

3. *Pressure groups are seen to play a constructive, positive role in deepening democracy and enhancing our liberties, but they have also been criticized on many counts. Discuss.*

(150 words) 10

**Approach:**

- Give a brief introduction of pressure groups.
- Mention how pressure groups play a constructive role in a democracy.
- Highlighting their criticism, mention how they subvert democracy and undermine public interest.
- Conclude accordingly.

**Answer:**

A pressure group is an interest group organised to promote the interests of its members and influence the policies of the government without seeking to exercise the formal powers of the government. They use instruments like lobbying, campaigns, polls etc.

They perform a key role in deepening democracy and increasing the choices for the citizens:

- **Participative democracy:** They keep the government in touch with the public opinion and provide representation to a wide range of diverse interests and opinions. For e.g. India Against Corruption made the government aware of rising resentment against corruption in public life.
- **Upholding interests of minorities:** Pressure groups give political voice to all kinds of minority groups and increase their power of negotiation with the state. For example, Naz Foundation's advocacy of rights of the LGBT community.
- **Grievance Redressal mechanism:** They provide alternative platforms to citizens to redress grievances and hold the government responsible. For e.g., the **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan** contributed to the passage of the Right to Information Act, 2005.
- **Influencing Government Decisions:** Workers' organizations, employees' associations and most of the movement groups often resort to strikes, in order to force the government to take note of their demands. For instance, Government of India's withdrawal from RCEP was mainly due to protests by **Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh** and other trade unions.
- **Provides technical inputs for policy formulation:** Business groups often employ professional lobbyists and send their experts to participate in official bodies and committees that offer advice to the government. In India, this is done by FICCI and ASSOCHAM.

However, pressures groups have also been criticized on account of their interference with functioning of the state and in process undermining the democracy:

- **Asserting the interests of influential minorities:** Pressure groups, such as trade unions and business groups, may represent a powerful minority force in society and exert political influence to the detriment of the majority of society.
- **Against public interests:** Few interests groups use techniques like strikes, demonstration, blockades and picketing causing hardships to the community in general.
- **Not accountable:** Pressure groups unlike any other political organizations such as political parties can not be held accountable, which sometimes leads to them exploiting their powers, acting illegally or promoting civil disobedience.
- **Undemocratic Internal functioning:** Leaders are very rarely elected by their members. They might become influential and unrepresentative of the whole group and may try to exert their own personal interests and agendas.

Despite their shortcomings, pressure groups form an indispensable component of modern democracies. They provide a means by which ordinary citizens can participate in the decision-making process, as well as maintaining a check on government activity. Similarly, governments can be better informed of the electorate's sensitivities to policies, because of the pressures articulated by these groups.