

**SPEECH FOR THE 15TH D.T. LAKDAWALA
MEMORIAL LECTURE ON “PARLIAMENTARY
DEMOCRACY AND ITS CHALLENGES TODAY”**

23RD FEBRUARY, 2018

It is indeed a matter of pleasure for me to be delivering the 15th D.T. Lakdawala Memorial lecture today.

2. An eminent economist, Prof. Lakdawala made immense contribution to the economic policy discourse of the Nation during its formative phases. He was one of my predecessors as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission during 1977-1980 and I had an opportunity to interact closely with him during my own stint as Deputy Chairman between 1991-1996. The Lakdawala Committee headed by him worked on the critical task of methodological and computational aspects of poverty estimation during the time when our economy had taken a liberal turn and submitted its report in 1993.

3. His report showed marked improvement in poverty figures, a trend that once again vindicated the path of Constitutional and Democratic socio-economic transformation that we had envisaged for ourselves after independence. From more than 80% in 1947, poverty had fallen to 39% in 1987 (The figure stands at 22% now). This transformation was to be carried forward by the institutions of a Parliamentary Government, where the sovereign will of the people of India manifested in its Parliament was to debate, discuss, deliberate and hold the executive accountable for the execution of its decisions.

4. Friends, it has been 70 years that we became independent and 68 years since we gave to ourselves our Constitution. The Constitution that we gave to ourselves was not something enacted by the British Parliament nor was it a religious code set in edicts. The sovereign Constituent Assembly of India , representing the will of its people drafted our Constitution whose preamble set out our way forward. It guided us – the legislators, institutions and the citizens to forge a nation that secures for all its citizens, “Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.” These goals were to be achieved through a parliamentary system of government that we chose for ourselves after much deliberation and debate in the assembly. There were various models and prototypes available. There was the obvious option of a Laissez Faire Liberal Democracy, a Centralized Presidential System, an invitingly romantic idea of Communism and a Proportional representation driven Fabian Socialism. However, we chose a single member constituency based Parliamentary system whose goals were revolutionary in terms of socio-economic and political change.

5. While it is easy to interpret the adoption of parliamentary government as a natural corollary to the Westminster system of all colonial masters, it was not as simple as that. The political system that we adopted was not a mere transportation of western ideas of liberalism and market economy. Our institutions attained organic growth on the Indian soil which had been experiencing with Republican governments, self governing institutions and deliberative representative bodies since Vedic times.

6. Our indigenous experience with representative government started in the republic (*Gad Rajya*) of *Lichhavi, Kapilvastu, Pava, Kushinara, Ramagrama, Sunsamagiri, Piphali, Suputa, Mithila and Kollanga* in the 6th Century BC and continued up till 400 AD in various parts of the country. The *Sabhas, Samitis* and *Ganapati* of these republics were the modern day Parliament, Cabinet and the Prime Minister respectively. Even our emperors with their Council of Ministers were more like the Governor-General in the council who was additionally bound by Dharma – today's parallel of rule of law, limited government and constitutionalism. While the Islamic invasion in 7th century AD and subsequent British colonial rule somehow was bereft of representative character. Representatives, *gram sabhas* and *panchayats* continued to function and flourish at the level of the villages.

7. Having said that, to my mind, our experiments and experience with limited parliamentary practices during colonial times did have a bearing on our founding fathers adopting a parliamentary form of government as our way forward.

8. The origins of the modern day legislative process can be traced back to the 1601 Charter which authorized the Governor and the East India Company to make, ordain and constitute such and so many laws, constitutions, orders and ordinances, as shall seem necessary and convenient for good government. The Charter of 1726 vested, for the first time, the Governors and the Councils of the three Presidencies with legislative power.

9. The Regulating Act of 1773 holds a special significance in the legislative history of India as it marks the beginning of parliamentary control over the government of the Company. This Act is also said to have started the process of territorial integration and administrative centralization in India.

10. The Charter Act of 1833 terminated the trading rights of the Company and rendered it merely an administrative agency of the Crown in India. (The Governor-General of Bengal was, thereafter, designated as the Governor General of India and empowered to administer the whole of British India.) For the first time, the Governor General's Government was known as the Government of India and his Council as the Indian Council. This Act set up one legislative council for all the British territories in India and introduced an element of institutional specialization by differentiating the law-making meetings of the Council from its executive meetings. Legislative functions of the state was thus for the first time separated from its executive functions.

11. Under the Charter Act of 1853, discussions in the Council, when acting in its legislative capacity, became oral instead of in writing. The bills passed through all three stages and were referred to Select Committees. Legislative business was conducted in public instead of in secret and reports of proceedings were officially published. Standing orders were adopted to conduct and regulate proceedings. The new Council envisioned its duties not to be confined only to legislation but also began to assume the character of a miniature representative assembly, assembled for the purpose of enquiry into and redress of grievances.

12. The Act of 1853 gave the legislature for the first time the right to frame its own rules and procedure. Shri Prasanna Kumar Tagore was appointed to the post of Clerk of the Council and he went on to provide the Council with a parliamentary form of procedure and encouraged it to assert its independence as a separate organ of government. Public were allowed to witness the proceedings of the Council and press reporting was permitted in 1856. Despite the progressive establishment of legislative practices and procedures, there was, however, no Indian participation in the Council.

13. The Government of India Act 1858, initiated for the first time non-official participation in the Council. The Governor-General was authorized to nominate to his council 'not less than six nor more than twelve' additional members at least one half of whom were to be non-officials. In 1862, Viceroy Lord Canning appointed three Indians- Maharaja Sir Narendra Singh of Patiala, Raja DeoNarain Singh of Benares and Raja Sir Dinkar Rao Raghunath of Gwalior to the newly constituted Legislative Council. Between 1862 and 1892, forty-five Indians were nominated to the Legislative Council. Most of them were ruling princes or chiefs and rich *zamindar* families. Intellectuals such as Syed Ahmed Khan, V.N. Mandlik, K.L. Nulkar and Rash Behari Ghosh were among those nominated to the Council during 1872-92.

14. The nominated Indian members however took little interest in the discussions and usually read out short prepared speeches. They remained passive and presented little opposition to the Government. There remained at the same time strong opposition to Indian involvement in the Councils on the part of many Englishmen. A satirical pamphlet in 1883 argued any encouragement to the Bengalee Baboos would result in nothing less than complete extinction of British rule that a self governing India would prove an abortive parliamentary democracy which would run into chaos and subjected to military dictatorship.

15. Introduction of the Criminal Procedure Amendment Bill (1883-84) or Ilbert bill led to the first meeting of the first National Conference at Kolkata on 29 December 1883. Surendranath Banerjee and Ananda Mohan Bose were its leading organizers. Bose depicted this conference as the first stage towards the formation of a National Indian Parliament. The Conference demanded introduction of representative assemblies for the advancement of the people of India. The National Conference was in many ways the precursor of the Indian National Congress.

16. The founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 hastened the evolution of responsible Government. At its very first session, the Congress passed a resolution asking for constitutional reforms and for the admission of a considerable proportion of elected members to the Legislative Councils and the right to discuss the budget. Delivering his Presidential Address at the first session in Kolkata, W.C. Banerjee described the Congress as the National Assembly of India.

17. The demand for reform and expansion of the Legislative Councils continued to be made by every annual Congress and became more vociferous from year to year. The Congress considered the reform of the Councils at the root of all other reforms. At the same time, Viceroy Lord Dufferin publicly dismissed Congressmen as a microscopic minority and believed democratic methods of government or the adoption of parliamentary system to India would be a very big jump into the unknown.

18. In response, speaking on the resolution on the reform of Legislative Councils at the fifth Congress Session at Bombay (1889), Bannerjea said If you get that, you get everything else. On it banks the entire future of the country and the future of our administrative system.

19. The Indian Councils Act of 1892 enlarged the Legislative Council to consist of 'not less than ten nor more than sixteen' additional members. In the case of the Governor-General's Legislative Council, or the Indian Legislative Council as it came to be known, five more 'additional' members were brought in, one being nominated by the non-official members of each of the four Provincial Councils and one by the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce. Though the term 'election' was scrupulously avoided, the fact that non-official members of the Provincial Councils recommended and returned their nominees to the Central Council, indicated implicit acceptance of the principle of indirect election.

20. The system of preparing an annual budget and laying it before the Legislature was first introduced in India in 1860 by James Wilson who was a Member of the British Parliament, sent to India as Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council. The first budget was presented on 18 February, 1860. While discussion on the budget as such was not allowed, it was possible to hold a debate on proposals linked to the budget. The Council had no right to vote on the Budget.

21. The Act of 1892 conceded to both the Central and Provincial Councils the privilege of financial criticism or the right to discuss the budget under certain conditions for the first time. Members of the Council however still had no powers to submit or propose any resolution or to divide the Council in respect of any financial discussion.

22. Under the Act of 1892, Members were for the first time granted the privilege of asking questions and interrogating Government Members. The first question was asked on 16 February 1893. The questioner was the Maharaja of Bhinga and the question concerned hardships caused by the system of collecting supplies of provision for government officers on tour. During the two years - 1905 and 1906 - only 13 questions were asked and the subjects were Services, Railways, Revenue and Exchange. Sometimes information could be denied on the ground that an answer would involve lengthy preparation by officials.

23. The entry of elected members marked the beginning of the new era in the life of the Council. Congress veteran Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, the first elected Indian Member was frank, bold and vigorous in his criticism of government policies. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta was known as 'Ferocious Mehta' because of his role as a Legislator. In order to stem the growth of the nationalist movement in India, Lord Lytton decided to censor the vernacular press. Pherozeshah Mehta vehemently opposed the move. He believed that the press should be as free as possible, and that it was the fundamental duty of the government to educate the masses. England must raise India to her own level, or India will drag her down to hers, he warned.

24. During 1890-1909, besides Sir Mehta, the Council had great stalwarts like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ashutosh Mukherjee, Rash Bihari Ghose, G.M. Chitnavis, P. AnandaCharlu, Bishambarnath, Muhammad Rahimtullah Sayani and Salimulla who made full use of limited opportunities for ventilating the grievances of the people on political, economic and social issues. Gokhale whom some people had started calling 'The Leader of the Opposition' was a great authority on economics. He exposed the Government's contention that budget surpluses showed the health of the economy and showed with facts and figures the extent of dismal and deepening poverty in India resulting from heavy expenditure on the Army, policy of heavy taxation, imposition of excise duties on indigenous industries like textiles, lack of irrigation facilities for farmers etc.

25. The shortcomings of the Act of 1892 were obvious. There remained an official majority in the Councils. The Government could always pass Bills disregarding opposition by Indian members. The vehement criticism by Indian members proved ineffective in preventing the Government from following a policy of repression, large scale imprisonments, deportations etc. following the agitation against the partition of Bengal, natural calamities like the Great Famine and Plague epidemic etc. which in the 1880s resulted in the death of a large number of people.

26. At its 22nd session at Kolkata presided over by Dadabhai Naroji in 1906, the Congress declared Swaraj as its goal and demanded immediate expansion of the Legislative Councils to secure larger control over the financial and executive administration of the country. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 empowered the Governor General to nominate one Indian member to the Executive Council leading to the appointment of Shri Satyendra Prasanno Sinha as the first Indian member.

27. The Government of India Act 1909 increased the number of members of the Indian Legislative Council from 16 to 60. Elected members were to be returned by constituencies, such as municipalities, district and local boards, universities, chambers of commerce and trade associations and groups of persons such as land-holders or tea planters.

28. The Act of 1909 created non-official majority in all the Provincial Legislative Councils, but maintained official majority in the Central Legislative Council. The constituencies were small, the largest of them comprising only 650 persons. Out of 27 elected members in the Central Council, only 9 were supposed to represent the people of India as a whole. It is this Act which regrettably introduced for the first time the principle of communal representation in India and created separate electorates.

29. The 1909 Act also for the first time gave members of the Council power to move resolutions on any matter of general public interest and to divide the Council upon them. This was the beginning of non-official resolutions. The first resolution under the rules was moved on 25 February 1910 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale recommending prohibition of indentured labour for Natal in South Africa. On the Rowlatt Bill, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya spoke for two and a half hours. Similarly, on Indemnity Bill he spoke for four hours continuously and in all, he spent six and a half hours speaking on the Bill. It was very rare that non-official members could have their way. Still, they made their presence felt by moving amendments, resolutions and asking questions.

30. The Rules of the Council framed in 1909 also enlarged the scope of discussion on the Budget. The Budget was considered in two stages. Some items of expenditure such as that of the Army were however treated as non votable.

31. The right to put questions for seeking information from the government was provided in 1892 but right to ask supplementary questions was not conceded until 1909. Though non-official members were in no position to defeat government measures in the Council, they took question procedure very seriously. While in 1911 only 151 questions were put and answered, the number rose to 397 by the year 1919.

32. Two Bills, the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Indian Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill, commonly called the Rowlatt Bills were introduced in the Council in February 1919 with a view to give extensive powers to the government to put down revolutionary nationalist movements. These were met with bitter and prolonged opposition both inside and outside the Legislature. Debate went on for eight hours extending over two days in which as many as 20 non official members took part. The Indian members opposed the Bill not only at the introduction stage but at every stage.

33. During the course of the passage of the Bill, the Council was divided 16 times. On all occasions, Indian members voted solidly together. Some members such as Malaviya and Sukul resigned their membership of the Council in protest.

34. The Government of India Act 1919 introduced the system of 'dyarchy' in eight major Provinces known as Governors Provinces. This system established a dual form of government in each province. Control of some areas of government called the transferred list, were given to a Government of Indian ministers answerable to the Provincial Council. At the same time, all other areas of government (the 'reserved list') remained under the control of the Viceroy. The 'reserved list' included Defence, the Foreign Affairs and Communications. The 'transferred list' included agriculture, supervision of local government, Health and Education.

35. Under the 1919 Act, the Imperial Legislative Council was enlarged and a bicameral legislature introduced. The lower house was the Legislative Assembly of 144 members, of which 104 were elected and 40 were nominated with tenure of three years. The upper house was the Council of States consisting of 34 elected and 26 nominated members and tenure of five years. The 1919 Act also provided for classification of subjects of administration as Central and Provincial and for the devolution of authority in respect of provincial subjects to local governments; and for the allocation of revenues and other moneys to those governments.

36. I have mentioned earlier the role and contribution of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. This address will be incomplete without a special mention of 'Swarajists' like S. Satyamurti, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Pandit Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Srinivasa Sastry etc. These leaders disagreed with the Congress policy of non-cooperation with the Government on the matter of entry into the Council. They believed that work within the legislatures could be an equally effective instrument for furthering the nationalist cause. It could highlight the deficiencies of alien rule and at the same time; demonstrate to the British our ability to master the nuances of the parliamentary system.

37. S. Satyamurti, a lawyer and outstanding orator, entered the Madras Legislative Council in 1923 and his fame as a legislator spread all over the country. He excelled himself in the question hour and became a master of the art of interpellation. He was known as the 'terror of the question hour'. His brilliant and effective speeches earned him the name Trumpet Voice. Shri Satyamurti was member of the Central Legislative Assembly from 1935 to 1939 where his success as a legislator led Gandhiji to remark that if there had been ten Satyamurtis in our legislatures, the British would have quit long ago.

38. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru broke openly with the Congress after the ascent of Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated non-violent civil disobedience against British rule. Sir Sapru was opposed by those who considered the legislatures to be unrepresentative "rubber stamps" for the Viceroy. However, many Congress politicians respected Sir Sapru as an eminent jurist. His ties with the British made him valuable as a mediator and Sir Sapru mediated between Gandhi and the Viceroy Lord Irwin, helping to forge the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Sir Sapru also mediated between Gandhi, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the British over the issue of separate electorates which was settled by the Poona Pact. Sir Sapru was chosen as the representative of Indian Liberals at the Round Table Conferences of 1931-1933. His last prominent role was as one of the main lawyers engaged to defend captured soldiers of the Indian National Army.

39. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das as leader of the Swarajya Party in Bengal Council assisted by H.S. Suhrawardy, KiranSankar Roy, Tulsi Goswami etc. shook the foundation of the British rule with his oratory and parliamentary skill. At the same time, Pandit Motilal Nehru as leader of the Swarajya Party in Central Council laid the basic foundation of constitutional government in India. Both Motilal and Chittaranjan were able to keep the Muslims with the Swarajya Party to project a united India.

40. The 1919 Act was followed by the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935 which introduced federal features and provincial autonomy in the system and also made provisions for the distribution of legislative powers between the Centre and the provinces. The Government of India Act, 1935 which, among others, envisaged a 'federation of all-India', consisting of the British provinces and the Indian states willing to join it. Till the Round Table Conference of 1930, India was a completely unitary state and whatever powers the Provinces had were given to them by the Centre. That is, the Provinces were only agents of the Centre.

41. The 1935 Act for the first time provided for a federal system which would consist of not only the Governors' Provinces of British India but also the Chief Commissioners' provinces and the princely states. It finally sought to break up the unitary system under which British India had hitherto been administered. The principle of the constitution of 1919 had been decentralization rather than federation. Under the new Act the Provinces were for the first time recognized in law as separate entities, exercising executive and legislative powers in their own field, in their own right, free in normal circumstances from Central control, in that field. However, even after the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935, the constitution of the Central Government in India, by and large, remained what it was under the Act of 1919. The federal part of the 1935 Act never came into operation.

42. The Constituent Assembly, the first representative body of the people of India, commenced its momentous task on 9 December 1946. The members of the Constituent Assembly were chosen through indirect election by the members of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 enacted by the British Parliament declared the Constituent Assembly to be a fully sovereign body and the Central Legislative Assembly and the Council of States ceased to exist from 14 August 1947. With the dawn of our Independence on the midnight of 14-15 August 1947, the Constituent Assembly assumed full powers and took over as the Legislative Assembly of Independent India. The two functions of the Constituent Assembly, that is Constitution-making and Legislation, were clearly separated and the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) commenced functioning from 17 November 1947.

43. The Constituent Assembly, with Dr. Rajendra Prasad as its President and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, held intensive deliberations in the Central Hall of Parliament House for a long period of 2 years, 11 months and 17 days spread over eleven Sessions and gave an outstanding parchment, an ideal for a resurgent India. The members of the Constituent Assembly chose to adopt the Parliamentary form of Government as it was more suited and adaptable to the context of India. In choosing this form of government the makers of our Constitution preferred responsibility over stability. This was reiterated by Dr. Ambedkar in his speech to the Constituent Assembly, ***“The Daily assessment of responsibility which is not available under the American system is it is felt far more effective than the periodic assessment and far more necessary in a country like India.”*** (Unquote)

44. A reading of the Constituent Assembly Debates lets one arrive at the conclusion that the key factors that led to the adoption of the parliamentary system of government in India were – representation of diverse interest groups and the familiarity of the Indian polity with the working of the British system of government. As explained by Shri Mahavir Tyagi in the Constituent Assembly, ***“The British parliamentary system is successful not only because it is a parliamentary system but because there is a perpetual flexibility in the Constitution which is all unwritten. Therefore they can readily adapt their Constitution to the changing circumstances that may arise along with changes both in time and space.”*** (Unquote) He rightly stated that our democracy is an improvement on both the Parliamentary democracy of England and the Republican democracy of America, and is a mixture of both.

45. The reason behind establishing political democracy in the Constitution was to prohibit the perpetual dictatorship of any particular body of people. The Constitution also lays down ideals before those who would be forming the Government explained in the words of Dr. B R Ambedkar, ***“Our Constitution is a piece of mechanism that lays down what is called parliamentary democracy. By parliamentary democracy we mean 'one man, one vote'. We also mean that every Government shall be on the anvil, both in its daily affairs and also at the end of a certain period when the voters and the electorate will be given an opportunity to assess the work done by the Government.”*** (Unquote) Another reason that drove our Constitution makers to adopt this form of governance was to prevent a conflict between the Legislature and the Executive. They envisioned a cohesive organic system that worked together in harmony for the people of India.

46. India is a diverse nation consisting of various groups from different classes, castes, religions, and cultures; holding varying opinions. It is this very reason that drove our Constitution makers to adopt a form of Representative Parliamentary Democracy to ensure that no voice is subdued. The Parliament stands for the will and aspirations of the people. These 'wills' and 'aspirations' are concretized through the medium of discussion and deliberation on the platform of the Parliament. However, over the years I have noticed, with grave concern, a decline in the culture of this very debate that keeps the spirit of Democracy alive. Even as it remains our best bet for the future, the Parliamentary system is faced with grave challenges.

Challenges to Parliamentary Democracy of India:

47. The parliament of India is supposed to be the fountain-head of governance in our country. The executive inherent in Parliament itself is subservient to the collective institution of Parliament. I have said it time and again and I repeat that the function of the Parliament is to make laws, debate, deliberate and decide on policies. Thereafter, it is the duty of Parliament to hold the Executive accountable for the execution of those decisions. All executive decisions prospectively or in retrospect are subject to scrutiny by the Parliament. However, a very unfortunate trend of undermining the very purpose of Parliament has evolved during the past decade or so.

48. Resorting to disruption, as an established Parliamentary practice and defining it as a constructive deliberative method has led to Parliamentary paralysis. This has affected the institution to such an extent that the very institution of Parliament is increasingly becoming irrelevant. Time that should be spent on debating issues that affect the people of India is lost to din, filibuster and drama. Both the Houses of Parliament are more often than not, adjourned for days altogether.

49. From an average of 127 days for Lok Sabha and 93 days for Rajya Sabha in the 1950s, the number of sittings of both the Houses has reduced to an average of about 75 days now. Even on these days, most of the time is lost in pointless partisanship and acrimonious blame-game between the treasury and opposition benches. There is an absolute lack of interest in issues of national importance. What apparently guides the agenda of both the Houses of Parliament is one-upmanship on divisive malicious allegations and counter allegations. The fact that Governments and Opposition are organically inseparable and symbiotic has been lost. This has given rise to a situation where issues that should be discussed in the Houses are taken up for discussion by social groups and individuals with vested interests.

50. In addition to this, the rise in identity based politics during the last three decades has diluted the very representative aspect of the Parliament. An electorate divided on caste and community lines throws up a polarised mandate. This is ultimately reflected in the functioning of the Parliament which rather than pursuing a national agenda ends up pursuing sectarian interests.
51. The Parliament of India is also the ultimate custodian of public finance. However, due to the reasons enumerated above, lakhs of crores of rupees are spent without proper Parliamentary scrutiny. This is happening despite the fact that not a single rupee can be spent out of the Consolidated Fund of India, without prior approval of the Parliament.
52. The process of auditing of expenditure through the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has also increasingly become ineffective because only a limited number of cases are either referred to it or accepted by it. In this regard, to my mind, it will be of immense help if the department related standing committees are involved in the task of auditing.

Friends,

53. As of today, the standing committees are mandated with: (i) scrutinising demands for grants and expenditure proposed in the Budget without any actual change, (ii) scrutinising of bills related to their Departments/Ministries, and (iii) Examining the Annual Report of the related Department/Ministry. We should provide them with a fourth mandate which entails scrutinising the audit reports not accepted by the Public Accounts Committee. This could be done without diluting the mandated role and responsibilities of the PAC. In fact, a suggestion to this effect was made during Prime Minister Vajpayee's tenure, where each of the Departmental Standing Committee could be entrusted to examine and scrutinize the post Budget expenditure proposals. We have, to a very large extent, institutionalised the committee system in the Parliament. If they are made more effective, they will be able to deliver much work that is mandated to the Parliament as a whole. For this to happen, mutual respect and understanding between the Government and the Opposition is the essential prerequisite.

54. Another challenge facing our Parliamentary system is a deliberate attempt by groups and individuals, who cannot otherwise get elected, to influence governance by discrediting the 788 members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. This indeed is a trend that needs to be arrested lest it leads to anarchy and oligarchic control of the state apparatus. Ironically, the task of establishing their credibility as a public representative lies with the members themselves. They will have to rise up to this challenge by proving their critics wrong.

55. Apart from the aforementioned, I would like to draw attention of all concerned towards some other shortcomings that have crept in over time in our Parliamentary system.

- i) Disproportionately large size of the electorate vis-à-vis the number of public representatives. The last enhancement of seats in Lok Sabha took place in 1977, almost half a century ago, on the basis of 1971 census, according to which the entire population of the country was 55 crores. Thereafter, there has been an embargo on increasing the number of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies till the year 2026. This has resulted in the fact that the number of voters per Lok Sabha Constituency as per the 2011 census has risen to more than 16 lakh. In the last general election of 2014, more than 83 crore voters were enrolled and were eligible for voting for 543 members of the Lok Sabha.

- ii) Adequate representation of women in Parliament and the Assemblies has emerged as a major area of concern. An appropriate mechanism to ensure this should be worked out and necessary amendments should be brought about in the Constitution.

- iii) During elections, the Election Commission of India puts an embargo on the sanctioning and implementation of developmental projects, leading to near estoppel of day to day administration. In a country of India's size and magnitude, where apart from the Parliament, there are 29 State Assemblies and 2 Union Territories with elected assemblies, almost throughout the year one or the other election takes place. In this regard, there is a thought of holding Assembly and Parliamentary Elections simultaneously. However, it is possible only by amending the Constitution and with political consensus. There are many flaws that will need to be adequately addressed if the pre 1967 electoral arrangements of simultaneous elections to Parliament and Assemblies have to be effected.

This may address this problem to some extent. Another alternate could be to amend the model code of conduct appropriately and ensure that no developmental work is stopped simply because of the fact that elections are taking place. Ideally, it may be confined only to the elections to Lok Sabha which takes place all over the country and should be for a period of 3-4 weeks when actual Election process starts with the filing on nomination papers and ends with the casting of votes. It need not be applicable to election to the Assemblies of the States and Union Territories

56. Towards the end Friends, after this rather long insight into the evolution, rolling out and shortcomings of the Parliamentary system in India, I would like to emphasize that despite challenges and obstacles, it has served the country well. Indeed, it will not be an overstatement to say that the Parliamentary System was and remains the best course of Governance and Administration for India in all its diverse and pluralistic splendour. Time and again any attempts at tampering with it have proved to be futile because of its inherently democratic strengths. The system, while on one hand ensured that our representative ethos was consistently upheld, on the other hand it proved to be the vehicle of unprecedented socio-economic transformation.

Thank You

Jai Hind