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Role of the Parliament

WHY PEOPLE SHOULD DECIDE

India won independence on 15 August, 1947 after a long and painful struggle against the British rule. People from all regions, classes and castes fought shoulder-to-shoulder for about a century to drive out the colonial rulers. They were inspired by the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Indian National Congress which spearheaded the freedom movement took all decisions on the basis of majority of opinion without showing favour or partiality to any region, religion, caste or class of people. After the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the nationalists began to openly criticise the policies of the government and make demands. In its very first session held in December, 1885, the Congress demanded that there be elected members in the legislature with a right to discuss the budget.

The Indian Councils Act of 1861 introduced representative institutions for the first time and associated the Indians with legislative work. By the Indian Councils Act, 1892, the principle of election was conceded. This Act led to the foundation of parliamentary government in India. The Government of India Act, 1909, provided for the enlargement of the central and provincial councils. The members were permitted to discuss resolutions on matters of public interest including the budget. The Act of 1919 introduced the system of Dyarchy in the provinces. The Act of 1935 introduced a bicameral legislature in the centre. It was termed as a 'mini constitution', many of whose provisions were included in the constitution of independent India.

The struggle and sacrifice by the masses in the freedom struggle convinced the nationalists that they had to be involved in making decisions. The citizens had to be given power and opportunity in independent India. The government had to be sensitive to people's needs, demands and aspirations.

This was not possible unless the people were empowered to elect their representatives. Therefore, the Constitution of Independent India laid down the principle of universal adult franchise. This meant that all adult citizens of the country (irrespective of caste, class or gender) have the right to vote.



For the first time Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) were used throughout the country in the 2004 general elections. It saved a lot of paper which was earlier used for printing the ballot papers.

PEOPLE AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

Should adult franchise be introduced involving an increase in the electorate from 35 million to 170 million? There was a long and heated discussion among the members of the Constituent Assembly. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad advocated its deferment for 15 years. Rajendra Prasad and Jawaharlal Nehru plumped for adult franchise as an act of faith in the common man. The vote favouring it was carried amidst acclamation.

The basic and central idea of democracy is that the individual or the citizen is the most important person. Power 'flows' from the people. The government, its agencies and institutions must have the trust and goodwill of the people or common citizens. All decisions have to be taken by the citizens. The basic feature of a democracy is that the government must

have the desire, approval and participation of people. People's consent and wish should be reflected in all aspects of a democratic polity.

In modern democracies, it is not possible to give approval to a decision directly and collectively. Therefore, people elect their representatives to rule on their behalf. They elect their representatives to the Parliament every five years through election. The majority group from among the elected representatives form the government. The Parliament, which comprises elected representatives of the people, controls and guides the government. Thus, people form the government and control it indirectly through their representatives. Similarly, people elect their representatives to the State Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha). The Indian Constitution has separated the power and functions of the Parliament and the Legislative Assembly. An elected representative of the Parliament is called an MP and that of the Assembly is called an MLA.

THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

The Parliament of India consists of the President and the two houses – the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. Though the President of India is a constituent part of the Parliament, he does not sit or participate in discussion in either of the two houses.

The Lok Sabha consists of members directly elected by the people. It is elected once every five years. The country is divided into 543 Parliamentary constituencies. Each of the constituencies elects one person to the Lok Sabha.

The candidates contesting elections belong to various political parties. The President has the power to nominate two members from the Anglo-Indian community. The present Lok Sabha has 545 members. The total strength of the Lok Sabha cannot exceed 550 members.

The Rajya Sabha consists of 250 members. Twelve members out of these are nominated by the President,



The Parliament (Sansad) consists of two Houses — The Rajya Sabha and The Lok Sabha



Inside view of the Rajya Sabha.



Inside view of the Lok Sabha.

the rest are elected by the states. The Rajya Sabha is a permanent body. It does not get dissolved. Members are elected for six years and every two years, one-third of its members retire.

1. To Select the National Government : The most important function of the Parliament is to select the national or union government. After the Lok Sabha elections are over, the Election Commission of India prepares a list of newly elected MPs belonging to different political parties. There are 543 elected members to the Lok Sabha. Hence, a political party which has more than half the total members (i.e. 272) of MPs is in a position to form the government. The leader of the majority party is invited by the President to form the government. He/she is appointed Prime Minister by the President. From among his party MPs, he submits a list of prominent and experienced MPs to be included in the Council of Ministers. On the advice of the Prime Minister, the ministers are appointed by the President of India.

The Council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister forms the executive organ of the government. The Ministers are allotted different areas of government functioning like health, finance, defence, education etc. They are the administrative heads of various departments at the national level. As we have read earlier, the main work of the executive is to implement the laws made by the Parliament.

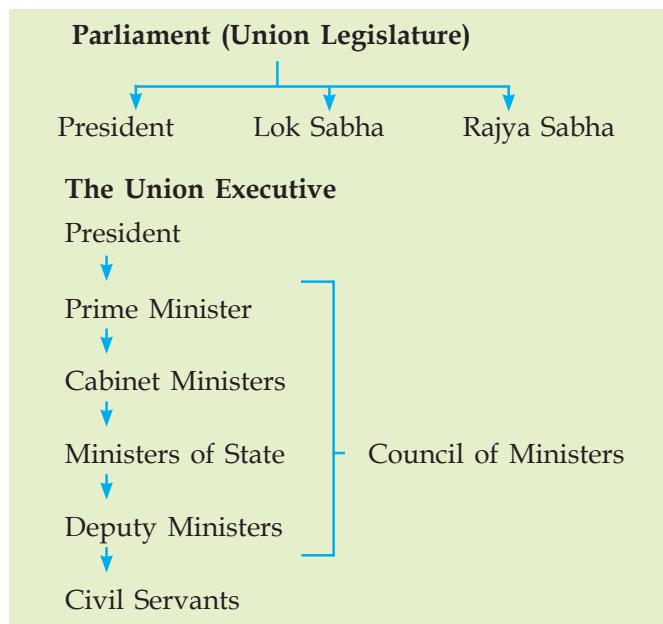
The leader of the majority party in the Lok Sabha is called the leader of the Lok Sabha. Apart from the ruling party, all other political parties that oppose the majority party coalition, form the opposition. The leader of the largest opposition party is called the leader of the opposition.

As has been the practice in recent past, if a single political party is unable to get the majority on its own, it joins together with other like-minded parties to form a majority. Such a government is called a coalition government. A coalition government works on the basis of a common minimum programme. The coalition partners might support the government from outside. Their members may prefer not to join the council of ministers.

The Rajya Sabha functions primarily as the representative of the states in the Parliament. The Rajya Sabha is the upper house of the Parliament. Its members are elected by the elected members of state assemblies. A bill can be introduced in either House

of the Parliament. To become a law, a bill has to be passed by Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha. The Rajya Sabha has the power to change certain provisions in the bill. However, its power regarding a Money Bill is limited.

The president is an integral part of the Parliament. No bill can become a law unless the President gives his assent to it.



2. To control, guide and inform the government: Perhaps the most vital function of the Parliament is to ensure that the executive does not overstep its authority and remains responsible to the people. The Parliament is the highest forum of debate in the country. Members are free to speak on any matter without fear.

The Parliament, while in session, begins with a Question Hour. The Question Hour is important because any M.P. can raise a question to elicit information from a minister regarding the working of the government. The question may relate to an M.P.'s constituency or general functioning of the government. As ministers head different government departments, members can ask them questions about their respective departments. By asking questions the government is reminded of its shortcomings, and it is kept on its toes. The government also comes to know the opinion and concerns of the people through their representatives. It is very important for every M.P. to ask questions. The opposition parties highlight drawbacks in various policies and programmes of the government.

Questions are usually written down and given to the Secretary General of the House. The minister takes some time to get the desired information from the department. A member who desires an oral answer to the question is required to mark it with a star. Such questions are known as starred questions. Some questions without stars are also asked. These are meant for written answers. They are called unstarred questions.

There are other ways also in which members can keep control over the government. Some of these are— **Calling Attention Notice, Adjournment Motion**, etc. In these cases, members can request the speaker to have a pointed discussion on a particular issue. The most important motion is called ‘No Confidence motion’. The parties may move a motion that the Lok Sabha does not have confidence in the Council of Ministers. If the majority in the house votes against the motion, the Council of Ministers continues to be in power. However, if the majority votes for the motion, the Council of Ministers has to resign.

In all matters dealing with finances, the Parliament’s approval is necessary. The financial powers of the Parliament involve grant of resources to the government to implement its programmes. The Parliament also ensures that the government does not mispend or overspend. This is done through discussion of the budget and annual financial statements. If the government of India proposes to introduce any new tax, it has to get the approval of the Parliament.

The members of Parliament have a pivotal role in controlling, guiding and informing Parliament. This is a key aspect of functioning of Indian democracy.

3. Law-Making : The Parliament makes laws for the entire country. It is the primary function of parliament.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN THE PARLIAMENT

Till the 1970s most of the members of the Parliament belonged to the upper classes and upper castes of Indian society. Most of them belonged to national parties. Now, the Parliament has more and more members from different backgrounds. There are many members belonging to rural areas and regional parties. Peoples and communities that were earlier not represented, have fair representation in the Parliament.

| Lok Sabha | Election Years | Voter Turnout (%) |
|-----------|----------------|-------------------|
| 1st | 1951-52 | 44.87 |
| 4th | 1967 | 61.04 |
| 5th | 1971 | 55.27 |
| 6th | 1977 | 60.49 |
| 8th | 1984 | 63.56 |
| 10th | 1991 | 56.73 |
| 14th | 2004 | 58.07 |
| 15th | 2009 | 58.19 |
| 16th | 2014 | 66.38 |

There has also been significant rise in political participation by the Dalits, backward castes (OBCs) and the minorities. On the whole, there has been more popular participation in political activities.

Candidates in Fray for (Lok Sabha) Elections

| Year | No. of Candidates |
|------|-------------------|
| 1952 | 1,874 |
| 1957 | 1,519 |
| 1962 | 1,985 |
| 1967 | 2,369 |
| 1971 | 2,784 |
| 1977 | 2,439 |
| 1980 | 4,629 |
| 1984 | 5,493 |
| 1989 | 6,160 |
| 1991 | 8,953 |
| 1996 | 13,952 |
| 1998 | 4,750 |
| 1999 | 4,648 |
| 2004 | 5,435 |
| 2009 | 8,070 |
| 2014 | 8,163 |

Representative democracy involves elections which are very costly. Often money and muscle power play an important role in election of candidates. Therefore, it is felt that representative democracy is not able to produce a perfect reflection of society. Dalits, backward castes and other historically marginalised

communities do not have adequate representation. With this in mind, some seats are reserved in the Lok Sabha for SCs and STs. This has been done so that these representatives can represent, safeguard and promote interests of their communities. Of the total 543 elective seats in the Lok Sabha, 423 are in 'general' category, while 79 seats are reserved for the SCs and 41 seats for the STs. It has also been realised that women do not have adequate representation in Parliament vis-a-vis their total population. Therefore, there has been proposal for reservation of seats (33%) for women in the Lok Sabha. Women's Reservation Bill is pending before the Parliament and it is being earnestly debated among political parties.

But there has been significant increase in political participation by women. Women voter turn-out increased from 38.8 per cent in the fifties to 57.89 per cent in 1998. The number of women contestants (for Lok Sabha) has progressively risen election after election. This figure which remained under 50 in the first two general elections rose to 65 in the third, to 355 in the Fourteenth Lok Sabha and 556 in 15th and 636 in Lok Sabha elections held in 2014.

There is a difference of opinion about whether our democratic system is representative enough. As we have discussed above, still there are communities and groups which are not well represented in the legislatures. The rising cost of fighting an election

Representation of Women in Lok Sabha

| Lok Sabha | Total No. of Seats | Women Members | % of Total |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| First | 499 | 22 | 4.4 |
| Fourth | 523 | 31 | 5.9 |
| Sixth | 544 | 19 | 3.4 |
| Eighth | 544 | 44 | 8.1 |
| Ninth | 517 | 27 | 5.22 |
| Tenth | 544 | 39 | 7.18 |
| Eleventh | 544 | 40 | 7.18 |
| Twelfth | 543 | 43 | 7.20 |
| Thirteenth | 543 | 49 | 9.02 |
| Fourteenth | 543 | 45 | 8.3 |
| Fifteenth | 543 | 59 | 10.86 |
| Sixteenth | 543 | 61 | 11.23 |

prevents poor people from being elected as people's representative. Therefore, there has been suggestion for State funding of elections. However, the very fact that we are concerned about equal representation and are trying to resolve the question is the reflection of the reality that ours is a vibrant democracy.

Points to Remember

- The dreams and aspirations of the freedom struggle were made concrete in the Constitution of Independent India.
- Our Constitution laid down the principle of universal adult franchise to give power to the common people.
- The take-off point for a democracy is the idea of consent, that is, desire, approval and participation of people.
- There are three chief functions of the Parliament—
 - (a) to select the national government.
 - (b) to control, guide and inform the government.
 - (c) to make laws for the country.
- At the time of creation of the Parliament, Dalits, Other Backward Classes and minorities were not well-represented. Therefore, some seats are reserved in the Parliament for SCs and STs.
- Women are still not adequately represented in the Parliament.
- Out of a total membership of 543 in the 16th Lok Sabha, only 61 are women members.

Glossary

- COALITION** : An alliance of political parties to form a government at the centre or in a state.
- LOWER HOUSE** : Lok Sabha (House of People)

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| QUESTION HOUR | : Session of parliament/ legislatures usually begins with a Question Hour in which members ask questions from ministers. |
| STARRED QUESTIONS | : Questions meant for oral answer in the Parliament. |
| UNSTARRED QUESTIONS | : Questions meant for written answer in the Parliament. |
| UPPER HOUSE | : Rajya Sabha (Council of States) |
| ZERO HOUR | : Time allotted in the House every day for miscellaneous activities. |

TIME TO LEARN

TASKS FOR SA

A. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

- Which Act introduced the system of Dyarchy in the provinces?

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) Government of India Act, 1909 | (b) Government of India Act, 1919 |
| (c) Government of India Act, 1935 | (d) None of these |
- Which Act is termed as a 'mini constitution'?

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) Act of 1909 | (b) Act of 1919 |
| (c) Act of 1935 | (d) Indian Independence Act, 1947 |
- Into how many parliamentary constituencies is India divided?

| | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| (a) 540 | (b) 541 | (c) 542 | (d) 543 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
- Who appoints twelve members to the Rajya Sabha?

| | | | |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| (a) President | (b) Vice President | (c) Prime Minister | (d) Speaker of the Lok Sabha |
|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|

B. Match the following

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Council of States | (a) Lok Sabha |
| 2. House of the People | (b) Seeking written answer |
| 3. Unstarred questions | (c) Reserved seats in Lok Sabha |
| 4. Starred questions | (d) Seeking oral answer |
| 5. Dalits | (e) Rajya Sabha |

C. Fill in the blanks with the words given below :

- The Lok Sabha is usually elected once every _____ years.
- In representative democracies, people do not participate directly but choose their _____.
- A true democracy must allow universal _____.
- One of the most important functions of the Lok Sabha is to select the _____.
- In the Rajya Sabha, _____ members are nominated by the President.

D. Short answer type questions.

- What do you mean by universal adult franchise?
- What is the 'basic idea' of a democracy?
- Whose office is the PMO?
- Which ministries are housed in the North Block?
- What do you mean by a 'coalition government'?
- Why were seats reserved for SCs and STs in the Parliament?

[HOTS]

7. What is the total membership of the Rajya Sabha? Why is it called a 'Permanent House'?
8. Why do you think there are only 61 women members in the 16th Lok Sabha?

E. Long answer type questions.

1. Explain the role of the Parliament, in brief.
2. Why do you think the nationalist movement supported the idea that all adults have a right to vote?

[Value Based Question]

TIME TO DO

TASKS FOR FA

F. Making a chart

Make a chart comparing the powers and functions of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

G. Discussion

Hold a discussion/debate on the topic, "Do you agree with the view that limited franchise, not universal adult franchise is more suitable to India?"

H. Visit

Visit the Vidhan Sabha of your state while it is in session. Observe how it functions. Write a report.

I. Assignment

Prepare a list of any five states which have coalition government.

LIFE SKILLS

Having Civic Sense is a virtue in itself.

It means:

- Inclusion of all people in the social and political process.
- Keeping the environment clean and pollution free.
- Respect for authority, law and public property.
- Tolerance for ideas and views of others.
- Having core ethical values.

You are a citizen of India and you must respect your duties as much as you respect your rights.

TASKS FOR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT-I (FA-1)

(Based on Chapters 1 to 3)

A. TABLES & CHARTS

Explain the key features of Indian Constitution with the help of tables and charts.

B. ASSIGNMENT

Write a fictitious story to explain the concept of 'why a country needs a Constitution?'

[**Note:** You can take the examples of need of rules and regulations in school, family, sports etc.]

C. PROJECT

Write a detailed project on secularism. You can highlight the following features:

- Meaning and definition of secularism.
- Secularism: its basic outlines in the Constitution.
- How does the Indian State function as a secular State?
- Comparison with other secular countries such as USA and France.

D. DISCUSSION

Hold a discussion/debate in the class on the following topics:

1. Some political parties believe the Women Reservation Bill will lead to election of women belonging only to upper classes and castes in the parliament.
2. India should have a limited franchise instead of universal adult franchise.

E. VISIT / EXCURSION

Visit the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha while it is in session. Observe how it functions. Write a report describing your experience of a debate in the House.

F. COLLAGE

Make a collage of all speakers of the Lok Sabha till date. Mention their tenure and the parties they belonged to.

G. PICTURE STUDY

Identify and name these former Presidents of India.



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