

The Role of Opposition & Parliamentary Democracy in India

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Abstracts

The Parliamentary democracy is regarded as the ideal type of government. It approves the citizens to express their desires and complaints to their elected officials. Various parliamentary procedures like arguments, debates, and ruling decisions are the hallmarks of parliamentary government. The opposition party is one of the driving forces of parliamentary democracy. At the beginning of this research article, I analyzed the importance of the opposition party in a parliamentary democracy. Nowadays, India's parliamentary opposition is not only fragmented but also in disarray. In these research articles, I will see the role of opposition in Indian parliamentary democracy in different periods. These research articles also attempt to explain the significance of the opposition politics at the present scenario in Indian politics.

Keywords: *Parliamentary Democracy, Parliamentary Procedures, Fragmented, Embrangle, Government, Opposition.*

Introduction

The right to oppose the government is a fundamental feature of democracy. That right is manifested in a pattern of ways and forums, including the capabilities to sue the government in the courts, the holding of free & fair continuous elections, and the privilege of unrestricted speech within the legislatures. Specifically, in parliamentary government systems, the opposition party does not always favor various institutions but rather strengthens and consolidates institutional relationships. In other government institutions, the opposition plays a separate role from the government. In the study of institutions, comparison is the engine of knowledge creation.

In the Indian perspective, the role of the opposition party is as important as that of the ruling party. They make certain that the works of the ruling party are not harmful to the interest of the public or nation at large. The requirement for an opposition has been acknowledged in parliamentary democracy. Democracy cannot exist without opposition. The opposition is an essential component of an ideal democracy. In a parliamentary system, the political party chosen to form the government and serve the full term. The house is often divided into two wings. The governing party members sit to the right of the speaker, while the opposition sits to the left. According to Schapiro, the opposition party is "an organized political group with the objects of leaving the government in power and replacing it with someone of its choosing." In an open democracy, there is limitless space for choice up until the election of the government. This implies that opposing viewpoints are allowed to be heard in the legislature.

This also includes the opinions of lawmakers who are opposed to the present administration's policies but are not part of it. The political opposition in a parliamentary democracy plays a crucial role in holding the administration to account for striking a fair balance between majority and minority interests. To be effective under a parliamentary system, the opposition party must do more than simply serve as a "government-in-waiting." It must also prevent the ruling party from becoming autocratic. When it comes to the ruling party, a good opposition acts as a check and balance, making sure it doesn't overstep its bonds while also regularly offering a realistic alternative. The point was driven home by the reality that democracies rely on opposition parties, as one-party governments have always crumbled in the absence of one. There is no doubt about the significance of opposition in any democracy, regardless of its shape or function. Democracies across the world display different forms of resistance because there is no universal pattern of opposition. A two-party system, or perhaps a multi-party system, is necessary for a democracy to succeed.

A nation-state with a party-dominated system provides enough opportunity for the ruling party to become dictatorial. In every democratic country, a one-party system is most likely to devolve into tyranny. When there is a party system, the opposition is usually crushed and stomped, and a single-party dictatorship emerges. Every nation cannot envisage a democratic system without robust and vigilant opposition. An effective opposition is required to carry out its tasks fearlessly and productively for any parliamentary democracy to succeed. Political parties with less seats sit in the assembly as opposition and convey their views, make suggestions to the ruling party, and occasionally criticize government policies if they are detrimental to the interests of the common people.

Importance of Opposition in Parliamentary Democracy

In a parliamentary democracy, the opposition party has greater importance and status than the government. In a democratic framework, an active, effective opposition party receives constitutional recognition and makes the government aware. However, the opposition is defining material not only democratic governance but also politics universally. In every democratic form of administration, the opposition party is allowed to execute and promote democratic ideals and virtues. Such laws and acts that abstract or constrain opposition are not only destructive to the opposition, but also detrimental to the advancement of democracy. Now, we shall discuss the various roles of opposition in parliamentary democracy. These are.

- The elected members of the opposition party engage in the house deliberations and openly voice their viewpoints, enriching the parliamentary democracy system.
- Opposition members have the right to enlighten citizens. They also have access to a variety of information sources, such as television channels and internet websites.
- Opposition-elected members will have the unique opportunity to debate, analyze, and scrutinize the incumbent government's policies, choices, and actions. It also has the right to question members of the government, either verbally or in writing. Similarly, they have the right to get oral or written responses to queries from members of the ruling government. Similarly, they have the right to have their queries answered there. They have the right to initiate the question hour, and opposition members will be able to ask more questions than government members in parliament.

- The opposition can hold the current administration accountable through censure or a resolution of no confidence. The right to request discussion and debate on an urgent and vital matter, as well as the necessary numbers, should be granted to him.
- Opposition members have the authority to request the formation of an inquiry committee, a fact-finding mission, or a parliamentary mission of information.
- The opposition will be given ample time to speak. In certain circumstances, speaking time must also be ensured for the government and opposition members alike. Because the opposition party is the important pillar of parliamentary democracy.
- The elected Members of the opposition in parliament will have the right to information. They should have free and equal access to information like the members of the ruling party. Because they are also elected representatives, and they are also accountable to the public.
- The opposition-elected members enjoy the right to participate in the management of parliamentary business. They enjoyed the Right to access various positions such as vice-president and other positions of responsibility. The composition of any governing body in the parliament shall respect the principle of proportional representation, and the opposition shall be given its fair share.
- The right to ask for the constitutional revival of adopted laws and to refer the matter to the constitutional court or other legal body before their adoption. The opposition members enjoyed the right to access the Audit court and seek its opinion on financial matters. In this way, the opposition members make the government aware of building a transparent embodiment.
- The chairmanship of various standing committees and permanent committees inside the Parliament House will be allocated to the parliamentary parties based on proportional representation. The opposition should be allowed to head at least one standing committee.
- The opposition-elected members will take part in the various political decisions. Along with this, opposition parties also perform many important functions in parliamentary democracies like India.
- To rally the political community around a common cause, political parties serve as a vital organ. When people pool their interests, it's common for their preferences, ideas, and beliefs to shine through in the budgeting and policymaking processes.
- Members of the opposing parties work to foster a more democratic atmosphere inside their party and the political society at large.
- By articulating competing societal ideals, values, and policies, the political opposition parties offer a realistic alternative to the incumbent administration. The opposition party can take control of the regime through transparent and free elections if the current ruling party fails to satisfy the voters.
- For the opposition's elected representatives, staying in touch with voters is essential to proving that politics matters for the informed, the oppressed, and the downtrodden.
- Responsible and reasonable discourse is undertaken by the elected opposition members. It raises the bar for democratic discourse and encourages "national dialogue" to a more advanced stage of political growth.

- Young leaders are groomed in political parties. Shadow ministers, for instance, often handle party business in their assigned ministries.
- Voter registration, civic education, and election transparency are all areas that the opposition parties work with the electoral commission, NGOs, and the media to examine and enhance.
- Lastly, the ruling party's opponents serve as the government's unskilled but devoted primary researchers. Current governments have used opposition party manifestos as a springboard to steal ideas, policies, and programming without their consent, fitting in with the middle ground defined by post-Cold War political dynamics.

Historical Preview of Opposition Party in Indian Democracy

It has long been believed that a robust opposition party, capable of maintaining its position in power, is essential for a parliamentary democracy to function well. However, things have been quite different in India. Some may have thought the opposition's function was purely negative at first, but now we know it plays a significant and positive part in national politics. That the opposition party is constitutionally recognized is, thus, the greatest parliamentary tradition in our country's parliamentary form of governance.

The Opposition in India originated during the British rule when India was governed through British Acts. Then, small organizations used to play the role of opposition by raising the voice of the people. For instance, the British Indian Association, the Bombay Association, Madras Mahajan Sabha, the Prayer Society, Arya Samaj, etc. In Dada Bhai Narouji, Surendra Nath Banerji, Taiyabji, etc, were prominent personalities. He used to discuss India's problems from time to time and attracted the attention of the government by giving loud speeches about the problems of the people. After 1885, the Congress was formed, after which the role of other institutions was reduced, and the Congress became a party in which every section of the society was represented. He opposed every wrong policy of the British government.

As the strength of the Congress party organization increased, it restored to strike. Congress played the role of good opposition till the Act of 1919 came, in the Act of 1919, parliament was developed as an institution in India, which had Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha), at that time the congress was the powerful party which was paying the role of opposition, although other parties also subsist in which Muslim league, Hindu Mahasabha, Socialist there were teams etc. Congress did not participate in the first election held in 1920-21. The moderate wing leaders of the Nationalist Liberal Union, who reached the assembly after winning the elections, continued to play the role of opposition in the elections for the second assembly of 1932. In the assembly elections held in 1935, the congress came back with full force and played the role of a good opposition, and the government had to resort to powers from the Governor-General many times.

The Post-Independence Scenario

The Indian National Congress was widely supported and believed in by the general population following India's independence in 1947. Attempts to depose the Congress Party from office were highly unrealistic. Both were victorious in the central state elections when

Pt. Nehru presided over the country's first general election in 1952. On the other hand, during this period, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee formed the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, an opposition party. The Congress Party's ideas and plans came under fire from socialists and communists when Ashok Mehta took charge. Communists, Socialists, the Swantantra party, and the Bhartiya Jana Sangh were prominent political groups until the 1962 elections.

The Opposition Party since 1967

This put a strain on the party's monolithic nature, which allowed the opposition to gain ground. The defeat of India in the war against China in 1962 brought widespread condemnation to the ruling Congress party. Many long-serving opposition lawmakers were re-elected by the voters to the Lok Sabha, where they continued to vocally oppose the Congress Party's agenda items. After Nehru passed away in 1964, the nation had elections in 1967, and the opposition was considerably stronger than before. Many states outright rejected the distinctive character of the Congress party. In many states, the opposition parties came together to establish governments, with the United Front and the United Legislature party playing key roles. A no-confidence resolution was introduced against the administration many times by the increasingly powerful opposition, but each time it was unsuccessful. This was also a formative time for regional opposition parties such as the Janata Party. Their Lok Sabha lawmakers vehemently disagreed with the central government's governing Congress.

Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi and Congress Party president K. Kamraj had a public falling out in 1969. A strong resistance emerged because of this separation. Also, in 1969, the Lok Sabha was the first chamber in India to officially acknowledge the opposition, with Congress leader Ram Subhag Singh named as the head of the opposition. A national emergency was declared in 1975 while Indira Gandhi was the prime minister, leading to the imprisonment of all opposition party leaders. The sixth Lok Sabha elections took place in 1977, following a 19-month emergency. On this occasion, a new national party named Janta was created when five separate groups—Bhartiya Jana Sangh, Congress (0), Congress for Democracy (founded by Jagjivan Ram after he broke from Congress), Charan Singh's socialist organization, and Bhartiya Lok Dal—joined forces. The ruling Congress party suffered a crushing loss during the emergency because of certain government policies and press control. The newly created Janta party, which was the national alternative to the Congress, came out on top. Although they had a small voice in the fifth Lok Sabha, the opposition played a larger role following Indira Gandhi's declaration of emergency.

The Opposition Party since 1977

After all, the Janta Party administration disintegrated in 1977 after just 2.5 years in office, owing to mutual differences, after having been formed by Morarji Desai and Charan Singh. The house was disbanded after a few months. At the end of 1979, the Congress party won the Seventh Lok Sabha elections by a wide margin. In 1984's Eighth Lok Sabha election, the Congress had a large mandate, while the TDP received 30 seats as the opposition party. The Rajiv Gandhi administration broke with tradition by designating TDP lawmakers as Lok Sabha leaders of opposition (LOP). In the Seventh Lok Sabha, no official opposition could be created, yet the quality of that opposition was high. Similarly, in the Eighteenth Lok Sabha, no official opposition could be formed; however, the role of the few that did form played a

respectable role. Both houses were strongly against government bills. Despite having the most votes, the Congress ended up in opposition in the Nineteenth Lok Sabha (1989), leaving the National Front in a minority administration. After rising to the post of opposition leader, Rajiv Gandhi acted as a model opponent. The Congress party established a coalition administration in the Tenth Lok Sabha in 1991. During this administration, Atal Bihari Vajpayee succeeded Lal Krishn Advani as head of the opposition. The first instance of this was in the Eleventh Lok Sabha (1996), when P. Sangama, a member of the opposition, was chosen as a speaker.

When the 1998 Lok Sabha election came around, the BJP teamed up with the Congress. As a result, Sharad Pawar took charge of the rebels. The weapons of the opposition included the Temple-Mosque conflict, the Pokhran blast, the functioning "Liberhan commission" of CBI, and other similar incidents. In 1999, during the Thirteen Lok Sabha, the BJP established a government, and Sonia Gandhi became charge of the opposition. This Lok Sabha's operations were halted after the Tehelka episode, which severely encircled the governing party. During their time in office, the opposition mostly participated by making noise, creating slogans, and boycotting. There was a weak government from 1989 to 2004 due to the significant role played by opposition and minority parties in building and deposing administrations. For example, the BJP opposed the Congress's 1991 liberation program but now supports it, even though the opposition had promised to offer an alternative policy perspective before gaining power. After the 2004 elections, a big change occurred: the political parties on the left, who had been the most vocal opponents of the Indian government's economic policies, joined the coalition that was in power. This turn of events lent credence to the ruling party's critics. This turn of events bolstered the ruling system's opponents. The ruling government's policy initiatives were monitored by left-wing political groups. As the dominant opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) harshly condemned major scandals like the Bofors Scam and the issues linked to the administration that was in power from 2004 to 2014 (the fourteenth and fifteenth Lok Sabha). Nevertheless, the BJP is almost mimicking the first and second UPA regimes when it comes to policymaking and execution, while having spent much of its efforts denouncing them.

Opposition Politics from 2014 to Now (2025)

The BJP won 283 of the 533 seats available in the Sixteenth Lok Sabha elections in 2014, thanks to the Modi wave. With the largest majority any party has had in 30 years, this election's outcome came as a shock to many. In contrast, the Congress Party's electoral total was a meager 44 seats. In the Seventeenth Lok Sabha (2019 election, a comparable scenario played out, with the BJP securing 303 seats and the Congress losing 52. As an alternative, the BJP-led NDA Alliance took power in the 2024 Lok Sabha general elections with 240 seats, defeating the Congress Party's 99 seats. Thus, the opposition's image was entirely whitewashed in these elections. On the other hand, the most recent election came as somewhat of a surprise; throughout the first two terms of Modi's rule, no political party emerged as a formidable opponent. The minority parties in Parliament banded together in opposition to the BJP's policies and actions as their popularity grew. Opposing a program is

simpler than supporting it, and people can congregate in close quarters without reaching a consensus—as shown in extreme gatherings—as Duverger (1989) astutely noted.

The crisis in the existence of not only the opposition parties but the leader of the opposition has deepened under the Modi rule. Now the question is, where will Indian democracy take a run? Because in such a situation it makes a difference because the voice which can be of a person sitting in a constitutional post, cannot be of the status given by grace or government. Now parliament needs Leader of opposition more than before because the phase of first, second and third Lok Sabha was in Nehru's time and the foundation of democracy was being laid at that time, the form which was made by the constitution makes was strictly followed. Nehru had great respect for the leader of the opposition, and he used to invite criticism. Many times, they had said in the parliamentary speech that there should be no hesitation in criticizing me in front of me. In today's era, due to the weakening of the opposition, a little apprehension increases in governance. During the previous BJP government, there were many occasions when there were allegations of tampering with constitutional institutions, and something happened for the first time. For example, the judges of the Supreme Court had to hold a press conference, and it was alleged that attempts were being made to influence the functioning of the judiciary. There was turmoil during the appointment of the Director of CBI as well. However, in August 2024, questions have started to arise in the minds of the public about the CBI investigation process in the case of the murder of a female doctor on duty at the RG Kar Hospital in West Bengal. x

Aside from this, the BJP administration abruptly announced demonetization on 7 August 2016. Therefore, Modi hoarded 86% of the value of the cash in circulation in India's economy. Without consulting anybody or holding any kind of parliamentary discussion, the ruling party made its decision unilaterally, without notifying the opposition or any other parties. Governors Raghuram Rajan and Urjit Patel of the Reserve Bank of India were not involved in the decision-making process. It was done under the mistaken belief that there was an excess of cash in the economy, accounting for 12% of GDP, and that the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes were extremely high denominations. The idea was to eliminate counterfeiting and black money, but we know what happened. Over ninety-nine percent of the system's money ended up in "banks and dividend." Among the most capricious actions ever made by a democratically elected leader, demonetization deserves special mention. Official records on the Rafale purchase have shown that the acquisition of 36 fighter planes for the Indian Air Force was reduced from 126 fighters from the UPA era without the required permits, contradicting the claims of the Modi government that there has been no corruption during his term. The prime minister-led cabinet committee on security unilaterally increased the aircraft's baseline price to around & 3 billion. A combined parliamentary committee and an investigation into the issue were demands made by the opposition. To prevent any kind of probe, the administration proceeded to make many regulatory amendments. The Modi government lied to get several measures passed despite having a majority in the Lok Sabha but a minority in the Rajya Sabha; a democratic government would have allowed discussion on every item in both chambers. The government hid the amendments to four laws that would enable the secret electoral bond scheme—which allows anonymous and unlimited donations to political parties—in the Finance Bill 2017, which allowed it to pass through the Lok Sabha

without allowing the Rajya Sabha to debate the provisions that were not part of the money bill, such as the Aadhaar Bill.

A lack of significant resistance is sensed, and the weak presence of opposition is apparent in all the examples listed above. Since they were unable to challenge the ruling party, the opposition appears to have capitulated them indirectly.

Significance of Opposition Politics in Parliamentary Democracy

When it comes to offering a realistic critique of the governing party, India's opposition is crucial. A leader inside the opposition party should be able to fulfill these responsibilities on behalf of minor parties. Without a strong leader to unite the opposition, it will be impossible to challenge the current administration in a parliamentary democratic manner. Appointments to constitutional institutions, including the Chief Vigilance Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Director of the CBI, the Chairperson of the NHRC, and justices of the Supreme Court, are heavily influenced by the opposition leader.

In a parliamentary democracy, the post of the leader of the opposition is at the level of the Prime Minister and Chief Justice Indian democracy has been a witness to the fact that whenever leaders of opposition like Atal Bihari Bajpai, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, L. K. Advani spoke in parliament, the ruling party listened to their words very seriously. Not only listening, but the policies and plans of the ruling party were given edge by the debate of the opposition, and it was considered better for the uplift of the people. The importance of opposition in democracy can be understood very well from these lines of the Tamil poet 'Thirukkural' that, "a king who has no one to criticize, who is devoid of protection, yet no one is destroyed, he is surely destroyed".

Conclusion

The opposition in a parliamentary democracy is essential to ensure that the government performs "with minimum government and maximum governance" and is transparent, responsive, and accountable. Playing the vital role of the opposition party in India has been very challenging from the beginning; its situation has been subjected to many ups and downs from time to time. At present, a divided and weak opposition is more dangerous for the Indian parliamentary democracy than the powerful ruling party. There are many dimensions of opposition in India, some of which are as follows:

Firstly, despite the importance of opposition, the tradition of healthy opposition never existed in India because the Congress Party had dominated Indian politics since independence from the very beginning. The Congress party was not only a political party, but as an organization, it made a great contribution to the national freedom struggle movement of India. Therefore, it had a very deep impact on the hearts and minds of the common people of India. Due to the representation of the whole Indian political culture of the Congress Party at that time, it also represented the entire Indian public. Due to the popularity of the Congress Party in the public, no strong opposition party has ever emerged, although resistance voices were raised based on caste and religion from time to time, but they did not last very long. Even if the opposition parties like Jana Sangh and Bhartiya Janata party were formed, they failed to attract the attention of the public.

Secondly, in India, there was always the influence of power politics, and power was always the center of competition. Here, every political party is only looking at getting power, and no party wants to be in opposition. The only objective of the opposition parties is to defame the government in any way and occupy power themselves. That is why opposition parties oppose the government just for the sake of opposition, due to which the spirit of constructive opposition can never develop in them.

Thirdly, in the Indian scenario, Political corruption is a very big problem in Indian politics, and it has been there for a long time. Here, the leaders do vote bank politics; they ask the public for votes based on caste and religion. They are engaged in straightening their owl, their only aim is to win the election. Here, the main issues due to the politics of caste and religion never come to the center, and the public just gets entangled in the battle of caste and religion. However, as people become aware and educated, the notion that it is happening is decreasing.

Fourthly, as we all know that India is a full country of diversity, here there is a sense of unity in diversity. India is a multilingual, multiethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country. Due to these variations, the two-party systems like America and Britain could not develop so that a strong and sharp opposition could not be formed here. India is also a very large country in terms of population, so many political parties have been formed here due to the representation of all the people on different grounds. Due to the presence of many political parties, the development of the opposition here also always happens in fragments.

Fifthly, in India, enlightened public opinion has never emerged because, at the time of independence, the literacy rate was very low. Therefore, the ethnic elements like caste, religion, and language remained at the center of the elections of Indian politics from the very beginning and never had the primacy of issues like education, health, development, inflation, corruption, and employment, and even if they were, they did not rise very fast. It is a matter of regret that today, when we are developing very fast in every field, even after so many years of independence, elections are being fought on the issue of caste and religion in our politics. One of the main reasons for this is that the people here are never aware of the electoral issues, and yet there is a lack of public awareness about what is right and what is wrong for them. The people here are very naive and get caught up in the emotional and sentimental rhetoric used by political parties at the time of elections, due to which they are unable to use this discretion properly. If the public had been aware, PM Modi would have lost the general election in 2019 only because of the decision of demonetization.

Sixthly, in the Indian context, if public opinion is strong in a democracy, then the government also must take their side, like what happened during the Mumbai Anti-Terrorist attack, Anna Hazare's movement, and the Nirbhaya incident, when the people of the whole country came together in unison. This, too, becomes like a role of the opposition, but the people here are always entangled in the dispute of the temple-Mosque; earlier there was the Ayodhya Ram temple issue, and recently the Gyanvapi mosque issue remains in the discussion. Along with this, the role of the opposition could not be effective due to nepotism in Indian politics.

Seventhly, currently, in Indian politics, the fear of "tyranny of the majority" is a serious concern due to the BJP's strong central position, which it gained in the 2019 parliamentary election. At this critical point, the BJP may work even harder to bring the country together in the pursuit of a "Hindu Nation" if the opposition is not unified, powerful, significant, devoted, credible, and accountable. With the opposition party suffering its biggest loss ever in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and showing no indications of recovering, the present political environment in India presents a bleak image in this respect. Considering this, the opposition must stand up to dynastic politics and weak alliances by expelling the Macbeths and settlements for the sake of the nation. On top of this, the opposition needs an inspiring figurehead to restore its once-proud reputation and secure its role in the process of reconstructing the nation. This is a great chance for the opposition to get more seats in the Rajya Sabha, which will help them win over state legislatures.

However, according to Lord Acton, the backdrop of historical evidence shows that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The opposition party is inevitable to prevent any attempt to act against the will and interests of the party people in power. Therefore, in any parliamentary democracy, both the part of government and the part of opposition are two wheels of the same vehicle. India needs a strong, enlivened, and constructive opposition right now because democracy does not seem like a democracy due to the lack of leadership in the opposition. In any democracy, if the opposition is sharp, effective, and honest, then the government tramples because of its fear, the country is benefited, the arrogance of the government Leaders their autocracy and arbitrariness are controlled. In the words of the great thinker J.S. Mill, "Democracy is a way of life," which means that in any democratic country every person should be democratic and every individual's opinion should be respected, no matter how adversarial and no matter what this type of dispute should be resolved through dialogue only. This is real democracy, and it aims to produce moral people. Finally, democracy arises out of the notion that those are equal in all respects because men are equally free and claim to be equal. In a democratic regime, the tradition of ruling as well as opposing parties is unparalleled. The opposition forces the government to steer it in the right direction while also helping the citizens to always remain vigilant. All these statements and points prove how the Indian parliamentary democracy stands tall in the perspective of the world.

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