

CIVICS



Power Sharing

Power sharing refers to the sharing or division of power between various political parties and various sections of society.

Power Sharing in Belgium and Sri Lanka

Belgium

Belgium, a small European country, has Dutch-, French- and German-speaking populations. While 59% of the total population of the country live in the Flemish region and speak Dutch, the other 40% of the people live in the Wallonia region and speak French. In Brussels, the capital of Belgium, about 80% of the people speak French, while the remaining 20% speak Dutch.

The minority French-speaking population was rich and powerful. This was resented by the Dutch-speaking population as they received the benefits of education quite late. This sparked tension between the two communities. However, this problem was solved by the political leaders of Belgium who wanted the people to coexist peacefully with one another. Some steps taken by the leaders were

- It was decided that equal representation should be given to the French- and Dutch-speaking population. Thus, there were equal numbers of ministers belonging to both communities in the Central Government.
- State Governments of both Flemish and Wallonia regions were given many powers.
- In Brussels, where the French were in majority, both communities were given equal representation, as the Dutch had agreed to equal representation at the centre despite them being in majority.
- Community government at the local level was elected by one linguistic community only. This community government looked after educational- and cultural-related issues.

These arrangements in Belgium were successful and avoided any kind of tension between the two linguistic communities. This also negated any possibilities of the division of the country on linguistic lines.

Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka became independent of colonial rule in 1948. There were two major communities—Sinhalese and Tamilians. The Sinhalese were in majority, and hence, after being elected to power, the Sinhalese leaders followed a series of majoritarian policies in order to ascertain the supremacy of their community.
- By an Act passed in 1956, Sinhala was recognised as the only official language of the country. Preferential positions in government jobs were given to the Sinhalese.
- All these measures led to dissent among the Tamilian community which finally culminated into a civil war, with the Tamilians demanding the formation of an independent Tamil state in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. Thousands of people were killed in the civil war.

We find that both Belgium and Sri Lanka dealt with the issue of power sharing differently. In Belgium, the leaders respected the interests of both linguistic groups and avoided any possibilities of clashes among the Dutch- and French-speaking communities. In Sri Lanka, however, the assertive policies of the majority community led to a civil war threatening the unity and integrity of the country.

Need for Power Sharing

Power sharing is desirable because of two main reasons. They are

- Prudential reason: It reduces any chances of conflicts between social groups. By avoiding conflicts, political stability and unity of the country can be maintained. Dictatorship of the majority community can be oppressive for the minority and can even wreck the majority community as well.
- Moral reason: Power sharing is the true spirit of democracy. Every section of community has the right to be consulted on how they are to be governed. Governance should be carried out keeping in mind the larger interests of each section of the community.

Different Forms of Power Sharing

In democracies, power is shared in various ways. These are

a. Sharing of power among different organs of government

- A government has three organs-legislature, executive and judiciary. Separation or division of power among the three organs ensures that no organ becomes too powerful.
- In such a system, one organ also keeps a check on the other organ of the government. This results in maintaining balance of power.
- For example, judges who are appointed by the executive can check the functioning of the executive or the legislature. The ministers are also responsible to the Parliament. This is called a system of checks and balances.

b. Power sharing among different levels of government

- In a federal government, there are two main levels of government-the Union or the Central Government and the State Government.
- While the Central Government looks after the administration and law and order of the entire country as a whole, the State Governments look after the administration and law and order in their own states.
- Municipal corporations and village panchayats are the local units of administration.

c. Sharing of power among different social groups

- Sharing of power among various social, linguistic or ethnic communities is another form of power sharing.
- Representation given to the weaker sections of society and religious minorities in the Government ensure the diversity and unity of the country.
- In India, the system of reserved constituencies in the assemblies and in the Parliament is an example of power sharing among different social and ethnic groups.

d. Power sharing among political parties, pressure groups and movements

- In a democracy, more than one political party exists. People have the freedom to vote for any political party. Such competition among various political parties guarantees that power is not concentrated in the hands of one political party only.
- Sometimes, an alliance of one or more political parties is voted to power. This is known as a coalition government.
- Many sections of society such as traders, farmers and workers may form their own interest groups and can influence the decision-making body of the Government. This ensures that voices of each section of society are heard.

Thus we find that power sharing is an important requirement and feature of democratic societies.