

Power Sharing & Federalism

Case Study 1: Accommodation vs. Majoritarianism (Power Sharing)

Read the source given below and answer the questions that follow:

Between 1970 and 1993, Belgian leaders amended their constitution four times so as to work out an arrangement that would enable everyone to live together within the same country. The arrangement they worked out is different from any other country and is very innovative. They established that the number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers shall be equal in the central government. Some special laws require the support of the majority of members from each linguistic group. Thus, no single community can make decisions unilaterally. 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. Brussels has a separate government in which both communities have equal representation.

Conversely, Sri Lanka chose a different path after gaining independence in 1948. The leaders of the Sinhala community sought to secure dominance over the government by virtue of their majority. In 1956, an Act was passed to recognise Sinhala as the only official language, thus disregarding Tamil. 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. All these government measures, coming one after the other, gradually increased the feeling of alienation among the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Questions:

- 1.1** Which core system of government did Belgium move toward when its central government shared powers with the regional governments? **(1 Mark)**
- 1.2** Identify the majoritarian measure taken by the Sri Lankan government in 1956 that deeply alienated the minority Tamil population. **(1 Mark)**
- 1.3** Differentiate between how Belgium and Sri Lanka resolved their internal cultural and linguistic diversities, highlighting the ultimate consequences of their respective paths. **(2 Marks)**

Case Study 2: The Structure and Spirit of Federalism (Federalism)

Read the source given below and answer the questions that follow:

Federalism is a system of government in which the power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of the country. Usually, a federation has two levels of government. One is the government for the entire country that is usually responsible for a few subjects of common national interest. The others are governments at the level of provinces or states that look after much of the day-to-day administering of their state. Both these levels of governments enjoy their power independent of the other.

In this sense, federations are contrasted with unitary governments. Under the unitary system, either there is only one level of government or the sub-units are subordinate to the central government. The central government can pass on orders to the provincial or the local government. But in a federal system, the central government cannot order the state government to do something. State government has powers of its own for which it is not answerable to the central government. Both these governments are separately answerable to the people.

Questions:

- 2.1** Why is the Indian federal structure not considered a purely 'unitary system' despite having a strong central government? **(1 Mark)**
- 2.2** In a federal system, whom are both the Central and State governments ultimately and separately answerable to? **(1 Mark)**
- 2.3** Explain the dual objectives that a federal system aims to safeguard and promote within a diverse nation like India. **(2 Marks)**

Case Study 3: Decentralisation and Local Self-Government (Federalism)

Read the source given below and answer the questions that follow:

A vast country like India cannot be run only through two tiers of government. States in India are as large as independent countries of Europe. In terms of population, Uttar Pradesh is bigger than Russia, Maharashtra is about as big as Germany. Many of these states are internally very diverse. There is thus a need for power sharing within these states. Federal power sharing in India needs another tier of government, below that of the State governments. This is the rationale for decentralisation of power. Thus, resulted a third tier of government, called local government.

When power is taken away from Central and State governments and given to local government, it is called decentralisation. The basic idea behind decentralisation is that there are a large number of problems and issues which are best settled at the local level. People have better knowledge of problems in their localities. They also have better ideas on where to spend money and how to manage things more efficiently. At the local level it is possible for the people to directly participate in decision making. This helps to inculcate a habit of democratic participation. Local government is the best way to realise one important principle of democracy, namely local self-government.

Questions:

- 3.1** What fundamental principle of democracy is realized through the active implementation of a decentralized local government? **(1 Mark)**
- 3.2** Give one practical reason from the text explaining why local issues are best resolved at the community level. **(1 Mark)**
- 3.3** Analyze how the historic Constitutional Amendment of 1992 made the third tier of democracy in India more powerful and effective. **(2 Marks)**

Answer Key & Marking Scheme:

1.1 Answer: Belgium moved from a unitary system to a Federal system of government.

1.2 Answer: The passage of the 1956 Act, which recognized Sinhala as the sole official language of the country, thereby completely disregarding the Tamil language.

1.3 Answer: • Belgium adopted a policy of accommodation, sharing power equally among linguistic groups, which successfully avoided civil strife and kept the country unified.

• Sri Lanka adopted majoritarianism, forcing the dominance of the majority over minorities, which led to a devastating civil war and fractured the social fabric of the nation.

2.1 Answer: Because the State governments in India derive their power directly from the Constitution and are not strictly subordinate to the central government.

2.2 Answer: They are separately answerable to the people (the citizens/voters of the nation and respective states).

2.3 Answer: 1. To safeguard and promote the unity of the country.
2. To accommodate regional and cultural diversity.

3.1 Answer: The fundamental principle of local self-government and direct grassroot democratic participation.

3.2 Answer: Local people possess deeper knowledge of issues in their neighborhood and have clearer insights into where to spend money efficiently.

3.3 Answer: The 1992 Amendment institutionalized local governance by:

1. Making it constitutionally mandatory to hold regular elections to local government bodies.
2. Reserving at least one-third (33%) of all positions for women, alongside reservations for SCs, STs, and OBCs. [