

On to last there is full
and harmonious



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On the contrary, under Parliamentary system, “ from first to last there is full and harmonious collaboration between the law-making and money- granting authorities, on the one hand, and the law-enforcing and money-spending authorities on the other.” There are, thus, few chances of conflict of authority and jurisdiction.

With authority thus concentrated, the full power of government can be promptly brought to bear upon any great emergency. Bryce adds two more advantages of the presence of Ministers in the legislature: (1) Being in constant touch with the Opposition as well as in still closer contact with the members of their own Party, the Ministers can feel the pulse of the Assembly and through it the pulse of the public opinion and can thereby obtain useful criticism, in a friendly way, of their measures. The members of the legislature can also call to the attention of the Government any grievance felt by their constituents and secure quick redress. (2) The system secures “ swiftness in decision and vigour in action, and enables the cabinet to press through such legislation as it thinks needed, and to conduct both domestic and foreign policy with the confidence that its majority will support it against the attacks of the opposition.” Parliamentary system is the best example of representative democracy, for it recognizes the ultimate sovereignty of the people. Ministerial responsibility is immediately to the legislature, but no majority dare ride rough-shod over public opinion. The ultimate appeal rests with the people, and the government must remember those to whom it will have to account in the future.

“ Government with us,” says Jennings, “ is government by opinion, and that is the only kind of ‘ self-government’ that is possible.” The government is

ever under scrutiny and the Parliamentary system provides for daily as well as periodic assessment of what the rulers do. It is kept on the qui vive (alert) by the constant probing and questioning of the Opposition and by the publicity given to governmental policies and actions by the more responsible segments of the press.

Parliamentary democracy, thus, keeps more nearly in step with public opinion than the Presidential system. Parliamentary system is in the real sense a government by criticism. The majority party forms the government. The minority constitutes the Opposition. The Opposition must oppose and criticize the government. There is a saying in Britain that the Prime Minister knows the leader of the Opposition more than he knows his own wife. It explains how far the Ministry is alive to the opinion of the Opposition and apprehensive of its criticism. A government which neglects the Opposition does so at its peril.

The lapses of the government are its opportunities and the Opposition uses them to appeal to the public opinion. “ The House is its platform, the newspapers are its microphones, and the people are its audience.” No other form of government can, therefore, meet the ideal of rationality and responsiveness better than parliamentary democracy. In his inaugural address to the 37th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference at New Delhi, on September 23, 1991, the President of India, R. Venkataraman described the system of parliamentary democracy as “ superior to all other systems that human ingenuity has so far been able to devise” and emphasised that if worked properly and honestly, there was perhaps no better substitute than the representative parliamentary democracy.

Another merit claimed for the Parliamentary system is its flexibility and elasticity. Bagehot highly eulogised this aspect and pointed out that people can, under this system of government, “choose a ruler for the occasion” who may be especially qualified to successfully pilot the ship of the State through a national crisis. Churchill replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister, because national emergency demanded it and this change was brought about without any political upheaval in the country. But such a smooth change is not possible under a Presidential type of government. The office of the President goes by calendar. Come what may, Presidential elections must be held after every four years. “The American Government,” says Bagehot, “calls itself a government of the supreme people; but at a quick crisis, the time when the sovereign power is most needed, you cannot find the supreme people ... all the arrangements are for stated times.

There is no elastic element; everything is rigid, specified and stated. Come what may, you quicken nothing and can retard nothing. You have bespoke your government in advance and whether it suits you or not, whether it works well or works ill, whether it is what you want or not, by law you must keep it.” This is one way of expressing the flexibility of the Parliamentary system.

Another is the ease with which it can meet the crisis in the social and political life of the people. The executive can explain to and impress upon the legislature its assessment of the situation and the methods proposed to meet the emerging situation. Even well established customs may be waived temporarily, as was done in Britain in 1931, when the Ministers “agreed to differ” as against the constitutional convention of collective responsibility, to

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meet the abnormal situations. Moreover, Parliamentary system can claim a high educative value. It cannot function without well-organised political parties. The object of every political party is to win elections and to capture government.

To win elections means that the party should be in a position to secure the majority of votes and the electorate should approve its programme. It is like placing one's cards on the table and acquainting the nation with the party's political programme. It is for the people to judge one party and the other on its merits. If an issue of national importance arises subsequently, on which the verdict of the people had not been obtained by the party in power, the legislature may be dissolved and an appeal made to the electorate.

Dissolution also helps to remove deadlocks between the executive and the legislature and makes the electorate the policy-determining factor.

According to K. Leoewenstein, " In the authentic form of parliamentary government, dissolution is the democratic fulcrum of the entire process of adjusting power conflicts by making the electorate the ultimate policy determining factor." Moreover, by-elections, which are so frequent during the life of Parliament, serve as a barometer of public opinion and the government corrects or adjusts its policies according to the results obtained from such elections.

All this democratic process has immense educative value. It makes the people politically conscious of their rights and responsibilities, and vigilance is the true price of democracy. Finally, Parliamentary system has succeeded in democratizing governmental machinery in all civilised countries,

particularly where exists the institution of hereditary monarchy. If Britain is called the citadel of democracy, it is because there is constitutional monarchy and the King or Queen does not actively govern. He reigns but does not rule. The latter is the function of his responsible Ministers.

Bryce has aptly explained this aspect. He says, “ As the actual working Executive has necessarily a party character it is a merit of this system that the National Executive, be the King or President, should be outside party, and represent that permanent machinery of administration which goes on steadily irrespective of party changes when a cabinet fails, the transfer of power to another is a comparatively short and simple affair.”