

Revision Notes
Chapter - 5
Popular Struggles and Movements

In the earlier chapters, we discussed why power sharing is important in a democracy and how different tiers of government and various social groups share power. In this chapter, we will carry this discussion further and see how those who exercise power are constrained by the influence and pressure exerted on them. We begin with this chapter with a discussion of how struggles around conflicting demands and pressure shape democracy. In this chapter, we look at the indirect ways of influencing politics, through pressure groups and movements. This leads us to the next chapter to direct ways of controlling political power in the form of political parties.

Popular struggles in Nepal and Bolivia

Movements for democracy in Nepal

1. Nepal witnessed an extraordinary popular movement in April 2006. The movement was aimed at restoring democracy.
2. The movement of April 2006 was aimed at retaining popular control over the government from the king.
3. All the major political parties in the parliament formed a Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and called for four-day strike in Kathmandu, the country's capital.
4. The number of protesters reached between three to five lakhs on 21 April and they served an ultimatum to the king.
5. The leader of the movement rejected the half-hearted concessions made by the king.
6. They stuck to their demand for restoration of parliament, the power to an all party government and a new constituent assembly.
7. On 24 April 2004, the last day of the ultimatum, the king was forced to concede all the three demands.
8. The SPA chose Girija Prasad Koilara as the new Prime Minister of the interim government.
9. This struggle came to be known as Nepal's second movement for democracy.

Mobilization and organizations

1. The protest against water privatization in Bolivia was not led by any political party.
2. It was led by an organization called FEDECOR.
3. This organization comprised of local professionals, including engineers and environmentalists.
4. The movement was supported by the socialist party. In 2006, this party came to power in Bolivia.
5. From both these examples, we can see that in a democracy several different kinds of organizations work behind any big struggle.
6. These organizations play their role in two ways:
 - a) One obvious way of influencing the decisions in a democracy is direct participation in competitive politics.
 - b) There are many indirect ways in which people can get governments to listen to their demands or their points of view.

Pressure groups and movements

1. Pressure groups are organizations that attempt to influence government policies.
2. These organizations are formed when people with common occupation, interest, aspirations or opinions come together in order to achieve a common objective.

Sectional interest groups and public interest groups

1. Usually, interest groups seek to promote the interests of a particular section or group of society.
2. Their principal concern is the betterment and well being of their members, not society in general.
3. Sometimes these organizations are not about representing the interest of one section of society. They represent some common or general interest that needs to be defined.
4. These second type of groups are called promotional groups or public interest groups.
5. They promote collective rather than selective goods. They aim to help groups other than their own members.

Movement groups

1. As in the case of interest groups, the groups involved with movements also include a very wide variety.
2. Most of the movements are issues specific movements that seek to achieve a single objective within a limited time frame.

3. The movement started with the specific issues of the people displaced by the creation of Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada River. Its objective was to stop the dam from being constructed.
4. These single-issue movements can be contrasted with movements that are long terms and involve more than one issue.
5. Pressure groups and movements exert influence on politics in a variety of ways:
 - a) They try to gain public support and sympathy for their goals and their activity by carrying out information campaigns, organizing meetings, file petition, etc.
 - b) They often organize protest activity like strikes or disrupting government programs.
 - c) Business groups often employ professional lobbyists or sponsors expensive advertisements.
 - d) In some instances, the pressure groups are either formed or led by the leaders of political parties or act as extended arms of political parties.
 - e) Sometimes political parties grow out of movements.
 - f) In most cases, the relationship between parties and interest or movement groups is not so direct.

Is their influence healthy?

1. It may initially appear that it is not healthy for groups that promote the interest of one section to have influence in democracy.
2. It may seem that these groups wield power without responsibility.
3. Pressure groups and movements may not get their funds and support from the people.
4. Putting pressure on the rulers is not unhealthy activity in a democracy as long as everyone gets this opportunity.
5. Public interest groups and movements perform a useful role in countering this useful role or countering this undue influence and reminding the government of the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens.