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CLASS XTH SUBJECT POLITICAL SCIENCE DATE 9.5.2021.

Ch:POWER SHARING (Notes)

Ethnic composition of Belgium:

Belgium is a small country in Europe, having a population of a little over one crore. 59 per cent of the country's total population lives in the Flemish region and speak Dutch language. Another 40 per cent people live in Wallonia region and speak French. Remaining one per cent of the Belgians speak German. Whereas in the Belgian capital, Brussels, 80 per cent of the population is French-speaking and 20 per cent is Dutch-speaking.

Belgian power-sharing model:

The power-sharing arrangements made by the Belgian leaders were different and more innovative than any other country. To recognize the existence of regional differences and cultural diversities, they amended their Constitution four times between 1970 and 1993.

The major elements of the Belgian Model are:

1. Constitution prescribes that the number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers shall be equal in the Central Government. No single community can take decisions unilaterally.
2. The State Governments are not subordinate to the Central Government.
3. Brussels, the capital, has a separate government where both the communities have equal representation.
4. A third kind of government, 'Community Government', is elected by people belonging to one language community – Dutch, French and German speaking—no matter where they live. This government can decide on cultural, educational and language related issues.

'Lebanon'—conflict related to power-sharing disputes were resolved by power sharing:

People from various communities lived in Lebanon's capital city, Beirut, and fought a bitter Civil War amongst themselves. As a result, thousands of people of various communities were either killed or lost their livelihood. At the end of this Civil War, Lebanon's leaders came together and agreed to some basic rules for power-sharing among different communities. As per these rules it was agreed that:

- The President would be from Maronite sect of Catholic Christians;
- The Prime Minister must be from the Sunni Muslim community;
- Deputy Prime Minister would be from an Orthodox Christian sect;
- Speaker—a Shia Muslim.

As per the pact, the Christians agreed not to seek French protection and Muslims agreed not to seek unification with the neighbouring state of Syria.

Prudential reasons:

Prudential reasons stress that power-sharing would bring out better outcomes by helping to reduce the possibility of any conflict between the social groups and power-sharing is a good way to ensure the stability of political order through unity of the nation.

Moral reasons:

Moral reasons uphold power-sharing as the very spirit of democracy. A democratic rule involves sharing power with those affected by its exercise. People have the right to be consulted and have equal participation in the government.

Principles of a good democracy:

- that power of a government must not vest in one person or a group of persons.
- that people are the source of all political power.
- that due respect be given to diverse groups and everyone should have a voice in the shaping of public policies.

System of checks and balances:

The horizontal distribution of power ensures that power is shared among different organs of government—the legislature, executive and judiciary. It allows different organs of government placed at the same level to exercise different powers. In a democracy, ministers and government officials exercise power. They are responsible to the Parliament or State Assemblies. The judges appointed by the executive can check the functioning of executive or laws made by the legislature. The horizontal distribution of power is also called a system of checks and balances.

Power-sharing in contemporary democracies:

In contemporary democracies, power-sharing takes the form of competition among different parties. Such competition ensures that power does not remain in one hand and is shared among different political parties representing different social groups and ideologies. This type of sharing often leads to the formation of an alliance between two or more parties, which, goes to form a Coalition Government.

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