

Disruption by the Ruling Party Signals a New Low for India's Parliament

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Seventy-three years may not be enough to pronounce a judgement on whether parliamentary democracy has worked in India or not. In a democracy, it is the lowest common denominator that prevails, and hence, it is futile to accept only Pericleses in the rough and tumble of the *demos*.

But it is this same Indian parliament that has managed, without doubt, to bring together under one roof, into some sort of dialogue, the incredibly diverse peoples, ethnicities, and religious denominations. Issues are settled in *Sansad* through debate – sometimes, a bit too loudly. But let us not forget that some of today's participants had once favoured the gun rather than talk. In just seven decades, governments and the parliament have, indeed, succeeded in cooling off numerous intractable sectarian and secessionist passions. The first election to the Lower House (Lok Sabha) will go down in history as one of those wonders that only Indians are capable of demonstrating – maybe once or twice in a century.

The state of the Indian parliament today

Currently, however, there is an eerie feeling that it is all over and that the ultimate consensus – which lies at the very heart of parliamentary democracy – is nearing its end. “Disruption is a legitimate form of protest,” Arun Jaitley of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had thundered from the opposition benches in 2012, even as his band brought both Houses to unseemly halts, time and again.

But *Sansad* takes it all in its stride and, in fact, accepts both smooth conduct and disturbance as twin traits. Nevertheless, the treasury bench has never before taken up a systematic plan to ensure that both sessions are stopped from functioning – every day, without fail. The bedlam is so utterly predictable and ruthlessly well-coordinated. It's been on since March 13 when the re-convened budget session commenced. This self-sponsored chaos ensures that the scandalous charges against Adani are not taken up for discussion at all. People had expected that the judiciary and the legislature investigate the executive's indulgences and misdemeanours. As parliament screeches to a halt every day, the legislature's power to investigate the Adani group's manipulation of the stock market and public policies is log-jammed by parliament itself.

[Also read: Parliament Adjourned as Chaos Over Protests by Treasury and Opposition Benches Continues](#)

But why did it take two full months for Narendra Modi to react in his storm-trooping Modi way to

throttle public discussions at the highest legitimate forum of the land, the parliament? We must remember that the Union government in Delhi does not function like those in certain user-friendly states, where the chief minister decides what has happened or what may happen – and everyone generally agrees.

Professional ‘intelligence gathering’ and analysis have long fallen by the wayside and think tanks remain ignored. At the centre, however, a host of highly-professional but competing agencies give complimentary and contradictory inputs while the best legal eagles look for chinks and cracks. Many bits of initial postulates are either upheld or rebutted by incoming non-political data and prognosis. Those cold imperial and imperious pillars of North and South Blocks have seen just too many national and international crises to even remember. Anything done without this ‘due process’ is fraught with ominous consequences like the disastrous ‘demonetisation’ of 2016.

And, it must also be remembered that immediately after the scam broke out, Adani needed time to do extensive damage control – to save at least 40% of his highest valuation. But more important was the fact that Modi and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman required a workable parliament to present their last full budget and hold, at least, minimal discussions. The opposition played along, without any disruption, but where the second 25-day long leg of the budget session (after the break) is concerned, the government’s priority is totally different.

Modi must ensure his Teflon lasts and the narrative just has to be steered away from the Modi-Adani nexus. An excellent deflector was found in a [statement](#) made somewhere far away, and the Goebbelsian gang claims that it hurts the nation’s image. A ludicrous excuse is good enough to arrest the work of the nation’s parliament. There was no need, therefore, to emulate Cromwell and send troops marching into Westminster.

Also read: [What Rahul Gandhi Said in the UK and Why It Hit a Raw Nerve of the BJP’s](#)

New low in parliamentary functioning

Indian parliamentary democracy sunk to a new low as majoritarian bullying took over – in a menacingly thunderous manner. Every day from the first, i.e., March 13, as soon as both Houses assembled and rituals were completed, a well-planned bedlam was let loose – by, lo and behold, the ruling party itself. The Opposition’s demands for immediate discussion on the Adani scam were bludgeoned into submission by the Treasury benches – every morning and every afternoon.

Scenes inside parliament are [not televised](#) without approval and severe editing, or else the smiles and smirks of roaring ruling party members would convey that majoritarian bullying is really big fun. The seven decades of the working of the Indian sansad have demonstrated the universal virtue that the majority does not decide the debate – it only clinches the final division or vote count. But no more. The pulsations of majoritarian hegemony have to be hammered in, every minute.

It is obviously orchestrated and well-timed. But the Prime Minister is nowhere to be seen. The first Lok Sabha speaker, Babasaheb G.V. Mavalankar, never hesitated to reprimand prime minister Nehru for perceived transgressions, despite the brute majority his party had. Yet today, only a stubborn utopian would like to believe that, one would see even a watered-down half-version of this. Pareto had predicted “the circulation of the elites”, but witnessing the actual process of seizure of power by not-so-genteel classes, with all sound and fury, is quite galling. Obviously, this government has a lot to lose if facts tumble out – but then, why is it that most Indians do not seem to be bothered?



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Rajya Sabha, during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi, February 8, 2022. Photo: RSTV grab via PTI

Well, politics has long been a profession in disrepute – the world over – and Lincolns, Gandhis, and Mandelas only emerge in their saintly best after history has had time to marinate and pickle them. It is not surprising that very few in India really care whether one political group is shouting down the other. The media, through which facts are conveyed to people, have all been co-opted into the reality of “*ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* (one people, one nation, one leader)”. Hence, the complete apathy is quite understandable, and over the last few decades, the disconnect between the most powerful section of the political class and the people is quite complete.

As one waits outside Sansad Bhavan every day for an official car drop for home, one is astonished at the open flaunting of the obscenity of wealth on wheels of many parliamentarians. Massive Mercedes, BMW, Rolls Royce, Bentley, Lamborghini, Ford and Toyota SUVs of the saviours of democracy whiz past small handfuls of *jhola-walas* and *andolan-jeevis*. So, who cares whether ‘democracy’ is being mauled?

In 2014, Narendra Modi touched his forehead on the steps of the Lok Sabha, under blazing cameras, but every day thereafter, he has systematically undermined the institution of parliament as no PM before him has done. In fact, others do this job for him by controlling the cameras focusing on both houses and then releasing only that version that suits someone who had pummelled the functioning of his state assembly to something like 29 days in a year. *Sansad* is more difficult to manage, so provoked disruptions are used and the Sansad TV cameras select their ‘targets’ and the ‘feed’ that would be disseminated to the media outside.

The narrative that is vigorously pursued thereafter is that the nation should hold the opposition responsible for stalemates and for wasting the taxpayers’ money. So firmly embedded is this in the public imagination that the rest is easy, even when the government itself disrupts the proceedings, day in and day out, without respite. It is almost certain that the rest of the budget discussion will be stymied or guillotined and no Indian shall lose a single night’s sleep.

Let’s cut for a moment to the other scene. Globally reputed *Financial Times* has just [reported](#), “Almost half of all foreign direct investment into Gautam Adani’s conglomerate in recent years came from offshore entities linked to his family, highlighting the role of hard-to-scrutinise money flows in financing the Indian tycoon’s business empire”. Half the group’s \$5.7 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the last five years came from opaque sources, added FT. The trillion dollar question is: “Whose money went out of India and then came back to Adani as FDI and FPI?”

Obviously, the very stability of the model – where big finance is seamlessly dovetailed into big politics – is under nerve-wracking threat. Revelling in this entropy, Modi has become the first PM in India’s history to ensure that parliament is neutralised and made totally immaterial – without any repercussions at all.

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