1 Power Sharing

Story of Belgium
• Belgium is a small country in Europe which has a population of a little over one crore.
• The ethnic composition of this small country is very complex.
• Out of the total population of the country, 59 percent lives in the Flemish region and speaks Dutch
language. Another 40 percent people live in the Wallonia region and speak French. Remaining one percent of the Belgians speak German.
• In Belgium's capital, Brussels, 80 percent people speak French while 20 percent are Dutch speaking.
• The minority French-speaking community was relatively rich and powerful.
→ This made Dutch-speaking community angry as they the benefit of economic development and education much later.

• During the 1950s and 1960s, tensions between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities created due to these differences.

Story of Sri Lanka
• Sri Lanka is an island nation, south of India having diverse population of about two crore people.
• The major social groups are the Sinhala-speakers (74 percent) and the Tamil-speakers (18 percent).
• Tamils are divided into two groups:
→ Sri Lankan Tamils (13 percent) - Tamil natives of the country
→ Indian Tamils (5 percent) - came from India during colonial period as plantation workers.

• Most of the Sinhala-speaking people are Buddhists, while most of the Tamils are Hindus or Muslims.
• There are about 7 percent Christians, who are both Tamil and Sinhala.

Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka
• The democratically elected government adopted a series of Majoritarian policy measures to establish Sinhala supremacy. These are:

→ Sinhala as the only official language.
→ The governments followed preferential policies that favoured Sinhala applicants for university positions and government jobs.

• These decisions gradually increased the feeling of alienation among the Sri Lankan Tamils.
• The Sri Lankan Tamils launched parties and struggles for the recognition of Tamil as an official language, for regional autonomy and equality of opportunity in securing education and jobs.
• By 1980s several political organisations were formed demanding an independent Tamil Eelam (state) in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka.
• It soon turned into Civil War.

Accommodation in Belgium
• Between 1970 and 1993, Belgian's constitution amended four times to work out an arrangement that would make everyone to live together.
• The elements of the Belgian model:

→ Constitution prescribes that the number of Dutch and French-speaking ministers shall be equal in the central government.
→ Many powers of the central government have been given to state governments of the two regions of the country.
→ Brussels has a separate government in which both the communities have equal representation.
→ There is also provision of 'community government' elected by people belonging to one language
community which has the power regarding cultural, educational and language-related issues.

Why power sharing is desirable?
• Power sharing is good because it helps to reduce the possibility of conflict between social groups.
• Power sharing is the very spirit of democracy.
→ A democratic rule involves sharing power with those affected by its exercise, and who have to live with its effects.

Forms of power-sharing

• In modern democracies, power sharing arrangements can take many forms.

→ Horizontal distribution of power: Power is shared among different organs of government, such as the legislature, executive and judiciary. Example: India.
→ Federal Government (Vertical distribution of power): Power can be shared among governments at different levels – a general government for the entire country and governments at the provincial or regional level. Example: USA.
→ Power may also be shared among different social groups such as the religious and linguistic groups. Example: 'Community government' in Belgium.
→ Power sharing arrangements can also be seen in the way political parties, pressure groups and movements control or influence those in power.