

Chapter Notes: Power-sharing

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Introduction

Power sharing is a fundamental principle of democratic governance that ensures the distribution of power among various organs of government, social groups, and political entities to prevent the concentration of power in a single authority. This approach is crucial for maintaining stability, fostering inclusiveness, and promoting fairness in diverse societies.

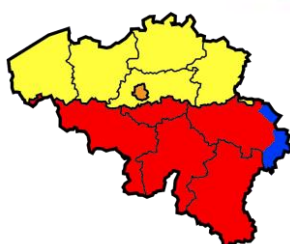
In a democracy all power does not rest with any one organ of the government. An intelligent sharing of power among the legislature, executive and judiciary is very important for the design of democracy.



Belgium and Sri Lanka

Belgium

- Belgium is a small European country, smaller in area than Haryana state.
- Borders: France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Luxembourg.
- Population: Just over one crore, with a complex ethnic composition.
- Language breakdown: 59% Dutch speakers in Flemish region, 40% French speakers in Wallonia, and 1% German speakers. In Brussels, 80% speak French and 20% speak Dutch.
- Tensions: Dutch-speaking community felt disadvantaged compared to the French-speaking minority, leading to conflicts in the 1950s and 1960s.



Community:

Flemish
Flemish and French
French
German-speaking

Region:

Flanders
Brussels
Wallonia
Wallonia

Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka is an island nation close to Tamil Nadu with a population similar to Haryana.
- Population: Around two crores with significant diversity.
- Social groups: 74% Sinhala speakers, 18% Tamil speakers, including Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils.
- Religion: Majority of Sinhala speakers are Buddhists, while Tamils are mostly Hindus or Muslims.
- Concentration: Sri Lankan Tamils are mainly in the north and east of the country.
- Possibilities: Potential conflicts due to demographic majorities could lead to partition and power struggles.

Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka

Post-Independence Era (1948 Onwards):

Following independence in 1948, Sri Lanka witnessed the rise of majoritarianism, where leaders of the Sinhala community sought to secure political dominance by leveraging their majority status.

Majoritarian Measures: A series of measures were adopted to establish Sinhala supremacy:

- **Official Language Act (1956):** Sinhala was recognized as the sole official language, disregarding Tamil.
- **Preferential Policies:** Government policies favored Sinhala applicants for university admissions and government jobs.
- **Religious Favoritism:** The constitution mandated state protection and promotion of Buddhism, further alienating the Tamil community.

Impact on Sri Lankan Tamils:

- **Growing Alienation:** Sri Lankan Tamils increasingly felt marginalized, perceiving that government policies denied them equal political rights, discriminated against them in employment opportunities, and ignored their cultural and linguistic needs.
- **Political Discontent:** Tamil leaders and parties sought recognition of Tamil as an official language, regional autonomy, and equality in education and job opportunities, but these demands were persistently denied.

Escalation and Civil War (1980s-2009):

- **Rise of Separatist Movements:** By the 1980s, political organizations advocating for an independent Tamil state, Tamil Eelam, emerged in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka.
- **Civil Conflict:** Distrust between the Sinhala and Tamil communities escalated into widespread conflict, culminating in a civil war that lasted until 2009.

Consequences of the Civil War:

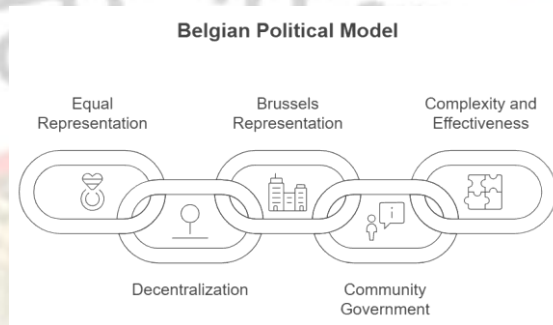
Human and Social Impact: The war resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, the displacement of families, and widespread economic and social disruption.

Cultural and Economic Setbacks: The conflict severely affected Sri Lanka's social fabric and economic development, undermining previous achievements in education, health, and overall well-being.

End of the Civil War (2009): The war concluded in 2009, leaving lasting scars on the nation's societal and economic landscape.

Accommodation in Belgium

Recognition of Diversity: Belgian leaders took a proactive approach by acknowledging the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities. To facilitate peaceful coexistence, they amended the constitution four times between 1970 and 1993, resulting in a unique and innovative arrangement.



Key Elements of the Belgian Model:

1. Equal Representation in Central Government:

- The constitution prescribes that the number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers in the central government shall be equal. This prevents any single community from making unilateral decisions.
- Some special laws require the support of a majority from each linguistic group, ensuring balanced decision-making and preventing domination by one community.

2. Decentralization and Autonomy of State Governments:

- Many powers of the Central Government were devolved to the State Governments of the two main regions (Flanders and Wallonia), which are not subordinate to the Central Government.
- This decentralization underscores the autonomy of the regions.

3. Equal Representation in Brussels:

- Brussels, the capital city, has a separate government where both Dutch and French-speaking communities have equal representation.
- This balance was accepted by the French-speaking population as the Dutch-speaking community agreed to equal representation in the Central Government.

4. Community Government:

- In addition to the Central and State Governments, a 'community government' exists. It is elected by people belonging to one of the three language communities-Dutch, French, and German-regardless of their residence.
- This government has authority over cultural, educational, and language-related issues, allowing each community to preserve its identity.

5. Complexity and Effectiveness:

- The Belgian model is indeed complex, even for the people living in Belgium.

- However, it has effectively avoided civic strife between the two major communities and prevented a potential division of the country on linguistic lines.
- The success of this model is further demonstrated by Brussels being chosen as the headquarters of the European Union.

Comparative Insights:

Belgium's Power-Sharing Success:

- Belgium illustrates how respecting the interests and feelings of different communities through power-sharing arrangements can preserve the unity of a diverse country.
- The model promotes mutual acceptance and cohesion.

Sri Lanka's Cautionary Tale:

- In contrast, Sri Lanka's experience shows that when a majority community attempts to enforce its dominance and refuses to share power, it can undermine national unity and lead to conflict.

Why Power Sharing is Desirable?

- **Social Stability:** Power sharing reduces the likelihood of conflicts between social groups, which in turn minimizes violence and political instability. Imposing the majority's will may seem appealing initially, but it can harm national unity in the long term.
- **Democracy's Essence:** Power sharing embodies the essence of democracy. Democratic governance involves sharing power with those impacted by decisions, allowing them a say in governance and a stake in the system.

Two Sets of Reasons:

- **Prudential Reasons:** Focus on the positive outcomes that power sharing can bring, emphasizing its practical benefits.
- **Moral Reasons:** Highlight the intrinsic value of power sharing itself, beyond its outcomes, by stressing the importance of citizen participation and stakeholder involvement in governance.

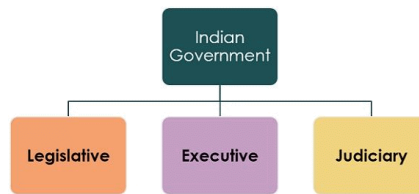
Forms of Power-Sharing

- Power-sharing can be considered as the spirit of democracy as power is not concentrated in the hands of few people.
- Moreover, the people in power are not only responsible for their decisions but are also held accountable for them.
- Power-sharing also gives respect to each and every social group which is rarely seen in any other type of government except democracy.

There are different ways in which power-sharing takes place in various democracies:

1. Power-Sharing between Different Organs of the Government

- The power division is horizontal where different organs of the government at the same level exercise different powers in their jurisdiction.
- This is easily seen in Indian democracy the legislature, judiciary and executive function on the same level and yet have different jurisdictions.



2. Power-Sharing between Different Levels of Government

- This refers to the system where the power is distributed among various levels of government such as the central and provincial governments.
- This system is also known as federalism. India is a prime example of the federal system of government.
- In certain matters, the power-sharing is so exclusive that certain subjects are only exclusive to the union government or the state government.



3. Power-Sharing between Different Social Groups

- **Representation of Social Groups:** Power may also be shared among different social groups, such as religious and linguistic communities. The 'community government' in Belgium is an example of this type of arrangement, where various groups have a voice in governance.
- **Constitutional and Legal Arrangements:** In many countries, there are constitutional and legal mechanisms to ensure that socially weaker sections and women are represented in legislatures and administration. For example, India uses a system of 'reserved constituencies' to ensure representation for marginalized communities.
- **Purpose of Social Power-Sharing:** These arrangements are designed to give minority communities and socially weaker groups a fair share of power, preventing them from feeling alienated from the government. This approach helps in accommodating social diversities within the governance framework.

4. Power-Sharing between Different Political Groups

- **Role of Political Parties and Groups:** Power-sharing in democracies often involves various political groups, including political parties, pressure groups, and other public interest groups.

These groups influence decision-making and ensure that power is not concentrated in one hand.

- **Competition and Coalition:** In a democratic system, competition among political parties allows citizens to choose their leaders. This competition can lead to power-sharing when two or more parties form an alliance to contest elections. If their alliance wins, they form a coalition government, sharing power directly.
- **Influence of Interest Groups:** In addition to political parties, interest groups such as traders, businessmen, industrialists, farmers, and workers also play a role in power-sharing. They may participate in governmental committees or exert influence on the decision-making process, ensuring that various societal interests are represented in governance.

Important Terms to Remember

1. **Power-sharing:** Power-sharing is the distribution of power among the organs of the government like-legislature, executive, and judiciary. It is an intelligent step to ensure the stability of political order. Besides, power-sharing also includes sharing at the different levels like union, state, and local.
2. **Majoritarian:** A concept which signifies a belief that the majority community should be able to rule a country in whatever way it wants is known as Majoritarian. In this type of rule, they disregard the wishes and needs of the minority.
3. **Ethnicity:** A social division based on shared culture. Most people belonging to the same ethnic group believe in their common descent because they have similarities of physical type or culture or both. They may not have the same religion or nationality, e.g, French-speaking, Dutch-speaking, Sinhala speaking, etc.
4. **Community Government:** A type of Government that is elected by people belonging to one language community is called community government. For example, Dutch, French, and German-speaking people form their respective community governments, no matter where they live. This is a very specific type of government in Belgium.
5. **Civil War:** A violent conflict between opposing groups within a country is known as a civil war. Sometimes it becomes so intense that it appears like a war.
6. **Prudential:** It is a set of reasons which favours power-sharing. It is based on prudence, or on careful calculation of gains and losses. Prudential reasons stress beneficial consequences.
7. **Checks and Balances:** A system in which each organ of the government checks the others which results in a balance of power among various institutions. It ensures that none of the organs can exercise unlimited power.
8. **Vertical Division of Power:** It is a type of distribution of power that involves the higher and lower levels of government such as central, provincial, and regional levels.
9. **Reserved Constituencies:** It is a system in which constituencies are reserved in the Assemblies and the Parliament for minorities in order to give them a fair share in power.
10. **Coalition Government:** When the alliance of two or more parties gets elected and forms a government it is known as the Coalition Government. This is another form of power-sharing.