of civic action.
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS SEEING HEADWINDS

Forces shaping citizen apathy

- Lack of trust in institutions
- Increasing binaries
- Exclusion of specific groups
- Shifting technological paradigm
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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GOI MEITY

Citizenship encompasses social rights, social responsibilities, and social accountability. Active engagement gives the right to hold others accountable, and accountability is the process of engaging in participation.

OBAMA FOUNDATION

Action civics means young people are actively engaged in identifying a problem in their local communities, researching solutions, and advancing them through civic channels, including organising and presenting their findings to policymakers.

DEFINING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
### FIVE WAYS IN WHICH A CITIZEN’S IDENTITY EXPRESSES ITSELF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VOLUNTEERING</th>
<th>CO-CREATION</th>
<th>ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION</th>
<th>RESISTANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>› Volunteering leading to moving up the ladder of engagement</td>
<td>› Civic initiated action</td>
<td>› Participation in elections</td>
<td>› Protest and mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>› Empowered communities</td>
<td></td>
<td>› Engagement with elected representatives</td>
<td>› Non-cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>› Social movements for non-institutionalized means of action</td>
<td></td>
<td>› Free and fair elections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>› ladder of engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### SOME ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND SAMAAJ MOVEMENTS IN INDIA POST-INDEPENDENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Type of Movement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Dalit Movement</td>
<td>Caste Based Movement</td>
<td>Since the launch of the Dalit Buddhist Movement by B.R. Ambedkar in 1955, multiple Dalit movements have challenged the caste system and promoted Dalit rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Chipko Movement</td>
<td>Ecological Movement</td>
<td>The forest conservation movement would eventually create a precedent for starting non-violent protest in India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Emergency Movement</td>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>Multiple organizations, political parties, and communities like the RSS, CPI(M), the Sikh community, among others participated in peaceful protests against the emergency and curtailment of fundamental rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Narmada Bachao Andolan</td>
<td>Ecological Movement</td>
<td>The agitation against construction of large dam projects saw widespread participation from notable personalities across the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Mandal Commission</td>
<td>Caste Based Movement</td>
<td>Bandhs, hartals, and dharam against the implementation of the recommendation of the Mandal Commission report, which suggested caste based reservation in government jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Jharkhand Struggle</td>
<td>Tribal Movement</td>
<td>A multi-year struggle by tribals (Santhals, Hos, Mundas, etc.) led to the formation of Jharkhand as a separate state, carved out of Bihar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Right to Information</td>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan led a decade-long movement that eventually led to the operationalisation of the RTI Act, 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Jan Lokpal Bill</td>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>Led by Anna Hazare, it was the largest anti-corruption movement in modern India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Farmer Protests</td>
<td>Class Based Movement</td>
<td>Farmers across the country protested three farm acts passed in the parliament, with nationwide strikes involving 250 million people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Nirbhaya Protests</td>
<td>Women’s Movement</td>
<td>Country-wide protests post the Nirbhaya incident resulted in women’s safety in India becoming an international concern.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IS DYNAMIC

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IS GEOGRAPHICALLY UBQUITOUS

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EXIST AS PART OF A MULTI-DIRECTIONAL, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER, FLUID UNIVERSE

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EXPANDS BEYOND BASIC CIVIL DUTIES

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP OPTIMIZES FOR ACTION OVER IMPACT

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP NEED NOT REQUIRE A DIRECT INTERFACE WITH GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IS NON-BINARY

BUT ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IS TRICKY AND COMPLEX
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

› What is active citizenship, and how may it be understood?
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METHODOLOGY

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› Primary interactions and consultations with close to 20 practitioners
We (India) potentially has 1.3 billion problem solvers.
**ENABLERS**

Organisations that foster active citizenship through indirect pathways such as creating knowledge, supporting dissemination and amplification etc.

**IMPLEMENTERS**

Organisations that create direct pathways or feedback loops to enable active citizenship are implementers.

Out of 79 Organizations

- 42% Both
- 48% Implementers
- 10% Enablers
PATHWAYS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND ENABLING

ACCA FRAMEWORK

creating Awareness
facilitating Connection
building Capacity
driving Action
41 out of 79 (53%) organisations enable active citizenship by driving awareness – informing citizens and amplifying their voice.

Organisations working in the “awareness” space work on one of three dimensions – as knowledge creators, as amplifiers, or as disseminators.
Knowledge creators provide other institutions such as other enablers, implementers, sarkaar actors etc. with the information and evidence they need to drive citizen action more effectively. These organisations may have a slight policy bent and create evidence and frameworks for the space.

Amplifiers

These are typically grassroots media organisations. They amplify citizen voices on the ground. These organisations help surface and amplify grassroots issues while also providing a platform for concerned citizens to raise their voices.

Disseminators

Information on government schemes, public issues, and government engagement exists and is readily available – however, citizens often find it challenging to understand and navigate the embedded bureaucracy. Some organisations working to generate awareness help source and organise information and then provide filtered, simplified and targeted insights to drive citizen interest. Many of these organisations tend to work as “implementers.”
33 out of 79 (41%) organisations offer programmes to help citizens engage with other fellow citizens or create an interface for engagement between citizens and government.

### Citizen-Citizen

21 of 33 organisations facilitate citizen-citizen engagement.

Jhatkaa’s Save Bangalore’s Trees campaign signed by 160,000 members stopped the construction of a flyover, saving 800 trees.

Socratus Foundation brings together people from different sectors to brainstorm over development challenges.

### Citizen-Government

14 of 33 organisations facilitate citizen-government engagement on a variety of issues:

- Democratising filing of RTIs (YouRTI, OnlineRTI),
- Public consultations (Civis),
- Smoothening claim making processes (Haqdarshak),
- Increasing government accountability (Janaagraha and Praja).
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

› Over 95% of organisations in this space are working on areas like capacity building through leadership development. These organisations focus on developing leaders and problem solvers of the future.

› Indian School of Democracy (ISD) and Netri working in political leadership, Centre for Civil Society and Citizens for Public Leadership working in policy leadership, and Yuva Shakti and CORO in grassroots leadership.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

› A small number of organisations are working to create efficiencies in the active citizenship process by building public goods that capacitate other organisations or the government.

› E Gov Foundation's DIGIT Urban Stack is a set of Open APIs, services, and reference implementations set up as a public good.
ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Interestingly “voting” as an action pathway has witnessed limited traction from CSOs. Political parties in India have strong grassroots networks at the forefront of a lot of organizing work (including voter turnout), reducing the scope and role of apolitical intermediaries in the space. Finally, it is difficult to take on a subject like voting and stay away from “politics”, and consequently, we see fewer funders willing to back efforts in this space, resulting in fewer non-profits and social enterprises thriving. Therefore most organisation are entering this space through leadership development.

PROBLEM SOLVING

› 45 out of 79 (56%) organisations help citizens to (individually or collectively) own the problem-solving process and directly implement solutions on the ground.

› Action could mean signing a petition for organisations like Jhatkaa and Change.org, organising a successful people-powered movement for Haiyya, or responding to public consultation for Civis.
Themes

- A majority (59 of 79) of the organisations profiled have a horizontal focus or are sector agnostic.
- The underlying assumption is that once people’s civic skills have been built, they can use the same to engage across different sectors or issue areas that interest them.

Note: the figure above adds up to >100% as some organisations have multi-thematic programmes.
Geographies

In terms of geographic reach, we find that over 70% of the organisations are present in 10 states or more.

This trend is observed for pure-play implementers (74% have a national scale) and for pure-play enablers (100% have a national scale).

Technology has been a key to helping organisations reach this scale, and we examine this in detail later in this presentation.
Only 17 of 79 (22%) organisations take an intentional gender lens - Pure-play implementers take a more gender intentional approach compared to pure-play enablers (26% are female-focused vs 12%).

Most of the practitioners were cognizant of the missing gender intentionality owing to the difficulty in finding talent (especially for tech-first organisations) and barriers to mobilising women.
Outcomes

- Close to half the organisations have programmes designed to influence outcomes at the national level. The proliferation of technology in the space has aided organisations to achieve scale rapidly and enabled citizens to mobilise resources and overcome geographical barriers to solve more complex issues collectively.

- Through technology-first crowdfunding platforms Milaap, Ketto, and GivelIndia collectively raised ~USD 161 Mn from 2.7 Mn donors for COVID relief campaigns in a span of a few months.
Over half of all organisations target citizens through training/workshops and live projects. Through training and live/on-ground projects, CSOs aim to capacitate citizens to drive meaningful change in a way that a technology-first approach may not be able to.
TECHNOLOGY AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
There is a global conversation on the rising importance of civic-tech organisations.

AAPTI INSTITUTE
Civic technology is any technology that enhances the citizen experience, which involves both citizen-citizen relations and citizen-state relations.

KNIGHT FOUNDATION
Technology that informs and encourages civic engagement, from simplifying voter registration to hosting virtual government town halls to launching crowdfunding campaigns supporting civic assets.

Technology seen as vital for expanding access, scale, transparency, speed, and state capacity.
There is a global conversation on the rising importance of civic-tech organisations.

› The core offering of 29 out of 79 (~37%) organisations is technology-first (civic-tech organisations).

› Pure-play enablers have done especially well in using technology to deliver their programmes more effectively — 50% of them are tech-first in nature.

› On the other hand, pure-play implementers still prefer a more hands-on, interpersonal, and offline approach (only 16% are tech-first in nature).
23 out of 29 tech-first organisations, offer programmes under awareness and 18 under connection. Technology can facilitate the generation, storage, and real-time communication of data (awareness) to help build knowledge and inform citizens as well as policymakers on timely decision making and action.

Technology also helps build online communities that aren’t constrained by size or geographic barriers and offer citizens alternate and efficient ways to connect in a more remote world.

EG: ENABLE VAANI, AND GRAM VAANI
Technology comes with some riders

› If digitisation is not combined with auxiliary inputs to expand access, it can be exclusionary.

› Access to technology needs to be linked with change management. Else it ends up distancing citizen from state versus bringing the together (makes the physical “State” less accessible)

› Technology also exacerbates extant structural issues

› Concerns around digital rights and data privacy need to be discussed as well
70% of the youth in India are engaged – actively or passively – in one or more forms of civic engagement on social media.
A cautionary tale...

**SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION** - A fact-checking website, BOOM, conducted 178 fact checks on COVID-19 related information on social media platforms and found that as much as 35% of the information shared in the form of posts/videos was fake.

**CLICKTIVISM** is a new kind of civic activism enabled by social/digital media: The “sign up” to “show up” funnel is very narrow - a CSO leaders shared that there is a drop off from ~1 million individuals (who have signed a campaign in the last 6 months) to participation only from 2,000-3,000 volunteers on the ground.

**BREEDING CYBERBULLYING** - Due to online anonymity, trolling and bullying is easier online, and harder to bring to account.
The structural framework for governing modern India is in many ways based on the tenets of open government - transparency and (to a lesser extent) participation are vital drivers of open government initiatives in India.
India has had a rich legacy of open, local, and participatory government. The roots of democratic decentralisation can be traced back to ancient India when republics existed, which were essentially areas without kings. These included the Vaijjian confederacy in Vaishali around 600 BC in the times of Lord Buddha. Since then, there have been recurring evidence of self-contained and self-governed village republics in India. Sir Charles Metcalfe, who was the acting governor-general of India in 1830, wrote, “The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations.”
Key frameworks and interventions that the government is using to drive public participation in India

- Local, decentralised governance (participation and accountability)
- Open data (information)
- E-Government (information and participation)
- Other new and innovative tools used by the government such as participatory budgeting, community scorecards, social audits, citizen charters
Even though government has taken steps towards open government, there are structural challenges for deep and sustained civic participation.
Since its very creation, bazaar has had a self-interest in maintaining a balance of powers with sarkaar and samaaj
The first wave of formalisation of corporate citizenship saw a shift in philanthropy from individual to corporate social responsibility.

The second wave of corporate citizenship has risen from recognising the “triple bottom line” and moved businesses to think about corporate responsibility as core strategic issue.
WHAT IS INFLUENCING BAZAAR?

› Changes in values held by employees are pulling organisations to be good corporate citizens

› Changes in values and preferences of customers are pulling organisations towards good corporate citizenship as well

› Rapidly deteriorating environmental context is driving firms to alter their plan of action

› Young entrepreneurs are likely to prioritize “doing well by doing good

› Investors are also pushing firms to be more intentional around good corporate citizenship by focusing on long-term value creation

› Mandatory reporting on triple bottom line parameters, e.g. ESG is coming from regulators

Fifty of the top 100 companies based on market capitalisation have increased the use of renewable energy. CEOs of 16 large Indian companies, including six with the largest market cap, stated that water scarcity and climate change are core threats to their business.
Researchers have found that active citizens enjoy better mental and physical health and higher levels of confidence and optimism about life.

The networks of trust and horizontal solidarity created by engaging as active citizens enable the development of anticipatory, absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities that drive resilience for communities.

Active citizenship also improves governance, builds trust between the citizens and state, and drives development and economic growth for communities.
ROLE OF CSR AND PHILANTHROPY

› An analysis of the Hurun EdelGive list of India’s biggest philanthropists (2020) suggests that less than 1% of private domestic philanthropic capital is directed to citizenship.

› An analysis of 22 of India’s top philanthropists who have devoted funding of INR 100 Bn (2019-2020). Only one donor primarily focuses on citizenship, while 3-4 donors support civic engagement as adjacencies.
FUNDING HEADWINDS

› Several Indian philanthropies tend to focus on “verticals” where the impact is measurable and attributable, not the “horizontals

› The perceived “political” colour of active citizenship also deters funders

› CSR funds are another avenue for CSOs to access funding in India. However, governance/democracy are not yet a part of the mandated list of areas company CSR arms can spend on.
We conclude this research with two key questions for us as citizens:

1. How can we sustainably co-own problem-solving for our communities?

2. What is our role in holding the institutions to a higher standard?