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Power Sharing

Power sharing is the practice of distributing political power among different groups or levels of government to prevent conflict and ensure fairness in a democratic setup. It is essential to maintain stability and promote participation of diverse groups in governance.

There are two main types of power sharing:

- **Horizontal Division of Power:** Power is divided among different organs of government such as the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary.
- **Vertical Division of Power:** Power is shared between different levels of government, such as the central government and state or provincial governments.

Power can also be shared among social groups through community governments and civic societies like political parties and interest groups.

Why is Power Sharing Important?

- It reduces the possibility of conflict between social groups.
- It is the spirit of democracy, ensuring fair representation and participation.
- It helps in accommodating diverse groups within a country.

Exam Question

Q: What is power sharing and why is it important in a democracy?

A: Power sharing means dividing power among different groups or levels of government to avoid conflict and ensure fairness. It is important because it reduces conflicts, promotes participation, and maintains stability in a democracy.

Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island country with a diverse population. The major ethnic groups are the Sinhalese (74%) and Tamils (18%). The country also has four major religions: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity.

In 1956, the government passed an Act recognizing Sinhala as the only official language, disregarding Tamil. This led to the dominance of the Sinhala majority in government decisions, a policy known as **majoritarianism**.

The constitution also stipulated that the state shall protect and foster Buddhism, further establishing Sinhala supremacy.

By the 1980s, political organizations demanded an independent Tamil state called Tamil Eelam in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. This distrust between communities escalated into a civil war.

Key Terms

- **Ethnic:** A social division based on shared culture or descent.
- **Supremacy:** The state of being the most powerful.
- **Majoritarianism:** The practice where decisions are determined by the numerical majority.
- **Civil War:** A violent conflict between opposing groups within a country.

Exam Question

Q: What was the impact of majoritarianism in Sri Lanka?

A: Majoritarianism led to the dominance of the Sinhala majority, disregarding minority rights, which caused distrust and conflict between communities, eventually resulting in a civil war.

Accommodation in Belgium and Forms of Power Sharing

Belgium is a small European country with a complex ethnic composition. The main languages spoken are Dutch (59%), French (40%), and German (1%). Brussels, the capital, has 80% French speakers and 20% Dutch speakers, creating a unique challenge as Dutch speakers are a majority nationally but a minority in the capital.

To accommodate this diversity, Belgium has developed innovative power sharing arrangements:

- The constitution requires equal numbers of Dutch- and French-speaking ministers in the central government.
- State governments are not subordinate to the central government, allowing regional autonomy.
- Brussels has a separate government with equal representation from both communities.
- There is a third type of government called the community government, which handles affairs related to specific social groups.

Power sharing in Belgium is based on both prudential reasons (to achieve better outcomes) and moral reasons (valuing the act of sharing power itself).

Forms of power sharing include:

- Sharing power among different organs of government (Legislature, Executive, Judiciary).
- Sharing power among different levels of government (central and regional).
- Sharing power among different social groups (religious and linguistic communities).
- Influence of political parties, pressure groups, and movements in governance.

Key Terms

- **Prudential:** Based on careful calculation of gains and losses.
- **Pressure Groups:** Organizations that influence government policies to protect their interests.

Exam Question

Q: How does Belgium accommodate its diverse communities through power sharing?

A: Belgium shares power by ensuring equal representation of language groups in the central government, granting autonomy to state governments, establishing a separate government for Brussels, and creating community governments for social groups.

Solved Examples

1. **Example:** Explain the difference between horizontal and vertical power sharing.

Answer: Horizontal power sharing divides power among different organs of government like the legislature, executive, and judiciary. Vertical power sharing

divides power between different levels of government such as central and state governments.

2. **Example:** Why did majoritarianism lead to conflict in Sri Lanka?

Answer: Majoritarianism gave dominance to the Sinhala majority, ignoring the rights of Tamil minorities, which caused distrust and eventually led to civil war.

Practice Set

Easy

1. Define power sharing.
2. What are the two main types of power sharing?

Moderate

1. Describe the ethnic composition of Belgium.
2. What was the significance of the 1956 language Act in Sri Lanka?

Challenging

1. Explain how Belgium's power sharing arrangement helps maintain peace among its communities.
2. Discuss the consequences of majoritarianism in Sri Lanka.

Answer Key

1. Power sharing is the distribution of political power among different groups or levels of government to prevent conflict and ensure fairness.
2. The two main types are horizontal division (among government organs) and vertical division (among levels of government).

3. Belgium has Dutch, French, and German-speaking communities. Dutch speakers are majority nationally but minority in Brussels, which is mostly French-speaking.
4. The 1956 Act made Sinhala the only official language, disregarding Tamil, leading to ethnic tensions.
5. Belgium's arrangements ensure equal representation, regional autonomy, and community governments, which accommodate diverse groups and prevent conflict.
6. Majoritarianism led to the dominance of the Sinhala majority, marginalization of minorities, distrust, and a civil war.

Quick Reference

- **Power Sharing:** Dividing power to ensure fairness and prevent conflict.
- **Horizontal Division:** Among legislature, executive, judiciary.
- **Vertical Division:** Between central and state governments.
- **Majoritarianism:** Majority dominance in decision-making.
- **Community Government:** Government for specific social groups.
- **Prudential Reason:** Practical benefits of power sharing.
- **Moral Reason:** Ethical value of sharing power.

Glossary

Ethnic

A social division based on shared culture or descent.

Supremacy

The state of being the most powerful.

Majoritarianism

Decision-making based on the numerical majority.

Civil War

A violent conflict between groups within a country.

Prudential

Based on careful calculation of benefits and losses.

Pressure Groups

Organizations that influence government policies to protect their interests.

Time Period /	Event / Change	Importance
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Year		
1956	Sri Lanka passes Act making Sinhala the only official language	Led to Tamil minority's marginalization and ethnic tensions
1980s	Formation of Tamil political organizations demanding Tamil Eelam	Escalated distrust and led to civil war
Post-1950s	Belgium adopts power sharing arrangements	Ensured peaceful coexistence of diverse linguistic communities

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