

THIRD CONCEPT

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BABUDDIN KHAN

THIRD CONCEPT aims at providing a platform where a meaningful exchange of ideas can take place among the people of the Third World. The attempt will be to communicate, debate and disseminate information, ideas and alternatives for the resolution of the common problems facing humankind. We welcome contributions from academics, journalists and even from those who may never have published anything before. The only requirement is a concern for and desire to understand and take the issue of our time. Contributions may be descriptive, analytical or theoretical. They may be in the form of original articles, reactions to previous contributions, or even a comment on a prevailing situation. All contributions, neatly typed in double space, may be addressed to:

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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

INSIDE

Editorial	
Parliamentary Gravitas	5
<i>BK</i>	
India and US rebalancing of Asian strategy	7
<i>Asif Ahmed</i>	
Can India Match China's Manoeuvres?	10
<i>Dr. Arvind Kumar</i>	
From America with Love: Democratizing the World	13
<i>Eddie J. Girdner</i>	
Concept of Peace in Buddhism	19
<i>Dr. Anant</i>	
The Federal Front	22
<i>P. V. Rajeev</i>	
WTO and Indian Textile Industry	24
<i>Dr. Mukud Mudaragi</i>	
Work Life Balance via Job Design	27
<i>Dr. Uma Narang</i>	
Social Work as an Evolving Profession	32
<i>Dr. Pirzada M Amin</i>	
Migrants as Agents of Change	37
<i>Dr. Amit Rahul</i>	
Dalits and Human Rights in India	41
<i>Dr. G. K. Rout & Dr R. Mohanty</i>	
Demerger: Legal Framework in India	46
<i>Dr. Ritu Sapra & Ms Shivani</i>	
Locating Women in the 18th century Himalaya	54
<i>Prof. Girija Pande & Dr. Madhu Pande</i>	

Parliamentary Gravitas

India prides itself being world's largest democracy; nevertheless this sense of pride is undermined by the erosion of credibility of the Parliament. Our Constitution represents the societal consensus on the philosophy, direction and instrumentalities of governance of the Indian Republic and Parliament is the pre-eminent institution created by this Constitution which symbolises the will and aspirations of the Indian people.

During the past six decades of its existence, the Indian Parliament, as hallowed institution, has been instrumental in ushering in a social revolution in this country through progressive pieces of legislation. This is the forum where vast array of ideas bloom and where the clash of ideas and concepts stimulates the minds. However, recent decades have been characterized by declining trends in the functioning of the Parliament thereby culminating in the erosion of its credibility. Currently, Parliament is grappling with the problem of its being dysfunctional. Society has expressed its serious concern over this state of affairs. However, the two Houses remain paralysed essentially because of a perceptual distortion characterised by a strange belief that debate and discussion are perhaps not the effective methods to highlight a problem and that disruptive action will lead to better result. Consequently, the Parliament remains dysfunctional paving way for erosion of its credibility.

There has been qualitative improvement in the educational background of the members of the Parliament (MPs). According to the data released by PRS Legislative Research, the percentage of MPs without secondary education has decreased from 23 per cent in 1952 to 3 per cent in 2009. The percentage of graduates has increased from 58 per cent in 1952 to 79 per cent in 2009 (This includes MPs with post-graduate and doctorate degrees). More MPs have post-graduate degrees than in 1952. The percentage of post-graduates has increased from 18 per cent to 29 per cent. In this backdrop, one wonders as to what has gone wrong with our Parliament. The phenomenon of disruption and forced adjournment of the House became more and more visible since the late eighties. Lok Sabha met for an average of 127 days in the 1950s and Rajya Sabha for 93 days. This had decreased to 73 days for both Houses in 2011.

However, it must be noted that Departmentally Related Standing Committees were instituted in 1993. Since then, Parliament refers many Bills / issues to these committees for detailed analysis. This work happens outside the scheduled sittings of Parliament. The All India Conference of Presiding Officers, Chief Ministers, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Leaders and Whips of Parties held in 2001 had called for immediate steps to ensure that Parliament meet for a minimum of 110 days every year. It had recommended that this change be brought in through a constitutional amendment if necessary. The number of Bills passed by Parliament has declined over the last few decades. The 1st Lok Sabha passed an average of 72 Bills each year. This has decreased to 40 Bills a year in the 15th Lok Sabha. Parliament passed 118 Bills in 1976. This was the highest number of Bills passed by Parliament in a single year. The lowest number of Bills was passed in 2004. In this year, only 18 Bills were passed by Parliament.

Perhaps the growing aggressiveness and intolerance in politics, changing power equations, resulting in the emergence of new political formations without a pan-Indian appeal, a growing perception about what is often called the unresponsiveness of the establishment — all these and many more complex factors influenced the minds of our law makers to leave debate and resort to direct action to make their point. Very often it has been found that the leadership of political parties would decide that the House should not function on a particular day and ask their members not to allow the House to run on that day.

The erosion of decorum and gravitas in parliamentary proceedings is a phenomenon often seen in Parliaments of democracies with a multi-party parliamentary system, with no party strong enough to enforce its political will on the conduct of the parliamentary proceedings. End of one crisis may lead to occurrence of another crisis in future unless and until there is an ethical introspection by all parties and the Congress leadership takes the initiative for restoring the decorum and gravitas of the parliamentary proceedings.

—BK