



IAS 100

A Civil Services Chronicle Initiative

PRESSURE GROUPS



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Pressure groups have become a very important part of an administrative system. These groups try to pressurize the administrative and political system of a country either to ensure that their interests are promoted or to see that at least their interests are not relegated to the background. No system can function effectively without taking their viewpoint into consideration. In developing countries like India where there is a scarcity of various resources on the one hand and acute poverty and deprivation on the other, the pressure on administrative system is bound to be very heavy. The pressure groups arise in different forms in different walks of life. They provide a stabilizing mechanism and form a crucial component of the structural equilibrium which means that they perform the system maintenance function. There can be another side of the phenomenon where the pressure on the system may reach a breakdown point. Thus, the questions like how the pressure groups are formed, how do they operate and what mechanisms the system adopts to cope with the pressures become important issues confronting the administration of any country.

PRESSURE GROUPS: MEANING

Pressure groups are forms of organizations, which exert pressure on the political or administrative system of a country to extract benefits out of it and to advance their own interests. In the present context these forms of organizations are broadly referred to as Civil Society Organizations (CSO).

The term 'pressure group' refers to any interest group whose members because of their shared common attributes make claims on the other groups and on the political process. They pursue their interests by organizing themselves and by influencing the governmental policies. Their aim is to see that laws or government's actions are favourable to their interests.

Pressure groups have been in existence in different forms ever since governmental machinery became capable of delivering certain benefits to either individuals or groups. They did take more

concrete form in the wake of industrial revolution and the rise of market oriented economies. The emergence of trusts and monopolies and the struggle over tariffs led to the formation of pressure groups. With the advancement of technology and agricultural skills new problems, desires and needs arose and therefore new groups and organizations came into being to advance their common interests. State assumed various welfare functions in addition to its earlier regulatory activities. All this entrusted considerable power and discretion in the hands of state apparatus and the need to exert more pressure on the State became stronger. The dominant sections of the society needed the help of the State in promotion of the economic activities and the weak and the deprived needed its help for meeting their basic requirements. To articulate their interests, and exert pressure on the State apparatus these groups gained prominence. Pressure groups in mobilising and organizing masses have widened the base of political participation as well as creating a responsive political and administrative system. They help in social integration, political articulation and act as catalysts for change. Finer has characterised pressure groups as 'anonymous empire'. Richard D. Lambert views it as unofficial government. These groups influence both public policy as well as administration. They also contribute towards determination of political structure of society and the form of government. Any social group which seeks to influence the, behaviour of any political officer, both administrative as well as legislative, without attempting to gain formal control of the government can be called a pressure group.

PRESSURE GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Pressure groups have to be differentiated from political parties. Political parties, in the strict sense of the term, are associations of individuals sharing common values and preferences. They are organized on ideological lines and present a vision for the future. They have well trained cadres who are

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESSURE GROUPS

❖ *Based on Certain Interests*

Each pressure group organizes itself keeping in view certain interests and thus tries to adopt the structure of power in the political systems. In every government and political party there are clashing interest groups. These groups try to dominate the political structure and to see that groups whose interests clash with theirs are suppressed. Thus, each political party and system is pressurised by certain interest groups which may be similar or reactionary to each other.

❖ *Use of Modern as well as Traditional Means*

Another characteristic feature of pressure groups is that they try to follow modern means of exerting pressure, without, fully giving up the traditional or old ways of operation. They adopt techniques like financing of political parties, sponsoring their close candidates at the time of elections and keeping the bureaucracy also satisfied. Their traditional means include exploitation of caste, creed and religious feelings to promote their interests.

❖ *Resulting Out of Increasing Pressure and Demands on Resources*

As the resources of developing countries are usually scarce, there are claims and counter claims on their resources from different and competing sections of the society. In such a situation, there has to be a process of allocation. The public policies thus become the devices through which allocation takes place. However, the allocation process has to be accompanied by certain amount of authority for the demands of all the groups cannot be satisfied. In the process certain other groups are denied the benefits. Those who are denied the benefits are found to be unhappy and do express their resentment through different forms. This may range from mild protests to violent outbursts. In such a situation the allocator of values, viz., the State employs different techniques to contain the movement or meet the protest. At ideological level the State would claim legitimacy of its authority to allocate the values. If the legitimacy claim is accepted then the conflicts get resolved in a more orderly fashion. If the claims for the legitimacy are

engaged in continuous political mobilisation of the masses. They use all the political means available to capture the power and consolidate their position to attain or realise their ideological goals. In a broader sense they are also interest groups. They have a social base whose interests it must protect and promote. They may adopt pragmatic approach and operate only in the immediate context. They may, sometimes, degenerate to the level of a pressure group to extract benefits for their group. In such a situation the distinction between a pressure group and political party may even disappear. The pressure groups unlike the political parties are formed to solve their immediate problems. They are relatively more temporary than political parties. A pressure group may appear for a short time if it does not present any long-range programme. However, where the interests of the group are of long-range, the pressure group may also last longer. In such cases it may even project the sectarian interests as general or universal interests. It depends on the imagination of their leadership. The pressure groups may have a well-knit organization and organized membership. Generally they do not have cadres and do not directly deal with people. In most of the cases they deal either with the political parties or governmental apparatus. The pressure groups have far greater flexibility compared to political parties as they do not go to people and stake their claims for power. It is precisely this process that distinguishes political parties from pressure groups.

PRESSURE GROUPS AND LOBBYING

Pressure groups and lobbying is not one and the same thing. Lobbying takes place when a few members of pressure groups loiter in the lobbies of the legislatures with a view to securing an opportunity to interact with legislators and to influence the decision of the legislators. Parity cannot be drawn between lobbying and pressure groups even though the lobbyists are the representatives of particular interest groups. Lobbying is a communication process used for persuasion; it cannot be treated as an organization. Lobbying is used in governmental decision making and it aims at influencing the policy process. It acts as an instrument that links citizens and decision-makers. Lobbying is different from pressure groups in the sense that pressure groups are organised groups and they perform various functions including lobbying.

rejected, the State employs force and justifies it on the grounds of legitimacy and maintenance of order in the general interest of the society. The pressure groups take birth in this process. In every society there is a continuous generation of demands. In developing countries like India, where around forty per cent population is below the poverty line, the demands emanate from the basic physical requirements of human beings. There are demands not only for food and basic needs but demands for work and opportunities. It is significant to note that the pressure for these demands has come more from the elite than the poor people themselves. Although there is restlessness, it has not acquired a concrete form in terms of poor peoples' organization. The poor continue to be one of the most unorganised segments of the society with the result their problems do not get articulated sufficiently and pressure applied is not adequate to extract the share that is due to them.

❖ *Alternative to Inadequacies of Political Parties*

Pressure groups are primarily a consequence of inadequacies of the political parties. The political parties are expected to articulate the demands of different deprived and dominant interests in the system. They are also expected to organize and mobilise the support structure to various demands. In India, the spectrum of political parties indicates that while all of them do talk of the poor and other deprived sections and give prominent place to their problems in their manifestoes, a larger number of them neither have the capacity nor the political will to organize the poor. Thus, the political parties leave a wide gap in the system. This gap is not filled by the pressure groups either. This is due to the inability of the poorer sections to organize themselves.

The political parties have not been able to present the interests of the dominant groups as adequately and fully as one would expect them to do. Most of the political parties compete for the same social base. With the result there is not much difference between one party programme and the other. This has left enormous gaps in the socio-economic system of the country. These gaps have come to be filled up by the pressure groups.

In a mixed economy where the state has opted for planned development, the dominant interests are always suspicious of the intentions of the state. This gives rise to organized pressure groups as a

counter-check to politics and political parties. For instance, the Acts like Monopolies Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) or land reforms can always be a source of doubt about the real intentions of the policy formulators. That is the reason why the dominant interests are alert through & pressure groups.

Another reason why political system leaves considerable space for pressure groups is the continuous regulations and restrictions imposed by the political system. From obtaining a licence to selling a product in the market, there is presence of the State. This is a highly bureaucratized process. The interest or pressure groups not only need to have a highly organized pressure system but maintain middlemen, liaison officer, hidden persuaders and so on. They adopt several methods to extract the favours from the system on the one hand and circumvent highly impending procedures, rules and regulations on the other. The political parties because of their dependence on the poor voters do not publicly plead for the course of the dominant interests. On the contrary their rhetoric is anti-dominant social groups. This gives rise to pressure groups.

❖ *Represent Changing consciousness*

Pressure groups are a sign of changing consciousness. The consciousness of different groups go on changing as the result (i) changing material conditions; and (ii) increasing politicisation. The change in the material conditions leads to higher level consciousness. For instance the increase in the food production or industrial goods does bring a change in the way individuals and groups look at the world. The stagnation in production leads to fatalism but increase in the production leads to demands, protests and formation of new pressure groups. This is the initial expression of the changes in material conditions. This also leads to sharpening of the political processes. The political parties and political groups try to mobilise various groups by raising new demands or articulating the new aspirations. The people at large respond to those processes as they enter a new phase of consciousness. Thus, the changing material conditions and consciousness create a new situation for the rise of pressures and in turn the pressure groups.

The pressures arising from competition are, in fact, the real arena of pressure group phenomenon. The poor and the deprived sections lack the capacity

to organise themselves, therefore, they are usually organized or represented by the elite for upper strata. That is why the nature of pressure that is applied on behalf of the poor would be different from the pressure that the better off sections apply on the society. The better off sections who are locked up in competition from the limited resources of the society employ all the methods possible to extract maximum benefits from the system. It is in understanding the modes and methods that these groups adopt, our awareness of the problem gets enlarged.

In present times, the role of some movements, for protection of rights of people, has become significant. They are playing the role of a pressure group. For example, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) movement has generated consciousness amongst the people in questioning the actions of government regarding dam construction and its repercussions.

Similarly, in the State of Rajasthan, a people's organisation known as Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), could succeed in making the people question and demand information on money spent on roads; loans to poor and so on. This made the basis for the right to information movement. People are exerting their rights to get information from the government regarding activities that rightfully concerns them.

TYPES OF PRESSURE GROUPS

Different writers on comparative government have classified interest groups or pressure groups on the basis of their structure and organization. According to Almond and Powell, interest groups can be classified into four categories:

❖ *Institutional Interest Groups*

These groups are formally organized which consist of professionally employed persons. They are a part of government machinery and try to exert their influence. But they do not have much autonomy. These groups include political parties, legislatures, armies, bureaucracies and churches. An example of institutional group can be the West Bengal Civil Services Association. Whenever such an association raises protest it does so by constitutional means and in accordance with the rules and regulations.

❖ *Associational Interest Groups*

These are organised specialised groups formed for interest articulation, but to pursue limited goals. These include trade unions, organizations of businessmen and industrialists and civic groups. Some examples of Associational Interest Groups in India are Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Indian Chambers of Commerce, Trade Unions such as AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress), Teachers Associations, Students Associations such as National Students Union of India (NSUI) etc.

❖ *Anomic Interest Groups*

These are the groups that have analogy with individual self-representation. In such type of groups, perpetual infiltrations such as riots, demonstrations are observed. These groups are found in the shape of movement demonstrations and processions, signature campaigns, street corner meetings, etc. Their activities may either be constitutional or unconstitutional.

❖ *Non-Associational Interest Groups*

These are the kinship and lineage groups and ethnic, regional, status and class groups that articulate interests on the basis of individuals, family and religious heads. These groups have informal structure. These include caste groups, language groups, etc.

NATURE OF PRESSURE GROUPS IN INDIA

The different types of pressure groups found in India are business groups, trade unions, peasant groups, student groups, teachers' association, caste and religious associations, women's associations, etc.

The Business Groups

The Business group is the most important and organised pressure group in India. They are also most effective. They are independent of the political parties that exist and they have enough resources with which they can safeguard their interests. Business associations have existed in India even before Independence. The important business groups include the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of

Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Associated Chamber of Commerce. They exert varied kinds of pressures, they try to influence planning, licensing bodies and economic ministries. Some businesspersons are always there in different legislatures at the Central as well as State level. Every Ministry of the Government of India has some kind of consultative committee and business groups are represented there. During pre-budget meetings the Finance Ministry interacts with the groups, to secure suitable inputs which helps in budget formulation.

Trade Unions

The Indian Trade Union movement has rapidly developed. The trade unions were present prior to Independence. Under communist influence, the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was established in 1920s. The emergence of the communist movement also played an important role in the growth of trade unions in India. In 1948, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) was established. Trade Unions in India are closely affiliated with the political parties; many national political parties have got their own federations of trade unions. In fact no amount of independence from political parties exists in trade unions. They seem to have been able to exert significant pressure at the policy formulation level and their strength is well recognized by political parties and government. The trade unions when required can be very vocal and militant in their actions to meet their demands. They work through the weapon of strike and have been able to achieve monetary gains in terms of wage increase, bonus, change in wage structure, etc. These type of pressure groups have been able to encourage class consciousness and class solidarity among the workers. We have witnessed over the past few years the trade unions resorting to demonstrations, during the disinvestment by the government in public sector undertakings over the past few years. In spite of certain institutional limitations, such as, ideological differences, internal splits, external pressures, lack of international backing, the trade unions exert significant pressure at various levels of policy formulation.

Peasants Organizations

The rise of peasants groups in India has been mainly due to abolition of Zamindari System, implementation of Panchayati Raj, land reform measures, Green Revolution Movement. They

gained power since 1960s. In 1936, the All India Kisan Sabha was established and after 1942. The Communist Party of India acquired control over it. Different parties have got their own peasant organizations. Like the trade unions, there is no peasant organization which may be independent of party control, though at the State level, their organisations are non-political, independent of the political parties and homogenous. The agriculturists are mainly organized more in regional or local class unions than on all-India basis. Even though there are some important All India Kisan Associations like All India Kisan Congress, All India Kisan Kamgar Sammelan, Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, peasant groups have been mainly organized on territorial basis. Their demands relate to procurement prices of agricultural products, fertiliser subsidy, tenancy rights, electricity charges, etc. The Bharatiya Kisan Party (BKP) in Western U.P. is considered the most significant pressure group. The interplay of language, caste factor, weak financial positions, etc. have been greatly responsible for non-emergence of national level pressure groups.

Students Organizations

The student organizations in India have also acted as pressure groups both prior to Independence and after Independence. The All Bengal Students Association was formed in 1928. The All India Students Federation (AISF) was established in 1936. After Independence the political parties continue to be affiliated with student organizations. The All India Students Congress and later on the National Students Union of India (NSUI) are affiliated to the Congress Party. The All India Students Federation and Students Federation of India (SFI), are controlled by Communist Party of India. The Radical Students Union, Democratic Students Union, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) etc. are all affiliated to different political parties. They try to pressurise governmental policy on various crucial issues, their activities are not just confined to educational issues. Like the students organizations we also have teachers' associations.

Community Associations

Apart from these there are various community associations in India. These community groups are organized on the basis of caste, class and religion. Some examples of caste organizations are Scheduled Caste Federation, Backward Caste Federation, etc.

Amongst other organizations there are some like Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Northern and Southern India Christian Conference, etc. which represent interests that are supposed to safeguard their respective religions.

METHODS OF OPERATION OF PRESSURE GROUPS IN INDIA

The pressure groups adopt different methods to realise their goals. These methods even include cordial rapport with the political party in power, to even resorting to agitational methods. The pressure groups finance the political parties during the election time and sometimes even during the non-election times. They control the parties through this funding mechanism. There have been several debates on election finances but no discussion resulted in regulating or controlling the flow of finances. Once the parties receive financial support, they cannot oppose these groups and their interests. On the other hand, they have to promote their interests. It is believed that several members of the national and state legislative bodies are on the rolls of the top industrial groups.

The pressure groups also maintain close rapport with the State apparatus, viz., the bureaucratic machinery. The organized pressure groups maintain a wavelength with the key bureaucrats. The role of rampant corruption needs no mention. The liaison officers are appointed to take care of the bureaucrats, particularly when they are stubborn. The lobbyists, middlemen, etc. have acquired enough of skills to manage them. This has also given rise to favouritism, corruption and other maladies in bureaucracy. While one cannot find anything seriously wrong with the pressure groups, it is the methods of operation which have become controversial.

Although all the pressure groups use identical methods, there are some groups which are far more effective than the others. The capacity of a pressure group is determined by:

- a) leadership
- b) organizational abilities
- c) mass media
- d) economic power base
- e) mobilisational techniques

There is a need to discuss these factors to assess the potential of a pressure group and the way it is determined.

Leadership

This is one of the essential components of pressure groups. For, it is the leadership which has to protect the interests of the group. It has to be so projected that in public image it is viewed as a universal interest. The leadership should also regularly communicate to the political parties, policy-making agencies and the public. The support of all these three forces are essential. The leadership should be able to establish credibility and be able to carry public opinion. The leadership should be, therefore, capable of communicating the viewpoint of their group orally, in writing and through dialogue. In short the success of leadership lies in universalising the particular interest.

Organizational Abilities

There is also a need for an organizational network. In a country like India with its size and magnitude, it becomes essential that there are units of the organization throughout the country. These organizations are needed for two reasons: firstly to associate the various facets of the interest groups and consolidate them and secondly, in a highly diversified society, communication should take place at multiple points so that rapport with different agencies at different levels is maintained. The size and organizational strength can always play a significant role in terms of the response of political system to the demands that the pressure group puts forward.

Mass Media

In India the mass media is slowly gaining importance. In countries like United States it has come to dominate the socio-political process to such a point that can make the things unmake. In United States it is completely in private sector. In India the newspapers are by and large owned by the major industrial houses. Now the regional newspapers are also becoming influential. The print as well as the Television in present times through their skills of communication create powerful public images and through continuous debate and propaganda influence the public opinion. The political parties and policy-making agencies are sometimes kept on tenterhooks by the media. In fact during the post-Independent India one issue on which government had to retreat is the issue of freedom of press. Whenever the bills were introduced either in the state legislature or union parliament, they had to be withdrawn. Enough of public pressure could be

built on this issue. For this is a major weapon in the hands of the industrial houses or private sector to influence the policy-making process.

Economic Power Base

The economic power of the interest groups is a crucial factor. The influence a pressure group commands is proportionate to its economic strength. From financing the elections and party funds to carrying propaganda, the economic power of the group plays an important role. In India the industrial and trading houses have been far more influential and powerful than the farmers associations, inspite of farmers being spread all over the country. It is clear that without adequate economic resources the pressure groups cannot exert proper pressure.

Mobilisational Techniques

Effectiveness of the pressure groups also depends on their capacity to mobilise the people. The interest groups not only create public opinion but sometimes draw the general masses into agitational and protest politics. If they want to set an industry in a particular area, they create the necessary climate and make the people of the area demand for the industry. If they want infrastructure facilities they pressurise the government through its network at first and through a public demand and an agitation, later, if necessary. This is how a major irrigation dam can also be demanded and realised. In a society where the majority is semi-literate and semiconscious, private interests can always be converted into public interests.

LIMITATIONS OF PRESSURE GROUPS

In India, organised groups largely influence the administrative process rather than the formulation of policy. This is dangerous as a gap is created between policy formulation and implementation. Unlike the pressure groups in the developed countries of the West, where these are invariably

organised to safeguard economic, social, cultural interests, etc., in India these groups are organized around religious, regional and ethnic issues. Many a time factors of caste and religion eclipse the Socio-economic interests. The result is that instead of serving a useful purpose in the political administrative process, they are reduced to work for narrow selfish interests. Moreover, many of the groups have a very short life because of the lack of resources. This explains the reason for the mushroom growth of pressure groups as well as their withering away as it becomes difficult to sustain the interest of the persons, initially attracted to form these pressure groups. In a country like India the tendency to politicise every issue, whether it has social, economic, cultural import, restricts the scope, working, and effectiveness of pressure groups. Instead of the pressure groups exerting influence on political process, they become tools and implements to subserve political interests. As a matter of fact, the factors which inhibit development of sound civic consciousness, also hinder emergence of healthy and functional pressure groups as a legitimate means of projecting legitimate socio-economic-ethnic and cultural interests of the citizen.

Pressure groups are now considered as an indispensable and helpful element of the democratic process. The society has become highly complex and individuals cannot pursue their interests on their own. They need the support of other fellow beings in order to gain greater bargaining power; this gives rise to pressure groups based on common interests. For a long time these groups remained unnoticed, initially they were considered as harmful for the democratic process, but now their role in the political process has become very important. Democratic politics has to be politics through consultation, through negotiation and some amount of bargaining is also involved. Thus, it is very essential for the government to consult these organized groups at the time of policy formulation and implementation.

