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The Role of Opposition in Indian Democracy: Challenges and Importance

Dr. Chandrappa K

Associate Professor, Dept of Political Science, Sahyadri Arts College, Shivamogga, Karnataka

ABSTRACT

The role of the opposition is to ensure that any government maintains the constitutional guardrails. The Opposition's main role is to question the government of the day and hold them accountable to the public. The Leader of Opposition is vital in maintaining checks and balances on the ruling government. Democratic politics has to be politics through consultation, through negotiation and some amount of bargaining is also involved. In democratic functioning and governance, strong, constructive and viable opposition as well as reformist can play an important role. Opposition party opposes all governmental measures and proposes nothing concrete. It only criticizes without giving constructive suggestions.

Keywords: Democracy, opposition, politics, governance, parliament, political and party

INTRODUCTION

The oppositional in a democracy plays as important a role as the government. For a strong and right government to work in a proper way according to the will the people, an equally strong and sensible opposition is a must. Such an opposition is the secret of the success of democracy in England. In England, the oldest democracy of the world, there is mainly one strong political party in opposition. In this lies the strength of democracy in that country. On the other hand, in India there are a number of opposition parties constantly quarrelling among themselves. This is the greatest weakness of Indian democracy. Opposition unity plays a critical role in shaping the dynamics of parliamentary government in India. Opposition parties contribute to a more open and responsive political environment despite facing significant challenge.

Some forms of government give no space for opposition and its slightest occurrence is suppressed strictly, while in another government, opposition constitutes an integral part. Democracy is a form of government in which opposition has prominent role to play. The British Parliament generally acknowledged being the Mother of Parliaments has become a popular model of the system where the opposition is officially recognized as the Majesty's opposition. The largest minority is the official opposition in the British Parliament, and the leader of the opposition is accorded official recognition. He is provided with several privileges and facilities to carry on his business properly and efficiently. Indeed, the role of a constructive, vigilant, effective and strong opposition is very important in a democracy. "The degree of opposition varies according to political conditions. For example, in authoritarian and democratic systems, opposition may be respectively repressed or desired" (Blondel, J 1997:462). In a democracy, opposition parties are supposed to criticize the government's actions and methods of operation.

In India there is no strong, united and healthy opposition. There are various reasons for it. The Congress which has been in power since independence did not allow the opposition to grow in a healthy way and always tried to retard its growth in various ways. No industrial revolution has taken place in this country. The result is that working class is not politically conscious, and there, it is disunited and weak. The opposition parties do not have any clear cut programmes and policies. Their approach is often communal sectarian or regional. Their leaders are confused and have no ideas of their aims and objectives. They quarrel for power and there are frequent splits. There is often defection on a large scale. People do not have faith in such parties and so they fail to command a majority in the elections. In the legislature itself, their leaders indulge in destructive criticism to gain their political ends. They keep party- interests above national interests. "Political opposition is generally considered a key aspect of democracy, as the opposition restrains the incumbent government and seeks to enlarge the rights available to those out of power" (Lipset, Seymour Martin 2000:48). Opposition works as a watchdog of public interests in a democracy and keeps the ruling party on its toes and criticizes the policies.

Democracy is a form of government which is supposed to work for the welfare of the people. But in the absence of a vigilant and watchful opposition, the ruling party generally tends to become complacent and tardy , and it starts working against the people because it is guided more by the lust for power than the welfare of the people. Sometimes the government goes beyond its limit and encroaches upon the rights of the people. It is the opposition which acts as a deterrent

and compels it to work within the well-defined limits laid down by the constitution, it draws the attention of the demands of the opposition, it mobilizes the public support in its favour and the government becomes unpopular with the masses. The fear of losing public support always makes them to work correctly. According to Seymour Martin Lipset, "over time, in both new and revived democracies, conflict between the governing and opposition parties helps establish democratic norms and rules" (Lipset, Seymour Martin 2000:55). Opposition parties help ensure that power is distributed evenly, and the government remains accountable to the people.

The role opposition party is not just to criticize the people in power. The opposition, like other constitutional bodies, is an agent for safeguarding the Constitution if the government willingly or unwillingly does something to violate it. The opposition, by healthy constructive and well-directed criticism, exposes the wrongs committed by the Government and to bring to light its acts of omissions and commission. If the opposition is active, alert and strong the ruling party can hardly afford to be slack and negligent in the performance of its duty towards the country. Healthy opposition means criticism of the government guided by the moral principles and basic values of life, with good intention of doing well to the public at large. In fact, this parliamentary system of government works smoothly when on their constitutional duties properly. "Winston Churchill remarked that "no one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time" (Winston Churchill, 2000). The opposition criticizes the government for the sake of criticism which is nothing but prejudice.

Often it is witnessed that patties in opposition oppose the government measures merely for the sake of opposition which creates unnecessary delays in implementation of various development plans resources. Sometimes it creates a very confusing situation and misleads the masses. However, the people may be politically ignorant; they hardly afford to forgive irresponsible and delinquent behavior on the part of the opposition party. "In the Jordan case study, scholars reference opposition increasingly challenge those in power as political and economic instability proliferated whereas the opposition in Morocco did not mobilize on the instability" (Lust-Okar, Ellen 2004:159) Serves as the primary representative of the opposition in the House.

An active and intelligent participation of the people is of great importance for the efficient functioning of the government. This can be ensured only when the people are politically trained and educated. Opposition party helps in this regard. It makes the people politically educated, it enables people to thin in public issues and unites them in support of the common body of principles and policies and to work together to see that those principles and policies are adopted and implemented by the government. The opposition makes articulate the inarticulate desires of different sections of society and gives expression to their pent-up feelings. It makes the government hear the voice of the lower strata of society and helps it to bring about changes in policies and programmes as per the aspirations of the people. Opposition parties also take up the momentary issues and awaken the people to the realities of the situation. Political culture, like political substitution, is equally important for the success of democracy and opposition has a significant role to play in developing political culture in a country.

The role of oppositional in a democracy is very important. The opposition accelerates the growth of the country or retards its growth by agitation, violence and by provoking the people and taking them in wrong directions. For example, the violent agitations in Gujrat and Bihar have resulted in great loss of life and property and have failed entirely to gain their objectives. The Government's policy of state trading in food grains was wrongly criticized for political reasons, with the result that it had to be given up. Consequently, there has been a considerable rise in food prices and the hardship of the people has increased. The role of opposition democracy should be healthy. It should criticize the government policies in the national interest and not for party gains. The opposition must came together and merge on the basis of familiarity in their ideologies. Universal illiteracy and universal poverty, unhealthy linguism, regionalism racism, and casteism characterize Indian life. They are all obstacles in the way of the growth of a cohesive social and political life in the country.

It is well known democracy is a government of the people for the people and by the people. Obviously, people have an important role to play. People's wishes, expectations and aspirations are always to be taken into account while formulating policies and programmes. No government can afford to ignore or bypass them if it were to commit this folly; it is destined to become unpopular with the masses. Opposition serves as an alternative to this situation. Consequently, there is a reversal of roles. The party in power goes out of office and assumes the role of opposition, white the party in opposition come to power. The smooth transition and the changeover mark an important characteristic of democracy. In dictatorship the transition is seldom smooth. There are coups, counter-coups, violence, bloodshed with immense loss to life and property. Our immediate neighbor Pakistan is a befitting example of this.

There is a mushroom growth of political parties due to the selfishness and lack of far-sightedness of their leaders. Parties can come together on the basis of a common ideology. But in India the party –alliances are opportunistic, the only common

ground between them being their hostility to the Government, obviously, such alliances are bound to be short lived. For example, the four- party grand alliance – Jan Sangh, Socialists, Congress Old, and B.K D proved to be a farce and a failure in the mid-term poll in 1971. The Janata Party was also a coalition of these very parties. So, it also did not prove more lasting than the inter-quarrelling of the opposition parties. In a democracy the aim of the government and opposition should be the same i.e, the good of the people. The opposition should force the government to implement its manifesto. It should criticize the government, only to make it more efficient and honest. Criticism should base on sound principles. Opposition parties should keep in mind that they may be called upon by the people to form the government at any time. They should, therefore, function in a responsible way. The failure of the opposition has so far been the greatest weakness of Indian democracy.

The modus operandi of the opposition involves mobilizing the public support in favour of its agenda and criticizing the government giving press statements, debating and discussing issues in Parliament, and placing no-confidence motion against the government. In India, submitting a memorandum to the President is a common practice. All these are commensurate with the democratic norms and contribute to the consolidation and stabilization of democracy. "Contemporary empirical evidence on the success of democracy is equivocal. On one hand, democracy is sometimes credited for bringing peace, individual freedoms and economic prosperity" (Pelke, Lars (2023:361). The opposition serves as a "watchdog" by monitoring and critiquing the performance of the government.

It is very necessary that the opposition should play its role very responsible and in a healthy manner. It needs to go beyond its petty interests and think in the larger interest of the society and nation. If the opposition behaves irresponsibility and indulges in unhealthy and destructive mud-slinging, instead of constructive criticism, the entire interest of the people otherwise democracy will become a mess. "Reason Wafawarova argued in 2008 that some approaches to democracy may undermine the ability for a developing country to achieve long-term stability and democracy" (Wafawarova, Reason 2008). The absence of intra-party democracy has contributed to political parties becoming closed autocratic structures

However, the role of opposition in India has been very healthy and constructive; it has always kept the government on its toes. When Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia would get up in Parliament to ask questions, even Jawaharlal Nehru would have regard for him. But the opposition has never been united on any issue due to personality clashes, petty policy difference and vested interests. In recent times, there is a decline in the role of opposition and it has not been very constructive. The opposition most of the time indulges in clashes and causes immense loss of public money and time. Besides, there are multitudes of opposition parties at the national and provincial levels. Naturally, an effective alternative to the ruling party is not available to the country. Confused and disillusioned.

The public has no option except looking towards the regional parties. In the history of India, there are rare instances when the opposition could unite on public issues. Hence, for the efficient functioning of the government, it is very important that opposition parties should rise above their petty interests and think about the progress and development of the people. Also, the opposition parties should keep in mind that the nation's interests are far above their own interests, and there should not be allowed to exceed those of the nation. In addition the ruling party should also avoid sowing seeds of disunity among the opposition.

In brief, opposition is indispensable for the sound working of a democracy. Its sole purpose should be to keep the government on it toes and to prevent the misuse of power. While dispensing with their role the opposition should exercise utmost restraint and observe discipline, giving top priority to the public interests. No policy or plan can benefit the people if we look only at its 'pros' and ignore the 'cons'. The opposition puts a rein on the government and it check consolidation and maintenance of democracy. Is necessary for part of opposition leads to instability and confusion and can prove harmful to the cause of democracy.

CONCLUSION

The opposition parties have a very important role to play in the proper and smooth functioning of democracy. Political parties are an essential part of India's parliamentary democracy. Opposition has an important role in highlighting loopholes in government bills, policies and action. Democratic politics has to be politics through consultation, through negotiation and some amount of bargaining is also involved. The significant role of the opposition party is to address the government of the day and hold them responsible for the open. They perform a cardinal role in the functioning of Parliament by holding the ruling government accountable for their policies. The role of the opposition party is not to oppose every decision of the ruling party.

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