

**SHOULD INDIA OPT FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL FORM OF  
DEMOCRACY ?**

**ANANDKUMAR P. SHAH**

**Asst. Prof. in Political Science**

**M.N.COLLEGE, VISNAGAR**

**DIST.- MEHSANA**

When we became independent in 1947, most of the members of our Constituent Assembly were of the opinion that we should adopt the parliamentary form of government not only because we were familiar with it, but also because it is more suitable to the conditions and requirements of our country. Hence in the Constitution adopted on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1950, we adopted the parliamentary form of government. Now it is over 65 years that we are trying to build a new nation through this system.

During the experiences of over six and a half decades, we have noticed many merits/advantages and demerits/disadvantages of our parliamentary democracy. It's merits/advantages certainly increase our confidence and faith in the system. Whereas it's demerits/disadvantages create problems and difficulties to the extent that many people argue to opt for an alternative to it, i.e. the presidential form of government. But the basic question is : is it really advisable to do away with the parliamentary form of government and opt for the presidential form of government? In this paper I humbly make an attempt to find the answer to this question by critically analyzing both of these systems in the Indian context.

It can safely be said that neither the parliamentary system nor the presidential system is completely foolproof. Both of them have some advantages as well as disadvantages, some strengths as well as weaknesses. In fact, strength of one system is sometimes a weakness of the other and vice versa. Hence a success or a failure of either parliamentary system or presidential system depends upon the conditions and requirements of any given country. While selecting a political system for India we must, therefore, keep in mind the historical, geographical, social, political, economic, cultural realities and requirements of our country.

I personally believe that the parliamentary form of government is more suitable and convenient to India even today. By saying this I do not in any way mean to suggest that there are no limitations or weaknesses in our present system. But these limitations and weaknesses, in my opinion, can be cured by some systemic, procedural and/or qualitative amendments or improvements. But on the whole, the present parliamentary form of government is more suitable and useful to our country. The following are the reasons behind this argument:

Firstly, the parliamentary system is more suitable to India from the historical, social and cultural point of views. Even before independence, though in a limited way, we were familiar with

this system. After independence, we have the experience of this system for over 65 years. Hence we are aware of the basic principles and mechanisms of this system now. On the other hand, India is a country of various diversities such as social, cultural, religious, linguistic etc. These diversities are better reflected and represented at the national level in our parliamentary form of government. The issues and matters of local and regional significance are also better represented at the Centre in this form of the government.

Secondly, it is strongly argued by the critics of parliamentary democracy that it is because of this system that we do not have stable governments at the Centre particularly during last three decades or so. But in my humble opinion, the issue of stability is perhaps over emphasized. We have the examples of Italy and Japan where an average term of governments was less than one year for over 40 years after the Second World War. By citing the examples of Italy and Japan, I do not try in any way to justify the political instability in our country. But the point is that this political instability does not necessarily hamper the social, economic and / or technological progress of the country. In spite of their political instability, both Italy and Japan have made remarkable progress in almost every sphere of life. Similarly, in India, the economic growth rate during the last 30 years of political instability is not lower than it used to be during the days of stable governments.

Thirdly, in spite of the argument made above against the undue importance given to political stability, I would certainly like to have some more stable political system in our country. But I believe that even this is possible within the present parliamentary form of government itself with, of course, some amendments in it. In Germany, for instance, there is a provision that one cannot press for the 'vote of no-confidence' against the government without a blue print of an alternative government. The tenure of the Legislature is fixed so that there is no need for numerous mid-term elections. Again, I do not simply suggest that we should blindly accept this method evolved by the Germans. But we can certainly evolve some mechanism suitable to our conditions and requirements within the framework of our parliamentary system, to have better political stability which in turn will save our time, energy and money spent on mid-term elections.

Fourthly, the critics of parliamentary democracy also argue vehemently that in this system the process of legislation is very slow, administration is lethargic and the leadership is relatively weak. Hence this system is not very useful during the times of war and other emergencies. But in my option, this argument also does not contain the whole truth. Great Britain having the same system fought two World Wars successfully. We have also fought three major wars successfully under the same system. We have also tackled quite effectively our internal problems - be it Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir or the North East. Our Constitution provides quite effective safeguards against such eventualities and, if required, we can still improve them. Not only this, the parliamentary system has one advantage over the presidential system during emergencies. Parliamentary system is flexible regarding the tenure whereas the presidential system is not. The Americans, therefore, had to go for elections even during the time of Second World War, whereas the Britishers could continue with the same government without any difficulty.

Fifthly, the advocates of presidential system argue that under parliamentary system we can't avail the services of the 'specialists'. But I don't buy this argument because, in my opinion,

mere change in the system will not help much to resolve this issue. Unless and until there is a qualitative improvement in our political culture, we can't expect much in this regard. Because if one of the present-day leaders tomorrow becomes the President of India, he is most likely to appoint the same persons as ministers even in the presidential system. On the other hand, if we are really committed to avail the services of the 'specialists', there is an ample scope for it in the present system itself. The Rajya Sabha can provide very useful mechanism to bring in those specialists in the government who cannot win the Lok Sabha elections. But this option is not utilized to its fullest potential for narrow political interests.

Finally, I humbly believe that experiment for the sake of experiment is neither necessary nor desirable. If the presidential form of government has worked successfully in the United States of America, France and Russia, it does not necessarily mean that it will succeed in India too. Our conditions and requirements are very different from them. Hence, as Prof. Sandeep Shastri points out, we must learn some lesson from our neighbor, Sri Lanka, who opted for presidential system without having any convincing reasons for it and paying the price for it.

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