

Essay on The Role of Opposition Party in Democracy

Democracy is a very lofty idea, the most popular form of government in the modern age and a form of government supposed to be most suited to the genius of people at large. It has been variously defined by various writers. To Lincoln, it was a government of the people, by the people and for the people. See lay defined democracy as a form of government in which everybody has a share. Dicey called it a form of government in which governing body is comparatively a large fraction of the entire nation. Literally, democracy is a form of political organization of society and the state under which power legally belongs to the people, and all citizens are equal before the law and enjoy political rights and freedom including the right to take part in managing the affairs of the state.

In modern representative democracies, the will of the people is formulated and expressed by their representatives duly elected to perform this function. Thus, elections are an integral part of democratic functioning which presupposes the existence of more than one political parties. The fate of the parties is decided through elections. The party that secures a majority of seats is called upon to form the government and run the administration. The other parties are supposed to function as opposition parties.

The opposition parties have a very important role to play in the proper and smooth functioning of democracy. Though in minority they function as, watch-dog and keep a vigilant eye on the functioning of government. They have to perform a two-fold function—one to place the matters of public interest before the government for action thereon, and two, to keep a check on the dictatorial and authoritarian actions of the government. Absence or inaction of opposition may virtually mean dictatorship of the ruling party. Presence of opposition makes

the function of the government truly democratic since it exercises to check on the misuse of power and authority by the party in power.

Like the party in power, the parties in opposition do have their ideologies, programmes, and policies, which they try to sell to the people. Through motions, resolutions, and bills in the legislature, they strive for implementation of their programmes which according to them are for the good of the people. They oppose all such measures of the party in power which they consider unjust and anti-people. In addition, they expose the misdeeds of the government. Lapses on the part of government, corruption, favoritism, nepotism and bureaucratic inefficiency are the main targets of opposition. The objective is to keep the government on the right track and not to permit dishonest politicians to grid their own ax.

On vital national and international issues, the opposition parties raise a public debate, mobilize public opinion, organize public meetings, rallies and demonstrations and try to force the government to accept their viewpoint. Their ultimate aim is to capture power by ousting the party from power. Thus, we can say that the chief function of the opposition is to propose, oppose, expose and depose.

The opposition, however, has a certain constructive role to play. It educates the people on all important issues pertaining to matters of national and international importance. During the hours of crisis and national emergency, the opposition is expected to extend its full support to the official efforts in resolving the crisis and facing the emergency.

For performing the above functions successfully and effectively, the opposition must be strong and healthy. The strength of the opposition lies in its members; commitment to its programmes and policies as well-as the public support it can muster as and when needed. A strong

and vigilant opposition in itself is a powerful curb on governmental autocracy and official high-handedness. No government, howsoever strong, can ignore the opposition, which is strong. A strong opposition keeps the government on its toes; it does not permit the government to be complacent. It is always respected, consulted and heeded by the government. Though numerically weaker a united, vigilant and effective opposition tends to prevent the government from indulging in corruption and anti-people activities.

The opposition needs to be healthy. It means it should possess healthy and constructive attitude., Healthy attitude implies a due appreciation of good things done by government and maximum co-operation in the official efforts aimed at the common good. Opposition for the sake of opposition is not a characteristic of a healthy opposition. The constructive approach includes the absence of negative attitude in dealing with the government. A negative approach on the part of opposition would destroy its credibility which is the bedrock of its strength. Hitting below the belt, character assassination, mud-slinging, violence, and rowdyism do not constitute decent legitimate Parliamentary practice. A healthy opposition must function with grace and dignity to be effective. In the absence of a strong and healthy opposition democracy will generate into a dictatorship of the ruling party.