



उप सभापति, राज्य सभा
संसद भवन, नई दिल्ली
DEPUTY CHAIRMAN,
RAJYA SABHA
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
NEW DELHI

INTRODUCTION

A bicameral Parliament at the national level is the defining feature of our constitutional framework of governance. Since their inception in 1952, both the Houses of Parliament, *i.e.*, Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha have played a pivotal role as law making and deliberative bodies. Their roles in holding the Government to account have been noteworthy and admirable. Both Houses of Parliament, by their immense contributions, have been strengthening our democracy.

The Rajya Sabha represents units of the Union, *i.e.* States and upholds the character of our polity. Being the Council of States, it provides an invaluable forum to voice their interests in democratic decision making. The hallmark of the Rajya Sabha is the principle of continuity as a permanent House in our parliamentary framework.

The vision of the framers of our Constitution to establish the Rajya Sabha as a second chamber of our Parliament was meant to provide a second look and obviate hasty legislation. Besides, it aimed at drawing upon those seasoned and eminent persons who have distinguished themselves in diverse fields such as literature, science, art and social service to serve the country. The association of such persons has given greater depth to the deliberations on issues of national importance. During the span of more than six decades of its existence, the Rajya Sabha has played a significant role in nation-building. It has stood the test of time as a legislative, deliberative and oversight body in our democratic polity and emerged as a shining example of a representative body at the apex level.

The Vice-President of India is the *ex officio* Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and as such has certainly enhanced the status and dignity of this House. All the Chairmen of the Rajya Sabha have played significant roles in securing an important place for the Rajya Sabha in our parliamentary set up. They have admirably guided the deliberations in the House and

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conducted its proceedings with utmost fairness and impartiality. Their rich legacy laid down great traditions for its smooth and dignified conduct.

Our present Chairman, Shri M. Hamid Ansari is a distinguished diplomat and an erudite scholar. He has the distinction of becoming the second Vice-President in the history of our Republic, after Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan to occupy this high office consecutively for two terms. He has taken important steps to enrich the proceedings of the House and enhance its image. Highlighting the importance of legislative and deliberative responsibilities of the Rajya Sabha for our polity and society, the Chairman while responding to the felicitations offered to him in the Rajya Sabha on 13th of August, 2012, stated that these ‘unavoidably also relate to public concerns in an era of rapidly changing expectations pertaining to good governance, probity in all aspects of public life, justice, inclusive growth, societal cohesion and social peace.’ Emphasising the fact that the conduct of Members in Parliament is now under greater public scrutiny, he observed that ‘the manner in which we attend to our business is watched by the citizen body with a discerning eye’. He has taken important initiatives for smooth functioning of the House and its effective legislative oversight of the executive by amending the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Rajya Sabha, especially those rules related to Questions. To maintain the sanctity and importance of the Question Hour and to insulate it from disruptions, he rescheduled its timings from 11.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon. He has always impressed upon Members to ask short and succinct supplementaries and urged Ministers to give pointed and appropriate replies to cover maximum number of questions and also to take up questions of even absent Members. He has also ensured that the Members get regular opportunities to raise matters of recent and urgent public importance with the permission of the Chair at each sitting of the House.

The Chairman has also expressed his anguish on the issue of disruptions in the House from time to time and exhorted the Members to maintain the decorum and dignity of the House. He once observed, “The Chair appreciates the view that a political assembly works on its perception of public impulses. Normal disciplinary procedures, therefore, have their limitations. The counterpart of this approach is self-discipline and a commitment to fulfil the objectives and purposes of a legislative body”. He urged the Members to ‘desist from approaches and practices that demean the stature of the Rajya Sabha ... and make the fullest possible use of instrumentalities of accountability and discussion available to them under the Rules of Procedure’.

It should be the endeavour of all Members to preserve and uphold the rich traditions of the Council. They are expected to maintain the dignity and decorum of the House while discharging their responsibilities as Members

of Parliament. We may recall the resounding words of our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who said that, “The Parliament does set some kind of an example to the rest of the country. As we behave here to each other, towards our work, towards the general public, to some extent others will behave elsewhere, whether in the State Legislatures or in the many other organs of self-government that exist in the country or that are growing up, right way down to that foundation of our democracy – the Panchayats in the villages.”

I have been associated with the Rajya Sabha for more than a decade and now for the last four years I have the privilege and honour to preside over the House as the Deputy Chairman. It has been my fortune to see the functioning of this House very closely and watch Members articulating themselves passionately and forcefully on critical issues facing the country. Their indepth deliberations have impacted the Government’s policies and programmes that set the direction of the country’s progress and positively affected the lives of millions of people. The Rajya Sabha is a vibrant body which represents the diversities of our federal polity and reflects the wide spectrum of interests and ideological persuasions. However, these differences do not come in the way of Members while discharging their duties towards society and the nation. They work together with a sense of camaraderie for strengthening parliamentary democracy. There are moments of turmoil when disruptions take place causing lot of anxiety to the Presiding Officers and inviting adverse criticism in the media and the public. These are, however, expressions of a vibrant democracy.


The task of the Presiding Officer is indeed delicate as he has to ensure that the rules of the House for conducting its business are properly followed by all Members while providing them adequate opportunities to participate in deliberations of the Council. This task has become more challenging for the Presiding Officer in the context of dynamics of multiparty democracy which often creates a situation wherein one or group of political parties obtain majority in the Lower House and in the Upper House, it is the Opposition which has a dominant position on account of its better numerical strength.

Ever since its inception, several practices, conventions and precedents have evolved in the annals of Rajya Sabha. Some of these are very unique to it. It is important to be familiar with such practices as well as the formal rules of procedure that govern the functioning of the House. Members need to understand the parliamentary rules, practices, customs and conventions so that they can make optimum use of the precious time of the House while participating in its deliberations. In the performance of such important tasks, the ‘Rajya Sabha at Work’ is a very useful publication which delineates

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various aspects of the functioning of the House. This publication highlights the fact that the Rajya Sabha is a distinct entity in our democratic polity, which plays a crucial role in the affairs of the nation. I understand that the first edition of this book was brought out in the year 1996 and, thereafter, it was revised in the year 2006. I extend my heartiest congratulations to Secretary-General, Rajya Sabha for taking the initiative in updating this important publication. I also extend my compliments to all those officials of the Secretariat who have been involved in this arduous exercise. I earnestly hope that this revised third edition would be a valuable and informative reference guide to the Members and to all those who evince keen interest in the functioning of our parliamentary democracy.

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(PROF. P.J. KURIEN)