



General Studies-2; Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Parliamentary Discussions

Introduction

- The standards of parliamentary functioning have taken a beating in recent years.
- In terms of the time spent on deliberating legislation, the conduct of fruitful debates, the quality of discussion, and participation of expert opinion through parliamentary committees besides other factors, parliamentary sessions have been found to be wanting.
- Much of this deterioration is a consequence of political parties utilising Parliament **more to showcase political spectacle than to use it as a forum for serious legislative functioning.**

Deteriorating parliamentary productivity in recent times

- **Disruption** has become the norm, with the Opposition seeking to use the **debates as a tool to gain publicity.**
- The ruling party with **absolute majority is passing the bills without any adequate deliberations or discussions.**
- The officials in charge of **maintaining decorum and order meanwhile have chosen to take punitive actions in suspending MPs.**
- **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.**
- **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.

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.
 - The Lok Sabha Speaker should suspend MPs not following such codes and obstructing the Houses' business.
- **Increasing Number of Working Days:**
 - It is recommended 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 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**.
 - 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 monitor the productivity of the day-to-day working of both Houses of Parliament.

Conclusion

- There are enough tools, mechanisms, structures and precedents in India's parliamentary history that can be relied upon by the current set of legislators to bring back useful deliberation.
- Parliamentarians must realise that the bedrock of a functioning democracy is a flourishing legislature.