

8th - Why Do We Need A Parliament



The Parliament enables citizens of India to participate in decision making and control the government, thus making it the most important symbol of Indian democracy and a key feature of the Constitution. India is a federal republic: it has one level of government at the centre, the Union government and one level of government at the state level, the state government. The body that governs India at the centre i.e. India's union legislative is called "Parliament". Parliament is the supreme legislative body of India. The Indian Parliament comprises of the President and the two Houses - Rajya Sabha (Council of States) and Lok Sabha (House of the People). The President has the power to summon and prorogue either House of Parliament or to dissolve Lok Sabha. The members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are called Members of Parliament (MP's). The Parliament holds its session at Sansad Bhavan or Parliament House in New Delhi.

People and their representatives: The main point for a democracy is the idea of consent, i.e. the desire, approval and participation of people. It is the decision of people that creates a democratic government and decides about its functioning. The basic idea in this kind of democracy is that the individual or the citizen is the most important person and that in principle the governments as well as other public institutions need to have the trust of these citizens. How does the individual give approval to the government? One way of doing so, as you read, is through elections. People would elect their representatives to the parliament, then, one group from among these elected representatives form the government. The parliament, which is made up of all representatives together, controls and guides the government.

Parliamentary form of government: India is a parliamentary form of government. Here the executive is answerable to the legislature. If the executive loses the support of the majority in Parliament, it will have to resign.

Presidential form of government: head of the state i.e. The President and is directly elected by the people and hence wields great power.

The role of the parliament: Created after 1947, the Indian parliament is an expression of the faith that the people of India have in principle of democracy. These are participation by people in the decision-making process and government by consent. The parliament in our system has immense powers because it is the representative of the people. Elections to the parliament are held in a similar manner as they are for the state legislature. The Lok Sabha is usually elected once every five years. The country is divided into numerous constituencies. Each of these constituencies elects one person to the parliament. The candidates who contest elections usually belong to different political parties. Once elected, these candidates become members of parliament or MPs. These MPs together make up the parliament. Once elections to the parliament have taken place, the parliament needs to perform the following functions:

To Select the National Government: The parliament in India consists of the president, the rajya sabha and the lok sabha. After the lok sabha elections, a list is prepared showing how many MPs belong to each political party. For a political party to form the government, they must have a majority of elected MPs. Since there are 543 elected (plus 2 nominated) members in lok Sabha, to have a majority a party should at least half the number i.e 272 members or more. The opposition in parliament is formed by all the political parties that oppose the majority party/coalition formed. The largest amongst these parties is called the opposition party. One of the most important functions of the lok sabha is to select the executive. The executive is a group of persons who work together to implement the laws made by the parliament. The prime minister of India is the leader of the ruling party in the Lok Sabha. From the MPs who belong to her party, the prime minister selects ministers to work with her to implement decisions. These ministers then take charges of different areas of

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government functioning like health, education; finance etc. the Rajya Sabha functions primarily as the representative of the states of India in the parliament. The Rajya Sabha can also initiate legislation and a bill is required to pass through the Rajya Sabha in order to become a law. It, therefore, has an important role of reviewing and altering the laws initiated by the lok sabha. The members of the Rajya Sabha are elected by the elected members of the legislative assemblies of various states. There are 233 elected members plus 12 members nominated by the president. Hence, members of Lok Sabha are directly elected by the people every five years; the members of Rajya Sabha are elected by the members of State legislatures.

Qualification for election to Lok Sabha:

1. Should be an Indian citizen and above 25 years.
2. Should not be bankrupt or mentally unstable.
3. Not hold any salaried government job

Speaker: presiding officer of the Lok Sabha. He/She belongs to ruling party. The current speaker is Sumitra Mahajan of the Bharatiya Janata Party, who is presiding over the 16th Lok Sabha. She is the second woman to hold the office, after her immediate predecessor Meira Kumar. Powers are:

1. Presides over the Lok Sabha
2. Maintains discipline in Lok Sabha
3. Certifies money bills
4. May cast his/her vote to resolve a tie after voting

Rajya Sabha: upper house of state, have upto 250 members. Lok Sabha can dissolve before completion of five years, when the ruling party loses the support of majority in Lok Sabha. If elections are held before completion of term, is called mid term election. But Rajya Sabha is a permanent body and cannot be dissolved.

Qualification for election to Rajya Sabha:

1. Ha to be Indian citizen aged 30 years and above.
2. Should not be bankrupt or mentally unstable.
3. Not hold any salaried government job

Most important work of Parliament:

1. Ordinary bills: any member, either of the ruling opposition, may introduce an ordinary bill. It can either be introduced in Lok Sabha or in Rajya Sabha. Once the bill is passed in One House after three readings it goes to the other House. The second House, in case it disagrees with or wants changes in the bill, may send it back to the House where it originated. But, if the House of origin refuses to make any alteration, up to a period of six months, a deadlock is created. Then the president of India will call for a joint session of both the houses which will be presided over by the speaker of the Lok Sabha. There after discussions, the bill will be passed. Once both the houses pass the bill, it goes to the president of India. If he or she signs the bill, then it becomes a law. The president can send the bill back with suggestions. But if the Parliament returns the bill with or without the suggested changes, the president has to sign it to make it a law. This law is then called an Act.

2. Money bills: money bill can be introduced only in the Lok Sbha and only by the ruling party. The speaker of the Lok Sabha has to certify it as a money bill. After three readings in



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the Lok Sabha, the bill is sent to the Rajya Sabha. It has to pass the bill with or without suggestions within 14 days. Otherwise, the Lok Sabha will assume the bill is passed. The Rajya Sabha can only make suggestions. The Lok Sabha may accept or reject them. On the issue of money bill, the Lok Sabha is more powerful. The president, on receiving the money bill will sign to make it a law, which becomes an act subsequently.

To Control, Guide and Inform the Government: Session in Parliament begins with a questions hour. The question hour is the first hour of every sitting of the Parliament. It is an important mechanism through which MPs can elicit information about the working of the government. This is a very important way through which the parliament controls the executive. By asking questions the government is alerted to its shortcomings, and also comes to know the opinion of the people through their representatives in the parliament, i.e. the MPs. asking questions of the government is a crucial task for every MP. The opposition parties play a critical role in the healthy functioning of a democracy. The government gets valuable feedback and is kept on its toes by the question asked by the Mps. In addition, in all matters dealing with finances, the parliament's approval is crucial for the government. This is one of the several ways in which the parliament controls, guides and informs the government.

Who are the people in parliament?

The parliament now has more and more people from different backgrounds. For example, there are more rural members as also members from many regional parties. Group and peoples that were till now unrepresented are beginning to get elected to the parliament. There has also been an increase in political participation from the dalit and backward caste and the minorities. Representative democracy cannot produce a perfect reflection of society. There is a realization that when interests and experiences separate us it is important to ensure that communities that have been historically marginalized are given adequate representation. With this in mind, some seats are reserved in the parliament for SCs and STs. Similarly, it has more recently been suggested that there should be reservation of seats for women. It is issues of kind that force the country to ask certain difficult and often unresolved questions about whether our democratic system is representative enough. The fact that we can ask these questions and are working towards answers is a reflection of the strength and the faith that people in India have in a democratic form of government.

