

WHY DO WE NEED A PARLIAMENT ?

CIVICS

In the time of colonial government, people of India faced grave danger if they tried to criticise the decisions of the British government. Nationalist leaders struggled hard at the risk of their life to get the participation of the people in decision-making. The nationalists opposed the arbitrariness of the British laws and policies. After independence in 1947 the government elected by the representatives which were elected by the people could not do what it felt like. The government has to be sensitive to people's needs and demands. The national assembly or group of the elected representatives is called Parliament.

People would elect their representatives to the Parliament. The one major group or several groups making a majority together from among these elected representatives elect their leader who would be the Prime Minister. The members of the Parliament and state legislative assemblies will together elect the President. On the advice of the Prime Minister the President will appoint the ministers in the Central Government. In this way, people, through their chosen representatives (legislature) form the government or the executive Government. In this way, people, through their chosen representatives (legislature) form the government or the executive.

The people through their representatives in the Parliament also decide about the functioning of the government i.e. control it. 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 government as well as other public institutions need to have the trust of these citizens. If the government works in an unjust and unfair manner, the people will criticise it. Thus, the main point for a democracy is the **idea of consent**, i.e. the desire, approval and participation of people.

India adopted Parliamentary Democracy because in this system the government is both responsible and responsive. The Parliamentary system leaves no scope for the emergence of a dictator. The President (Head of the State) possesses only nominal powers while the real power



People elect the Parliament

rests with the council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister. The council of ministers is collectively responsible (accountable) to the legislature (Parliament).

The Composition of the Indian Parliament

The Indian Parliament (Sansad) has two Houses, the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha. The Rajya Sabha (Council of States) with a total strength of 245 members is chaired by the Vice-President of India. Lok Sabha (House of the People) with a total membership of 545, is presided over by the Speaker. The Indian Parliament is the Union Legislature of India which consists of the two Houses and the President of India. The President of India is a part of the Parliament, although she/he is not a member of either house. Because all laws made in the Houses come into force only after they receive the assent of the President.

The Lok Sabha is directly elected by the people and exercises the real power on behalf of the people. The Rajya Sabha is elected indirectly by the people, i.e. by the elected members of the legislatures of the States and Union Territories. The term of the Lok Sabha is five years but it can be dissolved by the President before its full term. However, during emergency, the term of the Lok Sabha can be extended by six months at a time by the Parliament itself. The Rajya Sabha is a permanent house and is never dissolved. One-third of its members retire every second year. Every member has a term of six years.

The country is divided into numerous territorial constituencies. Each of these constituencies elects one person to the Lok Sabha. There are in total 543 constituencies out of which 79 are reserved for SC (Dalit) and 41 are reserved for ST (Adivasi) communities. In addition to these 543 constituencies the President can nominate 2 members belonging to the Anglo-Indian community, in case it does not have adequate representation. The candidates who contest elections from these constituencies usually belong to different political parties. Once elected, these candidates become Members of Parliament or MPs. These MPs together form the Lok Sabha House of the Parliament. **The Lok Sabha has the real powers, so, at many times, we mean Lok Sabha by the word Parliament.** In the Rajya Sabha, there are 233 elected members plus 12 members nominated by the President.

The offices of the central government are collectively called as Central Secretariat. It consists of the South Block and the North Block. The South Block houses the PMO (Prime Minister's Office), the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of External Affairs. The North Block has the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The other ministries of the Union Government are located in various buildings in New Delhi such as Krishi Bhawan, Vigyan Bhawan etc.

The Role or Functions of the Parliament

The Parliament in our system has immense powers because it is the representative of the people. It uses its powers to select the national



The Parliament House of India (outer view)



Lok Sabha (inside view)




Rajya Sabha (inside view)



South Block of Central Secretariat



North Block of Central Secretariat



government, to control and guide the government and makes the laws. The MPs inform the government and the Parliament of the various public issues in their respective areas.

1. To Select the National Government

When we use the term government, we mean the executive. The executive is a group of persons who work together to implement the laws/decisions made by the Parliament. 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 members in Lok Sabha, to have a majority a party should have more than half the number i.e. 272 members or more. Often it has been difficult for a single political party to get the majority, different political parties interested in similar concerns join together to form a coalition. The majority group is called the **ruling party or ruling coalition**.

The ruling party or coalition group **elects** its leader in the Lok Sabha which becomes the Prime Minister. From the MPs who belong to his/her party/coalition group, the Prime Minister selects ministers to work with him/her to implement decisions. These ministers are given charge of different departments of government functioning like finance, health, education etc. The MPs from all the political parties, other than the ruling party/coalition group, form the opposition in the Lok Sabha. The largest amongst these parties is called the **opposition party**. It elects its leader called the Leader of the opposition.

The Rajya Sabha functions primarily as the representative of the states of India in the Parliament. It has an important role of reviewing and altering the bills (laws initiated) by the Lok Sabha. A bill is required to pass through the Rajya Sabha to become a law. The Rajya Sabha can also initiate legislation.

2. To Control, Guide and Inform the Government

The MPs do not meet daily in the Parliament House. They meet in sessions. The Parliament, while in session, begins with a question hour. During this period the MPs can elicit information from the ministers about the working of the government. This is a very important way through which the Parliament controls the executive. The questions alert the government to its shortcomings. It also comes to know the opinion of the people through their representatives in the Parliament, i.e. the MPs. The opposition parties raise various public issues and highlight drawbacks in various policies and programmes of the government. Thus, the opposition parties play a critical role in the healthy functioning of a democracy.

Parliaments all over the world exercise some control over those who run the government. In some countries like India this control is direct and full. Those who run the government can take decisions only so long as they enjoy support of the Parliament. Parliaments control

all the money that governments have. In most countries any public money can be spent only when the Parliament sanctions it. Parliament is the highest forum of discussion and debate on public issues and national policy in any country. Parliament can seek information about any matter.

Through different types of motions, the Parliament controls the council of Ministers. The most important motion is called the **No-confidence Motion**. If the opposition moves a motion that the Lok Sabha does not have confidence in the council of ministers and if the majority of members votes for the motion, all ministers including the Prime Minister have to resign. An **Adjournment Motion** seeks to suspend the work of the House so that some matters of urgent public importance can be discussed.

3. Law-Making

Law-making is a significant function of the Parliament. Parliament is the final authority for making laws in any country. This task of law making or legislation is so crucial that Parliament assemblies are called legislatures. Parliaments all over the world can make new laws, change existing laws, or abolish existing laws and make new ones in their place.

Which of the Two Houses is More Powerful ?

Rajya Sabha is sometimes called the 'Upper House' and Lok Sabha the 'Lower House'. But this does not mean that Rajya Sabha is more powerful than Lok Sabha. This is just an old style of speaking and not the language used in our Constitution. Our Constitution does give the Rajya Sabha some special powers over the states. But on most matters, the Lok Sabha exercises supreme power.

Comparison of the Powers of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

Powers of Lok Sabha	Powers of Rajya Sabha
1. Executive is responsible only to Lok Sabha.	1. Executive is not responsible to Rajya Sabha.
2. It can amend the Constitution.	2. It also approves constitutional amendments.
3. Lok Sabha has exclusive power of approval or rejection of a money bill.	3. Rajya Sabha only enjoys the power to delay money bill for 14 days.
4. It can enact and amend both money and non-money bills.	4. It can initiate, consider and approve non-money bills. It can only suggest amendments to money bills.
5. It can move no-confidence motion against the government.	5. It cannot move no-confidence motion against the government.

Any ordinary law needs to be passed by both the houses. But if there is a difference between the two Houses, the final decision is taken in a joint session in which members of both the Houses sit together. Because of the larger number of members, the view of Lok Sabha is likely to prevail in such a meeting.



Is Our Democratic System Representative Enough ?

This is a difficult and often unresolved question. This question has two facts. First it has been found that only a little more than half of the eligible voters turn up at the polling booths. People's participation in Lok Sabha elections is about 60% (approximated to the nearest tens). To produce a perfect reflection of society at least 90% voters should use their voting rights. It has been seen that some people do not vote out of their complete disappointment from the governance. This they do after many times of voting !

Secondly, women and some communities have been marginalised for long. Sixty years ago only four per cent of MPs were women and today it is just above nine per cent. This is a small share when you consider the fact that half (fifty per cent of) the population are women. It has more recently been suggested that there should be thirty-three per cent reservation of seats for women. But the conflict between the political parties has caused the bill to remain suspended for several years. Adequate reservation in Lok Sabha seats is given to S.C. and S.T. communities so that the MPs elected from these constituencies will be familiar with and can represent Dalit and Adivasi interests in Parliament. However, groups 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 castes and the minorities. 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.



Key Words

- » Executive : government, part of legislature that implements the laws/decisions made by the whole legislature.
- » Collectively responsible : jointly responsible for any decision or action of the council of ministers.
- » Emergency : abnormal situation in the country— disruption of law and order, foreign attack etc.
- » Coalition : a temporary alliance of political parties after elections to form a clear majority
- » Unresolved : situations in which there are no easy solutions to problems
- » No-confidence motion : a move by the opposition in Lok Sabha when a government has to prove support of majority to it
- » Nominal : usually only for namesake

SUMMARY

- ▶ The people through their representatives, in the Parliament also decide about the functioning of the government i.e., control it.
- ▶ The Indian Parliament has two houses — Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
- ▶ The Indian Parliament is the Union Legislature which consists of the two Houses and the President.
- ▶ The Lok Sabha is directly elected by the people and exercises the real power on behalf of the people.
- ▶ The Rajya Sabha is elected indirectly by the people, i.e. by the elected members of the legislatures of the States and Union Territories.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

- Executive is responsible only to the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha.
a. Lok Sabha b. Vidhan Sabha c. Rajya Sabha d. Vidhan Parishad
- The current per cent of women MPs in Parliament is four/nine.
a. four b. nine c. ten d. twelve
- On money bills Rajya Sabha enjoys a power of rejection/delaying it for 14 days.
a. selection b. rejection c. delaying d. opening
- India is governed by Dictatorship/Democratic government.
a. Dictatorship b. Demperatic c. Selective d. All of these
- The passing of Adjournment/No-confidence Motion makes the government resign.
a. Adjournment b. No-confidence c. Constitution d. None of these

B. Fill in the blanks :

- Only _____ Sabha can enact a money bill.
- A government has to resign if a _____ is passed against it.
- _____ seats are reserved for SC and _____ for ST in the Lok Sabha.
- The _____ Sabha has the real powers.
- The Parliament, while in session, begins with a _____ hour.

C. Match the Following :

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Lok Sabha | a. 245 members |
| 2. Rajya Sabha | b. North Block of Central Secretariat |
| 3. External Affairs | c. Head of State |
| 4. Finance | d. South Block of Central Secretariat |
| 5. President | e. 545 members |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :


- Rajya Sabha is chaired by the Speaker.
- Lok Sabha enjoys more power than Rajya Sabha.
- The party/coalition group enjoying majority is called the opposition.
- The Rajya Sabha is directly elected by the people.
- Executive is responsible to the Lok Sabha.

E. Define the following :

- Coalition
- Executive
- Parliament
- No-confidence Motion
- Idea of Consent

F. Answer in one word or one phrase :

- Who elects the MPs ?
- Whose assent is necessary after the laws are made by the Parliament ?

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3. Who is a part of the Parliament though not a member of either house of the Parliament ?
 4. For a majority how many members are required ?
 5. Who appoints the ministers in the central government ?

G. Answer these question briefly :

1. What is a Parliament ? Who are called MPs ?
2. The Parliamentary government is both responsible and responsive. Explain.
3. What is the composition of the lower house of the Parliament ?
4. Lok Sabha is more powerful than the Rajya Sabha. Justify with three examples.
5. How does Parliament control the executive ?
6. What is a No-confidence motion ?
7. What is the idea of consent ? Why is it necessary for democracy ?
8. Who elect the Rajya Sabha MPs ? What is their term ?

H. Answer these questions in detail :

1. Describe the composition of the two Houses of the Parliament.
2. Discuss the functions of the Parliament.
3. Who is more powerful, Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha ? Compare.

PROJECT WORK

- Find out and fill in the following table with information on the various representatives from your area (Constituency) :

	State Legislature	Parliament
1. Name of the present representative from your constituency		
2. When were elections last held ?		
3. When will the next elections be held ?		
4. Which political party/parties is/are now in power ?		
5. Which political parties form the opposition ?		