

Education & Training for Parliamentarians: A Pathway to Effective Governance

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Abstract

The Indian Parliament is a cornerstone of the country's democracy, embodying its constitutional ethos and democratic values. This article explores the historical trajectory and evolution of the Indian Parliament, tracing its roots from ancient Indian assemblies to its current bicameral structure. The discussion highlights the influence of colonial legislative councils, the framing of the Constitution, and the transformations post-independence. By examining these stages, the paper underscores how historical, political, and socio-economic forces have shaped the Parliament as a dynamic institution. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping competent leaders who can steer governance and policy-making effectively. In India, where parliamentary decisions impact over 1.4 billion citizens, the necessity for parliamentarians to possess a minimum level of formal education has been a matter of ongoing debate. This research article examines the significance of education for members of the Indian Parliament, exploring how it influences their legislative performance, ethical governance and ability to engage with complex socio-economic issues. Through an analysis of existing literature, comparative international practices and case studies, the paper underscores the role of education in ensuring accountability, inclusivity and informed decision-making in democratic governance. Recommendations for educational reforms and training programmes aimed at enhancing the competencies of Indian parliamentarians are also proposed. Parliamentarians play a pivotal role in the legislative, deliberative, and oversight functions essential for a thriving democracy. In India, with its complex socio-economic challenges and diverse population, the responsibilities of Members of Parliament (MPs) are particularly demanding. This paper highlights the need for systematic and comprehensive training programmes for Indian parliamentarians, outlines existing training facilities, and provides recommendations for improvement. By analysing current training initiatives and comparing them with international best practices, the article underscores the importance of equipping legislators with skills and knowledge for effective governance.

Keywords: Parliamentarians, Education, Indian Parliament, Governance, Legislative Performance, Democratic Accountability

The Parliament of India, comprising the President, the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), and the Lok Sabha (House of the People), is the supreme legislative body of the nation. It reflects a synthesis of India's diverse history and its aspiration to be a modern democratic republic. Understanding its evolution requires delving into the ancient Indian tradition of governance, colonial legacies, and the vision of the Constitution makers. India's tradition of democratic deliberation can be traced back to the Vedic period (circa 1500 BCE). The Sabha and Samiti, two assemblies mentioned in the Rigveda, were early examples of consultative governance. These bodies provided a platform for collective decision-making,

although they were limited to elite members of society (Sharma, 1956). During the Maurya and Gupta periods, councils such as the *Mantri Parishad* (Council of Ministers) served as advisory bodies to monarchs. Similarly, village assemblies, such as those in the Chola Empire (9th-13th century CE), functioned as local governance units, demonstrating grassroots democracy (Thapar, 2002). The establishment of British colonial rule marked a significant shift in India's legislative framework. The Regulating Act of 1773 established the first rudimentary legislative council in Calcutta. Subsequent acts, such as the Charter Act of 1833, centralized legislative powers, creating the Governor-General's Council for legislative purposes (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006).

The Indian Councils Act of 1861 introduced Indians into the legislative process, albeit in a limited capacity. This act was a precursor to later reforms, such as the Government of India Act of 1919, which introduced a dyarchy system, and the Government of India Act of 1935, which laid the groundwork for a federal structure with bicameral legislatures (Chandra, Mukherjee, & Mukherjee, 2000). Post-independence, the Constituent Assembly of India (1946-1950) played a pivotal role in shaping the modern Parliament. Influenced by global practices and indigenous traditions, the Assembly adopted a bicameral structure to balance regional representation and popular will. The Rajya Sabha was envisioned as a body representing states, while the Lok Sabha was designed to embody the voice of the people (Austin, 1999). The Indian Constitution, enacted on January 26, 1950, established the Parliament as a sovereign legislative body with extensive powers. Its functions include law-making, budget approval, executive oversight, and amending the Constitution.

Since its inception, the Indian Parliament has evolved to address the dynamic needs of a diverse and populous nation. Key milestones include:

Reorganization of States (1956): The States Reorganization Act led to changes in the composition of the Rajya Sabha, reflecting linguistic and regional aspirations.

Strengthening Parliamentary Committees: Over time, the committee system has become integral to the functioning of Parliament, enhancing its deliberative and oversight capabilities (Gupta, 2004).

Landmark amendments, such as the 42nd (1976) and 73rd/74th (1992), have shaped the Parliament's powers and its relationship with other institutions. The digital era has brought significant changes, including the live telecasting of proceedings and e-governance initiatives to increase transparency and accessibility (Joshi, 2010).

While the Indian Parliament has been instrumental in encouraging democracy, it faces several challenges, including disruptions during sessions, declining legislative productivity, and underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups. Addressing these issues requires institutional reforms, greater public engagement, and a recommitment to parliamentary ethics and norms.

India is the world's largest democracy, with a parliamentary system that relies on the competence and integrity of its elected representatives. Parliamentarians are entrusted with the responsibility of drafting laws, debating policies and representing the diverse interests of their constituents. Given the complexity of these tasks, education emerges as a critical factor that can empower parliamentarians to fulfil their roles effectively. While the Indian Constitution imposes no minimum educational qualifications for legislators, this flexibility has fuelled debates on whether the absence of such criteria compromises governance quality.

This paper explores the necessity of education for Indian parliamentarians, focusing on its impact on their legislative capabilities, ethical conduct and ability to engage with national and global challenges. Drawing from empirical studies, international examples and insights into Indian political dynamics, the

research highlights the need for structured educational frameworks to enhance parliamentary efficiency and accountability.

Education equips individuals with critical thinking, analytical skills and ethical awareness—qualities indispensable for governance. For parliamentarians, these attributes translate into informed policy-making, effective communication and the ability to interpret complex legislative matters.

A study by Besley and Reynal-Querol (2011) established a correlation between the educational attainment of political leaders and economic development, emphasizing that educated leaders are more likely to implement sound policies. Similarly, in the Indian context, researchers have noted that legislators with higher educational qualifications tend to perform better in parliamentary debates and committee work (Jain, 2018).

India's Parliament comprises individuals from diverse educational and socio-economic backgrounds. While this diversity enriches democratic representation, it also raises concerns about the preparedness of some parliamentarians to address complex policy issues. According to the 17th Lok Sabha's statistical profile, approximately 27% of members held only secondary-level qualifications, while a significant proportion had no formal education beyond primary school.

This educational disparity often manifests in legislative inefficiencies, such as poor participation in debates, limited engagement with policy intricacies and inadequate scrutiny of bills. Furthermore, the absence of educational prerequisites can sometimes lead to the election of individuals who lack the competence to navigate governance challenges, thereby undermining public trust in the democratic process.

Several countries mandate minimum educational qualifications for legislators, highlighting the global recognition of education as a cornerstone of effective governance. For instance, Pakistan requires members of its National Assembly to hold at least a bachelor's degree, a policy aimed at ensuring a baseline level of competence. Similarly, in countries like Sweden and Norway, high literacy rates among parliamentarians correlate with efficient governance and robust democratic institutions (Andersson, 2019).

While imposing strict educational criteria may conflict with democratic inclusivity, these examples illustrate the potential benefits of ensuring that legislators possess foundational knowledge and skills. India can draw lessons from such practices to strike a balance between inclusivity and competency in its parliamentary framework.

Education not only enhances legislative performance but also encourages ethical governance. Educated parliamentarians are more likely to uphold democratic values, resist corruption and prioritize public welfare over personal gains. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index has consistently highlighted a link between the educational background of leaders and governance quality, with higher education correlating with lower corruption levels.

In India, where corruption and unethical practices remain significant challenges, promoting education among parliamentarians can serve as a deterrent against malpractices. Ethical governance, rooted in education, is essential for building public confidence in democratic institutions.

Despite its merits, the proposal to mandate educational qualifications for parliamentarians faces several criticisms. Opponents argue that such requirements may disenfranchise individuals from marginalized communities who often lack access to quality education. This could exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities, undermining the democratic principle of equal representation.

Moreover, educational qualifications alone do not guarantee effective leadership. As history reveals, several influential leaders, including India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and social reformer B. R. Ambedkar, achieved remarkable success despite varied educational backgrounds. Leadership qualities, such as empathy, vision and commitment, often transcend formal education.

To address these concerns while enhancing parliamentary competence, the following measures are recommended:

Voluntary Educational Programmes: Establishing voluntary training modules for parliamentarians on governance, lawmaking and public policy can bridge knowledge gaps without imposing mandatory qualifications.

Leadership Development Institutes: Dedicated institutions, akin to the Lok Sabha Secretariat's Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE), can offer comprehensive courses tailored to the needs of elected representatives.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Encouraging voters to prioritize education and competence when electing representatives can encourage a culture of accountability and meritocracy.

Scholarships for Aspiring Leaders: Providing scholarships and educational support to aspiring political leaders from underprivileged backgrounds can ensure inclusivity while promoting educational advancement.

Legislative Internships: Introducing internship programmes that allow aspiring leaders to gain firsthand experience in legislative processes can cultivate a generation of well-informed politicians.

India, the world's largest democracy, boasts a robust parliamentary system that plays a central role in governance. The effectiveness of this system relies significantly on the competencies of its elected representatives. Despite the critical responsibilities parliamentarians bear, there has been little emphasis on structured training programmes to prepare them for their multifaceted roles. This gap raises questions about their ability to address complex legislative issues, oversee executive actions, and respond to the diverse needs of their constituencies.

The Case for Training Indian Parliamentarians

Complex Legislative Environment: Parliamentarians must navigate an intricate policy landscape characterized by economic reforms, technological advancements, and global challenges. Understanding legislation, budgets, and international agreements requires specialized knowledge.

Role as Representatives: MPs represent constituents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, necessitating cultural sensitivity, negotiation skills, and awareness of local development needs.

Oversight Responsibilities: Effective oversight of the executive branch involves understanding complex issues such as financial management, national security, and governance frameworks.

Adapting to Change: Rapid technological advancements and global issues like climate change demand parliamentarians stay updated with contemporary knowledge.

Despite these demands, many Indian MPs lack formal exposure to governance principles, policy analysis, or administrative processes, underscoring the need for training interventions.

Existing Training Facilities for Indian Parliamentarians

Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST): Established in 1976, BPST functions under the Lok Sabha Secretariat and provides orientation programmes for newly elected MPs. These

programmes cover parliamentary procedures, rules of debate, and the legislative process. BPST also organizes workshops and seminars on specific themes, such as **budgetary processes and social issues**.

State Legislatures' Training Institutes: Several state legislatures have dedicated training wings, providing similar orientation for members of legislative assemblies. However, the depth and consistency of these programmes vary widely.

Indian legislators occasionally participate in training programmes conducted by institutions like the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). These offer exposure to best practices in legislative functioning globally.

Organizations like the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) and PRS Legislative Research provide issue-based briefings and capacity-building workshops, focusing on legislative analysis and policy evaluation.

Most training programmes for Indian MPs are voluntary, leading to low participation rates.

Limited Scope: While introductory training focuses on parliamentary procedures, there is a lack of advanced modules addressing specialized topics like public finance, international relations, and technology governance.

Ad hoc Implementation: Training initiatives often lack systematic follow-up or evaluation mechanisms to assess their impact.

Unequal Access: MPs from rural and remote constituencies face challenges in accessing training facilities due to logistical constraints.

Countries like the UK, Canada, and Australia provide comprehensive training for legislators through institutions such as the Parliamentary Institute of Canada and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. These programmes include induction courses, regular skill-building workshops, and personalized mentorship opportunities. Drawing lessons from these models, India could enhance the scope and reach of its training initiatives.

Recommendations

Mandatory Induction Programmes: Introduce compulsory training for newly elected MPs to ensure uniform understanding of parliamentary roles and responsibilities.

Advanced Modules and Continuous Learning: Develop specialized courses on emerging areas like digital governance, climate policy, and global trade.

Decentralized Access: Establish regional training centres to make programmes accessible to MPs from all regions.

Use of Technology: Leverage e-learning platforms and virtual classrooms for training, enabling legislators to learn at their convenience.

Institutional Partnerships: Collaborate with academic institutions, think tanks, and international organizations to bring global best practices to India.

The Indian Parliament's journey from ancient assemblies to a modern legislative institution reflects the interplay of historical legacies and democratic aspirations. As it continues to evolve, it must balance tradition with innovation to remain a robust pillar of India's democracy. The necessity of education for parliamentarians in India cannot be overstated. While the absence of mandatory educational qualifications reflects the inclusive spirit of Indian democracy, it also poses challenges to governance

efficiency and accountability. By investing in educational initiatives and encouraging a culture of lifelong learning among legislators, India can strengthen its democratic foundations and ensure that its leaders are equipped to navigate the complexities of governance. Ultimately, education is not merely a qualification but a transformative force that empowers parliamentarians to serve their constituents with integrity, competence and vision. As India aspires to play a leading role on the global stage, equipping its lawmakers with the tools of knowledge and critical thinking will be instrumental in realizing this ambition. Training parliamentarians is a critical investment in strengthening India's democracy. By equipping legislators with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective governance, the country can ensure more informed policy decisions and better oversight of executive actions. Strengthening existing facilities and adopting best practices will bridge the current gaps and enable Indian parliamentarians to meet the evolving demands of their roles.

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