

10th – Power Sharing



Power sharing among the three organs of state viz., Legislature, Executive and Judiciary is very important for the proper functioning of the democracy. The idea of power sharing has emerged in opposition to the notions of undivided political power. In a democracy, everyone has a voice in the shaping of public policies. To understand how democracies handle demands for power sharing, here, we are discussing the forms of power sharing in Belgium and Sri Lanka.

Belgium: Belgium is a federal state in Western Europe. It is smaller in area than the state of Haryana. It has borders with the Netherlands, France, Germany and Luxembourg. It has a population of a little over one crore which is about half of the population of Haryana. Its Ethnic composition is very complex. Out of the total population of the country, 59% live in the Flemish region and speak Dutch language. Other 40% people live in the Wallonia region and speak French. The remaining 1 % speak German. The capital of Belgium is Brussels, where 80% people speak French, while 20% are Dutch speaking. The minority French speaking community was relatively rich and powerful. This made the Dutch speaking community angry who got the benefit of economic development and education much later.

Problems/Tensions Between the French and Dutch Communities: The social disparity between Dutch and French-speaking communities during the 1950s and 1960s led to tensions between them. This tension was more acute in Brussels with a special problem. It was that the Dutch-speaking people constituted a majority in the country, but a minority in the capital.

Ethnic A social division based on shared culture. People belonging to the same ethnic group believe in their common descent because of similarities of physical type of culture or both. They need not always have the same religion or nationality.

Flemish Of or relating to Flanders, its people or their language.

Disparity Lack of similarity or equality; inequality.

Accommodation in Belgium: The Belgian leaders took a different path by recognising the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities of the country. Between 1970s and 1993, the Constitution of Belgium was amended four times. Following are the arrangements which the Belgian leaders work out to enable everyone to live together within the same country

(i) The Constitution prescribes that the number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers shall be equal in the Central Government. Some special laws require the support of majority members from each linguistic group. Thus, no single community can make decisions unilaterally.

(ii) The State Governments are not subordinate to the Central Government. More powers of the Central Government have been given to the State Governments of two regions of the country. -

(iii) Brussels has a separate government, in which both the Dutch and French-speaking people have equal representation. The French-speaking people have accepted this because majority has accepted equal representation at central level.

(iv) Apart from the central and the State Government, there is a third kind of government i.e. 'Community Government'. It is elected by people belonging to one language community—Dutch, French and German- speaking, no matter where





they live. The government has the power regarding cultural, educational and language related issues.

Belgian model has worked well so far which avoided civic strife between two major communities and country remains united. Brussels was chosen as the headquarters of the European Union from the very beginning.

Sri Lanka: It is an island nation in the Indian Ocean. It is just a few kilometers off the Southern coast of Tamil Nadu. Sri Lanka has a diverse population of about two crore people with 74% being Sinhalese and 18% Tamils.

Sub-groups of Tamils: Tamils have two sub-groups Sri Lankan Tamils: Tamil natives of Sri Lanka are called Sri Lankan Tamils, they constitute 13% of the population and are concentrated in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Most of Sinhala-speaking people are Buddhist, while most of the Tamils are Hindus or Muslims.

Indian Tamils: The Tamilians whose came from India as plantation work colonial rule and settled in Sri Lanka Indian Tamils. They constitute 5% of the There are about 7% Christians, who are both Tamil and Sinhala.

Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka: Majoritarianism is a concept which signifies a belief that the majority community should be able to rule a country in whichever way it wants, by disregarding the wishes and needs of the minority. Sri Lanka emerged as an independent 1948. The leaders of the Sinhala community to secure dominance over government - their majority. As a result, the democratically elected government adopted a series of majoritarian measure Sinhala supremacy. In 1956, an act was passed recognize Sinhala as the only official language, thus disregarding Tamil. The government followed preferential policies that favoured Sinhala applicants for university positions and government jobs. A new Constitution stipulated that the state shall protect and promote Buddhism. All these government measures gradually increased the feeling of alienation among Sri Lankan Tamils. They felt that none of the major political parties led by the Buddhist Sinhala leaders were sensitive to their language and culture. The relation between Sinhala and Tamil communities became strained time.

The Struggles for Making Tamil as an Official Language: The Sri Lankan Tamils launched parties and struggles for the recognition of Tamil as an official language. They demanded regional autonomy and equality of opportunity in securing education and jobs but, their demand was repeatedly denied. By the 1980s, several political organization like LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) demanding an independent Tamil Eelam (state) in Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka between the two communities turned in: conflict. It soon turned into a Civil War.

Stipulate: To state clearly and firmly that something must be done or how it must be done.

Strain: Any pressure on somebody or something which is very difficult to deal with.

Civil War: A violent conflict between opposing groups within a country that becomes so intense that it appears like a war.

Result of Struggles: The Civil War resulted in the killing of thousands of people of both munities. This Civil War also caused the terrible setback to the social, cultural and economic life of the country. Many families were forced to leave the country as refugees and lots of people lost their livelihood.

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Lessons from the Two Stories of Belgium and Sri Lanka: both are democracies. Yet, they dealt with the question of sharing power differently. In Belgium, leaders have realized that the unity of the country is possible only by respecting the feelings and interests of different communities and regions. Such a realisation resulted in mutually acceptable arrangements for sharing power. In Sri Lanka, it shows us a contrasting example. It shows us that, if a majority community wants to force its dominance over others and refuses to share power, it can undermine the unity of the country.

Need of power sharing: Two different sets of reasons:

Prudential: The First Set of Reason

It stresses that power sharing will bring out better outcomes. Power sharing is good because it helps to reduce the possibility of conflict between social groups. Since, social conflict often leads to violence and political instability. Power sharing is a good way to ensure the stability of the political order. Apparently imposing the will of majority community over others, may look like an attractive option. But in the long-run, it undermines the unity of the nation. Tyranny of the majority is not only oppressive for the minority community, sometimes it brings ruin to the majority class itself.

Moral: The Second Set of Reason

It emphasises that every act of power sharing is valuable. Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy. People have a right to be consulted on how they are to be governed. A legitimate government is one, where citizens through participation can acquire a stake in the system.

Forms of power sharing: In a democracy, people rule themselves through institutions of self-governance and everyone including minorities has the voice in the shaping of public policies. So, it follows that in a democracy, political power should be distributed among as many citizens as possible. In modern democracies, power sharing arrangements can take many forms such as:

(I) **Horizontal Distribution of Power:** Power is shared among different organs of government, such as the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. This arrangement is called horizontal distribution of power because it allows different organs of government placed at the same level to exercise different powers. Such a separation of power ensures that none of the organs can exercise unlimited power. Each organ checks the others. This results in a balance of power among various institutions. For example, the judges are appointed by the Executive, but they can check the functioning of Executive or laws made by the Legislatures. This arrangement is called a system of checks and balances.

(II) **Federal Government and Vertical Division of Power:** Power can be shared among governments at different levels—a general government for the entire country and governments at the provincial or regional level. Such a general government for the entire country is usually called Federal Government. In India, we refer to it as the Central or Union Government. The governments at the provincial or regional level are called by different names in different countries. This system is not followed in all countries. There are many countries, where there are no provincial or State Governments. But in those countries like ours, where there are different levels of government, the Constitution clearly lays down the powers of different levels of government and that is called vertical division of



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power. This is what is found in Belgium, but not in Sri Lanka. It is known as federal division of power. The same principle can be extended to lower levels of government like the Municipality and Panchayat.

(III) **Community Government:** Power may also be shared among different social groups such as the religious and linguistic groups. 'Community Government' in Belgium is a good example of this arrangement. In some countries, there are constitutional arrangements whereby socially weaker section and women are represented in the legislatures and administration. This method is used to give communities a fair share in power.

(IV) **Coalition Government:** Power sharing arrangements can also be seen in the way political parties, pressure groups and movements influence those in power. In a democracy, the citizens must have freedom to choose among various contenders of different political parties for power. In democracy, power is shared among different political parties that represent different ideologies and social groups. Sometimes, this kind of sharing can be direct when two or more parties form an alliance to elections. If their alliance is elected, they Coalition Government and thus, share power.

(V) **Different Interest Groups:** In a democracy, we find the interest groups like businessmen, industrialists, farmers and in workers. They also have a share in governmental power through participation in governmental commit bringing influence on the decision-making process.

Checks and Balances A system in which each organ of the government checks the others. It results in a balance of power among various institutions and ensures that none of the organs can exercise unlimited power.

Contenders A person who tries to win something in a contest.

Ideologies The body of doctrine, myth, belief, etc that guides an individual, social movement or large group.

