This Thesis a) presents the current Western usages of ‘Civil Society’, b) studies the conceptions of the State – Civil Society relationship by Hegel and Marx, and c) suggests provisionally how their insights can be extended and used for a progressive political perspective on Indian politico-economic affairs. The overall frame of reference is the idea of politics in command of the economic.

The first chapter presents a) six current perspectives on ‘Civil Society’ and the context of these perspectives as reflected in the concerns they express; b) Locke’s formulation of the extra-political, moral and material maturity of man; c) the ‘discovery’, in Adam Smith, of the self-equilibrating realm of economy; and d) the ideas on the unintended positive consequences, to individuals and their society of their unsocial traits and behaviour. This is the historical and intellectual background against which the philosophical and empirical analyses of Rousseau, Hegel, and Marx and proposed to be appropriated.

The next chapter highlights Rousseau’s understanding of man as a subject of social interaction and historical development, Rousseau’s criticism of the modern society as incapable of solidarity and the modern man as lacking in character and integrity. Following Colletti, Rousseau is
presented as an early critic of Civil Society, but, Colletti's anachronistic reading of Marxian ideas in Rousseau is sought to be corrected by the interpretations of Shklar (Rousseau the pessimist utopian) and Viroli (Rousseau's revival of the classical concept of order).

The third chapter is on Hegel. It tries to show how, according to Hegel, Civil Society generates uncomprehended mutual dependence, impoverishment, and disaffection, enervating freedom, and decline in civic virtues. Hegel, however, thinks that the same Civil Society can also stimulate intermediate solidarities, foster culture, impose restraints on the operations of individual freedom and make it less problematic. Hegel argues for a perspective of the modern man and society as partaking of a complex and encompassing conceptual spirituality. This perspective, once recognized by individuals, both restricts and nourishes their freedom.

Chapter four presents Marx's critique of Civil Society. Marx used the Feurbachian method to criticise Hegel for having transformed the 'logical' features of human activities and practices into a subject of which the activities become attributes. By restoring man's claim to circumscribed subjectivity, Marx set himself on two distinct but related routes: 1) the materialist transformation of Hegel's notion of activity, 2) which helps
him transform the Rousseauvian theme of the opposition between man and citizen. It is argued that Marx's theory of alienation, made possible by his Feuerbachian critique of Hegel, introduces two themes: 1) exploitation, and 2) the dichotomy between production for use and production for exchange. These two become two major contrasts in Marx: 1) classless societies and class societies; 2) pre-capitalist societies and capitalism. Marx's enquiries along these overlapping but separate contrasts produce his critique of capitalism as an order destructive of human agency and community. It is claimed that to understand Marx primarily as an opponent of private appropriation of surplus is to miss the wider implications of his critique.

Chapter five points out why the analyses of Hegel and Marx are not acceptable in entirety. Hegel's strategy of conferring significance on various activities, events and institutions which enables him to present them as part of a meaningful historical order amounts to a justification by philosophical redescription and it transsubstantiates profane and oppressive institutions into embodiments of cosmic spirituality. Marx has no adequate conception of politics and situated freedom as Kolakowski and Taylor have argued. But he drew our attention to the centrality of forms of forced labour and his distinction between the ruling class and the governing class suggests a quasi-Hegelian perception of the universality of the modern State.
as an operative myth which can be utilized for progressive politics, forcing the State to dominate the economic affairs.

The reflections of Hegel and Marx are not universally valid as feminist and third-world scholars trenchantly argue. Therefore we need to look for a method by which they can be appropriated outside their European context. In so appropriating we must avoid the idea of faithfulness to either the original or to our own tradition. Taylor’s formulation of the nature of language as non-designative, expressive medium of our sociality which forms and in turn is constituted by our sociality; Connolly’s discussion of the essentially contested (i.e. multidimensional and inescapably normative, evaluative) nature of all our political concepts; and Skinner’s idea of the illocutionary force of speech-acts as a function of the prevalent discourse: these three can be used to extend the Hegelian-Marxian ideas of politics in command of the material sphere to contemporary India.

The last chapter then identifies ‘the Third Way’ (between capitalism and socialism) as the dominant motif of Indian political discourse, points at the competing formulations of this Third Way, and seeks to revive a subjugated formulation (from the Gandhian Socialist Javdekar) as capable of being developed into an integrally Gandhian and Marxian challenge
to both the threatened Nehruvian and the newly emerging pro-liberalization formulation of the Third-Way. Civil Society in this perspective will be both a norm (norm of political command over the economic) and a dark reality of subservience of the political to the economic.