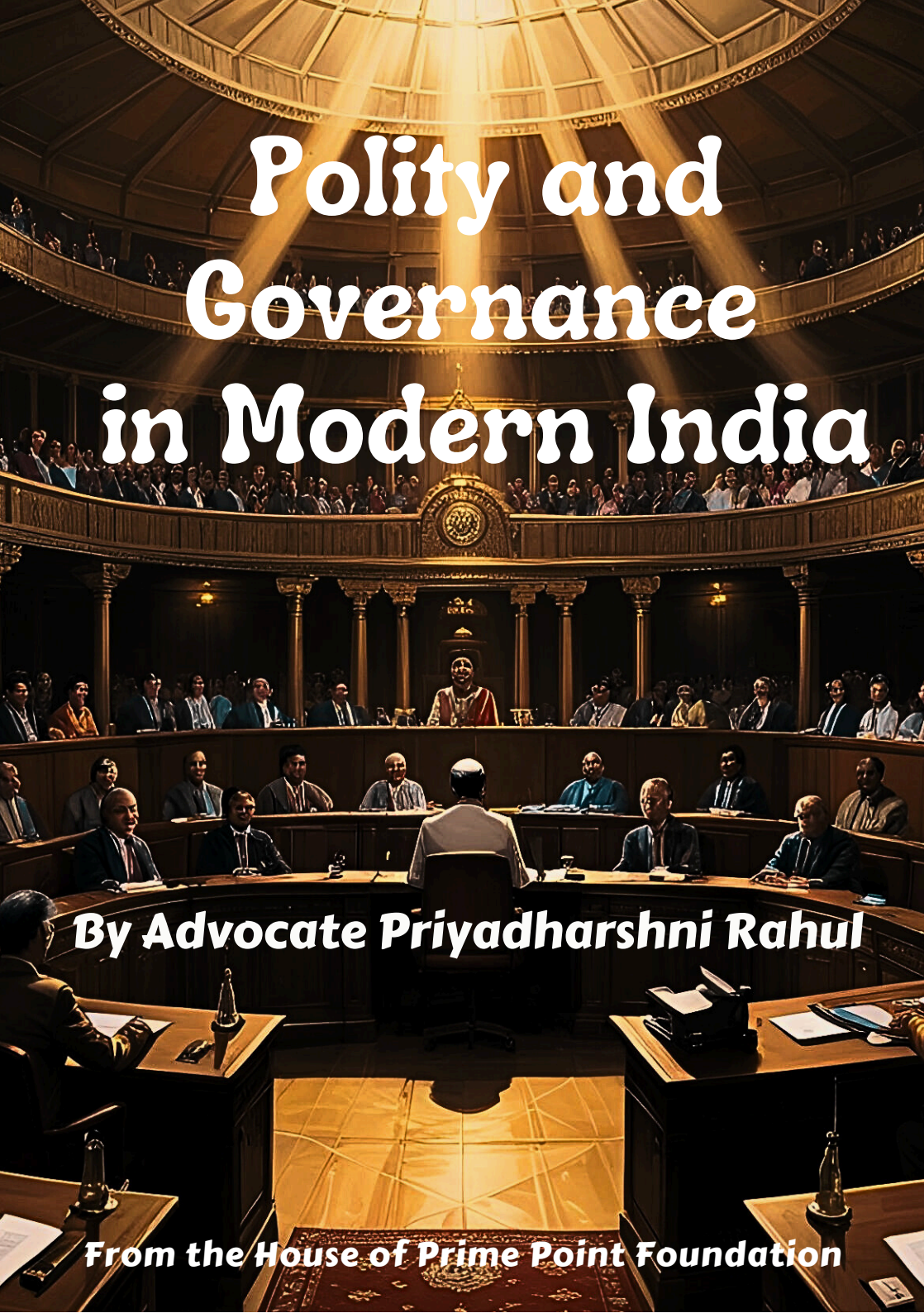
Polity and Governance in Modern India



By Advocate Priyadharshni Rahul

From the House of Prime Point Foundation

सत्यमेव जयते

प्रधान मंत्री
Prime Minister

MESSAGE

It is indeed heartening to learn about the 13th edition of Sansad Ratna Awards being held in New Delhi. Greetings and heartiest congratulations to the distinguished Parliamentarians for winning the awards.

As the Mother of Democracy, India's socio-political systems and practices have an ancient tradition of debate, dialogue, spirit of cooperation, transparency and inclusiveness.

Our democracy, Parliament, Parliamentary systems and procedures and the participation of people's representatives have played a crucial role in furthering the nation's glorious journey.

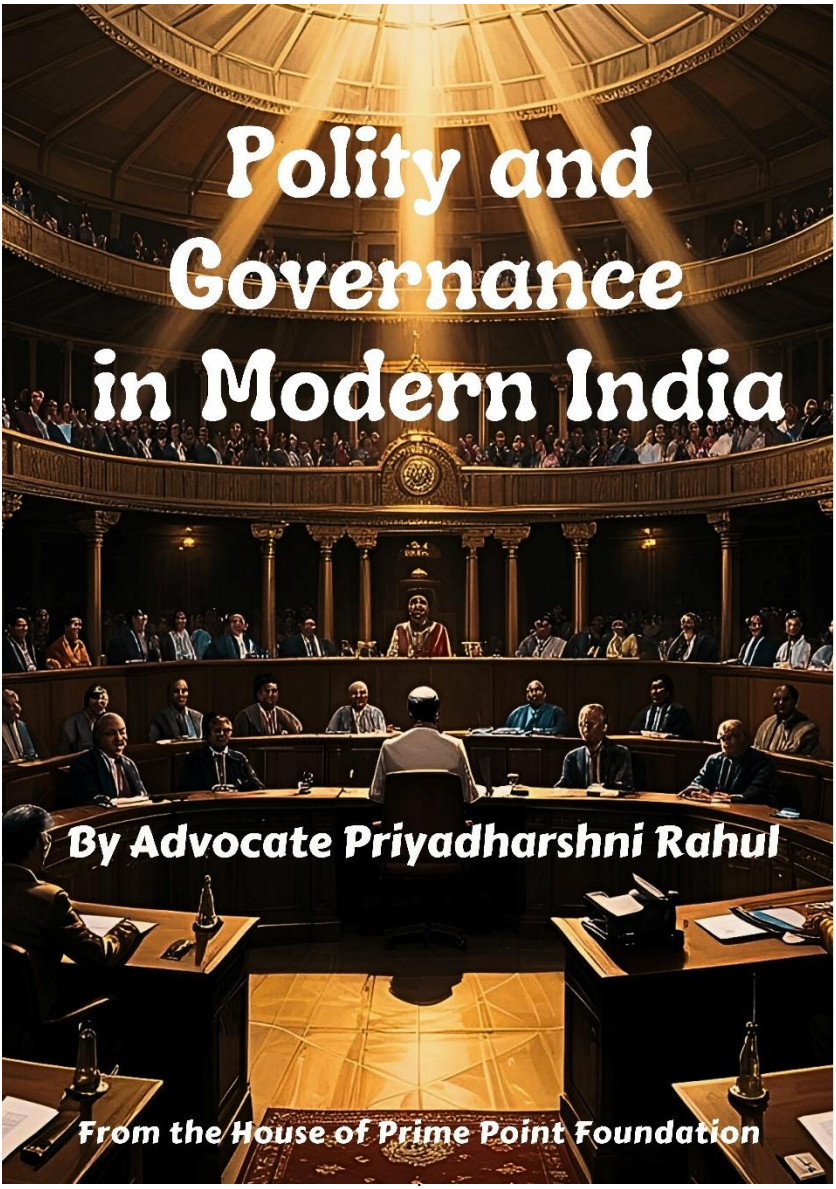
Discussions and debates in Parliament provide a forum to the government and policymakers to fulfil the people's aspirations and take the country's development journey ahead. It is the responsibility of every Parliamentarian to enhance the quality of debates in the House, as also voice the concerns of the people, particularly the poor and marginalised sections of the society.

This year's edition of Sansad Ratna Awards recognise and honour the outstanding contributions of some of our eminent Parliamentarians. I am sure that the Awards will inspire every Member to further enrich Parliamentary proceedings through their vision and wisdom.

Best wishes to everyone associated with Sansad Ratna Awards Committee for their future endeavours.

(Narendra Modi)

New Delhi
फाल्गुन 05, शक संवत् 1944
24th February, 2023


Polity and Governance in Modern India
By Advocate Priyadharshni Rahul
From the House of Prime Point Foundation

Publishing date August 2025

Copyright © With the publishers – any part of this book can be reproduced only with prior information to the publishers and with reference to them.

ISBBN 978-93-91803-83-4

Pages 136

Price Free distribution

Publisher Prime Point Foundation, 14, Vasan Street, T Nagar, Chennai 60005

Printer Adyar Students Xerox P Limited, Triplicane, Chennai 600005

Websites www.primepointfoundation.org
www.corpezine.com
editor@corpezine.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction _____ *5*

Foreword From Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam For The PreSense100 ____6

Authors Profile _____7

Prime Point Foundation: 25 Years of Empowering India's Youth _8

Author's Note _____10

Polity and Governance in Modern India _____ 11

Chapter 1: The Soul of the Republic: India's Constitutional Foundation _____13

Chapter 2: The Machinery of Democracy: Parliament and the Electoral Process _____23

Chapter 3: The Legislative Crucible: How Laws are Made and Scrutinised _____35

Chapter 4: The Unseen Engine Room: The Power of Parliamentary Committees _____47

Chapter 5: The Watchdog's Dilemma: Constructive Opposition vs. Disruptive Politics _____57

Chapter 6: The Federal Tapestry: Centre-State Relations and Regional Governance _____68

Chapter 7: The Guardians of the Law: The Judiciary and Constitutional Norms _____78

Chapter 8: Governance in Practice: From Policy Formulation to Public Response_____88

Chapter 9: A Comparative Performance Review of the Lok Sabha _____99

Chapter 10: The Anatomy of Leadership: Lessons from India's Parliamentarians_____110

Chapter 11: The Path to Institutional Reform _____120

Glossary of Key Terms in Indian Polity and Governance __ 129

Books Authored by Priyadharshni_____ 136

Introduction

Foreword From Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam For The PreSense100

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam
Former President of India

सत्यमेव जयते

10, Rajaji Marg
New Delhi-110011

FOREWORD

I am very happy to know that the PreSense monthly ezine published by Prime Point Foundation is bringing out a book based on some of the unique articles, interviews and events published in its editions so far since from March 2006. The 100 issues of the publication have gone through an eventful journey, focusing on knowledge capture and important knowledge dissemination. I recollect my direct association with PreSense in July 2008, when I launched the cartoon character, 'Prince', created exclusively for PreSense.

I see PreSense continuing in its journey under the mentorship of Prime Point Srinivasan, maintaining its status as a must-read ezine, in the fast moving and evolving world of communication, knowledge and connectivity.

I congratulate the Editorial Team of PreSense for bringing out the 100th Edition as a Collector's Digest.

28th May 2015

A.P.J.Abdul Kalam)

Authors Profile

Priyadharshni Rahul, Supreme Court Advocate with dual degrees in Political Science and Law plus a master's in psychology, Editor of PreSense and President of Prime Point Foundation, Digital Journalists Association of India, and Next Gen Political Leaders. A distinguished achiever from childhood—Duke of Edinburgh Award, President's Award, Prime Minister's Award for leading Tamil Nadu NCC at Republic Day 2005, and India's Youth Ambassador to UK—she has authored six books and received multiple recognitions, including the Dr Abdul Kalam Award of Excellence. She is a motivational speaker and writer. She has authored 8 books, including this book. She has received several awards including Dr Abdul Kalam Internal Award and PRCI's National Award as Young Visionary. India Book of Records (IBR) has also recognised her services and included her in the world records.

She is also the Standing Council for Municipal Corporation of Delhi and New Delhi Municipal Corporation. She is one of the busy advocates in Delhi. She has been assisting many senior Parliamentarians, including Chairmen of Joint Parliamentary Committees on legal matters.

She is currently pursuing a PhD in Indian Parliamentary democracy.

Prime Point Foundation: 25 Years of Empowering India's Youth

Since 1999, Prime Point Foundation has been helping young Indians become better leaders and communicators. Founded by Shri K Srinivasan, a former banker turned digital journalist, this non-profit organisation has grown into one of India's most respected youth development platforms.

The Foundation runs five key programmes that make a real difference:

eMagazine PreSense - Started in 2006 on Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's suggestion, this digital magazine promotes positive journalism. With 221 editions published till July 2025 and recognition from the India Book of Records, it includes the popular cartoon character Prince, which Dr Kalam himself launched in 2008.

Sansad Ratna Awards - Since 2010, these prestigious awards honour India's best-performing MPs and Parliamentary Committees. Dr Kalam inaugurated the first ceremony, and over 15 years, 143 Awards have been presented. The India Book of Records acknowledges this as the largest parliamentary award programme run by civil society.

Next Gen Political Leaders - This programme trains young people who want to enter politics, connecting them with experienced Ministers and MPs through workshops and mentoring sessions.

Education Loan Task Force - Helping students and families understand education loans since 2010. The team has answered over 30,000 questions and helped resolve 5,000 serious complaints with banks.

Digital Journalists Association of India - Training journalists to adapt to the digital age, including AI through workshops and seminars with industry experts.

All programmes are run by passionate volunteers and focus entirely on helping young people succeed. Prime Point Foundation proves that dedicated efforts can create lasting change in Indian democracy and society.

***

Author's Note

As the Editor of PreSense eMagazin, which is been published for 20 years, I've had the privilege of researching the intricate details of Indian polity and governance. This sustained work nurtured a deep passion, transforming a professional duty into a personal quest for understanding. This book is the culmination of that journey.

Polity and Governance in Modern India is my humble attempt to synthesise years of insights into a single, accessible volume. It is written to demystify our complex system for aspiring leaders, students, and every citizen who wishes to actively participate in our nation's democratic life. This being my eighth book, I know such milestones are not reached alone.

I am profoundly grateful to my mentor, Prime Point Srinivasan, for his unwavering guidance, which has been the bedrock of this project. My sincere thanks also go to Ramesh Sundaram for his meticulous editing and encouragement.

It is my earnest hope that this book serves as a useful companion for anyone seeking to understand the magnificent, and often challenging, machinery of Indian democracy.

***

Polity and Governance in Modern India

Thirukkural

முறைசெய்து காப்பாற்றும் மன்னவன் மக்கட்கு
இறையென்று வைக்கப் படும். (Kural 543)

English Translation:

A ruler who delivers impartial justice and protects his people will be considered a god by them.

Chapter 1: The Soul of the Republic: India's Constitutional Foundation

This chapter explores the historic Constituent Assembly debates that shaped India's Constitution, detailing its core principles of Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and the structure of its democratic pillars.

***

In a bustling government office in Mumbai, a young woman named Priya waits anxiously. Her application for a small business loan under a government scheme for entrepreneurs has been repeatedly delayed. Armed with a printout of the scheme's guidelines and a basic understanding of her rights, she confidently approaches the senior officer. She doesn't raise her voice. Instead, she calmly points to the rules, mentions her right to equal opportunity, and speaks of the government's duty to support its citizens. The officer, surprised by her clarity and resolve, re-examines her file. The loan is approved the next day.

Thousands of kilometres away, in a quiet village in Kerala, a group of residents gather. They are protesting the illegal dumping of waste into their local river. Their protest is peaceful, organised, and grounded in a fundamental belief: they have the liberty to voice their concerns and demand justice for their community.

These two seemingly disconnected events—one an individual's quiet assertion of economic rights, the other a community's collective demand for environmental justice—are bound by a common thread. They are powered by a single, foundational document created over seven decades ago: the Constitution of India. This chapter delves into the making of that sacred text, exploring the philosophical vision of its creators and the timeless principles that form the very soul of the Indian Republic.

Forging a Nation's Soul: The Constituent Assembly

The birth of India's Constitution was no simple task. It was a monumental undertaking, born from the crucible of a long freedom struggle and the painful reality of Partition. When the Constituent Assembly first convened on the 9th of December 1946, the task before its 207 participating members was not merely to write a set of laws but to forge a new identity for a nation of staggering diversity . It was a nation of multiple languages, countless faiths, and deeply entrenched social hierarchies.

The Assembly was a microcosm of India itself, featuring some of the most brilliant minds of the era. Under the wise chairmanship of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was elected on the third day, the Assembly embarked on its historic mission. The colossal task of drafting the Constitution was entrusted to a committee chaired by the formidable legal scholar and social reformer, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar . For **two**

years, eleven months, and seventeen days, these visionaries debated, argued, and collaborated, meticulously crafting each article of what would become the world's longest written constitution.

The debates were intense, reflecting the complexities of the nation they sought to unite. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru brought a forward-looking, secular vision, while Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel focused on the practicalities of national integration. The discussions were not always harmonious. For instance, Dr. Ambedkar famously expressed his reservations about granting special status to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370, reportedly telling Sheikh Abdullah, "To give consent to this proposal, would be a treacherous thing against the interests of India and I, as the Law Minister of India, will never do it" . The final article was drafted by N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, demonstrating the Assembly's capacity for compromise even on deeply contentious issues .

Similarly, the inclusion of the word "secular" in the Preamble was debated at length. Dr. Ambedkar argued that the principles of secularism were already embedded in the Fundamental Rights, stating that the state's policies on social and economic matters "must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances" and not be rigidly enshrined in the Constitution itself . Ultimately, the word was not included in the original

document, only to be added later in 1976. These debates underscore a crucial point: the Constitution was not a monolithic document imposed from above, but a product of democratic deliberation, compromise, and a shared vision for a united India.

Finally, on 26th November 1949—a day now celebrated as **Constitution Day**—the Constituent Assembly formally adopted the Constitution. On 24th January 1950, 284 members signed the official, beautifully handwritten copies. Two days later, on 26th January 1950, the Constitution came into full effect, and India was officially declared a Sovereign, Democratic Republic.

The Preamble: A Promise to the People

The Preamble is the heart of the Constitution. In just a few lines, it encapsulates the philosophy, the ideals, and the solemn promise that the Republic makes to its citizens. It is the guiding star that illuminates the path for the nation's governance. The core principles laid out in the Preamble are the bedrock of modern India .

Core Principle	Meaning in the Indian Context
JUSTICE	Not just fairness in courts, but **social** justice to overcome historical inequalities like caste discrimination;

Core Principle	Meaning in the Indian Context
	economic justice to bridge the gap between rich and poor; and **political** justice to ensure every citizen has a voice in governance.
LIBERTY	The freedom of **thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship**. It is the right of every Indian to think freely, speak their mind, and practise their faith without fear, a fundamental principle that underpins our vibrant and often noisy democracy.
EQUALITY	The guarantee of **equality of status and opportunity**. This principle seeks to dismantle traditional hierarchies by making every citizen equal before the law and ensuring that no one is denied opportunities based on their religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

Core Principle	Meaning in the Indian Context
FRATERNITY	Assuring the **dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation**. This is a call for a sense of common brotherhood among all Indians, transcending religious and regional identities to build one, unified nation .

These four principles are not abstract ideals. They are the practical foundation upon which the entire institutional framework of the Indian state is built. They are the promise that fuels the aspirations of millions, from the young entrepreneur in Mumbai to the protesting villagers in Kerala.

The Three Pillars of Indian Democracy

To translate the promise of the Preamble into reality, the Constitution established a robust framework for governance built on three distinct but interconnected pillars. This structure is designed to distribute power, ensure accountability, and protect the rights of the citizens.

1. **The Legislature (The Law-Makers):** This is the Parliament at the national level (comprising the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha) and the State Assemblies at the state level. Its primary function is to debate and

enact laws that govern the country. It is the voice of the people, where elected representatives discuss policies, approve budgets, and hold the government accountable.

2. **The Executive (The Law-Implementers):** This is the Government, headed by the Prime Minister at the national level and Chief Ministers at the state level, along with the entire administrative machinery. Its main responsibility is to implement the laws passed by the Legislature and run the day-to-day administration of the country. It formulates policies and is answerable to the Legislature for its actions.
3. **The Judiciary (The Law-Interpreters):** This is the system of courts, with the Supreme Court at its apex, followed by High Courts and subordinate courts. The Judiciary's role is to interpret the Constitution and the laws, ensure they are applied fairly, and act as the ultimate guardian of the citizens' fundamental rights. It has the power of judicial review, which allows it to strike down any law that it deems unconstitutional.

This tripartite structure ensures that the immense power of the state is not concentrated in a single body.

A Delicate Balance: Separation of Powers

While the Constitution divides power among the three pillars, it does not do so in rigid, watertight compartments. Instead, it creates a sophisticated **system of checks and balances** to ensure that no single branch becomes supreme and that each one remains accountable to the others and, ultimately, to the people of India. This doctrine of separation of powers is the masterstroke of our constitutional architecture.

Consider these real-world examples of checks and balances in action:

- **Judiciary checks Legislature:** If Parliament passes a law that violates the fundamental rights of citizens, the Supreme Court can declare it "unconstitutional and null and void," thereby protecting the people from legislative overreach . The landmark S.R. Bommai case, for instance, curtailed the misuse of President's Rule by the central government, strengthening the federal structure .
- **Legislature checks Executive:** The government cannot spend a single rupee without the approval of Parliament. Through instruments like the **Question Hour**, debates, and no-confidence motions, Members of Parliament constantly scrutinise the government's

actions, ensuring it remains answerable to the people's representatives .

- **Executive checks Judiciary:** The President of India (acting on the advice of the government) appoints the judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts. While this is an executive function, it is balanced by the fact that judges can only be removed through a difficult process of impeachment by Parliament, ensuring their independence.

This intricate dance of power—where each pillar both exercises its authority and is restrained by the others—is what keeps our democracy stable and resilient. For an aspiring leader, understanding this delicate balance is not just an academic exercise; it is essential to governing effectively and ethically within the bounds of the Constitution.

The Enduring Ethos

The Constitution of India is more than just a rulebook for governance. It is a social contract, a charter of values, and a testament to the audacious dream of building a just, liberal, and unified nation out of a deeply divided and wounded society. It is a living document that continues to evolve, but its core ethos—of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity—remains timeless.

From the Panchayat hall to the Parliament, from the smallest village to the bustling metropolis, the spirit of our Constitution lives in the everyday actions of our citizens. It is in the courage of Priya demanding her loan and in the collective voice of the Kerala villagers protecting their river. For every leader who aspires to serve modern India, the first and most sacred duty is to understand, uphold, and champion this constitutional ethos. The soul of the Republic depends on it.

***

Chapter 2: The Machinery of Democracy: Parliament and the Electoral Process

This chapter examines the functioning of India's Parliament, detailing the roles of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and explores the electoral process managed by the Election Commission.

***

The sun is yet to rise over a small village in rural Uttar Pradesh, but a palpable sense of anticipation hangs in the air. A queue has already begun to form outside the local primary school, which for today has been transformed into a polling station. In the line, a farm labourer stands next to a shopkeeper, a young first-time voter chats excitedly with her grandmother, and a teacher discusses the candidates with a retired soldier. They come from different castes, different economic backgrounds, and hold different political views, but today they are united by a single purpose: to cast their vote. An indelible ink mark on their forefinger will soon become a symbol of their power, their voice in the world's largest democracy.

This scene, replicated in over a million polling stations across the length and breadth of India, from the snow-clad mountains of Ladakh to the coastal plains of Tamil Nadu, is the lifeblood of the nation's democracy. It is the moment the sovereign power of the people is exercised, setting in

motion the vast and complex machinery of governance. This chapter delves into the heart of that machinery: the Indian Parliament, the supreme legislative body, and the intricate electoral process that gives it life. For any aspiring leader, understanding this machinery is not just important; it is fundamental to navigating the path of public service.

The Two Houses: India's Bicameral Parliament

The Indian Parliament, housed within the magnificent Sansad Bhavan in New Delhi, is the cornerstone of the country's democratic framework. It is a bicameral legislature, meaning it consists of two houses: the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). This two-house structure was deliberately chosen by the framers of the Constitution to ensure adequate representation for a country of immense diversity and to provide a mechanism for checks and balances within the legislative process itself.

Lok Sabha: The Voice of the People

The Lok Sabha is the lower house of Parliament and represents the direct will of the Indian people. Its members are elected through general elections held every five years, based on the principle of universal adult suffrage. Any Indian citizen above the age of 18 is eligible to vote, making the Lok Sabha a truly representative body. The Constitution provides for a maximum of 552 members, with 543

members currently elected from various constituencies across the country.

The Lok Sabha holds a position of primacy in the Indian parliamentary system, particularly in financial matters. Key functions and powers include:

- **Law-Making:** It is the primary body for introducing and passing legislation. A Bill passed by the Lok Sabha is then sent to the Rajya Sabha for its consideration.
- **Financial Control:** The Lok Sabha has supreme authority over the country's finances. The annual Union Budget can only be presented in the Lok Sabha, and no tax can be levied or expenditure incurred without its approval. Money Bills, which deal exclusively with financial matters, can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha.
- **Executive Accountability:** The Council of Ministers, headed by the Prime Minister, is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha. The government remains in power only as long as it enjoys the confidence of a majority of the members of the Lok Sabha. If a no-confidence motion is passed, the government must resign.

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha presides over its sessions, maintaining order and ensuring that parliamentary procedures are followed. The Lok Sabha is the arena where

the most vigorous political debates take place, reflecting the immediate concerns and aspirations of the electorate.

Rajya Sabha: The Council of States

The Rajya Sabha, or the Council of States, is the upper house of Parliament. Unlike the Lok Sabha, it is a permanent body and is not subject to dissolution. Its members are elected indirectly, primarily by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies. This makes the Rajya Sabha a forum where the interests of the states are represented at the national level.

The Rajya Sabha has a maximum strength of 250 members, of whom 238 are elected by the states and union territories, and 12 are nominated by the President of India. These nominated members are eminent personalities from fields such as literature, science, art, and social service, bringing a wealth of expertise and experience to the legislative process.

The Rajya Sabha plays a crucial, albeit different, role compared to the Lok Sabha:

- **Legislative Review:** It acts as a revising chamber, scrutinising Bills passed by the Lok Sabha. This provides an opportunity for a second look at legislation, preventing hasty or poorly conceived laws.

- **Representation of States:** As its name suggests, it is the primary platform for states to voice their concerns and protect their interests within the federal structure.
- **Permanent House:** Since it is not subject to dissolution, the Rajya Sabha provides continuity to the parliamentary process, even when the Lok Sabha is dissolved.

The Vice-President of India is the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, presiding over its proceedings. While the Rajya Sabha cannot vote on Money Bills, its role in deliberating on all other legislation is vital for maintaining the quality and balance of India's laws.

Feature	Lok Sabha (House of the People)	Rajya Sabha (Council of States)
Representation	Represents the people of India directly.	Represents the states and union territories.
Election	Members are directly elected by the people.	Members are indirectly elected by state legislatures.

Term	Five years (subject to dissolution).	Permanent body; one-third of members retire every two years.
Strength	Maximum 552 members (currently 543).	Maximum 250 members (currently 245).
Presiding Officer	The Speaker.	The Vice-President of India (ex-officio Chairman).
Financial Power	Supreme power in financial matters; Money Bills can only be introduced here.	Limited financial power; cannot reject or amend Money Bills.
Accountability	The government is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.	The government is not directly accountable to the Rajya Sabha.

The Great Indian Election: A Mammoth Exercise

If Parliament is the heart of Indian democracy, then the electoral process is the circulatory system that keeps it

alive. Conducting elections in a country with over **900 million eligible voters** is a logistical feat of staggering proportions, rightfully earning it the title of the world's biggest democratic exercise. This monumental task is managed by a single, independent constitutional body: the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**.

The Guardian of Free and Fair Elections: The Election Commission

Established under Article 324 of the Constitution, the ECI is endowed with the authority, direction, and control to conduct elections to Parliament, state legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President. Its independence is the bedrock of India's electoral integrity.

The ECI's responsibilities are vast and encompass every aspect of the electoral process:

- **Preparing Electoral Rolls:** The ECI is responsible for preparing and periodically revising the electoral rolls, ensuring that every eligible citizen is registered to vote.
- **Conducting Polls:** From announcing the election schedule to declaring the results, the ECI manages the entire process. In the 2019 General Elections, this involved setting up over **1.035 million polling stations** and deploying nearly **3.96 million Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)**.

- **Enforcing the Model Code of Conduct (MCC):** Once elections are announced, the MCC comes into force. This is a set of guidelines agreed upon by all political parties to ensure a level playing field. The ECI is responsible for its strict enforcement, and violations can lead to severe penalties.
- **Recognising Political Parties:** The ECI grants recognition to national and state parties and allots them election symbols, a crucial aspect in a country with varying levels of literacy.

From Ballot Boxes to EVMs: The Evolution of Voting

India's electoral journey has been one of continuous innovation. The first General Elections, held between 1951 and 1952, were a remarkable achievement. With a largely illiterate electorate, the ECI, under the leadership of the first Chief Election Commissioner, Sukumar Sen, devised a system of using separate ballot boxes for each candidate, each marked with a distinct symbol.

Over the decades, the process has evolved. The introduction of **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)** in 1998 was a landmark reform, making the voting process faster, more efficient, and less prone to malpractices like booth capturing and ballot stuffing. The EVMs are designed and manufactured by two public sector undertakings,

Bharat Electronics Ltd. and Electronic Corporation of India, ensuring their security and integrity.

In recent years, the ECI has added another layer of transparency with the **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)** system. Attached to the EVM, the VVPAT machine prints a slip with the symbol of the party the person voted for, which is visible to the voter for a few seconds before being deposited in a sealed box. This allows for a physical audit of the votes cast, further strengthening public trust in the electoral process.

Challenges to the Democratic Machinery

Despite its remarkable successes, India's electoral process is not without its challenges. The very vibrancy of its democracy also gives rise to issues that threaten the integrity of the system. For aspiring leaders, confronting these challenges is as important as understanding the mechanics of the process.

The Influence of Money and Muscle Power

One of the most persistent and corrosive challenges is the role of money and muscle power in elections. The expenditure limits for candidates are often flouted, with vast sums of unaccounted money being used to influence voters through cash distribution, liquor, and other inducements. The ECI has been proactive in tackling this menace, with seizures of cash and goods running into thousands of

crores during election periods. In the 2019 elections, the ECI seized over **₹3,166 crores** worth of cash and goods intended for distribution to voters.

The criminalisation of politics is another grave concern. Candidates with criminal records often use their influence and resources to win elections, undermining the rule of law. While the Supreme Court has mandated that candidates declare their criminal antecedents, more robust electoral reforms are needed to prevent individuals with serious criminal charges from contesting elections.

The Double-Edged Sword of Social Media

The 2019 General Elections highlighted the growing influence of social media as a powerful campaign tool. With over 360 million social media users in India, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become crucial for political communication. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's effective use of these tools in 2014 and 2019 demonstrated their potential to reach a vast audience.

However, this has also opened the door to new challenges. The spread of **fake news, misinformation, and malinformation** poses a significant threat to the integrity of the electoral process. Malicious content, often designed to polarise communities or malign opponents, can spread rapidly through platforms like WhatsApp, influencing voter perceptions based on falsehoods. The ECI is grappling with

how to regulate this digital space without infringing on the freedom of speech, a delicate balancing act in the modern era.

The Need for Electoral Reforms

The challenges of money power, criminalisation, and misinformation all point to an urgent need for comprehensive electoral reforms. For years, experts and former election commissioners have advocated for changes, including:

- **State Funding of Elections:** To curb the influence of black money, proposals for the state to fund the election expenses of political parties have been discussed.
- **Strengthening the ECI:** Giving the ECI more power to de-register political parties and disqualify candidates for serious violations of the MCC.
- **Simultaneous Elections:** The idea of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies has been proposed to reduce the massive expenditure and disruption caused by frequent polls. However, this remains a contentious issue, with concerns about its impact on the federal structure.

These reforms require political will and consensus among all parties. For the next of leaders, championing these reforms will be a crucial test of their commitment to

strengthening the very machinery of democracy they seek to be a part of.

Conclusion: The Responsibility of Representation

The Indian Parliament and the electoral process together form an intricate and powerful machinery. It is a system designed to translate the diverse voices of 1.4 billion people into coherent governance. It is a testament to the vision of India's founders and the resilience of its democratic spirit.

However, this machinery is not self-sustaining. It requires constant vigilance, participation, and a commitment to reform from both its citizens and its leaders. For those who aspire to enter the halls of Parliament, the journey begins not with a grand speech but with a deep and humble understanding of this machinery. It requires a respect for the institutions, an appreciation for the electoral process, and an unwavering commitment to the constitutional values that bind the nation together. The indelible ink on a voter's finger is a mark of faith; the seat in Parliament is a position of trust. The ultimate duty of a leader is to honour both.

***

Chapter 3: The Legislative Crucible: How Laws are Made and Scrutinised

This chapter details the legislative process in India, from a Bill's conception to its enactment, and explores the parliamentary tools MPs use for scrutiny and accountability.

***

In a small, bustling town in Maharashtra, a group of women running a cooperative find themselves tangled in bureaucratic red tape. A new regulation, passed as part of a larger financial Bill, has inadvertently made it harder for small-scale enterprises like theirs to access credit. Frustrated but not defeated, they reach out to their local Member of Parliament (MP). During the next session of Parliament, the MP raises their issue, not in a fiery speech, but through a pointed, specific query during Question Hour. She asks the Finance Minister to clarify the regulation's impact on micro-enterprises. The Minister, now on record, promises to review the matter. A few months later, a clarificatory circular is issued, easing the burden on the cooperative.

This small victory, achieved without protests or headlines, is a perfect illustration of the legislative process at work. It shows that the making and shaping of laws is not a distant, abstract exercise confined to New Delhi. It is a dynamic process, a crucible where the needs of the people are

forged into the laws of the land. This chapter will demystify that process, tracing the journey of an idea as it becomes an Act of Parliament and exploring the vital "Parliamentarian's Toolkit"—the procedural instruments that transform an MP from a mere representative into an effective agent of governance and accountability.

The Birth of a Law: From Idea to Bill

Every law begins as an idea. These ideas spring from the diverse and complex realities of Indian society. A demand for a new law might arise from a public campaign, a recommendation from an expert committee, a judgment from the Supreme Court, or a policy decision taken by the ruling government. Once the government decides to legislate on a particular subject, the journey of a Bill begins.

1. **Drafting the Bill:** The concerned administrative ministry (for instance, the Ministry of Health for a healthcare Bill) prepares a preliminary draft. This draft outlines the objectives of the proposed law and its main provisions. This draft is then sent to the Ministry of Law and Justice, which gives it a formal legal structure and refines the language to ensure it is precise and constitutionally sound. This is a meticulous process, as every word and clause will be subject to intense scrutiny.

2. **Cabinet Approval:** The final draft Bill is then presented to the Union Cabinet. The Cabinet, comprising the Prime Minister and senior ministers, discusses the Bill's political, economic, and social implications. Only after the Cabinet approves the Bill can it be introduced in Parliament. This step ensures that the proposed legislation has the collective backing of the government.

Once the Cabinet gives its green light, the Bill is ready to enter the legislative crucible of Parliament.

The Parliamentary Gauntlet: Three Readings of a Bill

For a Bill to become an Act, it must be passed by both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. This process is structured around three distinct stages, known as "readings," a practice inherited from the British parliamentary system. This is not a mere formality; it is a rigorous process of debate, scrutiny, and refinement.

The First Reading: A Formal Introduction

The First Reading marks the formal entry of the Bill into the legislative process. The minister in charge of the Bill moves a motion seeking "leave to introduce the Bill" in the House. At this stage, there is no debate on the substance of the Bill. The motion is rarely opposed, though a member can object on the grounds that the Bill falls outside the legislative competence of Parliament.

Once the House grants leave, the minister introduces the Bill by reading its title. The Bill is then published in the Official Gazette of India. This formal introduction and publication constitute the First Reading. The Bill has now become the property of the House, ready for the next, more intense phase of scrutiny.

The Second Reading: The Heart of the Matter

The Second Reading is the most critical stage in a Bill's life. It is here that the Bill is examined in minute detail, and its principles and provisions are thoroughly debated. This stage itself is divided into two parts.

Stage 1: General Discussion and Referral

The House discusses the Bill's underlying principles. At this point, four courses of action are possible:

1. The Bill may be taken into consideration by the House immediately.
2. It may be referred to a **Select Committee** of the House where it was introduced.
3. It may be referred to a **Joint Committee** of both Houses.
4. It may be circulated to the public to elicit opinions.

Referring a Bill to a committee is a vital part of the legislative process, a topic we will explore in depth in the next chapter. The committee examines the Bill clause by clause, invites

expert opinions, and suggests amendments. This detailed scrutiny ensures that the final law is well-considered and robust.

Stage 2: Clause-by-Clause Scrutiny

This is the legislative equivalent of a fine-tooth comb. The House takes up the Bill clause by clause, as introduced or as reported by the committee. Each clause is debated, and members can propose amendments. Every proposed amendment is discussed and voted upon. If an amendment is accepted by a majority, it becomes part of the Bill. This is an exhaustive process, often taking several hours or even days for complex legislation. It is during this stage that the Bill is moulded into its final shape, with every detail scrutinised by the people's representatives.

The Third Reading: The Final Seal

After the clause-by-clause consideration is complete, the minister moves that "the Bill be passed." The debate at this stage is confined to arguments for or against the Bill as a whole. Detailed discussion of clauses is not permitted, as that has already been done. Only formal, verbal, or consequential amendments can be moved.

The House then votes on the motion. If a simple majority of the members present and voting support the Bill, it is considered passed by that House. It is then authenticated

by the presiding officer and transmitted to the other House for its consideration.

The Bill in the Other House

The Bill goes through the same three-reading process in the second House. The second House has several options:

- It can pass the Bill in the form sent by the first House. In this case, the Bill is sent to the President for assent.
- It can pass the Bill with amendments. The Bill then goes back to the first House. If the first House agrees to the amendments, the Bill is passed. If it disagrees, a **deadlock** ensues.
- It can reject the Bill altogether.
- It can take no action, and if more than six months pass, it is considered a deadlock.

To resolve a deadlock between the two Houses, the Constitution provides for a **Joint Sitting**, summoned by the President. At a joint sitting, members of both Houses sit and vote together. As the Lok Sabha has more than twice the members of the Rajya Sabha, it usually has an advantage in a joint sitting. If the Bill is passed by a majority in the joint sitting, it is considered passed by both Houses.

The President's Assent: The Final Step

Once a Bill has been passed by both Houses, it is presented to the President of India for assent. The President has three options under Article 111 of the Constitution:

1. **Give Assent:** The President can give assent, and the Bill immediately becomes an Act, a law of the land.
2. **Withhold Assent:** The President can withhold assent, effectively vetoing the Bill.
3. **Return for Reconsideration:** The President can return the Bill to Parliament for reconsideration. However, if Parliament passes the Bill again, with or without amendments, and sends it back to the President, the President is constitutionally bound to give assent.

This entire journey, from a simple idea to a Presidential signature, is the formal machinery of law-making. But the life of Parliament is not just about passing Bills. A significant part of its work involves holding the government of the day accountable, and for this, every parliamentarian has a powerful toolkit at their disposal.

The Parliamentarian's Toolkit: Instruments of Accountability

An effective MP is not just a passive participant in the legislative process but an active watchdog of the executive. The rules of parliamentary procedure provide several

instruments that allow MPs to scrutinise government actions, question policies, and bring the concerns of their constituents to the national stage. Mastering these tools is what separates a truly effective legislator from a mere party representative.

The Power of Questions

The first hour of every parliamentary sitting is the **Question Hour**, and it is one of the most potent tools for ensuring executive accountability. During this hour, MPs can ask questions to ministers about any aspect of their administrative responsibility.

- **Starred Questions:** These require an oral answer from the minister on the floor of the House. This is a critical opportunity for MPs to ask supplementary questions, effectively "grilling" the minister and demanding immediate clarification. As seen in the 17th Lok Sabha, which had a high productivity rate for Question Hour, this tool can be incredibly effective when used well.
- **Unstarred Questions:** These require a written answer from the minister, which is then laid on the table of the House. While they do not allow for supplementary questions, they are an essential way to obtain detailed information and data from the government.

- **Short Notice Questions:** These are for matters of urgent public importance and can be asked with a notice shorter than the usual ten days.

The sheer volume of questions asked is a testament to their importance. In the 16th Lok Sabha, for instance, a staggering **1,42,158 questions** were raised by members, demonstrating how actively this tool is used to keep the government on its toes.

The Arena of Debate

Debates are the soul of a parliamentary democracy. They are the platforms where policies are dissected, government performance is evaluated, and national issues are discussed from multiple perspectives. Parliament offers several avenues for debate:

- **Zero Hour:** This is an Indian parliamentary innovation. It is the time immediately following the Question Hour, where members can raise matters of urgent public importance without any prior notice. It is often the most lively and at times chaotic part of the parliamentary day, but it serves as a crucial outlet for raising immediate concerns.
- **Short Duration Discussion (Rule 193):** This allows for a discussion on a matter of urgent public importance without a formal motion or voting. It is a way to draw the

government's attention to a critical issue and have a structured debate on it.

- **Calling Attention Motion:** An MP can use this to call the attention of a minister to a matter of urgent public importance and request an authoritative statement from the minister.
- **Debates on Bills and Budgets:** The most extensive debates occur during the discussion of legislation and the annual budget. These are opportunities for members to delve deep into policy and financial matters, offering critiques and suggestions. The 16th Lok Sabha saw a significant number of debates, with **21,196 initiated debates**, showing a healthy level of engagement from its members.

Private Members' Bills: The Voice of the Individual MP

Not all legislation is initiated by the government. Any MP who is not a minister is a "Private Member," and they have the right to introduce their own Bills. These are known as **Private Members' Bills (PMBs)**.

While very few PMBs actually become law (only 14 have been passed since independence), their importance cannot be understated. PMBs serve several crucial functions:

- They allow individual MPs to highlight legislative gaps and bring important social and economic issues to the forefront.

- They can pressure the government to take action on a particular issue. Often, the government may later introduce its own Bill based on the ideas presented in a PMB.
- They provide a space for innovative and forward-thinking legislative ideas that may not be on the government's immediate agenda.

The 16th Lok Sabha saw a remarkable surge in the use of this tool, with **1,116 PMBs** being introduced, a significant increase from previous Lok Sabhas. This indicates a growing desire among individual MPs to play a more proactive role in the legislative process.

Conclusion: The Responsibility of the Legislator

The journey of a law from a nascent idea to a formal Act is a long and arduous one, deliberately designed to be thorough and deliberative. It is a process that demands diligence, expertise, and a deep commitment to the public good from every participant. For an aspiring political leader, understanding the rules of this legislative crucible is non-negotiable.

However, true legislative effectiveness goes beyond just knowing the procedures. It lies in the skillful and responsible use of the parliamentarian's toolkit. It is about asking the right questions, participating in informed debates, and using every available instrument to hold the government

accountable. The data from recent Lok Sabhas clearly shows that active and engaged MPs, regardless of their party affiliation, can make a significant impact.

The legislative process is, in essence, a reflection of the nation's democratic health. When it functions well, with rigorous scrutiny and constructive debate, it produces laws that are just, effective, and in the national interest. When it is subverted by disruption or disinterest, the entire nation suffers. The ultimate responsibility of every legislator is to ensure that this crucible remains a place of thoughtful creation, not a theatre of pointless conflict.

***

Chapter 4: The Unseen Engine Room: The Power of Parliamentary Committees

This chapter illuminates the crucial role of Parliamentary Committees as the "mini-Parliaments" where laws are scrutinised, budgets analysed, and policies debated in detail, away from the public glare.

***

The televised proceedings of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha often present a picture of high drama. Passionate speeches, heated exchanges, and the occasional disruption capture the nation's attention. This is the public theatre of democracy, where political battles are fought and grand policy statements are made. But behind this visible stage lies a network of smaller, quieter rooms where the real, painstaking work of governance takes place. These are the committee rooms of Parliament—the unseen engine room of Indian democracy.

If the main chamber is the showroom where the final product is unveiled, the committee room is the workshop where it is meticulously assembled, tested, and refined. It is here that laws are taken apart, clause by clause; budgets are scrutinised, line by line; and complex national issues are examined with a level of detail and expertise that is impossible in the vast, formal setting of the House. This chapter pulls back the curtain on these vital institutions,

revealing how they function and why their role is indispensable for good governance. For any leader who wishes to make a substantive, rather than a merely symbolic, contribution, mastering the world of parliamentary committees is essential.

What are Parliamentary Committees? The 'Mini-Parliaments'

Parliamentary Committees are small bodies of Members of Parliament (MPs), appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker/Chairman, to examine specific issues in depth. Comprising MPs from different political parties, roughly in proportion to their strength in Parliament, these committees function as "mini-Parliaments". This cross-party composition is their greatest strength, fostering a spirit of collaboration that is often absent in the more adversarial environment of the main chamber.

There are several types of committees, but the most significant for day-to-day governance are the **Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs)**. Established in 1993, there are 24 DRSCs, each assigned to oversee a specific cluster of government ministries (e.g., Committee on Finance, Committee on Defence, Committee on Agriculture). These committees are the primary mechanism through which Parliament exercises its oversight function throughout the year.

The Core Functions: Scrutiny, Scrutiny, and More Scrutiny

The work of a Standing Committee is threefold, and each function is critical to ensuring an accountable and effective government.

1. **Scrutiny of Legislation:** When a Bill is introduced in Parliament, the presiding officer can refer it to the relevant Standing Committee for detailed examination. This is where the real legislative heavy lifting occurs. Away from the pressure of party whips and the glare of television cameras, committee members can:

- **Conduct Clause-by-Clause Analysis:** Unlike in the main House, where time is limited, the committee can spend weeks or months dissecting every clause of a Bill, debating its implications, and identifying potential flaws.
- **Summon Officials and Experts:** The committee has the power to summon senior government officials to explain the rationale behind the Bill's provisions. Crucially, it can also invite outside experts, academics, industry representatives, and civil society organisations to provide testimony. This infuses the law-making process with valuable external expertise and diverse perspectives.

- **Seek Public Opinion:** Committees can invite written memoranda from the public and stakeholders, making the legislative process more participatory and democratic.
- **Recommend Amendments:** Based on its deliberations, the committee submits a report to Parliament with its findings and recommendations, often suggesting specific amendments to strengthen the Bill. While these recommendations are not binding, they carry significant weight and are often accepted by the government.

2. Scrutiny of the Budget (Demands for Grants): The Union Budget involves allocating tens of lakhs of crores of rupees across various ministries. While the Lok Sabha debates the overall budget, it is physically impossible for it to scrutinise the detailed spending plans of every single ministry. This vital task falls to the Standing Committees.

After the Finance Minister presents the budget, the Houses are adjourned for a recess. During this period, the DRSCs examine the detailed expenditure proposals, known as "Demands for Grants," for their respective ministries. They analyse how funds were spent in the previous year and assess whether the proposed allocations for the coming year are justified. They can question ministry officials on their spending priorities and performance. Their reports help inform the subsequent debate on the budget in the

House and serve as a crucial tool for financial accountability.

3. Examination of Policy Issues: Beyond specific Bills and budgets, committees can examine broad policy issues of national importance. For example, the Committee on Information Technology might undertake a detailed study on data privacy and surveillance, or the Committee on Labour might investigate the conditions of gig economy workers. These inquiries result in comprehensive reports with long-term policy recommendations for the government. This proactive, investigative role allows Parliament to engage with complex, emerging challenges in a structured and informed manner.

The Power of Bipartisanship: Working Beyond Party Lines

One of the most remarkable features of the committee system is its ability to foster a non-partisan and collegial atmosphere. The proceedings of committees are held in private, away from the media. This confidentiality allows members to express their views freely, engage in frank discussions, and deliberate on issues based on merit rather than political posturing.

An MP from a ruling party might agree with a critique offered by an opposition member, and an opposition member might appreciate the government's perspective when presented

with detailed evidence by officials. The focus shifts from scoring political points to finding workable solutions. Decisions in committees are most often unanimous, arrived at through consensus rather than a vote. This collaborative spirit is the true strength of the "unseen engine room," allowing for a level of constructive engagement that is vital for a healthy democracy.

A Disturbing Decline: The Bypassing of the Committee System

Given their immense value, it is a matter of grave concern that the practice of referring Bills to Standing Committees has seen a sharp and steady decline over the past decade. The data paints a stark and worrying picture of this trend.

Lok Sabha Term	Government	Percentage of Bills Referred to Committees
14th Lok Sabha	UPA-I (2004-2009)	60%
15th Lok Sabha	UPA-II (2009-2014)	71%
16th Lok Sabha	NDA-I (2014-2019)	27%

17th Lok Sabha	NDA-II (2019-2024)	16%

This dramatic fall—from 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha to just 16% in the 17th—represents a significant weakening of the parliamentary scrutiny process. When the government uses its majority to push Bills through Parliament without referring them to committees, it bypasses a crucial stage of deliberation and consultation. This trend has profound and damaging consequences for the quality of India's laws and the health of its democracy.

The High Cost of Haste: Consequences of Bypassing Committees

1. Poorly Drafted and Ineffective Laws: When Bills are not subjected to the rigorous clause-by-clause scrutiny of a committee, they are far more likely to contain ambiguities, technical flaws, and unintended consequences. Hasty legislation often proves to be weak legislation. As the former Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, observed, the lack of quality debate and scrutiny in Parliament was creating a "sorry state of affairs," as it leaves "many aspects of laws unclear". This ambiguity leads to confusion in implementation and, inevitably, to litigation.

2. Increased Burden on the Judiciary: When laws are poorly drafted, the burden of interpreting them falls on the courts. The judiciary is forced to step in to clarify legislative

intent and fill the gaps left by inadequate parliamentary scrutiny. This not only overburdens the already strained judicial system but also blurs the lines of separation of powers, as judges are compelled to enter the domain of policy-making.

3. Lack of Stakeholder Consultation: Bypassing committees means shutting the door on valuable input from experts and the very people who will be affected by the law. A committee provides a formal platform for stakeholders—be they farmers, doctors, industry leaders, or activists—to present their views. Ignoring this process leads to laws that are disconnected from ground realities.

4. A Case Study in Failure: The Farm Laws The most potent example of the perils of bypassing the committee system is the contentious episode of the three Farm Laws. In 2020, these sweeping agricultural reforms were passed by Parliament without being referred to a Standing Committee. The government argued that the laws were in the farmers' best interests, but the lack of prior consultation created a massive trust deficit.

What followed was a year-long, nationwide protest by farmers who felt their concerns had been ignored. The situation escalated, leading to significant social and political turmoil. Had the Bills been referred to the Committee on Agriculture, it would have provided a crucial forum for farmers' unions and agricultural experts to voice their

apprehensions. The committee process could have facilitated a dialogue, identified areas of disagreement, and potentially forged a consensus or a more acceptable compromise. Instead, the hasty passage of the laws led to a complete breakdown of trust, culminating in the government's eventual decision to repeal all three laws in November 2021. The entire episode stands as a powerful lesson on the democratic and political costs of circumventing the established process of parliamentary scrutiny.

Conclusion: The Imperative of Revitalisation

The parliamentary committee system is not a bureaucratic hurdle to be bypassed in the name of efficiency. It is the very heart of deliberative democracy. It is the mechanism that ensures laws are not just passed, but are well-crafted, well-informed, and command the broad support of the people they are meant to serve.

The declining trend of referring Bills to committees is one of the most serious institutional challenges facing Indian democracy today. It weakens Parliament's ability to hold the executive accountable, diminishes the quality of legislation, and alienates citizens from the law-making process.

For the next generation of political leaders, the path to effective governance lies not in weakening these institutions, but in strengthening them. It requires a

commitment to embracing scrutiny, valuing consultation, and respecting the deliberative process.

The real work of a parliamentarian is often done not in the glare of the television cameras, but in the quiet, diligent, and collaborative environment of the committee room. Revitalising this unseen engine is not just a matter of procedural reform; it is essential for restoring the substance and soul of India's parliamentary democracy.

***

Chapter 5: The Watchdog's Dilemma: Constructive Opposition vs. Disruptive Politics

This chapter explores the vital role of the opposition in a democracy, contrasting the power of constructive critique with the high cost of parliamentary disruption, and offers a framework for effective opposition.

***

In 1991, India stood on the brink of economic collapse. The treasury was nearly empty, and the nation's gold reserves had been pledged to stave off a sovereign default. The new minority government, led by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, embarked on a series of radical economic reforms that would open up the country to the world. It was a moment of profound uncertainty and national crisis. In the charged atmosphere of Parliament, the opposition could have easily chosen the path of obstruction, bringing the fragile government to its knees for political gain.

Instead, something remarkable happened. The leader of the opposition, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and his colleague L.K. Advani, despite their deep ideological differences with the ruling party, chose to put the nation first. They engaged in rigorous debate, questioned the government's methods, but ultimately provided the crucial support needed to pass the reforms. When Pakistan raised allegations against India at the United Nations, Prime Minister Rao, in an

unprecedented gesture of trust, deputed Vajpayee to represent the nation. This act sent a powerful message to the world: on matters of national interest, India's political class stood united.

This historical moment stands in stark contrast to the scenes that have become all too common in recent parliamentary sessions: members storming the well of the House, shouting slogans, tearing papers, and forcing repeated adjournments. This chapter delves into the heart of this contrast—the watchdog's dilemma. It explores the profound difference between a constructive opposition that acts as a guardian of democracy and a disruptive one that paralyses it. For an aspiring leader, understanding this distinction is the key to becoming a force that strengthens, rather than undermines, the republic.

The Constitutional Mandate: The Opposition as a Pillar of Democracy

In the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy that India adopted, the opposition is not an adversary to be vanquished but an integral and indispensable part of the system. It is often referred to as the "government-in-waiting," a constant reminder to the ruling party that it holds power in trust and can be replaced. The role of the opposition is not merely to oppose for the sake of opposition, but to perform a set of critical functions that ensure good governance:

- **Accountability and Scrutiny:** The primary duty of the opposition is to hold the government accountable for its actions and policies. Through parliamentary debates, questions, and committee work, it scrutinises every legislative and financial proposal, forcing the government to justify its decisions to the people.
- **Representation of Alternative Viewpoints:** In a diverse nation like India, the government's policies may not reflect the views of all sections of society. The opposition gives voice to these alternative perspectives, ensuring that minority opinions and regional concerns are heard in the national discourse.
- **Protecting Constitutionalism:** The opposition acts as a watchdog against any potential overreach by the executive. It is the first line of defence against any attempt to undermine constitutional norms, individual liberties, or the rights of states in our federal system.
- **Public Education:** Through its critiques and debates, the opposition plays a vital role in educating the public about the functioning of the government and the implications of its policies, thereby fostering an informed and engaged citizenry.

An effective opposition, therefore, is not a sign of a weak government but a hallmark of a healthy and mature

democracy. It provides the necessary friction that prevents the machinery of state from running amok.

The Art of Constructive Opposition

Constructive opposition is an art form that requires diligence, research, and a deep commitment to parliamentary procedure. It is about fighting political battles with facts, not just fury, with well-reasoned arguments, not just loud slogans.

The Power of Informed Debate

The most powerful tool of a constructive opposition is informed debate. When an opposition member stands up in Parliament armed with data, historical context, and a well-researched critique of a government policy, they command the attention of the House and the nation. Their arguments force the government to engage on substance, leading to better-informed policymaking. The effectiveness of leaders like Vajpayee or, in an earlier era, socialists like Madhu Limaye and Ram Manohar Lohia, stemmed from their mastery of this art. They could dismantle a government's argument with logic and evidence, compelling either a change in policy or, at the very least, a public justification.

Utilising the Parliamentarian's Toolkit

As detailed in the previous chapter, Parliament provides a formidable toolkit for accountability. A constructive opposition uses these tools with precision:

- **Question Hour:** It is often said that the Question Hour belongs to the opposition. It is their prime opportunity to put ministers on the spot and extract information and commitments on behalf of the common person.
- **Committee Work:** In the collaborative environment of Standing Committees, opposition members can work with their ruling party counterparts to refine legislation and scrutinise budgets, making a substantive contribution away from the public eye.
- **Private Members' Bills:** This tool allows opposition MPs to introduce their own legislation, highlighting policy gaps and proposing alternative solutions, thereby shaping the national agenda.

When these tools are used effectively, the opposition can achieve significant victories for the people without bringing the House to a standstill.

The Turn to Disruption: When Noise Replaces Nuance

In recent years, however, the art of constructive opposition has often been overshadowed by the tactic of disruption. The belief that shouting down the government is more effective than debating it has taken hold, leading to a precipitous decline in parliamentary productivity.

The article "Mother India@75 Sorrows Over Parliament Disruption" published in PreSense, provides a painful snapshot of this reality. During the Monsoon Session of

2021, the Lok Sabha worked for only **21%** of its scheduled time, and the Rajya Sabha for a mere **29%**. The Winter Session of 2023 was equally dismal, with the suspension of 146 MPs following continuous disruptions. This is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a worrying trend. The 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) is set to become the shortest full-term Lok Sabha since 1952, having functioned for only 274 sittings, with 11 of its 15 sessions being adjourned ahead of schedule.

The High Cost of a Paralysed Parliament

The consequences of this "disruption-as-policy" approach are severe and multifaceted, inflicting deep wounds on the body politic.

1. The Financial Cost:

Running the Indian Parliament is an expensive affair, funded entirely by the taxpayer. While exact figures vary, estimates have often placed the cost at over ₹2.5 lakhs per minute. When the House is adjourned, this money is simply wasted. The repeated disruptions over the past decade represent a colossal loss of public funds that could have been used for development, healthcare, or education. It is a direct financial betrayal of the citizens who fund the very institution being paralysed.

2. The Democratic Cost:

The democratic cost is even higher. When Parliament does not function, the government is not held accountable.

- **Legislation Without Scrutiny:** In the chaos of disruptions, crucial Bills are often passed within minutes, without any debate or discussion. The article "Do Political Parties Follow Democratic Norms in the Parliament?" notes a shocking instance where the Rajya Sabha passed **13 Bills in just 7.5 hours**. This legislative haste, a direct result of opposition boycotts and disruptions, leads to poorly drafted laws that are detrimental to the national interest.
- **Bypassing Committees:** As discussed in the previous chapter, disruption provides the government with an excuse to bypass the vital committee system, further weakening the scrutiny of laws.
- **Silencing Voices:** Disruption is a blunt instrument that silences everyone. Sincere MPs who come prepared to raise the pressing issues of their constituents—be it water scarcity, unemployment, or inadequate healthcare—are denied the opportunity to speak. The voice of the common person is drowned out in the din.

3. The Governance Cost:

A paralysed Parliament leads to policy paralysis. Important legislative reforms are delayed, budgets are passed without

scrutiny (in the 2023 Budget Session, the entire budget was passed without any discussion), and pressing national issues are left unaddressed. This governance deficit has a real and tangible impact on the lives of millions of citizens.

The Watchdog's Dilemma: Justifiable Protest or Irresponsible Politics?

Why has disruption become such a prevalent tactic? Opposition parties often argue that they are forced to resort to such measures when a government with a brute majority becomes arrogant and unresponsive. They claim that in the face of the "tyranny of the majority," disrupting the House is the only way to draw national attention to critical issues like corruption scandals or attacks on democratic institutions.

This is the watchdog's dilemma. Is there a point where protest must escalate to disruption to be heard? While the right to protest is fundamental to democracy, the line between legitimate protest and irresponsible obstructionism is a fine one.

The core responsibility of the opposition is to ensure that Parliament functions, not to prevent it from functioning. By bringing the House to a standstill, the opposition inadvertently helps the government escape accountability. A government is never more comfortable than when Parliament is not in session or is mired in chaos, as it frees them from having to answer tough questions or defend their

policies in debate. As the article "The Ruckus in Parliament: A National Shame" points out, the ruling party, which itself used disruption as a tool when in opposition, now seems content with the chaos as it deflects attention from pressing national issues.

A Framework for an Effective Opposition

For aspiring leaders, the path forward lies in reclaiming the art of constructive opposition. The goal should not be to create the most noise, but to make the most impact. Here is a framework for being an opposition voice that strengthens democracy:

1. **Build Expertise (The Shadow Cabinet Model):** An effective opposition must do its homework. It should function like a "shadow cabinet," with designated members developing deep expertise on specific ministries. When they speak on defence, finance, or health, they should do so with authority and credibility, backed by thorough research.
2. **Master the Rules of the Game:** Parliamentary procedures are not obstacles; they are weapons. A well-drafted question, a strategically timed motion, or a powerful intervention in a committee can be far more effective than shouting slogans in the well of the House.
3. **Offer Alternatives, Not Just Obstruction:** It is not enough to criticise a government policy; a credible

opposition must also offer a viable alternative. This shows that it is not just interested in scoring political points but is a serious contender for power, a true "government-in-waiting."

4. **Choose Your Battles Wisely:** Not every issue warrants the same level of protest. An effective opposition knows how to prioritise, focusing its energy on matters of significant national importance rather than dissipating it on trivialities.
5. **Use Disruption as the Last Resort:** The "nuclear option" of disrupting the House should be reserved for the rarest of rare occasions, such as when there is a fundamental assault on the Constitution itself. Its overuse has devalued its impact and normalised parliamentary paralysis.

Conclusion: The Choice Before Every Leader

In the end, the choice between constructive and disruptive politics is a choice about the kind of democracy we want. A democracy built on debate, deliberation, and mutual respect, or one defined by chaos, cynicism, and institutional decay.

The legacy of leaders like Vajpayee reminds us that it is possible to be a fierce critic of the government while remaining a steadfast patriot and a committed parliamentarian. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wisely stated,

"Democracy means tolerance, not merely of those who agree with us, but of those who do not agree with us".

For the next generation of leaders who will sit on the opposition benches, the challenge is clear. They must resist the easy temptation of disruption and embrace the harder, more rewarding path of constructive engagement. They must understand that the true measure of their strength lies not in their ability to stop Parliament from working, but in their capacity to make it work better for the people of India. The health of our democracy depends on their choice.

***

Chapter 6: The Federal Tapestry: Centre-State Relations and Regional Governance

This chapter examines India's federal structure, exploring the constitutional division of powers, the contentious role of the Governor, and key friction points like resource allocation and the use of central agencies.

***

During the devastating floods that swept through Assam a few years ago, a coordinated rescue effort swung into action. On the ground, the State Disaster Response Force, comprising local police and officials who knew the terrain intimately, worked tirelessly to evacuate stranded villagers. At the same time, helicopters from the Indian Air Force, dispatched by the central government in New Delhi, dropped food packets and airlifted the critically injured. The Prime Minister announced a significant financial aid package from the National Disaster Response Fund, while the Chief Minister of Assam managed the relief camps and coordinated the efforts of district administrations.

This seamless, if frantic, collaboration between two distinct levels of government—the Centre in New Delhi and the state in Dispur—is a perfect snapshot of Indian federalism in action. It is a system designed to govern a nation of continental proportions, balancing the need for a strong, unified country with the imperative of empowering diverse

regional identities. However, this relationship is not always so harmonious. Often, it is a site of intense political friction, financial disputes, and constitutional debates.

This chapter unravels the intricate threads of India's federal tapestry. It explores the constitutional design that divides power between the Union and the states, examines the key institutions and flashpoints that define their relationship, and provides aspiring leaders with a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance required to govern this vast and varied nation.

The Constitutional Blueprint: A Union of States

The framers of the Indian Constitution were acutely aware of the dual challenge they faced: forging a strong, united nation from the fragments of British India and the princely states, while also preserving the distinct linguistic and cultural identities of its regions. Their solution was to create what is often described as a **"quasi-federal"** system, or a **"Union of States"** with a strong central government. Unlike a true federation where states come together to form a union (like the United States), in India, the Constitution created both the Union and the states, with a clear tilt of power towards the Centre.

The cornerstone of this federal structure is the **Seventh Schedule** of the Constitution, which meticulously divides

legislative powers between the Union and the states through three lists.

The Three Lists: A Clear Division of Labour

List	Who Can Legislate?	Key Subjects	Real-World Example
List I: The Union List	Only the Parliament of India.	Defence, Foreign Affairs, Railways, Banking, Currency, Atomic Energy, Census.	The decision to purchase Rafale fighter jets or to conduct a national census is taken exclusively by the central government.
List II: The State List	Only the State Legislatures.	Public Order, Police, Public Health, Agriculture, Local Government (Panchayat	The recruitment of state police officers or the implementation of a state-specific agricultural subsidy scheme is the

		s, Municipalities).	responsibility of the state government.
List III: The Concurrent List	Both Parliament and State Legislatures	Criminal Law, Marriage and Divorce, Education, Forests, Trade Unions, Electricity.	Both the Centre and the states can make laws on education. If there is a conflict between a central law and a state law, the central law generally prevails.

This division of powers is the bedrock of our federal system, designed to create a clear demarcation of responsibilities. However, the reality of governance is far more complex, and the relationship between the Centre and the states is often a dynamic interplay of cooperation and conflict.

The Governor: Constitutional Head or Central Agent?

At the heart of the Centre-State relationship lies the office of the Governor. Appointed by the President on the advice of the central government, the Governor is the constitutional

head of the state. In theory, their role is analogous to that of the President at the national level—to act on the aid and advice of the state's Council of Ministers. However, the Governor also serves as a vital link between the Centre and the state, and this dual role has been a source of persistent controversy.

Opposition-ruled states have frequently accused the central government of using the Governor's office as a political tool to undermine and destabilise elected state governments. Several key areas have become flashpoints:

1. Appointment of the Chief Minister: After an election, the Governor invites the leader of the party or coalition with a majority to form the government. However, in cases of a fractured mandate with no clear winner, the Governor's discretion becomes crucial and, at times, controversial.

2. Recommending President's Rule (Article 356): The Governor has the power to recommend the imposition of President's Rule if they believe the state government cannot be carried on in accordance with the Constitution. This provision, meant to be used sparingly in cases of a genuine breakdown of constitutional machinery, has often been misused by central governments to dismiss opposition-ruled state governments. The landmark **S.R. Bommai vs. Union of India (1994)** judgment by the Supreme Court significantly curtailed this power by ruling

that the President's proclamation is subject to judicial review, thereby strengthening the federal structure.

3. Reserving Bills for the President's Consideration: The Governor can reserve a Bill passed by the state legislature for the consideration of the President. While this is intended as a constitutional safeguard, it has sometimes been used to delay or veto legislation passed by state governments that may be at odds with the Centre's political agenda.

For a leader, the office of the Governor represents a critical constitutional nexus. Navigating the relationship with the Governor requires a firm understanding of constitutional propriety and the ability to manage a delicate political balance.

Flashpoints in the Federal Tapestry

Beyond the role of the Governor, the relationship between the Centre and the states is marked by several recurring points of friction. These disputes often revolve around the three critical resources of governance: finances, administrative power, and policy control.

1. The Battle for Resources: Financial Relations

Money is the fuel of governance, and disputes over the distribution of financial resources are the most common and contentious issue in Centre-State relations.

The GST Impasse: The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 was hailed as a landmark reform in cooperative federalism. It created a single national market and established the **GST Council**, a body where the Union Finance Minister and the finance ministers of all states collectively decide on tax rates. However, the implementation has been fraught with challenges.

When GST was introduced, states gave up most of their taxation powers. In return, the Centre promised to compensate them for any revenue loss for the first five years. This **GST compensation** became a major lifeline for states. However, in recent years, delays and disputes over the payment of this compensation have led to a serious breakdown of trust. States argue that the Centre is not fulfilling its constitutional obligation, leaving them with massive revenue shortfalls and crippling their ability to fund essential services. This ongoing tussle over GST has become a symbol of the deep-seated financial friction in the federal system.

2. The Administrative Tussle: The Use of Central Agencies

Another major area of conflict is the role of central investigative agencies like the **Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)** and the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)**. While these agencies have a national mandate to investigate corruption and serious crimes, opposition-ruled

states frequently allege that they are used by the central government as instruments of political vendetta.

The timing of investigations and arrests of opposition leaders often coincides with elections or moments of political crisis, leading to accusations that the agencies are not acting independently but at the behest of the ruling party at the Centre. This perception, whether real or imagined, erodes the credibility of these vital institutions and vitiates the political atmosphere, turning administrative action into a federal flashpoint.

3. The Policy Divide: Central Schemes and State Autonomy

While the Constitution lays out a division of powers, the Centre has increasingly used its financial leverage to influence policy in areas that are constitutionally in the domain of the states, such as health and agriculture. This is often done through **Centrally Sponsored Schemes**, where the Centre provides a significant portion of the funding but also sets the guidelines for implementation.

While these schemes can bring much-needed resources to the states, they can also lead to friction. States often complain that the "one-size-fits-all" approach of these schemes does not account for local needs and priorities, thereby encroaching on their policy-making autonomy. The now-repealed Farm Laws were another example of this

policy friction. Although agriculture is a state subject, the Centre passed laws that fundamentally altered the agricultural marketing landscape, leading to massive protests and accusations that the Centre was undermining the federal structure.

Weaving Cooperation into the Tapestry

Despite these areas of conflict, the Indian federal system also has robust mechanisms for cooperation. The very survival and progress of the nation depend on the Centre and the states working together.

The Inter-State Council: This is a constitutional body set up to facilitate coordination between the states and the Centre. It provides a forum for discussing issues of common interest and resolving disputes.

NITI Aayog: The successor to the Planning Commission, the NITI Aayog was created to foster a spirit of **cooperative federalism**. It acts as a think tank for the government and provides a platform for states to share best practices and participate in the national policy-making process.

Zonal Councils: These are statutory bodies that group states into five zones to promote cooperation on economic and social matters.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite its challenges, was a powerful example of cooperative federalism. The Centre, states, and local governments had

to work in close coordination to manage lockdowns, scale up healthcare infrastructure, and implement the world's largest vaccination drive. It was a stark reminder that in times of national crisis, cooperation is not a choice but a necessity.

Conclusion: The Art of Federal Governance

Governing India is a continuous exercise in managing its incredible diversity. The federal tapestry, with its intricate patterns of shared and divided powers, is the constitutional framework for this management. It is a system that is neither purely federal nor purely unitary, but a unique blend designed for the specific needs of India. The relationship between the Centre and the states will always be dynamic and, at times, contentious. This is not a sign of weakness but a natural feature of a vibrant, multi-party democracy where different political forces govern at different levels.

For an aspiring leader, the key lesson is that effective governance in India requires more than just a strong mandate; it requires a deep appreciation for the federal spirit. It demands a commitment to consultation, a respect for regional aspirations, and the political wisdom to know when to lead from the front and when to build consensus. Navigating this complex and often challenging federal terrain is the true art of modern Indian statesmanship. The unity and integrity of the nation depend on mastering it.

Chapter 7: The Guardians of the Law: The Judiciary and Constitutional Norms

This chapter focuses on the judiciary as the guardian of the Constitution, exploring its structure, the power of judicial review, landmark judgments, and its role in checking legislative and executive power.

***

In the early 1990s, the state of Karnataka was in political turmoil. The elected government, led by Chief Minister S.R. Bommai, was dismissed by the central government, which imposed President's Rule under the controversial Article 356 of the Constitution. The reason cited was a breakdown of constitutional machinery, a claim Bommai vehemently denied. To him and many others, it was a blatant misuse of central power to topple a state government led by an opposition party. The case, a seemingly political dispute, travelled through the courts, eventually landing before a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India.

What followed was not a political resolution, but a constitutional one. In its landmark 1994 judgment in *S.R. Bommai vs. Union of India*, the Supreme Court laid down strict guidelines for the imposition of President's Rule, declaring that the power of the Centre was not absolute and was subject to judicial scrutiny. The Court asserted that federalism and secularism were part of the "basic structure"

of the Constitution and could not be violated. It was a powerful assertion of judicial authority, a moment when the judiciary stood as a firm bulwark against executive overreach, forever changing the dynamics of Centre-State relations in India.

This case is more than just a legal precedent; it is a profound illustration of the role of the Indian judiciary. It is the third pillar of our democracy, acting not just as an interpreter of laws, but as the ultimate guardian of the Constitution and the fundamental rights of its citizens. This chapter explores the architecture of this vital institution, its immense powers, and the critical role it plays in preserving the delicate checks and balances that define the Indian Republic.

The Architecture of Justice: The Indian Judicial System

The Indian judicial system is a unified and integrated structure, with the Supreme Court at its apex. This hierarchy ensures that the law is applied consistently across the country and provides avenues for appeal, ensuring that justice is not only done but is seen to be done.

1. The Supreme Court of India:

Located in New Delhi, the Supreme Court is the highest court of the land and the final court of appeal. Its decisions are binding on all other courts in India. It consists of the Chief Justice of India and a number of other judges

appointed by the President. The Supreme Court's jurisdiction is vast:

- **Original Jurisdiction:** It can hear certain cases directly, such as disputes between the central government and one or more states, or between two or more states.
- **Appellate Jurisdiction:** It is the highest court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases from the High Courts.
- **Advisory Jurisdiction:** The President of India can seek the opinion of the Supreme Court on any question of law or fact of public importance.
- **Guardian of Fundamental Rights:** Any citizen whose fundamental rights have been violated can move the Supreme Court directly for their enforcement.

2. The High Courts:

Each state in India has a High Court, which is the highest judicial authority in that state. High Courts have the power of supervision over all subordinate courts within their jurisdiction. They primarily hear appeals from lower courts but can also hear certain cases directly, including those involving the enforcement of fundamental rights.

3. Subordinate Courts:

Below the High Courts lies a network of subordinate courts, which handle the bulk of the judicial workload at the district

and local levels. These are generally divided into civil courts, which deal with disputes over property and contracts, and criminal courts, which try criminal cases. This structure ensures that justice is accessible to citizens at the grassroots level.

This integrated, hierarchical system is the framework within which the guardians of the law operate, ensuring that the constitutional promise of justice reaches every corner of the nation.

The Ultimate Safeguard: The Power of Judicial Review

The most significant power wielded by the Indian judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court and the High Courts, is the **power of judicial review**. This is the power to examine the constitutionality of any law passed by the Legislature or any action taken by the Executive. If the court finds that a law or an executive action violates any provision of the Constitution, it can declare it unconstitutional and therefore null and void.

This power is not explicitly mentioned in a single article but is derived from several provisions of the Constitution, including those guaranteeing fundamental rights. Judicial review serves as the ultimate safeguard for the rights of citizens and ensures that no branch of government can act in a manner that is contrary to the supreme law of the land—the Constitution. It is this power that transforms the judiciary

from a mere interpreter of laws into a powerful check on both legislative and executive authority.

Landmark Judgments: The Court as a Shaper of the Polity

Over the decades, the Supreme Court has delivered a series of landmark judgments that have not only interpreted the Constitution but have also profoundly shaped the course of Indian polity. These judgments are essential reading for any aspiring leader, as they illuminate the core constitutional values that govern the nation.

1. Kesavananda Bharati vs. State of Kerala (1973): The "Basic Structure" Doctrine

This is arguably the most important judgment in the history of the Indian Supreme Court. The case dealt with a fundamental question: is Parliament's power to amend the Constitution unlimited? The government argued that it was. However, in a historic 7-6 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that while Parliament has the power to amend the Constitution, it cannot alter its "basic structure". The Court did not provide an exhaustive list of what constitutes the basic structure, but it identified elements like the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and the federal character of the nation as being fundamental. This doctrine established a crucial limit on the power of the Legislature, ensuring that the core identity and

democratic ideals of the Constitution could never be destroyed by a temporary parliamentary majority.

2. Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India (1978): Expanding the Right to Life

This case revolutionised the understanding of fundamental rights in India. The Court ruled that the "procedure established by law" for depriving a person of their right to life and personal liberty (Article 21) must be "right, just and fair" and not arbitrary or oppressive. This judgment expanded the meaning of the "right to life" to include the right to live with human dignity, encompassing a wide range of rights such as the right to a clean environment, the right to livelihood, and the right to privacy.

3. Shah Bano Begum vs. Mohd. Ahmed Khan (1985): Personal Law and Secularism

This case brought the conflict between religious personal laws and the constitutional guarantee of equality to the forefront. The Supreme Court ruled that a Muslim woman, Shah Bano, was entitled to maintenance from her divorced husband under secular Indian law. The judgment was seen as a progressive step towards gender justice. However, it sparked a massive controversy, with some Muslim leaders arguing that it was an interference in their personal law. The Rajiv Gandhi government, under political pressure, passed a law in Parliament to overturn the judgment, an act that

was widely criticised for appeasing fundamentalists and setting back the cause of women's rights. This case remains a crucial reference point in the ongoing debate about a Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

Contemporary Issues: The Judiciary in the Public Eye

The judiciary does not operate in a vacuum. It is constantly engaged with the most pressing and often contentious issues of the day. For a modern leader, understanding these contemporary debates is crucial to grasping the judiciary's evolving role.

1. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Debate:

Article 44 of the Constitution directs the state to "endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India". The goal is to replace the diverse personal laws based on religion with a single set of secular laws governing matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption for all citizens.

Proponents, including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar during the Constituent Assembly debates, have argued that a UCC is essential for promoting national integration and gender equality, as many personal laws are seen as discriminatory towards women. However, the issue is politically sensitive. Opponents, particularly from minority communities, fear that a UCC would be an imposition of majority culture and would infringe upon their constitutionally protected right to

freedom of religion. The Supreme Court has repeatedly, in cases like Shah Bano, urged the government to move towards a UCC, but the lack of political consensus has meant that it remains a directive principle rather than a reality.

2. Judicial Appointments: The Collegium Controversy

How judges are appointed has been a subject of intense debate. The Constitution states that judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts are appointed by the President after consultation with judicial authorities. Over time, the Supreme Court evolved the "Collegium System," where a group of senior Supreme Court judges, headed by the Chief Justice of India, recommends names for appointment and transfer. This system was designed to protect the independence of the judiciary from executive interference.

However, the Collegium has been criticised for its lack of transparency and accountability, often being described as a system of "judges appointing judges." In 2014, the government passed a constitutional amendment to create a **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)**, which would include the Law Minister and eminent persons in the appointment process. However, the Supreme Court struck down the NJAC as unconstitutional, arguing that it undermined judicial independence. The debate continues on how to strike the right balance between the

independence of the judiciary and the need for a more transparent and accountable appointment process.

3. Contempt of Court: Protecting Dignity or Stifling Criticism?

The judiciary has the power to punish for "Contempt of Court." This is a crucial tool to protect the dignity and authority of the courts and to ensure that their orders are obeyed. As explained in "Politics and Governance," contempt can be civil (disobeying a court order) or criminal (scandalising the court or interfering with the administration of justice).

However, this power has also been criticised as a potential tool to stifle legitimate criticism of the judiciary. In a democracy, no institution can be above critique. The challenge lies in distinguishing between constructive criticism, which is essential for accountability, and malicious attacks that are intended to undermine public faith in the judicial system. The recent case against advocate Prashant Bhushan for his tweets critical of the judiciary brought this debate into sharp focus, highlighting the delicate balance the court must maintain between protecting its authority and upholding the freedom of speech.

Conclusion: The Sentinels of Our Republic

The Indian judiciary, with its vast powers and profound responsibilities, stands as the ultimate sentinel of our

constitutional republic. It is the institution that gives meaning to the promise of justice, liberty, and equality enshrined in our Constitution. It acts as the great equaliser, the forum where an ordinary citizen can challenge the might of the state.

However, the judiciary is also under immense strain, grappling with a massive backlog of cases, challenges to its independence, and the complexities of a rapidly changing society. For the leaders of modern India, the path forward requires a deep and abiding respect for this third pillar of democracy. It means defending its independence from political interference, engaging constructively with its judgments, and working to address the systemic issues that hinder its functioning.

The Legislature makes the laws, and the Executive implements them, but it is the Judiciary that ensures both act within the sacred bounds of the Constitution. In the grand tapestry of Indian governance, it is the judiciary that holds the constitutional threads together. A strong, independent, and respected judiciary is not just an option for India; it is the very foundation of its democratic survival.

***

Chapter 8: Governance in Practice: From Policy Formulation to Public Response

This chapter moves from the structures of polity to the processes of governance, using case studies of major policy initiatives to draw invaluable lessons on consultation, implementation, and public responsiveness.

***

The theoretical architecture of a state—its constitution, its legislature, its courts—provides the essential blueprint for governance. But a blueprint is not the building. The true test of a nation's democratic vitality lies not in the elegance of its structures, but in the messy, complex, and often contentious process of translating policy into practice. How is a law born? How is it implemented on the ground? And, most critically, how does the state respond when the people, in whose name it governs, speak back?

Governance is a dynamic cycle, a continuous conversation between the rulers and the ruled. It begins with the formulation of a policy, moves through the challenges of implementation, and is ultimately judged by the public's response. A government that masters this cycle thrives; one that fails to listen to the feedback loop of democracy eventually falters.

This chapter moves from the 'what' of Indian polity to the 'how' of Indian governance. By examining four pivotal case

studies from India's recent history—the economic liberalisation of 1991, the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the contentious Farm Laws and their repeal, and the historic passage of the Women's Reservation Bill—we can uncover invaluable, real-world lessons. These are not academic exercises; they are stories of crisis, cooperation, conflict, and consensus that offer a practical compass for any leader aspiring to govern modern India.

Case Study 1: The 1991 Economic Liberalisation – The Crisis Catalyst

The Context: In mid-1991, India was facing its most severe economic crisis since independence. The country was on the verge of defaulting on its international loan payments. Its foreign exchange reserves had dwindled to just **US$5.8 billion**, barely enough to cover three weeks of essential imports. The situation was so dire that the government had to physically pledge the country's gold reserves as collateral for an emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This economic collapse was the culmination of decades of a state-controlled, inward-looking economic model, famously known as the "Licence Raj," which had stifled entrepreneurship and led to chronic inefficiency. It was against this backdrop of imminent bankruptcy that P.V. Narasimha Rao took office as Prime Minister, heading a minority government.

The Policy: On 24 July 1991, the new Finance Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, presented a budget that would forever change India's economic trajectory. The reforms were swift, bold, and comprehensive. They aimed to dismantle the Licence Raj, integrate India with the global economy, and unleash the power of the private sector. The key measures included:

- **Industrial Delicensing:** Abolishing the need for government permits for most industries.
- **Trade Liberalisation:** Drastically reducing import tariffs and removing restrictions on foreign trade.
- **Encouraging Foreign Investment:** Opening up the economy to foreign direct investment (FDI).
- **Public Sector Reform:** Reducing the state's monopoly in many sectors and beginning a process of disinvestment.

The Process and Response: The 1991 reforms were a classic example of top-down, crisis-driven policy-making. There was no time for widespread public consultation or building a slow political consensus. The government, acting out of sheer necessity, pushed the reforms through with remarkable speed. The process was led by a small, determined team of political leaders and technocrats who understood that gradualism was not an option.

The response was initially one of shock and opposition. The reforms were a radical departure from the socialist consensus that had dominated Indian politics for decades. They were criticised by the left for abandoning the poor, by the right for selling out to foreign interests, and even by sections within the ruling Congress party itself. However, as the economy began to stabilise and then grow at an unprecedented rate, the criticism gradually subsided. The success of the reforms created their own constituency, and what was once a bitter pill became the accepted wisdom of a new generation.

The Lesson for Leaders: The 1991 liberalisation offers a crucial lesson in the role of **decisive leadership during a crisis**. It demonstrates that when faced with an existential threat, a government must have the courage to take bold, and even unpopular, decisions. It also shows that the success of a major policy shift can, over time, build its own political legitimacy. However, it is also a cautionary tale about the social costs of rapid, top-down change, which in the subsequent decades led to rising inequality—a challenge that continues to shape India's political discourse today.

Case Study 2: Goods and Services Tax (GST) – The Cooperative Conundrum

The Context: For decades, India's indirect tax system was a labyrinth of bewildering complexity. A product moving

from one state to another would be subjected to a cascade of central, state, and local taxes—Central Excise, Service Tax, Value Added Tax (VAT), Octroi, and more. This "tax on tax" system made compliance a nightmare for businesses, distorted prices, and fragmented India into dozens of small markets, hindering the free movement of goods. The need for a single, unified national tax was clear, but achieving it required a monumental act of political and federal cooperation.

The Policy: The Goods and Services Tax (GST), finally implemented on 1 July 2017, was designed to be that unified tax. It subsumed most of the existing indirect taxes into a single, destination-based tax, creating a common market across India. The most innovative feature of the GST regime was the creation of the **GST Council**. This constitutional body, chaired by the Union Finance Minister and comprising the finance ministers of all states and union territories, was designed as a new engine of **cooperative federalism**. All decisions, from setting tax rates to framing rules, were to be taken by consensus in the Council, giving states a powerful voice in a national policy.

The Process and Response: Unlike the 1991 reforms, the journey of GST was a masterclass in **consultation and consensus-building**. The idea was debated for over a decade, spanning multiple governments. The final legislation was the result of years of painstaking

negotiations between the Centre and the states in the GST Council. This collaborative process was essential to persuade states to give up their taxation powers in the larger national interest.

However, the implementation phase proved to be far more challenging. The GST Network (GSTN), the complex IT backbone designed to manage the new system, was plagued by technical glitches, causing immense hardship for small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The frequent changes in rules and tax slabs added to the confusion. Furthermore, the promise of compensating states for any revenue loss became a major point of friction, with states accusing the Centre of delaying payments and undermining the spirit of cooperative federalism.

The Lesson for Leaders: The story of GST provides two critical lessons. First, it highlights the immense power of **cooperative federalism** and stakeholder consultation in building the political will for complex, structural reforms. The GST Council, despite its recent frictions, remains a remarkable institutional achievement. Second, it serves as a stark reminder that **policy formulation is only half the battle**. The challenges of implementation—technical preparedness, administrative capacity, and clear communication—are equally, if not more, critical. A brilliant policy on paper can easily fail if the groundwork for its execution is not laid with meticulous care.

Case Study 3: The Farm Laws Repeal – The Power of Public Protest

The Context: In 2020, the central government announced its intention to undertake major reforms in the agricultural sector, which employs nearly half of India's workforce. The stated goal was to liberalise the sector, give farmers more choices in selling their produce, and encourage private investment.

The Policy: The government introduced three laws: one allowing farmers to sell their produce outside the government-regulated *mandis* (markets), another creating a framework for contract farming, and a third amending the Essential Commodities Act to remove stock limits on certain agricultural goods.

The Process and Response: The process adopted by the government became the central point of contention. The laws were first introduced as ordinances in June 2020, bypassing the normal legislative process. They were then pushed through Parliament in September 2020 with minimal debate and, crucially, **without being referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture**.

This lack of consultation triggered a massive backlash. A large section of farmers, particularly from Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh, perceived the laws as a threat to the existing system of Minimum Support Price (MSP) and

a move to favour large corporations at their expense. What followed was one of the largest and most sustained protests in modern Indian history. For over a year, hundreds of thousands of farmers camped on the borders of Delhi, braving extreme weather and a global pandemic.

The government held eleven rounds of talks with the farmer unions, but the deep trust deficit, created by the initial lack of consultation, proved insurmountable. The government's narrative, which at times labelled the protestors as "anti-national" or "misguided," only hardened their resolve. Finally, in November 2021, in a surprising televised address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the government would repeal all three laws, admitting that his government had "failed to convince some farmers".

The Lesson for Leaders: The saga of the Farm Laws is perhaps the most powerful lesson in modern Indian governance on the **absolute necessity of stakeholder consultation**. It demonstrates that in a democracy, the process is as important as the policy itself. Even a government with a formidable parliamentary majority cannot afford to ignore the voices of the people it seeks to govern. The repeal showed that sustained, peaceful public protest remains a potent force for accountability. For any leader, the key takeaway is clear: before you legislate for the people, you must first listen to the people.

Case Study 4: The Women's Reservation Bill – The Politics of Patience

The Context: For nearly three decades, a Bill to reserve seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies had been a recurring feature of India's political discourse. Despite women constituting nearly half the population, their representation in Parliament has hovered at a dismal 15% or less. The Bill, first introduced in 1996, had been repeatedly stalled due to a lack of political consensus, with various parties raising concerns about sub-quotas for different communities.

The Policy: The *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam* (Women's Reservation Act), passed in a historic special session of Parliament in September 2023, provides for reserving **one-third of the seats** in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women.

The Process and Response: The passage of the Bill was a remarkable display of **political consensus-building**. The Modi government managed to bring almost all political parties on board, resulting in the Bill being passed with near-unanimous support: 454-2 in the Lok Sabha and 214-0 in the Rajya Sabha. This success, after 27 years of failure, demonstrated the power of political timing and the ability to forge a broad coalition for a cause whose time had come.

However, the public response was a mix of celebration and caution. While the passage of the Bill was hailed as a landmark victory for gender justice, there was also significant criticism regarding its implementation clause. The Bill states that the reservation will only come into effect after the next census is conducted and a subsequent delimitation exercise (redrawing of constituency boundaries) is completed. This means the reservation is unlikely to be implemented before the 2029 general elections, if not later. This delay led many to question whether the immediate impact was more symbolic than substantive.

The Lesson for Leaders: The Women's Reservation Bill teaches a vital lesson in the **politics of patience and consensus**. It shows that landmark social reforms often require decades of advocacy and the right political moment to succeed. It also underscores the importance of managing public expectations. While passing a law is a significant achievement, leaders must be transparent about the timeline and challenges of implementation to maintain public trust and ensure that legislative victories translate into tangible, real-world change.

Conclusion: The Governance Compass for Modern Leaders

The four case studies, each a defining moment in India's journey, offer a rich and complex tapestry of lessons in

governance. They reveal that there is no single, monolithic formula for success. The path a leader must take depends on the context:

- **Crisis** demands decisive, top-down action, as seen in 1991.
- **Federal complexity** requires patient, cooperative consensus-building, as demonstrated by GST.
- **Grassroots impact** necessitates deep, authentic stakeholder consultation, a lesson painfully learnt from the Farm Laws.
- **Generational social reform** calls for the right political timing and broad-based consensus, as shown by the Women's Reservation Bill.

Together, they form a governance compass for the modern Indian leader. The true north of this compass is the unwavering principle that governance is not a monologue but a dialogue. It is a continuous process of formulating policy with wisdom, implementing it with diligence, and, most importantly, listening to the response of the people with humility.

A leader who can navigate this intricate cycle—who knows when to be bold, when to cooperate, when to listen, and when to wait—is a leader truly equipped to serve the vibrant, demanding, and ever-evolving democracy that is modern India.

Chapter 9: A Comparative Performance Review of the Lok Sabha

This chapter provides a definitive analysis of the Indian Parliament's lower house, comparing the performance of the 17th Lok Sabha against its predecessors, examining productivity, legislative scrutiny, and evolving democratic trends.

***

The Indian Parliament, the sanctum sanctorum of the world's largest democracy, is more than just a legislative body; it is the crucible where the destiny of over a billion people is debated, shaped, and decided. As the directly elected House of the People, the Lok Sabha bears the primary responsibility of reflecting the popular will, holding the executive to account, and enacting laws that govern the nation. Its effectiveness is, therefore, a direct measure of the health and vitality of Indian democracy.

Over the seventeen terms since its inception, the character and functioning of the Lok Sabha have evolved, mirroring the shifts in India's political, social, and economic landscape. From the era of single-party dominance to the complexities of coalition politics, each Lok Sabha has left its unique imprint on the annals of parliamentary history. The conclusion of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) provides a critical juncture to assess its performance, not in

isolation, but in a comparative context with its immediate predecessors. This analysis seeks to move beyond partisan rhetoric to evaluate the institution on the basis of empirical data, focusing on productivity, legislative activity, and the quality of democratic deliberation**.**

A Look Back: Performance Metrics of the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabhas

To appreciate the context of the 17th Lok Sabha, it is essential to understand the performance benchmarks set by earlier terms. The period from 2004 to 2019, encompassing the 14th, 15th, and 16th Lok Sabhas, was a time of significant political transition, covering two terms of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and the first term of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Productivity and Disruptions

Parliamentary productivity is a straightforward, yet crucial, metric: the number of hours the House functions against the total scheduled time. Disruptions, which lead to forced adjournments, directly erode this productivity.

The 14th Lok Sabha (2004-2009), functioning with a UPA-I coalition government, recorded a respectable productivity rate of 87%, losing only 13% of its time to disruptions. This period, while not without its political controversies, maintained a relatively high standard of parliamentary

functioning. This standard, however, saw a dramatic decline during the 15th Lok Sabha (2009-2014). Despite the UPA-II returning with a stronger mandate, this term was marred by a series of corruption allegations and intense political confrontations. Consequently, productivity plummeted to 63%, with a staggering 37% of its scheduled time lost to disruptions. This era marked a low point in parliamentary decorum and set a worrying precedent.

The 16th Lok Sabha (2014-2019), which saw the return of a single-party majority government after three decades, brought a significant course correction. Productivity rebounded to 85%, nearly matching the levels of the 14th Lok Sabha, with time lost to disruptions falling to 15%. This was widely seen as a restoration of order in the House, facilitated by the government's strong majority.

Comparative Productivity of Lok Sabhas (14th - 16th)

Lok Sabha Term	Sittings	Actual Working Hours	Time Lost to Disruption	Productivity
14th (2004-09)	332	1,737	13%	87%
15th (2009-14)	357	1,342	37%	63%
16th (2014-19)	331	1,616	15%	85%

Source: PRS Legislative Research

Legislative Scrutiny: The Role of Standing Committees

One of the most vital, yet often overlooked, functions of Parliament is the detailed scrutiny of legislation. This is primarily carried out by the Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs), which act as 'mini-Parliaments', examining Bills clause-by-clause, away from the partisan glare of the main chamber. The percentage of Bills referred to these committees is a key indicator of the rigour of the legislative process.

Here, a concerning trend emerges. The 14th and 15th Lok Sabhas demonstrated a strong commitment to this process, referring 60% and 71% of their Bills to committees, respectively. This ensured that a majority of laws underwent detailed examination by a cross-party group of MPs.

However, the 16th Lok Sabha saw a sharp and unprecedented decline in this practice. Only 27% of the Bills introduced were referred to a Standing Committee. This shift marked a significant departure from established parliamentary practice, raising concerns that legislative rigour was being sacrificed for expediency. In the 17th Lok Sabha, it was further reduced to 16%.

Unlocking the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024): Triumphs and Challenges

The 17th Lok Sabha commenced its term with the NDA government returning with an even larger majority. This five-year period was marked by momentous legislative actions, the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, and intense political debates.

A Parliament of Paradoxes: Sittings and Productivity

The most striking feature of the 17th Lok Sabha is the paradox it presents. On one hand, it is set to become the shortest full-term Lok Sabha in India's history, having convened for only 274 sittings. This is a significant drop from the 331 sittings of the 16th Lok Sabha and the 357 of the 15th. Out of its 15 sessions, 11 were adjourned ahead of schedule, resulting in the loss of 40 planned sitting days.

Yet, on the other hand, when the House did sit, its productivity in terms of hours worked was often remarkably high. The overall productivity for its term stood at 88%. The first session, for instance, recorded a productivity of 135%, the highest in two decades, as the House sat late to complete its business. This suggests a pattern of shorter sessions but more intensive work during the sittings. However, the decline in the number of sitting days remains a matter of concern, as it reduces the overall time available for MPs to hold the government accountable.

Legislative Business: Haste and Diminished

The 17th Lok Sabha was legislatively very active, passing a total of 179 Bills. These included historic and contentious pieces of legislation such as the abrogation of Article 370, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the three Farm Laws (which were later repealed), and the landmark Women's Reservation Bill. However, the trend of bypassing committee scrutiny, which began in the 16th Lok Sabha, accelerated alarmingly. The percentage of Bills referred to committees fell to a new low of just 16%.

This meant that a vast majority of laws, including those with profound and far-reaching implications for the nation, were passed without the benefit of detailed, cross-party examination. Furthermore, the speed of legislation became a defining feature. An analysis shows that 35% of Bills were passed with less than one hour of discussion in the Lok Sabha. The entire Union Budget for 2023 was passed without any discussion on the demands for grants from any ministry. This legislative haste, often enabled by the suspension of a large number of opposition MPs, has drawn criticism from various quarters, including a notable observation from the then Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, who lamented that the lack of quality debate was leading to ambiguities in laws and increasing the burden on the judiciary.

Sharp Decline in Bills Referred to Parliamentary Committees

Lok Sabha Term	Percentage of Bills Referred
14th (2004-09)	60%
15th (2009-14)	71%
16th (2014-19)	27%
17th (2019-24)	16%

Source: PRS Legislative Research,

The Role of the Opposition and Parliamentary Decorum

A functioning Parliament requires a constructive opposition. The 17th Lok Sabha witnessed a highly adversarial relationship between the treasury and opposition benches. While the opposition's role is to question the government, the frequent resort to disruptions led to significant loss of productive time and the suspension of an unprecedented number of MPs. In the Winter Session of 2023 alone, 146 MPs were suspended from both Houses.

While the opposition argued that disruptions were their only tool against a government unwilling to concede to their demands for debate on critical issues, the government maintained that the opposition was abdicating its responsibility to participate in legislative business. This dynamic often resulted in a gridlock where crucial national issues could not be debated, and Bills were passed amidst the din.

A significant institutional anomaly of the 17th Lok Sabha was its failure to elect a Deputy Speaker for its entire five-year term. This is the first time in India's post-independence history that this constitutional post has remained vacant for a full term, a departure from a long-held parliamentary convention.

Comparative Analysis: Key Trends and Takeaways

Placing the performance of the 17th Lok Sabha alongside its predecessors reveals several clear and significant trends that will shape the future of Indian parliamentary democracy. Consolidation of Executive Power: The trend from the 16th Lok Sabha onwards, particularly in the 17th, points towards a strengthening of the executive's control over the legislative agenda. A strong majority, combined with a willingness to bypass committee scrutiny and curtail debate, has led to a more efficient but less deliberative law-making process.

Erosion of Institutional Norms: The decline in referring Bills to committees, the reduction in sitting days, and the failure to appoint a Deputy Speaker represent a significant erosion of established parliamentary conventions. These practices, while not illegal, weaken the institutional mechanisms designed to ensure checks and balances.

The Productivity Paradox: The 17th Lok Sabha worked longer hours on the days it sat but sat for fewer days overall. This raises a fundamental question: Is productivity merely about passing a high volume of legislation in a short time, or is it about the quality of deliberation and the quantum of time dedicated to holding the government to account? The latter has arguably diminished.

Increased Adversarial Politics: The relationship between the government and the opposition has become increasingly confrontational, moving from constructive debate to frequent disruption and mass suspensions. This has vitiated the atmosphere of the House and undermined its ability to function as a forum for national consensus-building.

Conclusion: The Path Forward for the People's House

The 17th Lok Sabha has been a period of significant legislative change, driven by a government with a decisive mandate. It has been efficient in pushing its agenda and has passed laws of historic importance. However, this efficiency has come at a cost. The reduction in deliberative time, the marginalisation of the committee system, and the breakdown in communication between the ruling and opposition parties have weakened the Parliament's core function of scrutiny. As India has elected its 18th Lok Sabha, the lessons from the past decade are clear. A healthy democracy requires not just an effective government but also a robust and respected Parliament. This requires a renewed commitment from all political parties to uphold institutional norms. The government of the day must see legislative scrutiny not as an obstacle but as a valuable tool for crafting better laws.

The opposition must balance its right to protest with its responsibility to participate in debate. The performance of a Lok Sabha cannot be judged solely by the number of Bills it passes. It must be judged by the quality of the laws it enacts, the rigour of the accountability it enforces, and the health of the debates it fosters. The challenge for future Parliaments will be to restore this delicate balance, ensuring that the People's House remains a vibrant and effective instrument of deliberative democracy.

Chapter 10: The Anatomy of Leadership: Lessons from India's Parliamentarians

Drawing on the journeys of Sansad Ratna awardees, this chapter synthesises the core qualities of exemplary leaders: a foundation in grassroots activism, the importance of mentorship, a deep connection with constituents, and a relentless focus on parliamentary performance.

***

0What truly defines an effective political leader in the vibrant, chaotic, and demanding landscape of Indian democracy? Is it the power of oratory that can sway millions, the strategic acumen to navigate complex political alliances, or the charisma that builds a loyal following? While these traits have their place, a deeper examination reveals that the anatomy of exemplary leadership is composed of something far more substantial. It is forged not in the television studios or on the grand stages of political rallies, but in the dusty lanes of villages, the crowded municipal offices, the quiet mentorship of elders, and the hallowed, often-unseen, work within the corridors of Parliament.

For an aspiring leader, the path to public service can seem daunting, a world dominated by legacy and power. Yet, the journeys of India's most effective parliamentarians tell a different story. They reveal a consistent and replicable

blueprint for success, one built not on privilege, but on a foundation of hard work, unwavering values, and a profound sense of duty. This chapter, drawing extensively from the experiences of the Sansad Ratna awardees—parliamentarians recognised for their outstanding performance—dissects this anatomy of leadership. It moves beyond theory to showcase the real-world qualities and work ethic that transform a politician into a true public servant and a legislator of substance.

The Bedrock: A Foundation in Grassroots Activism

A recurring theme in the stories of India's most effective leaders is that their journey did not begin in the corridors of power, but at the very grassroots of society. Before they became national figures, they were student leaders, municipal councillors, trade unionists, and community activists. This foundational experience is not merely a stepping stone; it is the crucible where the essential qualities of leadership—empathy, resilience, and a genuine understanding of people's problems—are forged.

Consider the journey of **Bidyut Baran Mahato**, the MP from Jamshedpur. His political consciousness was awakened not in a university seminar, but during the long and arduous struggle against the unjust acquisition of his community's land. He recalls, "In 1970, a movement was started against this land acquisition... Throughout this movement, I was actively involved in all the activities". This

decades-long fight, which also saw him involved in movements for workers' rights and the creation of Jharkhand state, taught him the power of collective action and the importance of standing up for justice. It was this deep grounding in people's struggles that shaped his political identity.

Similarly, **Varsha Eknath Gaikwad**, a four-time MLA from Dharavi before becoming an MP, honed her leadership skills not in political backrooms, but through her work with NGOs on issues like child labour, malnutrition, and domestic violence. This engagement gave her a "grassroots-level understanding of the systemic challenges faced by marginalised communities". Her leadership style was thus built on "compassion backed by evidence," a direct result of her time spent listening to the voices often excluded from policy discourse.

This pattern is consistent across the board. **Dr. Charanjit Singh Channi** began his journey in student politics and as a municipal councillor, experiences that gave him "invaluable grassroots experience" before he became Punjab's Chief Minister. **Naresh Mhaske**, MP for Thane, started by helping fellow students in college, which led him to the Bharatiya Vidyarthi Sena. His motivation was born from the direct experience of living in a slum, where he "made it my mission to tackle these challenges" of water, electricity, and sanitation.

The Lesson: For an aspiring leader, the message is unequivocal. True political education does not begin in Parliament; it begins in the community. Engaging with local governance—be it through student unions, panchayats, or civil society organisations—is the most effective way to understand the real-world impact of policy and to build the credibility and trust that are the currency of a lasting political career. It is this connection to the ground that ensures a leader remains a representative of the people, not just a resident of the capital.

The Guiding Hand: The Indispensable Role of Mentorship

No leader is self-made. Behind every successful public figure is a network of mentors, elders, and role models who provide guidance, instil values, and offer support during the inevitable challenges of a political journey. The stories of the Sansad Ratnas are replete with acknowledgements of the profound impact of mentorship on their careers.

Arvind Sawant, the veteran MP from Mumbai South, attributes his unwavering loyalty and fighting spirit to the mentorship of Shiv Sena founder, Balasaheb Thackeray. He recalls how Balasaheb's core teaching—"Do not tolerate injustice"—became his guiding principle, first as a trade union leader and later as a parliamentarian. He also credits senior leaders like Subhash Desai, who "guided me...inspired me tremendously during difficult times when I

would stumble and wonder what to do". This guidance provided not just political strategy, but also the moral fortitude to stay the course.

For **Dilip Saikia**, the MP from Assam, inspiration came from a pantheon of national figures like Sardar Patel and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but his direct entry into party politics was guided by a local mentor, the late Shri Dipok Kumar Barthakur. This blend of ideological inspiration from national icons and practical guidance from local leaders is a common pattern.

Mentorship often comes from within the family itself. **Bhartruhari Mahtab**, the seven-term MP from Cuttack, grew up watching his father, Dr. Harekrushna Mahtab, Odisha's first Chief Minister. He observed his parents' dedication to public service, their fight against casteism, and their joy in witnessing economic progress. This upbringing provided him with a powerful, lived example of ethical leadership. Similarly, **Praveen Patel**, MP for Phulpur, credits his father, a three-time MLA, as his "powerhouse obviously, and guide during my entire career," instilling in him the values of "dedication, integrity, or Sanskar".

The Lesson: A political career is a long and often lonely journey. An aspiring leader must actively seek out mentors who can offer not just political advice, but also ethical guidance and emotional support. A good mentor provides a

compass when the political landscape becomes confusing, a source of strength during setbacks, and a reminder of the core principles of public service. This inter-generational transfer of wisdom is vital for nurturing a new generation of principled and effective leaders.

The Lifeline: An Unbreakable Bond with the People

In the age of social media and national television debates, it can be tempting for a leader to focus on building a national profile at the expense of their own constituency. The journeys of the most effective parliamentarians, however, teach the opposite lesson: the most enduring political strength comes from an unbreakable bond with the people who elected you. Accessibility, responsiveness, and a genuine connection to one's constituents are non-negotiable.

P. P. Chaudhary, the MP for Pali, exemplifies this principle. His innovative "Sansad Aapke Dwaar" (Parliament at Your Doorstep) drive, which covered 500 panchayats, was designed to "convert scepticism into cooperation through relentless follow-up". He understood that trust is not built through grand announcements, but through the patient, day-to-day work of listening to grievances and ensuring they are resolved. His unique initiatives, such as installing 50,000 solar street lights and providing insurance cover for two lakh women, were born directly from these village dialogues.

Similarly, **N. K. Premachandran**, the MP from Kollam, despite being renowned for his powerful interventions in Parliament, remains deeply rooted in his constituency. He speaks of the necessity of working at the grassroots level to "understand ground realities before aspiring for higher positions". This connection ensures that his parliamentary work is not an abstract exercise, but a direct reflection of the needs of his people.

This commitment to the constituency is a matter of both principle and pragmatism. As **Bhartruhari Mahtab** notes, "People have faith in me because, perhaps, they see that I do exactly what they expect. I try not to raise their expectations unduly but to deliver on what I have promised". This focus on delivery and managing expectations is what builds the long-term trust that allows a leader to be re-elected term after term.

The Lesson: An MP's primary identity is that of a representative. An aspiring leader must never lose sight of this. Regular visits to the constituency, maintaining accessible offices, and creating robust systems for grievance redressal are not optional extras; they are the core of the job. A leader who remains connected to their roots will always have a reservoir of public support and a clear sense of purpose, no matter how high they rise on the national stage.

The Arena: A Relentless Focus on Parliamentary Performance

While a connection to the constituency is the foundation, the ultimate test of a parliamentarian's effectiveness is their performance in the arena where laws are made and the government is held accountable: the Parliament. The Sansad Ratna Awards themselves are a testament to this fact, as they are based on quantifiable metrics of performance—attendance, participation in debates, questions asked, and Private Members' Bills introduced.

The records of the awardees are a study in diligence. **Supriya Sule**, a consistent top performer, is known for her meticulous preparation and her prolific use of parliamentary questions to demand accountability. **Arvind Sawant** proudly points to his "100% attendance in sessions," viewing it as a fundamental part of his duty. **N. K. Premachandran** has made parliamentary interventions his passion, moving thousands of amendments and resolutions. He finds energy in this work, "regardless of government acceptance or rejection," because he sees it as his core responsibility to ensure thorough legislative scrutiny.

This commitment to performance requires a specific work ethic. **Bhartruhari Mahtab** reveals his secret: "Delhi offers many distractions, yet I spend more time in the library than gossiping in the lobby or canteen... I devote myself first to

the Parliament". This disciplined approach is what enables him to make informed and impactful contributions, whether in a debate or as the chairman of a powerful committee.

This focus on performance is not about seeking the spotlight. Often, the most significant work happens away from the cameras. As **Praveen Patel** puts it, "No matter how big or small the issue is, I have to make the most of every bit of time I get in Parliament. Every question I raise, every debate I participate in... is guided by the real concerns and needs of my constituents".

The Lesson: For an aspiring leader, this is a crucial insight. Political influence is not just about visibility; it is about effectiveness. Mastering the rules of parliamentary procedure, preparing diligently for debates, using questions to elicit information, and actively participating in committee work are the hallmarks of a serious legislator. Performance, not posture, is what earns the respect of colleagues across party lines and delivers tangible results for the nation.

Conclusion: The Synthesis of a True Leader

The anatomy of an exemplary Indian leader, as revealed through the journeys of the Sansad Ratnas, is a powerful synthesis of four core elements:

1. **Grassroots Grounding:** A deep and authentic connection to the people, born from early experiences in local activism and governance.

2. **Ethical Guidance:** A strong moral compass, shaped and sustained by the wisdom of mentors.
3. **Constituent Centricity:** An unwavering focus on the needs of the constituency, manifested through accessibility and responsiveness.
4. **Parliamentary Diligence:** A relentless commitment to performance within the legislative arena, using every available tool to ensure accountability and good governance.

These are not innate qualities; they are cultivated through years of hard work, discipline, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of public service. The stories of these parliamentarians demolish the cynical view that politics is solely the domain of the corrupt or the privileged. They prove that a path of integrity, performance, and genuine service is not only possible but is also the most effective route to a long and respected career in public life.

For the next generation of leaders, the blueprint is clear. The path to becoming a "Sansad Ratna"—a jewel of Parliament—begins not with ambition for power, but with a humble desire to serve. It is a journey that demands sacrifice, requires learning, and is sustained by an unbreakable bond with the people of India.

***

Chapter 11: The Path to Institutional Reform

This concluding chapter serves as a forward-looking manifesto, consolidating the arguments for urgent electoral and parliamentary reforms to forge a new compact of ethical, accountable, and effective governance for modern India.

***

Our journey through the landscape of Indian polity and governance has taken us from the philosophical soul of the Republic, enshrined in the Constitution, to the intricate machinery of its democratic institutions. We have explored how laws are made, how power is balanced between the Centre and the states, and how the judiciary stands as the ultimate guardian of our constitutional ethos. We have also confronted the troubling realities of practice: the erosion of parliamentary decorum, the weakening of legislative scrutiny, and the persistent challenges that threaten the integrity of our electoral process.

The preceding chapters have not been a mere academic survey; they have been a diagnostic of our democratic health. Now, we arrive at the final, most crucial question: What is to be done? A diagnosis without a prescription is an exercise in futility. This concluding chapter, therefore, is not a summary of what is, but a manifesto for what ought to be. It is a call to action, a forward-looking vision for forging a

new compact between the Indian state and its citizens—a compact built on the pillars of accountability, transparency, and institutional integrity.

The great institutions of our democracy are not ancient monuments to be admired from a distance. They are living organisms that require constant care, nourishment, and, when necessary, courageous reform. For the next generation of leaders who will inherit the mantle of governing modern India, the task is not merely to occupy these institutions, but to renew and revitalise them. This chapter offers a practical roadmap for that urgent and essential mission.

The Unfinished Agenda: The Imperative for Electoral Reform

The electoral process is the gateway to our democracy. It is the mechanism through which the sovereign will of the people is translated into political power. When this gateway is clogged by the impurities of money and muscle, the entire democratic structure is compromised. For decades, the need for comprehensive electoral reforms has been acknowledged, yet the political will to enact them has been conspicuously absent. This unfinished agenda must be the first priority in forging a new compact.

The Malady of Money Power

The escalating cost of fighting elections is perhaps the single greatest threat to Indian democracy. It creates a formidable barrier to entry for honest, capable, and well-intentioned citizens who lack access to vast financial resources. The candid admission by a sitting Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, that she lacked the funds to contest a Lok Sabha election is a stark indictment of a system where financial might is increasingly a prerequisite for political participation.

The expenditure by political parties has skyrocketed, from an estimated ₹30,000 crores in the 2014 general elections to a staggering ₹60,000 crores in 2019. This insatiable demand for funds fuels a vicious cycle of corruption, as parties and candidates become beholden to their donors, both licit and illicit. The current system of political funding, despite instruments like electoral bonds, remains opaque, leaving citizens in the dark about who is funding their political parties and for what potential quid pro quo.

The Path to Reform:

- **Transparency in Political Funding:** The first step must be to enforce complete transparency. All political donations, regardless of the amount, must be publicly declared. The anonymity afforded by electoral bonds

must be reconsidered in favour of a system that allows citizens to see who funds their political parties.

- **State Funding of Elections:** To break the nexus between money and politics, the long-standing proposal for state funding of elections must be seriously debated and implemented. As suggested by former Chief Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy, a **National Election Fund** could be established to allocate public funds to recognised political parties based on their electoral performance. This would level the playing field and reduce the reliance on private, often unaccountable, sources of funding.
- **Stricter Enforcement:** The expenditure limits for candidates must be enforced with greater rigour, and the penalties for violation must be swift and severe enough to act as a genuine deterrent.

The Scourge of Criminalisation

Equally corrosive is the persistent problem of criminalisation in politics. The fact that individuals with serious criminal charges—ranging from extortion and kidnapping to murder—can not only contest but also win elections is a grave mockery of the rule of law. It undermines public faith in the political process and creates a culture of impunity. While the Supreme Court has

mandated that candidates must declare their criminal records, this has proven to be an insufficient deterrent.

The Path to Reform:

- **Barring Tainted Candidates:** A clear and unambiguous law is needed to bar individuals against whom charges have been framed in a court of law for heinous crimes from contesting elections.
- **Fast-Tracking Cases:** The judicial process for cases involving politicians must be expedited. The creation of special courts is a step in the right direction, but they must be adequately resourced to ensure that justice is delivered in a time-bound manner.
- **The Role of Political Parties:** Ultimately, the responsibility lies with the political parties themselves. They must demonstrate the moral courage to deny tickets to candidates with a criminal background. A political consensus on this issue is not just desirable; it is a moral imperative for cleaning up public life.

Reclaiming the Sanctity of Parliament: A Charter for Reform

Parliament is the temple of our democracy. It is the sacred space where the nation's future is debated and decided. In recent years, however, this temple has been desecrated by disruption, its productivity has plummeted, and its core function of scrutiny has been systematically weakened.

Reclaiming its sanctity requires a comprehensive charter for parliamentary reform.

The Crisis of Productivity and Decorum

The data from the 17th Lok Sabha is alarming. It is on track to be the shortest full-term Lok Sabha since 1952, with a drastic reduction in the number of sitting days. Worse still, a significant portion of the time it does sit is lost to disruptions. The Monsoon Session of 2021, where the Lok Sabha worked for only 21% of its scheduled time, is a particularly egregious example.

This paralysis is often accompanied by a shocking decline in decorum, with members resorting to behaviour that shames the institution and the nation. This culture of disruption is a lose-lose proposition: it allows the government to evade accountability while preventing the opposition from raising the genuine concerns of the people.

The Path to Reform:

- **Mandate Minimum Sitting Days:** To counter the trend of shrinking parliamentary sessions, a minimum of 100 to 120 sitting days per year should be mandated for Parliament and a proportionate number for State Assemblies.
- **Enforce a Code of Conduct:** A strict and automatically enforceable Code of Conduct for MPs must be implemented. Disrupting the House, storming the well,

or displaying unparliamentary behaviour should lead to immediate and automatic suspension for a graded period. As suggested by civil society, this should be coupled with financial penalties, such as the withdrawal of daily allowances for the period of suspension.

Revitalising the Engine Room: The Committee System

As we explored in Chapter 4, the true engine room of Parliament is its committee system. It is where legislation is scrutinised with rigour and expertise. The sharp decline in the number of Bills being referred to committees—from 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha to a mere 16% in the 17th—is arguably the most damaging institutional trend of the past decade. This legislative haste, exemplified by the passage of the contentious Farm Laws without committee scrutiny, leads directly to flawed laws, public unrest, and an overburdened judiciary.

The Path to Reform:

- **Mandatory Committee Scrutiny:** It should be made a mandatory procedural requirement for all significant Bills, barring only urgent financial legislation and matters of national security, to be referred to the relevant Departmentally Related Standing Committee.
- **Empowering Committees:** The committees must be empowered with adequate research support, expert staff, and resources to conduct their work effectively.

Their recommendations should be given greater weight, and the government should be required to provide a formal "action taken report" on every recommendation.

- **Public Broadcasting of Proceedings:** To increase transparency and public engagement, the proceedings of the committees (barring sensitive depositions) should be publicly broadcast, just as the proceedings of the main House are. If there are practical difficulties in live broadcast, the Chairman of the Committee should brief the media at the end of the meeting about the discussion.

Forging the New Compact: A Roadmap for the Next Generation

The reforms outlined above—in our electoral process and our parliamentary functioning—are not merely technical adjustments. They are the essential components of a new compact for governance in modern India. This is a compact where accountability is not a buzzword but a lived reality, where transparency is the default, not the exception, and where public service is a calling of integrity, not a pathway to power.

This new compact requires a fundamental shift in mindset from our political class. It demands that the ruling party embrace scrutiny as a necessary component of good

governance, not as an obstacle to be overcome. It requires the opposition to reclaim the art of constructive debate and abandon the self-defeating tactic of disruption. It calls on all political parties to place the long-term health of our democratic institutions above the short-term gains of electoral politics.

For the young, aspiring leaders who are the primary audience of this book, this is your challenge and your opportunity. The path to a successful and meaningful career in public service lies not in mastering the old politics of patronage and power, but in championing this new politics of reform and renewal. Your legacy will be measured not by the elections you win or the positions you hold, but by your contribution to strengthening the institutions that form the bedrock of our republic.

The journey of modern India has been a testament to the resilience of its democratic spirit. Now, as we stand at a critical juncture, it is time to forge a new compact, to clean the gateways of our democracy, and to restore the sanctity of its temples. It is a monumental task, but it is a task worthy of a great nation and its future leaders.

***

Glossary of Key Terms in Indian Polity and Governance

Act: A Bill that has been passed by both Houses of Parliament and has received the President's assent, thereby becoming the law of the land.

Adjournment *sine die*: The termination of a parliamentary session for an indefinite period, without a specific day being fixed for its resumption.

Anti-Defection Law: Contained in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, this law is designed to prevent elected members from switching political parties for personal gain. It specifies that a member can be disqualified if they voluntarily give up their party membership or vote against the party's direction (whip).

Article 19(1)(a): The article in the Constitution of India that guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression to all citizens.

Article 44: An article under the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution that directs the state to endeavour to secure a "Uniform Civil Code" for all citizens, aiming to replace personal laws based on religion with a common set of civil laws.

Article 356 (President's Rule): A provision in the Constitution of India that allows the central government to

suspend a state government and impose direct rule of the Centre in that state, in the event of a failure of the constitutional machinery.

Basic Structure Doctrine: A legal principle established by the Supreme Court of India holding that while Parliament has the power to amend the Constitution, it cannot alter or destroy its fundamental features, such as democracy, secularism, federalism, and the rule of law.

Bill: A draft of a proposed new law that is introduced in Parliament for discussion, debate, and approval.

Bicameral Legislature: A legislature with two houses or chambers. The Indian Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Checks and Balances: The constitutional system designed to prevent any one of the three branches of government (Legislature, Executive, Judiciary) from becoming too powerful, by giving each branch powers to limit or check the others.

Constituent Assembly: The body of indirectly elected representatives that was established in 1946 to draft and adopt the Constitution of India.

Constituency: A specific geographical area whose voters elect a representative to a legislative body, such as the Lok Sabha or a State Legislative Assembly.

Cut Motion: A special power vested in the members of the Lok Sabha to oppose a demand in the financial bill discussed by the government. It is a tool to express disapproval of a specific policy or demand for a grant.

Demands for Grants: The detailed estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of India required by various ministries, which are presented to the Lok Sabha as part of the Union Budget for its approval.

Directive Principles of State Policy: A set of guidelines and principles contained in Part IV of the Constitution for the state to follow in the governance of the country. While not enforceable in a court of law, they are considered fundamental to the country's governance.

Election Commission of India (ECI): The autonomous and independent constitutional authority responsible for administering all electoral processes in India to ensure free and fair elections.

EVM (Electronic Voting Machine): A voting machine used in Indian elections to electronically record votes cast by citizens.

Executive: The branch of government responsible for implementing and enforcing laws. At the national level, it is headed by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers.

Federalism: A system of government in which power is divided between a central national government and various

state governments. The Indian Constitution establishes a federal structure with a strong central government.

Governor: The constitutional head of a state in India, appointed by the President. The Governor acts as the representative of the central government in the state.

Judiciary: The branch of government responsible for interpreting the Constitution and laws, and administering justice. It comprises the Supreme Court, the High Courts, and the subordinate courts.

Judicial Review: The power of the Supreme Court and High Courts to examine the actions of the legislative and executive branches of government and to determine whether such actions are consistent with the Constitution.

Legislature: The branch of government with the authority to make laws for the nation. In India, the national legislature is the Parliament.

Lok Sabha: The "House of the People," which is the lower house of the Indian Parliament. Its members are directly elected by the people for a term of five years.

Model Code of Conduct (MCC): A set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections, mainly with respect to speeches, polling day behaviour, portfolios, election manifestos, processions, and general conduct.

Money Bill: A Bill that deals exclusively with financial matters such as taxation, public expenditure, and borrowing by the government. It can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha.

MPLADS (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme): A scheme under which each MP has the choice to suggest to the District Collector works to the tune of ₹5 crores per annum to be taken up in his/her constituency, with a focus on the creation of durable community assets.

No-Confidence Motion: A motion moved in the Lok Sabha by the opposition expressing that it no longer has confidence in the ruling Council of Ministers. If the motion is passed, the government is obliged to resign.

Ordinance: A temporary law promulgated by the President of India on the recommendation of the Union Cabinet when Parliament is not in session. It has the same force as an Act of Parliament but must be approved by Parliament within six weeks of its reassembly.

Parliamentary Committee: A small group of Members of Parliament appointed to examine specific matters in detail, such as scrutinising legislation (Bills), budgets (Demands for Grants), or government policies. The most prominent are the Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs).

Preamble: The introductory statement to the Constitution of India that sets out its guiding purpose, principles, and philosophy, including Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

Private Member's Bill: A Bill introduced in either House of Parliament by a Member of Parliament who is not a minister.

Question Hour: The first hour of a sitting session of India's Lok Sabha, which is devoted to questions that Members of Parliament raise about any aspect of administrative activity.

Rajya Sabha: The "Council of States," which is the upper house of the Indian Parliament. Its members are indirectly elected by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies. It is a permanent body and is not subject to dissolution.

Republic: A state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch. India became a Republic on 26th January 1950.

Starred Question: A question asked by an MP during Question Hour that requires an oral answer from the concerned minister on the floor of the House. It is distinguished by an asterisk and allows for supplementary questions to be asked.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC): The concept of having one common set of civil laws for all citizens of India, regardless of their religion, governing personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. It is a Directive Principle of State Policy under Article 44.

Unstarred Question: A question asked by an MP that requires a written answer from the minister. The answer is laid on the table of the House and does not allow for supplementary questions.

VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail): A system attached to an EVM that allows voters to verify that their vote was cast as intended. It prints a slip containing the serial number, name, and symbol of the candidate, which is visible to the voter for a short period before being cut and dropped into a sealed box.

Whip: An official of a political party whose task is to ensure party discipline in a legislature. A whip ensures that members are present for important votes and that they vote according to the official party policy.

Zero Hour: An Indian parliamentary innovation, it is the time immediately following the Question Hour in both Houses of Parliament where members can raise matters of urgent public importance without any prior notice.

***

Books Authored by Priyadharshni

Prime Point Foundation has published more than 55 books in digital and print format. All books are distributed free of cost. The books can be downloaded from the following link.

https://tinyurl.com/PPFpublication

About this Book

This accessible guide demystifies Indian polity and governance. It decodes the Constitution and Parliament, offering practical, real-world lessons for aspiring leaders on effective leadership.

About the Author

Priyadharshni Rahul, Supreme Court Advocate with dual degrees in Political Science and Law plus a master's in psychology, Editor of PreSense and President of Prime Point Foundation, Digital Journalists Association of India, and Next Gen Political Leaders. A distinguished achiever from childhood—Duke of Edinburgh Award, President's Award, Prime Minister's Award for leading Tamil Nadu NCC at Republic Day 2005, and India's Youth Ambassador to UK—she has authored six books and received multiple recognitions, including the Dr Abdul Kalam Award of Excellence. She is a motivational speaker and writer. She has authored 8 books, including this book. She has received several awards including Dr Abdul Kalam Internal Award and PRCI's National Award as Young Visionary. India Book of Records (IBR) has also recognised her services and included her in the world records.

She is also the Standing Council for Municipal Corporation of Delhi and New Delhi Municipal Corporation. She is one of the busy advocates in Delhi. She has been assisting many senior Parliamentarians, including Chairmen of Joint Parliamentary Committees on legal matters.

She is currently pursuing a PhD in Indian Parliamentary democracy.