

## Significance of Parliamentary Committees

### What is the issue?

- The discussion over the [RTI Amendment Bill](#) was much controversial in the Rajya Sabha.
- The opposition parties' demand, to refer the Bill to a committee of the House for detailed scrutiny before being passed, needs serious consideration.

### What was the contention?

- Opposition parties were demanding that the Bill be referred to a Parliamentary committee for detailed scrutiny.
- The treasury benches and a few other parties emphasized on debating the Bill on the floor of the house before being passed.
- But ultimately, the House passed the RTI Amendment after voting down the demand for sending it to a committee.
- So far, none of the 13 bills passed by the Parliament in the current session have been referred to a parliamentary committee.

### How is consent ensured in the Parliament?

- Indian Parliament broadly has two forums for discussion.
- One is on the floor of the House where the debate is televised and MPs take positions based on their parties' stand on a subject.
- The other is the closed-door forum of parliamentary committees.
- Their meetings are not televised and the record of the meetings does not reflect the position taken by an individual MP.

### What are Parliamentary Committees?

- Parliamentary committees are established to study and deal with various matters that cannot be directly handled by the legislature due to their volume and complexity.
- These committees are made up of MPs either from one or both Houses.
- Both Houses of Parliament have a similar committee structure, with a few exceptions.
- Their appointment, terms of office, functions and procedure of conducting business are also more or less similar.
- They are regulated as per rules made by the two Houses under Article 118(1)

of the Constitution.

- Broadly, Parliamentary Committees are of two kinds - Standing Committees and ad hoc Committees.
- The former are elected or appointed every year or periodically and their work goes on, more or less, on a continuous basis.
- The latter are appointed on an ad hoc basis as need arises and they cease to exist as soon as they complete the task assigned to them.

### **How does it work?**

- A bill can usually be referred to a parliamentary committee in 3 ways.
- First, the minister piloting the bill can seek the permission of the House to refer the Bill to a committee.
- Second, the Chairman/Speaker has the discretion in referring the bill to a committee.
- Usually, when ministers are trying to build political consensus on a bill, they welcome its referring to a committee.
- However, when in a hurry, they impress upon the Chairman/ Speaker not to refer the bill to a committee.
- This is when the third mechanism comes into play.
- When a bill reaches a House where the government does not have a majority, the MPs can mobilise the numbers to move a motion to refer the bill to a committee.
- However, there is an additional dimension to the scrutiny of bills by committees.
- Whenever the government and Opposition are at extremes in terms of the provisions, the bills are generally not referred to a committee.

### **How significant are Parliamentary Committees?**

- The idea behind the committee system in Parliament is to provide a specialised forum for deliberation on policy issues.
- This ensures that the deliberations are not constrained by the limited number of sitting days as in the case of Parliament.
- Debates in committees are more technical and so, the deliberations require time and stretch for a few months.
- [Unlike this, a debate on the floor of the House allows for political debate and can be wrapped up in a few hours.]
- Besides this, the main purpose is to ensure the accountability of Government to Parliament through more detailed consideration.
- The purpose is to strengthen the administration by investing it with more meaningful parliamentary support.
- The committee, over the years, has worked well in strengthening the

country's legislative process.

- Moreover, if a bill is referred to a committee, its legislative journey slows down.
- This is because the Bill can be debated in the house only after the committee has submitted its report.
- This slow down of legislation provides the much needed time in building consensus, despite being a source of continued tension between the ruling party and Opposition.

### **What is the way forward?**

- A robust lawmaking process requires thorough scrutiny by Parliament.
- Such scrutiny should not be impacted by either the strength of numbers in Parliament or political agreement on issues.
- This robustness can be ensured by requiring that all Bills be referred to Parliamentary committees.
- Exceptions to this rule should be strictly defined and the exceptions explained to Parliament.
- In addition, the committees should be strengthened to scrutinise and present their reports in a timely fashion.
- These mechanisms will ensure that all bills passed by Parliament, irrespective of the party in power, go through a well laid-out process of debate.

**Source: Indian Express**

