Representative governments tend to encourage competing interests while moderating the conflict that inevitably accompanies group competition. Interest groups have an enormous role to play in politics in modern democracies. These groups play a very important part in supporting parties and politicians, raising issues onto the political agenda. Groups compete on a more or less level playing field created by the national and state constitutions as well as by laws. As a result, multiple competing interests are believed to create a stable political environment that allows those interests to be represented before the government. While most of the lobbying is done by business and professional interests through paid professionals, some lobbyists represent non-profits and work voluntarily for issues in which they are personally interested. But this trend is seen as a controversial phenomenon by journalists and the public, and frequently misunderstood.

DECISION-MAKING is the essence of political dynamics, and the efficiency of a political system is to be measured in terms of its capacity to make decisions that are widely accepted. Decisions involve compromises among conflicting interests of social groups and political parties, and decision-making is the resultant of the activity of organised groups and the interplay between social configuration, ideology and government organs. This is the postulate of group theory which holds that the reality of politics is hidden below the surface of the properly constituted and recognised organs through which decisions are articulated.¹ Many writers have recognised that the group is the fundamental political form; this trend originated from Arthur Bentley in 1908. The group bears importance in respect of law-making, organising party activity, framing public policy

and its application, decision-making in public administration, and protecting civil liberties. The political scientists have paid attention to the recognition of the significance of the study of group, and an understanding of politics, and they have also produced a good number of treatises on the nature of group organisation.²

The pluralist society of America is the home of pressure groups. The open-ended nature of party, the functioning of the party system and of the Congressional system attract the attention of pressure groups. For this reason, pressure groups of the USA try to influence the elections. The organisation of American Congress demands the presence of pressure groups. For instance, if a bill goes to the appropriate committee, it is subjected to hearing, i.e. outside witnesses are nothing but the representatives of the pressure groups. Unlike the British Parliament, the American Congress is independent of the executive, and it is competent to extend or reject any legislation initiated by it. This is also the reason why the America Congress attracts pressure-group activity. This separated power structure of the government invites attention of pressure groups. The concentration upon the executive can hardly ensure the success of pressure groups. In Britain, if a proposal is supported by the executive, it means that would have the support of the party’s majority in the House of Commons. Therefore, if the approval of the minister or civil servant is obtained, the major battle for the proposal is won. But this is not the case in the USA.³ Federalism, bicameralism, and the system of checks and balance make unified national government as in the UK which is wholly out of the question in the USA. The system is absolutely open to the external pressure of organised opinion.

There are literally thousands of interest groups in the USA today, some of them are organised and the others are not. Among the organised groups both the ‘associational’ and the attitudinal groups exist, covering the interests of the diverse segments of American Society like the manufacturers, distributors, finance professionals, religions and minorities. There are:

1. The business groups, the largest and most powerful of all American interest groups, like the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM);
2. Farm organisations like the American Farm Bureau Federation,

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³S.E. Finer, op.cit., n. 19, p. 248.
the National Grange, the National Council of Farmers’ Cooperatives, and the Farmer’s Union;

3. Labour Organisations like the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL—CIO) enrolling about 14 million workers;

4. Professional Organisations like the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Association of University Professors;

5. Veterans’ organisations like the American Legion; and

6. Religious organisations like the National Council of Churches (NCC), the Anti-Saloon League, etc.

By means of ‘lobbying’ behind-the-scenes bargaining, propaganda and information, and electoral support, persuasion and threats of violence, these groups have made a tremendous impact on the American political process by their involvement in the different stages in the making of policy.

Pressure groups in the UK may be mainly divided into interest groups and promotional groups. The interest groups have the function of protecting the interest of their own members though there is a widespread belief that their interest is also the interest of the nation. To this extent, they are promotional. Promotional groups are propagandist type. The members belonging to this type of association seek to promote the cause for which it is constituted.

In contrast to the American system which permits greater flexibility and a greater “substitutability of function” to use Almond’s phrase the British system is more centralised. The decision-making process is highly centralised in the government and in the parties, and there is a natural gravitation of interests towards the Central government consisting of the ministers and the permanent civil service.

For influencing policy-formulation, pressure groups aim at one or all of three targets: the executive (ministers), Parliament, and the Civil Service. This, of course, depends on expediency. Generally, the more material the interest, the greater is the tendency to focus on the civil servants. If this, attention is directed to the House of Commons.

Primarily, a pressure group acts at the executive level. It always has an ambition of acquiring close relationship with the government. The crown of this ambition is ‘consultative status’. In other words, the ministry recognises such a group with the rights as enjoyed by the British Sovereign— “The right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the

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right to warn.” It is because they have so largely acquired this ‘consultative status’. Generally, it is said that the most influential of the pressure groups are the most silent. The Confederence of British Industry, the Trades Union Council, the Country Councils Association and the like, attain their result in closed door consultation with the ministry.

The structure of British government includes, besides the hierarchical world of public servants and the parliamentary world of party politics, a very complex world of organised groups, and public decisions are the result of interplay between these worlds. As in other political systems, interest groups in the UK give political articulation to demands of their members, and between elections, provide the chief means by which ministers and civil servants are likely to obtain information and advice about the consequences of specific items of policy for particular groups into which the society is divided. The extent to which these groups shape and restrain government policy varies from issue to issue. Their methods of operation also differ greatly. These include: inducement to individuals, direct pressure on political parties, appeal to public opinion, providing the best information, and involvement in the making and implementation of public policy. They also differ greatly in their internal organisation, in their skill and political resources and in their significance in national political party politics. Interest groups in the UK do not really work in an unhealthy manner. They have helped in spreading knowledge, creating public opinion, and in producing practical legislation. By drawing people together for political action, these groups have acted as a powerful check on the bureaucracy. Far from weakening democratic government, these groups played an essential part in it, providing a channel of communication between those responsible for policy and the people most affected by it.

The French political system represents “a babel of interests—labour, agricultural and industrial—which competes for the ear of the government, never a united voice”. These interest groups persuade the policy-makers about the justice of particular causes. They generally adopt the method of negotiation for realising their aim. The French political system provides ample scope for the interest groups to represent their views to the policy-makers. The Prime Minister and the ministers habitually receive delegations from interest groups. Besides, there are thousands of advisory bodies in which interest groups themselves are represented. Informal contacts

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7Ibid., p. 60.
between interest groups representatives and administrators maintain a constant flow of communication. Big business probably enjoys a rather more advantageous position in this regard, for top-level management and top administrators hail from the same schools.

Negotiation may not produce the desired results. When negotiation fails to satisfy the group, it changes its level of activity. Escalation of the persuasion process can take various forms; demonstrations, strikes, or other forms of non-cooperation, or violence. Demonstrations are occasional in France; strikes are very frequent, particularly in the sphere of nationalised industries. In these cases, the massive but brief walk out is the usual form. The French political system, not frequently, witnesses anomic activity resorted to by some interest groups in order to further their interests.

As in the other liberal democracies of Western Europe, the power of organised interest is a pronounced feature in France. The groups are an essential component of the decision-making process, providing a kind of balance to the system, working on the parties, the public, and at the governmental level. Their autonomous position and their associational character are distinctly noticeable. In the Third and Fourth Republics in France, the power of group interests was largely political. Their effect was to defeat government policies and make stable government impossible. They were politically predominant. The assembly acted as both a shock absorber and a channel of communication between the government and the governed. In the Fifth Republic, with the shifting of balance of power to the government, the attention of the groups shifted to the centre of the decision-making, namely, the executive. The guiding principle of the Fifth Republic has all along been to tame the power of the political intermediaries—the groups as well as the parties. The initial ‘anti-group’ bias of President de Gaulle and his Fifth Republic, however, could not be retained. The accumulation of grievance and the explosion of May-June 1968 led, during Pompidou’s regime, to a process of consultation in the administrative process. This was most evident in the making of the Five Year Plans. All in all, the role of modern interest groups in the French political process is increasing.

As in all other developed nations, West German interest groups have increasingly become larger, less numerous and more situational in character. In fact, two major parties, particularly the Christian Democrats with its wide-ranging support-base, have developed along the Anglo-American

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pattern, becoming an agglomeration of interest groups. This integration of group demands has become possible owing to the fact that there has been more or less even impressive social and economic progress throughout Germany.

It is to be noted first that the Bonn Law of 1949 explicitly authorises the formation of groups so long as they are not criminal or unconstitutional. There are three major categories of economic pressure groups: trade union, employers and the agricultural interest. On many occasions, unions and employers are likely to combine when a particular region or industry is threatened in some way by a government decision. There is no difficulty in identifying interests of employers and those of employees. On many issues, they will look to the government for favourable action or decisions. If such actions and decisions are contrary to their interests, the interest groups try to modify or thwart their implementation. In Germany, the major organisation of the employers has been the Federation of Germany Industry representing the highest proportion of firms; it has the record successful intervention with governmental decisions relating to, *inter-alia*, Carte legislation and workers’ participation in the firms, decision-making. For the employees, the German Federation of Trade Unions represents 16 large trade unions and has some 6.5 million members. Both these organisations are engaged in political activity and both of these are consulted by the government on legislations pertaining to their interests. The agrarian interest is represented by several bodies, the chief of which is the German Farmers Association protecting the framing interest in the *bundestag* with the help of the representatives from the rural constituencies having heavy concentration of farmers.

So far as social groups are concerned, the influence of the church, especially the Catholic and the Evangelical denominations, is very strong. It exercises influence in regard to the matters relating to conscience, social welfare, educational policy and partly foreign policy as well.

Some of the important features of student activity in politics since 1967 are that it is less highly organised, it has several separate organisational structures, and its leadership is diverse. The student movement has been broadly left-wing with reformist and revolutionary sections. Its main purpose is to bring about university reforms and oppose any thing that its leaders denounce as anti-democratic or extreme right wing, such as the emergency laws, the NPD Strauss or the Springer publishing firms, anti-Americanisms expressed through oppositions of Vietnam war, etc. The movement is sporadic and anomic in character; it has found expression only in big cities like Munich and Berlin. In fact, it has been able to attract only a small section of the population, but the government has been
increasingly becoming cognizant of power in political process. The army played an important part in the policy formulation in the second Empire and the World War I. It had an ambivalent attitude to the government in the Weimar period and played a political role during the Third Reich. From these, it seems to be clear that the Army too has to be reckoned with in politics, from indications available, now, the Army has become the servant of the regime rather than its arbiter.

The strategies adopted by pressure groups are determined by three determinants, namely the political culture of the Federal Republic, its institutional structure, and the nature of issues under consideration. The pressure groups have the ‘targets’ of influencing the member of the Bundestag directly; in fact, they have supporters and officials among the legislators. But it should be pointed out that polarisations of the parties on different issues is so strong that it becomes extremely difficult for interest groups to mount pressure. Nevertheless, the pressure groups have an important place in aggregating, amplifying and transmitting the demands of individual citizens, and in representing sections of the community.

Despite mass illiteracy and consequent want of social communication, interest groups are very much in existence in India, although it must be admitted that they are not large in number, and are different from those in the Western countries. Interest groups in India are constituted mainly along occupational and economic interests, such as trade unions, peasant groups, teacher-student groups, women’s associations, the business community, caste groups, and number of religious associations, etc. Like many other Asian and African states, India has a good number of community interest groups too. The trade unions are divided on political party lines. The INTUC, organised under the banner of the Congress Party in 1947, has been representing the labour front. The CPI dominates the AITUC, while the CPI (M) controls the CITU (Centre for Indian Trade Unions). Interestingly, political leaders get their apprenticeship in public life by working as organisers in the trade union field. Peasant and student groups are also divided along party lines. The Farmers’ Forum and the Bharat Sevak Samaj reflect the Congress party views on rural problems. The Kissan Sabha is the organisation controlled by the communists. In the students’ forums, the All India Students’ Federation AISF is controlled by the CPI, while the Student Federation of India, SFI, is led by CPI(M) and the Chhatra Parishad by the Congress Party, the Chhatra Janata has emerged as the students’ wing of the Janata Party. Even some women’s associations have

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expressed affiliations to political parties. To use the terminology of Joseph Plombara, the pressure groups tend to work through political parties in a type of ‘parentela’ relationship.

The business community constitutes the most powerful interest group in India. Most of their associations are cautiously sympathetic to the Congress party, for it had so powerful and commanding a majority till the other day that to oppose it for attaining certain objectives would be tactically wrong. There are numerous business associations, such as the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce, in India (FICCI), Bharat Chamber of Commerce. They publish various business journals, e.g. *Capital, Indian Finance, Eastern Economist*, etc., to ventilate the views of Indian business to those who will read them.\(^{12}\)

An interesting feature of interest groups in India is the ‘caste lobby’. These lobbies try to influence the interest of particular castes and demand support for members of the same caste in the legislatures. There is no denying the fact that there exists a bond of relationship between Indian legislators and leaders of religious sectors. Interests organised around traditional loyalties to caste, religion, community, and the like are important forces in India. Of these, regional–linguistic–ethnic groups have been the most important. In the Almond–Powell typology, these represent the so-called non-associational interest groups which prevail mostly in states like UP, Bihar, parts of South India and some parts of West Bengal.

Rajani Kothari, a notable analyst of Indian politics, is of the opinion that given the dominant role of government in political institutionalisation and social and economic development, the most important interests are ‘crystallised in the form of ‘institutional interest groups’—the political parties, the bureaucracy and the factional network.\(^{13}\) He also observes that in conformity with the larger coalitional pattern that characterises India’s political system, the most interesting interest configurations are mixed rather than discrete.\(^{14}\) Myron Weiner believes that if institutional interest groups such as the army and the civil service are placed at one end of the continuum of organised interest articulation, the anomic movement would seem to be at the other end.\(^{15}\) Pressure tactics and methods have become an integral part of the prevailing political process in the country. The techniques of organised pressure, through mass campaigns, demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience, movements, *gheraos and bandhs*, have been frequently used

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\(^{15}\)Myron Weiner, ‘South Asia; in Almond and Colmam (Eds.), *op. cit*, no. 9, p. 215.
by interests groups, not so well organised, for pressurising the government to make some positive concerns to their demands. Myron Weiner has rightly commented that the very frequency with which mass action has succeeded in vetoing government action, or in positively modifying public policy, has strengthened the public belief that such measures are both desirable and effective.\textsuperscript{16} The prevailing political culture also does not so much favour the operation of organised interest groups, or makes people cynical of them. But it is equally true and inescapable that in the plural Indian society and the federal political structure, there is no alternative but to recognise the interest groups. The octopus dominance of the Congress Party in the Indian Political Parties Process up to March 1977 and even after 1980 may have been so frustrating for groups that they turned frequently to violent protest. Violence and anomic activities, however, have become an instrument of interest articulation in the so-called developed nations too. But all said and done, interest groups in India must be given opportunities to affect policies and their implementation. They must become oriented towards problem-solving and policy-making.\textsuperscript{17}