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THE PROBLEMS OF INDIAN PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

Dr. Kichidi Channappa
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,
SUBN Theosophical Women's College, Hosapete, Vijayanagara(Dist.) Karnataka.

ABSTRACT



Parliamentary Democracy is a refined from of Democracy. The Republican and Federal constitution of free India came into force on January 26, 1950. The constitution provides broadly for a Parliamentary form of Government based on Universal Adult Franchise and the accountability of the executive to the elected representative of the people. The Parliament represents all constitutionally organised shades of public opinion at national level and occupies an important place in the constitutional setup of the country. It has given a stage to the people through which they articulate and realize their aspirations and give ventilation to their grievances. The successful working of Parliamentary democracy is one of the notable achievements of free India.

KEYWORDS: *Universal Adult Franchise, the Accountability, Aspirations, Grievances, Dignity and Decorum.*

INTRODUCTION

Working of the Indian Parliament has given rise to much hopes and disappointment too. There are a few virulent critics who are of the opinion that India is unsuitable for Parliamentary Democracy. They point out that Parliamentary Democracy by virtue of being a western institution cannot be suited to India. A foreign observer writes "The root of the trouble lay in the decision to introduce Parliamentary Democracy in a society which was far from being homogeneous a river with a deep Hindu–Muslim Cleavage." Professor B. R. Sharma in his presidential address to the conference of Indian Political Science Association in December 1953 observed, "India has chosen to be a camp follower of west and is taking pride in godless secularism and in the paraphernalia of Parliamentary Democracy which it has decided to adopt. We know that institutions of Parliamentary Democracy have failed to give happiness and peace to large sections of the world population who spend sleepless nights in fear of war and party despotism." Prof. B. R. Sharma is not the only Indian scholar who attacks the functions of our Parliamentary Institution. As already stated Prof. K. T. Shah in the constituent assembly pleaded for a presidential type of government. All these critics looked at the parliamentary institution of India with jaundiced eye.

The Indian political picture is fair. So far Parliamentary Democracy has functioned successfully in this country. But this does not mean that parliamentary institutions in India are confronted with no problems. They have faced a number of problems.

1. Absence of Strong Opposition(Unbalanced party system)

Foremost among the problems may be reckoned the absence of a well organised opposition. It was no doubt good that a single party was able to secure a majority in the Centre and in the States. Such a majority, in the initial period of Parliamentary Democracy is very necessary. But Parliamentary Democracy depends upon the balance of power between the parties and in India there is no such balance of power in the party system. Congress party which was the spearhead of the struggle for independence and which was led by a very popular figure with mass appeal, dominated completely and fully. Its strength was out of all proportion to the strength of all other parties. But last three general election NDA led by BJP is extremely dominates by its mass leader. Therefore in the Centre and in most of the states, parliamentary system is lopsided. In present Lok Sabha there are 240 members belonging to the Bharatiya Janatha Party(318 members belonging form the NDA). Such majority is no doubt sweet to the party, but it brings retribution. Where the opposition is strong the government is on its toes. It does not become flabby and complacent. It is on its mettle. It is responsive to currents of public opinion and tolerant of criticism. Where the opposition is weak, the dominant party may ride roughshod over the rights of minorities and opposition may become irresponsible. It may make tall claims because it knows that it would not be called upon to implement its programme. Further there would be frustration and bitterness because the opposition knows that it cannot Occupy the Treasury Bench. It is true that there is the Congress party but it has been immobilized by the Bharatiya Janatha party as the Conservative party has immobilized the Labour party in England.

The majority is required in the parliamentary system that a party should have to run the government smoothly. That is the difference between the Treasury Bench and the opposition should not be less than one hundred members. In a House like a Lok Sabha it might be 300-200. A small majority would make the government ineffective. The constant attendance of the ministers in the house required by such small majority is harmful to their health and to the work of their departments. It often leads them to propose not what they regarded as best in the interest of the country but what will least offend the opposition. And where the majority is simple the tendency of the opposition party is to adopt as its policy the undoing of measures carried into law at the instance of the government of the day. If this becomes common it would reduce politics to a game of battle dore and shuttle cock and eventually to chaos. The effective working of the party system depends upon the acquiescence, of one party to measures carried out by the others.

If the above argument is accepted then the NDA majority was 10% more than what it should have. It is evident that the party system is lopsided. This lopsidedness could have been mitigated by the two party system. But there are a number of parties and groups in the opposition. They simply converge to defeat and criticise the government. They do not combine together for constructive criticism Therefore., it is suggested that instead of many parties, there should be only two parties. The two party system has certain advantages. It is the best for the successful working of representative government. In enables the electorate to choose its own government and finally under the two party system it is easy to fix responsibility.

Although we do not have a strong opposition, it is not a fatal defect. It is compensated by the development of alert and vigorous parliamentary committee system, discussion and criticism with in the party and readiness on the part of the party in power to listen to constructive criticism of the opposition. Further, the party in power had not abused the power vested in it. The party system is lopsided not only from the point of strength but also from the point of policies. In present, all the six National parties are claimed to be socialist or profess a socialist programme. In England there are two parties whose policies are fundamentally different from one another. In India also there is need for a conservative party and Labour with different programmes.

2. Illiterate Electorate

It is also said that another handicap of Indian Democracy is the nature of the electorate. A vast majority of the electorate are politically illiterate and this is found to affect our political institutions. This is a parrot cry of the intelligentsia. The Indian peasants and common man may be illiterate but he

is endowed with wisdom. He has some experience and faith. Dr. Rajendra Prasad first Indian President who had an intimate contact with the villagers said that we need not be dismayed by the illiteracy of the villagers. The village people who form the bulk of the electorate possess commonsense and intelligence. They also have a culture of their own which the sophisticated may not appreciate but which is solid. They will be able to take a lively interest in the affairs of the country if things are explained to them properly. This opinion of the president appears to be true. For instance they astonished the most impartial critic by the display of their political maturity. When they voted congress to power in 1952 and 1957 they did not give their vote to congress as a vote of thanks for its past services or as a vote of confidence in the leadership of Nehru but as a vote to the party which promised a strong secular state.

Admitting for argument sake that illiteracy is an obstacle to Indian parliamentary democracy, what is the alternative. Some say that we should have a dictatorship for ten or twenty years but a benevolent dictatorship. Let us assume that we shall have a dictatorship for ten – twenty years. Then can we be sure that there will be a smooth change over from dictatorship to Democracy? This is to expect the impossible. History clearly indicates that the change over from dictatorship to Democracy is a painful process and very nearly impossible. Further, the idea that we should have dictatorship emanated from the literate people. It is, therefore, necessary that we should make a serious attempt to re-educate the literate in the principles of Parliamentary Democracy.

3. Spread of Communism

It is also argued that the days of Parliamentary Democracy are numbered because it cannot exist where communism is likely to spread and communism is spreading in India. The communist party had captured power in Kerala and West Bengal. It polled eleven million votes in 1957 as compared with three million in 1952. The popularity of the party may increase in the years to come because of the sheer impossibility of the existing government to satisfy all the needs of the people. There are many frustrations and the people are not accustomed to urban discipline. But it may be remembered that in Kerala and West Bengal the communists were in power with the support of the independents. Further, Malayalees and Bengaliees are a difficult people to understand. Of all the races in the country they are the most material minded. If communism does not pay them good dividends they may forsake it for another 'ism'. Moreover, Indian communists are not like their European counter parts–ruthless, atheist and inhuman. They have promised to maintain democratic institutions and as long as they do not break their promise we need not be apprehensive of the communist. Russia and China became 'Red' for historical reasons, which are absent so far as India is concerned. Moreover, in comparison with her neighbors, India has more stable central government, a ruling party of longer popular standing, a more solid administrative frame work and steady record of economic progress under the Five year plans. Above all there is a basic attitude of mind in India, a penchant for democratic rule which makes the possibility of communist dictatorship remote.

4. Disappearance of the congress personality(Lack of Leadership)

It was also said that so long as the congress is under the leadership of that dynamic figure of Nehru, India may continue to be democratic. When that towering personality disappears from the scene, congress too may disappear and with the fall of congress Democracy may vanish like dew on a desert plant. The critics went to the extent of saying that by 1967 Democracy wood give place to totalitarianism. Ceaseless criticism and agitation of the congress party has already eroded the moral prestige of the party. This criticism is partly true. The strength of the congress party largely lies in the colossus Nehru himself. He had a great electoral appeal and gave such strength to the working committee that it was able to settle all squabbles that so often break out at the lower party levels. But it must be said that in a Democracy no one is inevitable. But as long as Nehru was there others appeared like planets round a withering sun.

5. Concentration of Economic Power

It may said that with the growth of public sector, all economic power will be concentrated in the hands of state. The ultimate result of such development is that individual freedom may dwindle. Forms of Parliamentary Democracy may remain but real democracy may not exist, because power will be concentrated in the hands of a few. There is an element of truth in this contention. But the vital fact is that we have to raise our productive capacity. This cannot be done by adopting 'Laissez faire'. Conditions in India are such that we cannot make any adequate progress by adopting the 'Laissez faire' method of free enterprise in all its glory. It may be that there might be greater production in individual factories and establishments. The total production might be substantial but it would be a wrong type of production wrongly distributed, widening the gulf between the poor and the rich. India's resources are limited and for the sake of general good we have to husband our resources. We cannot allow them to be appropriated by individuals. Further, we cannot go on borrowing for the financing of schemes. We have to increase domestic resources to finance development plans and this can be done by assigning a greater part to the public sector. Above all a socialist state need not necessarily stultify the individual. England is a socialist state and yet Parliamentary Democracy thrives there. So long as freedoms exist, it does not matter what name we give to that state and its government. Kernel is more important than husk.

6. Growth of Population

Another danger to Parliamentary Democracy is the tremendous growth of population. We are multiplying at an alarming rate. In 1960, every day about 11,000 children were born. According to UNICEF estimates of 2026, every day about 67,385 children are born in India. The Indian Economic system is not able to absorb the surplus population. The pessimism theory of Malthus has proved to be correct in the agricultural countries. India at present is like the man whose nose is by a hairs breadth above the water level. The merest ripple on the water means death. If the population goes on increasing and as a consequence the standard of life goes on decreasing, there may be disaster. The only way by which the growth of population may be checked is by pursuing the Malthusian sagacity. But in a vast country with illiterate population, birth control is very difficult. Industrialization, even on the grandest scale, may not be able to absorb even a fraction of the Surplus Population. If atomic power is harnessed and used for irrigation, large tracts of desert land may be rendered cultivable and the population crisis may be averted for the time being. Otherwise the surplus population may turn into a revolutionary army and Parliamentary Democracy may go to the dogs. The triumph of the communist in some of the countries may be attributed to the population crisis.

7. Language Conflict

Another possible threat to Parliamentary Democracy in India is the language conflict. The Language conflict began sometime in the second millennium B.C. - Perhaps between 2000 and 1500 BC. When the Indo European and the Dravidian Language came in conflict. At first the Dravidians were in the South East Asia then came the Indo–Europeans. Since its introduction, the Indo–European Languages have been slowly but steadily pushing back the frontiers of the Dravidian Language Territory. Sanskrit is the great language of the Indo-European family. Besides Sanskrit, Bengali, Guajarati, Hindi and Urdu to mention only a few belong to this family. The Dravidian Languages are Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. The constant advance of the Indo European family into the territory once held by the Dravidian Language has been galling to the Dravidians. They considered themselves the victims of a linguistic and cultural imperialism of the Indo–European family. When the Indian constitution adopted Hindi as the official language of the Union, the Dravidians felt that this was a current manifestation of the Indo–European cultural aggression which they had been experiencing for three thousand years. Since the Government of India has been endeavoring to promote the use of Hindi in administrative and educational spheres, the resentment of the Dravidians flared up. The Chennai Legislature passed a resolution that Tamil is the State Language. As a matter of fact they had already introduced Tamil as the medium of instruction even in the colleges. All these facts clearly indicate the

fear of the Dravidian that their political and economic interests would be jeopardized in a Hindi dominated India. They also felt that their inherited culture symbolized by their language was being slighted. Consequently, there had been violent demonstrations in the south particularly in the city of Chennai(Madras) against Hindi. David Kazhagam went to the extent of burning the Indian constitution and started a campaign against the Hindi Population in the city.

Apart from the conflict between the Indo-European and the Dravidian Languages, there are also conflicts between the members of the same language group, these have occurred in the case of Dravidian Languages. The basis of this conflict is that the people speaking the same language should as far as possible live in the same state. This was accompanied by the demand that each language should have a separate administrative unit. For instance there was and is rivalry between Tamil and Telugu, between Tamil and Malayalam, between Malayalam and Kannada, between Bengali and Hindi, between Hindi and Punjabi between Guajarati and Marathi. The Bengalis have objected to the promotion of Hindi in Bengal, motivated by the fear that it would supplant their own venerated language. The Marathi speaking people are conscious of the empire which they had held in India once. They are intensely proud of it and of their language. The Poona University went to the extent of introducing Marathi as the Medium of instruction.

8. Spirit of Lawlessness

The most disquieting development is the growth of spirit of lawlessness inspired and promoted by elements which have only a nominal regard for the principles of democracy. The Mahatma taught us Satyagraha. But now this instrument of Satyagraha is being used against the freely chosen government of one's own country. For each and every silly thing people are resorting to Satyagraha and fasts unto death Consequently the spirit of lawlessness is growing. The Inquiry Commission on the Police Firing at Chandanathope, Kerala(1958) reports as follows: "The spirit of defiance against law and authority exhibited by the workers at Chandanathope of July 26, 1958 cannot be viewed as a stray instance. Recently such the same instance accrued in India in September 2026. The Supreme Court quashes FIRs against GEN-Z UGC-NEET protestors under article 142 of the constitution. Such defiance has become a common feature of the present day agitation by the working classes in general. Whenever they find that there is difficulty in getting their demands, good or bad, conceded through proper and legitimate means, they think of coercing the management first by strike and then by picketing. When the strike is launched, they will adopt all means in their power to prevent the other section of the workers from exercising their fundamental right of peacefully carrying on their work. All unlawful activities such as obstruction, intimidation, assault and other forms of violence will then be carried on in the name of picketing. Very soon a situation will arise which will compel the authorities to interfere for the purpose of maintaining law and order the so-called pickets will then turn against the police defying all their lawful orders. Then the police are stoned after the strike is over, pardons are extended to convicted persons, prosecutions are withdrawn against those involved in illegal strike." This report speaks for itself. If this spirit of Lawlessness Increases one of the conditions for the existence of Parliamentary Democracy supremacy of law will disappear.

9. A Gap between Ability and Experience

One of the defects in our Parliamentary system is that there is a great gap in regard to ability and experience between the front and back benchers. Consequently there is a strong tendency for each to live in a world of his own. The Ministers are lonely and a good number of them are widowers and over worked. The back benchers are idle and frustrated and usually docile. This was true in the first Parliament. From the second Parliament this gap has been greatly narrowed by such devices as Parliamentary Committees, Party Committees and Junior Minister-ships etc. The second line of defence is well under preparation.

10. Absence of Independent Political thinking

Another defect which affects the working of Parliamentary Institution is the absence of independent political thinking. Political Leader can hardly be expected to think out complex problems of the modern state. In every country where democracy flourishes this function is performed by voluntary association of scholars, public men and others interested in special subjects. It is they who by unremitting research by constant public discussion by innumerable publications do the thinking for democracy. This is no doubt a serious defect in our country. But it may be said that this defect is being rectified by the establishment of specialized bodies like the Institute of Public Administration. A greater portion of the intelligentsia are entering private enterprises. Consequently, the amount of independent thinking is bound to increase in course of time.

Besides that, there are certain real dangers to Parliamentary Democracy in India. They are under follows:

Firstly, there had been a rapid bureaucratization of the government. In the long run this may stifle Democracy. Bureaucratization is the result of extensive state enterprise and state activities.

Secondly, the crusading spirit of nationalism is showing signs of decline. The sentiment of unity has been weakened and issues like language and regionalism are under-mining the centrifugal spirit.

Thirdly, with the march of time the middle class which is at present controlling the governmental machinery may disappear. In that case, the intellectual proletariat may join the ranks of the industrial proletariat. Ceaseless propaganda of the communist has already won recruits to their cause. Further, the peasants who constitute a vast majority of the Indian people are being slowly organised by the politicians. To the Landless proletariat Parliamentary Democracy has no meaning. The appeals of the communist have profoundly influenced them. Today the number of peasants who do not possess land is enormous and most of them are potential supporters of communism.

CONCLUSION

While Parliamentary institutions are not having good time in other countries of Asia, they are becoming increasingly popular in India. The quality of work of the Parliament depends upon the quality of its members. Often the behaviour of the members of the Parliament, Particularly the members of the Lok Sabha, is deplorable. They do not maintain dignity and decorum in the Parliament Indiscipline is a Prime cause of hindering the successful working of the Parliament. Indiscriminate and improper use of various privileges such as raising points of order or moving adjournment motions have obstructed the efficient transaction of the business of the Parliament. However, the speakers of the Lok Sabha have tried their best to maintain the dignity of the Parliament. Presiding Officers like Mr. Mavalankar, Mr. Ayengar, Mr. Sardar Hukum Singh and Mr. Sanjeeva Reddy, Balram Jakhar, P. S. Sangma, Somnath Chatterjee and others have built up a healthy tradition of impartiality. Critics often maintain the view that Parliamentary Democracy does not suit India because of its illiteracy, poverty and caste system, which prevail throughout the country. This view seems to be over–exaggerated. The General Elections of India has proved that voters have political consciousness. They voted for other parties with sound Political Judgment and common sense. After this election the position of the congress became weak both in the Centre and in the States. It marked the emergence of an effective opposition in Indian Parliament. No Longer congress party in the Parliament enjoys steam–roller majority which it had enjoyed in the last three Parliaments. Thus the present Parliament should pay more weight to the voice of the opposition. The opposition parties in order to become more effective should combine and follow a consistent and constructive policy. To conclude with Mr. Palmer, "With all these limitations the Parliament of India especially the Lok Sabha has functioned with remarkable effectiveness and it has established itself as an indispensable part of the Government Machinery".

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