



Parliamentary Disruption

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This article is based on **More days is a solution for disruption of Parliament** which was published in The Indian Express on 03/08/2021. It talks about the issues of frequent disruptions in the Parliament and suggests solutions.

Disruption is replacing discussion as the foundation of our legislative functioning. The passionate debate is taking place everywhere other than in Parliament.

Moreover, the government is considering curtailing the monsoon session of Parliament, if this happens, then all four sessions since last year would have been cut short. The first two because of **Covid-19**, 2021 budget session because of **campaigning in state elections**, and the **ongoing session on account of disruptions**.

Parliament's job is to conduct discussions, but in recent years Parliament proceedings are marred by frequent disruptions.

Parliamentary Disruptions - Data

- A PRS (PRS Legislative Research) report says during the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-14), frequent disruptions of Parliamentary proceedings have resulted in the Lok Sabha working for 61% and Rajya Sabha for 66% of its scheduled time.
- Another PRS report said, the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19) lost 16% of its scheduled time to disruptions, better than the 15th Lok Sabha (37%), but worse than the 14th Lok Sabha (13%).
- The Rajya Sabha lost 36% of its scheduled time. In the 15th and 14th Lok Sabhas, it had lost 32% and 14% of its scheduled time respectively.

Reasons for Disruption

- **Discussion on Matters of Controversy and Public Importance:** It appears that a number of disruptions in Parliament stem from discussions on either **listed topics that are controversial**, or **unlisted matters that are of public importance**.
The matters such as the **Pegasus Project**, **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019** are such examples of causing disruptions.
- **Disruptions May Help Ruling Party Evade Responsibility:** The maximum number of disruptions have been found to take place in the **Question Hour** and the **Zero Hour**.
While these disruptions are largely attributable to the behaviour of members of the opposition, they may also be a consequence of executive action.
- **Lack of Dedicated Time For Unlisted Discussion:** Disruptions also get triggered due to lack of adequate time for raising questions and objections in respect of matters that are not listed for discussion in a particular, or during a particular session.
- **Scarce Resort to Disciplinary Powers:** Another systemic reason why disruptions are not effectively prevented relates to the scarce resort to disciplinary powers by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.
As a result, most members engaging in disorderly conduct are neither deterred nor restrained from engaging in such conduct.
- **Other Reasons:** In 2001, a conference was held in the Central Hall of Parliament to discuss discipline and decorum in legislatures. It identified four reasons behind the disorderly conduct by MPs.
 - Dissatisfaction in MPs because of inadequate time for airing their grievances.
 - An unresponsive attitude of the government and the retaliatory posture of the treasury benches.
 - Political parties not adhering to parliamentary norms and disciplining their members.
 - The absence of prompt action against disrupting MPs under the legislature's rules.
- **Party Politics:** When a contentious issue crops up, the government dithers on debating it, leading to Opposition MPs violating the conduct rules and disrupting the proceedings of Parliament.
Since they have the support of their parties in breaking the rules, the threat of suspension from the House does not deter them.

Issues

- **Infringement of Constitutional Right:** The right to ask questions flows from **Article 75** of Indian constitution which says that the council of ministers shall be collectively responsible to the House of the people and people of the country in general.
Thus, the curtailment of question hour and zero hour undermines the principle of parliamentary oversight over executive.

- **A Hindrance To Representative Democracy:** Parliamentary discussion is a manifestation of a representative kind of democracy in operation, in the sense that representation of the people directly questions the government on matters of governance.

Way Forward

- **Code of Conduct:** To curb disorder in Parliament there is a need for strict enforcement of code of conduct for MPs and MLAs.
 - These ideas are not new. For example, the Lok Sabha has had a simple code of conduct for its MPs since 1952. Newer forms of protest led to the updating of these rules in 1989.
 - The Lok Sabha Speaker should suspend MPs not following such codes and obstructing the Houses' business.
- **Increasing Number of Working Days:** Recommended by the 2001 conference, there should be an increase in the working days of Parliament. It resolved that Parliament should meet for 110 days every year and state legislative assemblies for 90 days.

In the United Kingdom, where Parliament meets over 100 days a year, opposition parties get 20 days on which they decide the agenda for discussion in Parliament. Canada also has a similar concept of opposition days.
- **Democratic Participation:** Not all disruptions in the Parliament are necessarily counter-productive. Thus, the government of the day needs to be more democratic and allow the opposition to put their ideas in free manner.
- **Proposals in Individual Capacity:**
 - In 2019, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson mooted an idea of evolving a '**Parliament Disruption Index**' to monitor disruptions in Parliament and state legislature.
 - In the Lok Sabha, some members proposed **automatic suspension of members who cause disruption** and rush to the Well of the House.
 - But the proposals are still in a nascent stage.
- **Productivity Meter:** The overall productivity of the session also can be studied and disseminated to the public on a weekly basis.

For this, a "Productivity Meter" could be created which would take into consideration the number of hours that were wasted on disruptions and adjournments, and monitor the productivity of the day-to-day working of both Houses of Parliament.

Conclusion

Democracy is judged by the debate it encourages and sustains. More strengthening of the Parliament is the solution to prevent disruption of its proceedings. There should be a deepening of its role as the forum for deliberation on critical national issues.

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Legislative body's role must be strengthened and deepened so that disruption of proceedings ceases to be an option. Comment.