

Case Study

Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy. In a democracy all power does not rest with any one person, institution or organ of the State. An intelligent sharing of power among legislature, executive and judiciary is very important to design of a democracy. We shall focus on power sharing in Belgium and Sri Lanka to examine the causes and effects of power-sharing in a democracy. These studies yield some general conclusions about the need for power sharing and various forms of power sharing.

Belgium : Belgium is a small country in Europe. Its ethnic composition is very complex. Of the country's total population, 59 per cent lives in the Flemish region and speaks Dutch language. Another 40 per cent people live in the Wallonia region and speak French. Remaining 1 per cent of the Belgians speak German. In the capital city Brussels, 80 per cent people speak French while 20 per cent are Dutch-speaking.

The minority French-speaking people were relatively rich and powerful. This was resented by the Dutch-speaking community who got the benefit of economic development and education much later. This led to tensions and conflict between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities during the 1950s and 1960s. This class conflict was acute in Brussels where Dutch-speaking people constituted a majority in the country, but a minority in the capital.

The Belgian political leaders turned out to be very smart, intelligent and sagacious. They fully understood the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities. Between 1970

and 1993, they amended their constitution four times to hammer out an arrangement that would enable every community to live peacefully and ensure unity and integrity of Belgium. The arrangement they thrashed out is very innovative and especial.

- (i) Belgian 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 of members from each linguistic group. Thus, no single community can make decisions unilaterally.
- (ii) Many powers of the central government have been given to state governments of the two regions of the country. The state governments are not subordinate to the central government.
- (iii) Brussels has a separate government in which both the communities have equal representation. The French speaking people accepted equal representation in Brussels because the Dutch-speaking community accepted equal representation in the central government.
- (iv) There is a third level of government in Belgium, apart from the central and State Government. This 'community government' is elected by people belonging to one language community — Dutch, French and German-speaking — no matter where they reside. This government has the power regarding cultural, educational and language-related issues.

The Belgian model is very complicated but has been successful and worked well so far. The Belgian model of power-sharing shows the respect for democracy, its values, ethics and the extent of accommodation that a truly liberal mind can envisage for the sake of unity, integrity and prosperity of the country.

Sri Lanka : Sri Lanka has a diverse population – major social groups are the Sinhala-speakers (74%) and the Tamil-speakers (18%). Among Tamils are two sub-groups. Tamil natives of the country are called Sri Lankan Tamils (13%). The rest of Tamils are descendants of plantation workers who came to India during the colonial era – they are called Indian Tamils. Sri Lankan Tamils are concentrated in the north and east of the country. Most of the Sinhala-speaking people are Buddhist, while most of the Tamils are Hindus or Muslims. There are about 7 per cent Christians, who are both Tamil and Sinhala.

- (i) In 1956, an Act was passed to recognise Sinhala as the only official language, thus disregarding Tamil.
- (ii) The governments followed preferential policies that favoured Sinhala applicants for university positions and government jobs. A new constitution stipulated that the state shall protect and foster Buddhism.
- (iii) All these government measures, coming one after the other, gradually increased the feeling of alienation among the Sri Lankan Tamils. They felt that none of the major political parties led by Buddhist Sinhala leaders were sensitive to their language and culture. They felt that the constitution and government policies denied them equal political rights, discriminated against them in getting jobs and other opportunities and ignored their interests. As a result, the relations between the Sinhala and Tamil communities strained over time.
- (iv) The Sri Lankan Tamils launched parties and struggles for the recognition of Tamil as an official language, for equality of opportunities and regional autonomy. By 1980s, several political organisations were formed demanding an independent Tamil Eelam or Tamil state in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. The conflict

soon turned into a civil war — resulting in deaths of thousands of civilians, soldiers and separatists. The civil war caused a terrible setback to the social, cultural and economic life of the country.

Lessons from examples of Belgium and Sri Lanka : Both are democracies, yet they dealt with the question of power sharing differently.

In Belgium, the leaders realised that the unity of the country is possible only respecting the feelings and interests of different communities and regions. Such a realisation resulted in an extraordinary arrangement for sharing power.

Sri Lanka shows us a contrasting example. Its political leaders exhibited a distrust in the spirit of democracy and favoured majoritarianism. This led to a civil war for decades resulting in large scale destruction.

When we turn towards successful working of democracy in India, we find an excellent example of following the true spirit and ethics of democracy. We have horizontal and vertical power sharing mechanisms in place, giving due recognition to the principles of equality, fraternity and liberty. That is why India is a vibrant and powerful democracy despite our pitfalls and insurmountable problems.

Why Power Sharing is Desirable?

- (i) Power sharing is good because it helps to reduce the possibility of conflict between social groups.
- (ii) Since social conflict often leads to violence and all round instability, power sharing is a good way to ensure socio-economic and political stability.
- (iii) Tyranny of the majority is not just oppressive for the minority; it often brings ruin to the majority as well.
- (iv) Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy. People

have the right to be consulted on how they are to be governed. A successful democracy is one where citizens through participation, acquire a stake in the system.

Power Sharing Mechanism in Modern Democracies :

- (i) Power is shared among different organs of government.
- (ii) Power is shared among governments at different levels.
- (iii) Power is shared among different social groups.
- (iv) Power sharing arrangements can also be seen in the way political parties, pressure groups and movements control or influence those in power.

Competency Based MCQs

1. Which of the following countries is not an example of 'coming together federation'?
(a) USA (b) Switzerland (c) Australia (d) India
2. Which of the following countries is not an example of 'holding together federation'?
(a) Spain (b) Belgium (c) India (d) USA
3. Which government can make laws on the Concurrent List?
(a) Union government (b) State government
(c) Both of these (d) None of these
4. Which government has the authority to make laws on the Residuary subjects?
(a) Union government (b) State government
(c) Both of these (d) None of these
5. In August 2019, former state of Jammu & Kashmir was bifurcated into
(a) two states (b) two union territories
(c) one state and one union territory
(d) None of these