Chapter 6: The Parliamentary System: Legislature and Executive

Questions — Questions and Activities

Q1 What makes the Indian Parliament the "voice of the people"? How does it ensure that different opinions are heard?

SOLUTION

The Indian Parliament is called the "voice of the people" because its members — the Members of Parliament (MPs) — are directly elected by the citizens of India through universal adult suffrage. This means every adult citizen, regardless of their social or economic background, gender, race, or religion, has the right to vote and choose their representatives.

The Parliament represents the entire country by being composed of two Houses: the Lok Sabha, whose members are directly elected by the people, and the Rajya Sabha, which represents the states and is elected indirectly. Together, they bring in representatives from all parts of India.

Different opinions are heard through several mechanisms. Translation services in 22 Indian languages (including recently added Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, Manipuri, Urdu, and Sanskrit) allow MPs to speak in their own languages. Debates and discussions on bills are conducted in an orderly manner under the guidance of the Speaker (Lok Sabha) or the Vice President/Chairperson (Rajya Sabha). The Question Hour allows MPs from all parties to question ministers about government policies, ensuring that diverse political viewpoints and public concerns are raised and addressed.

Answer: Parliament is the 'voice of the people' because MPs are directly elected by all adult citizens through universal adult suffrage; two Houses, multilingual translation, open debates, and the Question Hour ensure diverse opinions are heard.

Q2 Why do you think the Constitution made the Executive responsible to the Legislature?

SOLUTION

The Constitution made the Executive (the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers) responsible to the Legislature (the Lok Sabha) in order to ensure democratic accountability — that the government acts in the interest of the people

and not just for itself.

Since the Parliament represents the elected will of the people, making the Executive answerable to it means the government must continuously justify its actions and decisions to the people's representatives. This is done through mechanisms like the Question Hour, where ministers must answer MPs' questions about government policies and activities, and through Standing Committees that scrutinise government work.

This arrangement also upholds the principle of separation of powers and checks and balances. The Legislature can hold the Executive accountable by asking questions, seeking explanations, and even withdrawing support (a vote of no confidence). This prevents the Executive from becoming too powerful or acting arbitrarily, ensuring that governance remains in line with the Constitution and the welfare of the people.

The example of Lal Bahadur Shastri resigning as Railway Minister after a train accident — even though he was not personally blamed — illustrates the spirit of moral and collective responsibility that the Constitution envisions for the Executive.

Answer: The Constitution made the Executive responsible to the Legislature so that the government remains accountable to the people's elected representatives, preventing misuse of power and ensuring governance follows constitutional principles.

Q3 Why do you think we have chosen the system of bicameral legislature at the Union level?

SOLUTION

India chose a bicameral (two-House) legislature at the Union level — with the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha — for two main reasons: representation and federalism.

First, a single directly elected House was felt to be inadequate to meet the challenges that independent India would face. A second House provides an additional layer of scrutiny for legislation, allowing more thorough deliberation before a bill becomes a law.

Second, and more importantly, in the spirit of federalism — where power is distributed between the Centre, states, and local governments — a Council of States (the Rajya Sabha) was needed to give the states a direct voice in the

Union Parliament. The number of Rajya Sabha seats allocated to each state is based on its population, ensuring that states are proportionately represented in national lawmaking.

The composition and process of election to the Rajya Sabha were also designed to be different from the Lok Sabha, so that it brings a different perspective: Rajya Sabha members are elected indirectly by state legislatures, giving continuity and stability since the Rajya Sabha is a permanent House (it is never dissolved; members serve staggered six-year terms).

Answer: India chose a bicameral legislature to ensure federal representation (Rajya Sabha gives states a voice), provide additional scrutiny of legislation, and create a more stable second chamber that balances the directly elected Lok Sabha.

Q4 The Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, was passed with wide support. Why might it have taken over 25 years for this bill to be passed, despite being discussed for so long?

SOLUTION

The chapter explains that the lawmaking process in India is elaborate and rigorous. A bill goes through multiple stages: introduction in one House, referral to a Standing Committee, clause-by-clause discussion and amendments, voting, repetition of the process in the other House, and finally Presidential assent. This process by design takes time.

Major debates often concern the practical implications of a proposed law — who it affects, how it will be funded, and which groups support or oppose it. The chapter notes that in the case of the RTE Act, major debates concerned funding; similarly, the Women's Reservation Bill likely faced prolonged debate over questions of political consensus, the mechanics of implementation (such as the rotation of reserved constituencies), and differing views among political parties.

The chapter also highlights challenges to the effective functioning of the legislature, including disruptions of sessions, reduced quality of debates, and sessions being cut short. These challenges mean that even widely-supported bills can take years to move through the process.

Finally, building the political will and broad cross-party agreement needed to pass a constitutional amendment (which the Women's Reservation Bill required) is inherently more difficult and time-consuming than passing an ordinary bill, as it demands a special majority in both Houses.

Answer: The bill took 25+ years due to the rigorous multi-stage lawmaking process, the need for cross-party consensus for a constitutional amendment requiring a special majority, prolonged debates over implementation, and the challenges — including disruptions — that slow Parliament's effective functioning.

Q5 Sometimes the Parliament is disrupted and does not function for the number of days it is supposed to. What impact do you think this has on the quality of laws and the trust people place in their representatives?

SOLUTION

The chapter explains that the Parliament typically meets three times a year in Budget, Monsoon, and Winter Sessions. Each session has sittings where Parliament deliberates on proposed laws, discusses governance matters, and holds the Executive accountable through the Question Hour. When Parliament is disrupted, these sittings are lost.

The impact on the quality of laws is direct: bills that require careful clause-by-clause discussion and amendment may be passed hastily or not discussed at all, reducing the depth and rigour of the legislative process. The chapter notes that when 'debates are disrupted, sessions are cut short and some bills take years to be discussed and passed, it becomes a matter of concern.'

The data in the chapter shows a declining trend in the number of sittings across Lok Sabhas — from 677 sittings in the 1st Lok Sabha (1952–57) to 356 in the 13th Lok Sabha (1999–2004). Former Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu noted that productivity dropped to as low as 6.80% in some sessions, with the lowest-ever annual productivity of 35.75% in 2018.

On public trust: the chapter notes that concerns have been expressed about sessions marked by angry or biased debates that do not seriously address issues affecting the people. When citizens see their representatives disrupting the very institution meant to serve them, it erodes confidence in democratic governance. The chapter emphasises that citizens staying informed, asking questions, and engaging constructively with representatives is one of the best ways to address this challenge.

Answer: Disruptions reduce the number of sittings available for rigorous debate and scrutiny, leading to poorly examined laws and delays in legislation; they also erode public trust by signalling that elected representatives are not seriously addressing issues that affect the people.

Q6 What is the role that the Judiciary plays in Indian democracy? What could happen if we didn't have an independent judiciary?

SOLUTION

The Judiciary is the branch of government responsible for interpreting and applying the laws of the land, including in specific cases of disputes. It functions through a system of courts.

The chapter describes the Judiciary as the 'custodian of the Constitution': it ensures that all branches of the government operate within the principles and parameters enshrined in the Constitution. Specifically, it checks that laws passed by Parliament have not violated the constitutional framework, and that when the Executive implements laws, it too acts within constitutional limits. If either the Legislature or the Executive oversteps, the Judiciary has the power to step in.

The Judiciary also plays a pivotal role in maintaining the democratic nature of society by resolving disputes and safeguarding fundamental rights.

Without an independent judiciary, there would be no effective check on the Legislature or the Executive. The Legislature could pass laws that violate fundamental rights or the Constitution, and the Executive could implement laws in arbitrary or unconstitutional ways, with no institution to review or correct these actions. This would undermine the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances that prevent any one organ of government from becoming too powerful, ultimately threatening citizens' rights and democratic governance.

Answer: The Judiciary acts as the custodian of the Constitution — interpreting laws, resolving disputes, safeguarding fundamental rights, and checking that both the Legislature and the Executive act within constitutional limits; without an independent judiciary, no institution could prevent unconstitutional laws or arbitrary executive action, threatening citizens' rights.