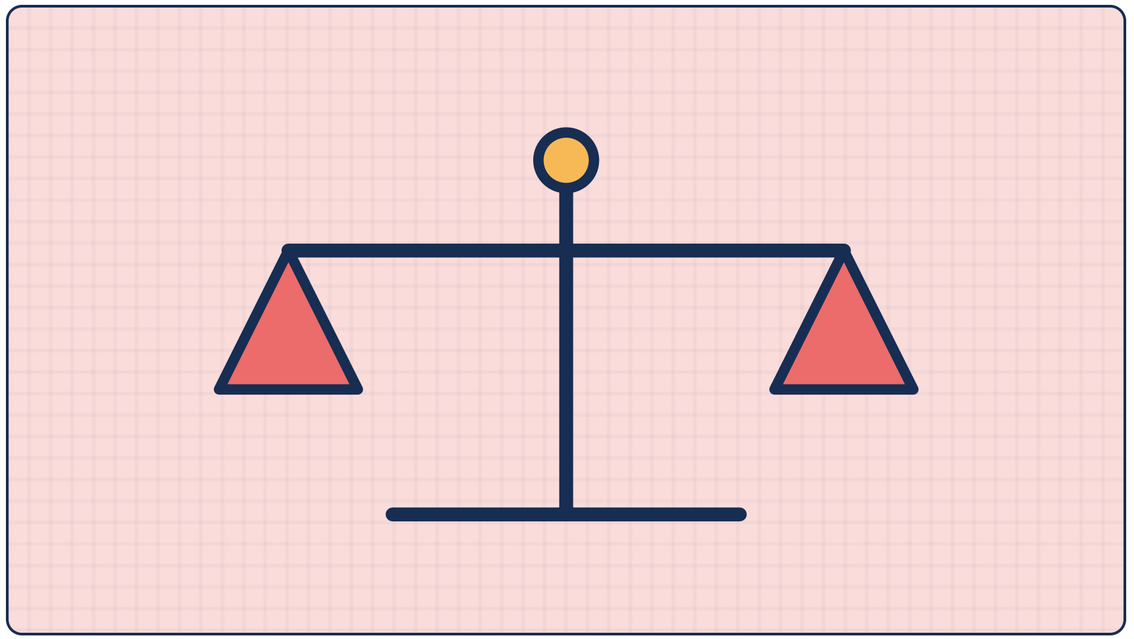
CBSE Class 10 Social Science · Democratic Politics, Chapter 1

# Power Sharing



Goals

# By the end of this lesson you can

- Describe the people of Belgium and Sri Lanka
- Compare the two countries' approaches
- Give prudential and moral reasons for sharing power
- Name four forms of power sharing, with Indian examples

# What is power sharing?

- Power is divided among institutions, levels and groups
- No single person, organ or group holds all power
- Different groups get a voice in decisions that affect them
- It is a key feature of democratic government

# Belgium: a small country with three languages

# 59%

**of Belgians live in the Flemish region and speak Dutch**

- About 40% live in Wallonia and speak French
- About 1% speak German
- Brussels: about 80% French-speaking, 20% Dutch-speaking

# Sri Lanka: an island of diverse communities

- About 74% Sinhala-speakers and 18% Tamil-speakers
- Sri Lankan Tamils (13%) live mainly in the north and east
- Indian Tamils descend from colonial-era plantation workers
- Most Sinhala-speakers are Buddhist; most Tamils Hindu or Muslim
- About 7% are Christian, both Tamil and Sinhala

# Key dates in the two case studies

- 1948: Sri Lanka becomes independent
- 1956: A law makes Sinhala the only official language
- 1970: Belgium begins amending its constitution
- 1993: Belgium's reforms create a federal state
- 2009: Sri Lanka's civil war ends

# Sri Lanka: rule by the majority

- 1956 Act made Sinhala the only official language
- Sinhala applicants favoured for university places and government jobs
- Constitution said the state shall protect and foster Buddhism
- Many Sri Lankan Tamils felt excluded and alienated
- Demands for autonomy grew, then conflict became civil war

# Belgium: accommodating every community

- Equal numbers of Dutch- and French-speaking central ministers
- Some laws need majority support in each language group
- Regional governments are not subordinate to the centre
- Brussels has a separate government with equal representation
- A community government handles language, culture and education

# Two paths, two outcomes

## Belgium

- Recognised regional and cultural differences
- Shared power among communities
- Stayed united as one country
- Brussels became headquarters of the EU

## Sri Lanka

- Majority sought dominance over government
- Minority felt shut out of power
- Distrust grew into a long civil war
- War ended in 2009 after great losses

# Why share power?

## Prudential reasons

- Reduce conflict between social groups
- Keep the political order stable
- Avoid tyranny of the majority

## Moral reasons

- Power sharing is the spirit of democracy
- People have a right to be consulted
- Citizens gain a stake in the system

# Form 1: Among organs of government

- Legislature, executive and judiciary share power
- Called horizontal distribution of power
- Each organ checks the others: checks and balances
- India: ministers answer to Parliament; courts can review laws

# Form 2: Among levels of government

- A general government for the whole country
- Governments at the provincial or regional level
- India: Union, State and local governments
- The constitution lays down each level's powers
- Called vertical or federal division of power

# Form 3: Among social groups

- Power shared among religious and linguistic groups
- Belgium's community government is one example
- India reserves seats in legislatures for SCs and STs
- Gives groups that might feel left out a fair share

# Form 4: Parties, pressure groups, movements

- Parties compete, so power does not stay in one hand
- Parties may ally and form a coalition government
- Interest groups of traders, farmers and workers influence decisions
- Movements put pressure on those in power

Worked example

# Power sharing in India, at a glance

- Parliament makes laws; courts check they follow the Constitution
- Union and State subjects are listed in the Constitution
- Panchayats and municipalities govern at the local level
- Reserved seats give SCs and STs representation
- India has seen coalition governments at the Centre

Quick check

# Belgium's community government is an example of power sharing among:

A. Organs of government

B. Levels of government

C. Social groups

D. Political parties

Summary

# Key takeaways

1. Belgium accommodated its communities; Sri Lanka followed majoritarian policies
2. Accommodation helped Belgium stay united
3. Prudential reasons: less conflict, more stability
4. Moral reason: power sharing is the spirit of democracy
5. Four forms: organs, levels, social groups, parties and groups