



## Reflections On The Prospects Of Parliamentary Democracy In India

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### **Abstract:**

The parliamentary democracy has been the key feature of the Indian political system. India is the largest democratic country in the world. The democratic ideals are not entirely alien to India. The nation has experienced democratic traditions since the ancient Vedic period. The modern parliamentary democracy has stemmed from British colonialism, though the substance of the government remains undemocratic. After independence, the founders of the Indian Constitution adopted the parliamentary form of government predominantly based on the British model as an institutional device to realise the democratic spirit. Under the parliamentary democracy, the political executive is basically an organ of the legislature, and the former is immediately or legally responsible to the latter. The smooth working of the parliamentary democracy is hindered by different problems making it a complex political system. The present paper intends to understand the basic features of the parliamentary democracy in India. It aims to highlight the major hindrances in the successful working of the parliamentary democracy. It gives an insight into the prospects of parliamentary democracy in India.

**Keywords:** *Challenges, Government, India, Legislature, Political Executive.*

### **Introduction:**

The term '*democracy*' has been derived from the Greek word *demokratia*, meaning "rule of the people". The origin of democracy can be traced to the Greek city-states. Today, it has become a political philosophy and an ideal practised by the politically mature and culturally advanced countries through representatives elected directly or indirectly by the people. It has become a potent force in the nineteenth century and developed over the centuries. The ideals of democracy are not entirely alien to India. The nation has experienced the process of democratic traditions since the ancient Vedic period. There were representatives and self-governing institutions committed to the welfare of the people.

Independent India adopted democracy as a form of government to realise the needs and aspirations of the people. Indicating its significance, Jawaharlal Nehru said, "*Public opinion is more powerful than the king as the rope made of many fibres is strong enough to drag a lion.*" Modern democracy has two forms of government based on the relationship between

the legislature and executive: (a) parliamentary and (b) presidential. Opting for a parliamentary or presidential democracy was doubtful while framing the Constitution. The chief reason for adopting parliamentary democracy has been the people's familiarity with its working during British colonialism. It has already been introduced in India, and the political parties demanded the introduction of a responsible parliamentary government. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "*We chose this system of parliamentary democracy deliberately; we chose it not only because to some extent we had always thought on those lines previously, but because we thought it in keeping with our old traditions, not the old traditions as they were but adjusted to the new conditions and new surroundings. We chose it- let us give credit where credit is due- because we approved of its functioning in other countries, more especially, in the United Kingdom.*" The parliamentary democracy of India is predominantly based on the Westminster model. Considering both direct and indirect representation, the nature of Indian parliamentary democracy is participatory democracy.

**Objective:**

The study intends to understand the basic features of the parliamentary democracy in India. It aims to highlight the major hindrances in the successful working of the parliamentary democracy. It gives an insight into the prospects of parliamentary democracy in India.

**Research Methodology:**

The study is descriptive and analytical. To achieve the objective of the study, the paper relies on information gathered from secondary sources such as books, journals, and research articles.

**Understanding Parliamentary Democracy:**

Political scientists have focused on the distinctions between the two models of government: parliamentary and presidential. Traditionally, parliamentary government represents a form of government by which the Parliament enjoys the supreme authority, and the executive is ultimately responsible to the legislature for its acts. Under the presidential government, the executive is independent of the legislature, and the former is not responsible to the latter for its acts. Dr Garner defined parliamentary government as the system in which the real executive- the Cabinet or Ministry- is immediately and legally responsible to the legislature or one branch of it (usually more popular chamber) for its political policies and acts, and immediately or ultimately responsible to the electorate; while the titular or nominal executive the chief of the state occupies a position of irresponsibility. In the words of Dr S.

Radhakrishnan, the parliamentary democracy is the best instrument for the ascertainment and the expression of the public mind. Parliament acts as a liaison between the people and the state. Its function is to express public opinion and social discontent.

**Basic features of the Parliamentary Democracy in India:**

The chief feature of the parliamentary democracy has been the existence of a titular or nominal executive of the state. In India, there exist two types of political executive- nominal and real. The Indian Constitution makes the President of India the nominal executive head of the state. The functions of the real executive are performed by the Council of Ministers, headed by the Prime Minister. Article 53 of the Constitution deals with the executive powers and functions of the President. In actual practice, he exercises them following the advice of the Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister as the head. Article 74 clearly states that there shall be a Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister to aid and advise the President who shall, in the exercise of his functions, act following such advice. The President may require the Council of Ministers to reconsider such advice, but he shall act as per the advice so tendered after reconsideration. Such advice shall not be inquired into in any court.

Secondly, the essence of parliamentary democracy has been the intimate relationship between the political executive and legislature. The executive is basically a legislative organ, and the former is immediately or legally responsible to the latter. The executive shall be in power as long as it continues to enjoy the majority support of the legislature. In other words, every member of the Council of Ministers is a member of either of the two Houses of Parliament. Article 75 states that they shall enjoy their powers and functions so long as they enjoy the confidence of the majority in the Lok Sabha.

Thirdly, there exists the rule of the majority party. The political party securing the majority or single largest seats in the Lok Sabha forms the government. The President invites the party leader and appoints him as the Prime Minister. He appoints other ministers on the advice of the Prime Minister. If there is no majority party, the President may invite a coalition of political parties to form the government.

Fourthly, the Prime Minister plays the leadership role in the parliamentary form of government. He is described as the keystone of the Cabinet arch and the Constitution. He is the pivot on which the whole constitutional machinery turns. He is the leader of the majority party. He advises the President to appoint the council of ministers. He is the leader of the council of ministers and the Parliament. He acts as the chief channel of communication between the President and the Council of Ministers. He enjoys the power of patronage and

symbolises national authority. It becomes impossible to run the government in his absence. Undoubtedly, Richard Crossman refers to the parliamentary government as a “*Prime-ministerial*” government.

Fifthly, India has a bicameral legislature: Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). The members of the Lok Sabha are elected directly by the people based on the universal adult franchise. It is subject to dissolution due to the lack of a majority in the House. The President has the power to dissolve Lok Sabha on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Rajya Sabha is a permanent body, and its members are elected by the representatives of the state assemblies.

Sixthly, the existence of a strong and well-organised opposition party has been the hallmark of the parliamentary democracy. The opposition party can be described as the life force of parliamentary democracy. It usually criticises the policies and programmes of the government. It checks the arbitrary exercise of power by the government.

Unlike the presidential system, there has been the coordination of powers instead of separation of powers. The legislature and executive are working in close contact, sharing some of the powers and functions. They depend upon each other in running the government.

There has been a dual membership in parliamentary government. All the ministers enjoy double membership, i.e., the legislature and the executive members. No person has the right to become a minister without being a member of either House of the Parliament. If a non-member is appointed as a minister, he must become a member of the Parliament within six months. He ceases to be a minister beyond the stipulated time.

Another important feature has been the responsibility of the Cabinet. In the parliamentary government, the Cabinet has performed manifold functions. It has the power to advise the President binding on him. It acts as the highest decision-making authority. It formulated all the Central government policies and has the power to direct the administrative departments. It is responsible for preparing the draft budget in consultation with the Prime Minister. Ivor Jennings called the parliamentary government a cabinet system because of being the nucleus of power in the parliamentary democracy.

Political homogeneity is another significant feature of the parliamentary government. The council of ministers, usually being the members of the political party, shares a common political ideology and approach. They are bound by the consensus in the case of a coalition government.

The bedrock principle of the parliamentary government has been the collective responsibility. Article 75 states that the council of ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha. They work as a team and are bound by each decision of the Cabinet. Every minister is required to support and defend the cabinet decisions inside and outside the House. If the Lok Sabha passes a no-confidence motion against the council of ministers, the entire council of ministers has to resign. Thus, they are in the same boat and have to choose between the two options: to swim together or sink together.

Lastly, there has been the principle of secrecy that every minister must follow related to their proceedings, policies, and decisions. Before entering their office, they have to take the oath of office and secrecy administered by the President.

### **Hindrances in the way of Parliamentary Democracy:**

India has been living with the parliamentary democracy for seventy-four years. The adoption of parliamentary democracy in India is suitable to its pluralism and heterogeneity character resulting in strengthening the democracy. However, debates and arguments about the hindrances in the smooth function of parliamentary democracy overshadowed the entire political system.

- (a) The first problem has been the ignorance and illiteracy of the people. It is a matter of grave concern for the successful working of parliamentary democracy. Bailey pointed out that the parliamentary system has never been fruitful for a prolonged period where most electors are illiterate. Educated electors with human dignity can exercise their rights to vote effectively.
- (b) The existence of abysmal poverty and economic inequality is the gravest threat to democracy. The majority of the Indian population lives below the poverty line. Democracy without an economic foundation is an illusion. Carl Becker says that democracy does not flourish in communities on the verge of destitution.
- (c) Casteism is a unique feature of Indian politics. It remains one of the determinants of voting behaviour. The people usually cast their votes on caste considerations. Prof. M. N. Srinivas says that caste played a crucial role in the functioning of representative institutions and the struggle for power. The politician who wants caste to disappear is aware of its vote-catching power and is thus faced with a real dilemma.
- (d) Communalism and regionalism posed another problem in Indian politics. Being a plural society, there has been a communal tendency in politics. It creates a frequent outbreak of communal riots and leads to the destruction of secular living. India has been struggling with a

regionalism that manifests itself in regional disparities and secessionist demands, thereby hampering the process of nation-building and national integration.

- (e) The criminalisation of politics has become a way and culture of politics. It has become a highly debatable issue. The democratic values and practices have become irrelevant. The only goal of politicians has become to win the election. The indulgence of politicians in criminal and undemocratic politics degraded the level of politics. Rathore stated, “*so brutalised has become politics today that we are handing over the country to the underworld.*”
- (f) Rampant corruption in the form of money or personal gain is prevalent in India. One can often see the true picture of bribery and corruption in politics and administration. The rising influence of money power in the electoral process is considered to be a dangerous development.
- (g) The practice of political violence is a bitter reality in Indian democracy. The resort to political assassinations and other violence to weaken the opposite side undermined the whole democratic values. Political violence for the political end is not a progressive phenomenon on ideal democratic lines.
- (h) The lack of influential role of the opposition parties has resulted in one-party dominance. They have failed to unite and remain in the wilderness.

#### **Future Prospects of Parliamentary Democracy:**

According to Bailey, “*Parliamentary government is a more difficult system to operate than is often realised. In only a few countries has it hitherto worked satisfactory*”. In the Indian context, some argued that democracy is an intricate and challenging form of government to operate due to many barriers. A comprehensive discussion of the pros and cons of the system should be made to understand the prospect of parliamentary democracy. It is obvious that the working of the parliamentary system is not free from hurdles in India. However, it has a long glorious history, and the operational mechanisms are effectively sound. The only necessary is to address and remove the major hindrances and negative tendencies to achieve its goals. They must be put to an end before they destroy the nation. Any form of government in all nations has certain defects. The apprehension that the parliamentary democracy has failed in India is not acceptable. In short, the prospect of parliamentary democracy in India is relatively safe.

#### **Conclusion:**

The foregone discussion proves that the Indian parliamentary democracy is based on the British model as a result of the familiarity of people with its working in the pre-independence

era. Critics say that a country like India, having social inequalities, a vast population, and an underdeveloped economy, is not suitable for adopting parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, it is admitted that the nation is trying to curb the existing problems for development. Despite many obstacles, the working of the parliamentary democracy in India is marching forward, and it will not be in danger in the near or distant future. The democratic ideals are cultured as a way of life in the contemporary era.

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