

9 Opposition and parliamentary accountability

Who sets the agenda?¹

Sandeep Shastri

I was in the opposition for 40 years but I never hesitated to congratulate the government of the day when the situation warranted. But, Congress behaved irresponsibly during the Kargil war

Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister 7 April 2004

The government does not want our cooperation or wants it on its own terms. We are the Opposition. But if the Government does not allow the Opposition to play the part then there would be difficulty and democracy would not work well

Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Leader of the NDA
while in the Opposition 26 August 2004

The Government and the opposition both have a sacred obligation. We do incalculable damage to the reputation of India's Parliament if we resort to disruption of Parliament to make a political point. Those who prevent Parliament from functioning, disable the voice of the people

Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister in
address to nation on 2 September 2012

The NDA government is pushing forward a discussion with not even a formal consultation with the Opposition. The Congress partly strongly opposes the move of the Government and will do so on the floor of the House

Manmohan Singh as Leader of the Opposition
in the Rajya Sabha on 21 December 2002

Approaching the theme

The opening four statements made by two very important leaders, who held the positions of both the Prime Minister as well as Leader of the Opposition,² succinctly highlight the difference in perspective

when one is the ruling and the opposition. All four statements draw attention to a clear difference in perception. Vajpayee rightly pointed out to the role of a constructive opposition when he was Prime Minister and highlighted the need for the opposition to be given its legitimate space when he was the Leader of the Opposition. Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister drew attention to the responsibilities of the opposition in allowing Parliament to function and bemoaned the lack of consultation between the ruling and the opposition when he was the Leader of the Opposition. In the working of India's parliamentary democracy, the role of the opposition is clearly now occupying the spotlight of attention. In the last quarter century with the formation of coalition governments at the national level and the clear emergence of a competitive party system, the role of the opposition has assumed added significance and relevance. There is of course, an element of ambiguity and lack of consensus (especially between the ruling and the opposition) on the legitimate role of the opposition in a parliamentary system. More often than not, for those in politics, where they 'stand' depends on which side of the aisle they 'sit'! This chapter makes an attempt to assess the position of the Opposition within the framework of Parliamentary democracy and analyze the multiple roles it has come to play within the boundaries of Parliamentary accountability.

If one were to look at the broader context there has been an interesting debate on the emerging role of the Parliament in India. While many commentators have drawn attention to the decline of Parliament and the strong public sentiment against Parliament³ others have focused on the progressive democratization of the legislative chambers.⁴ Scholars have also drawn attention to the changing characteristics of political parties in India as being the principal factor contributing to the decline of Parliament.⁵ While exclusively focusing on the Opposition in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, we would make the argument in this chapter that the political context in which the opposition operates on the one hand and the redefining of the role that elected representatives themselves seem to be increasingly believing in needs to be budgeted into any assessment.⁶

A framework for analysis

Robert Dahl referred to polyarchal democracies as offering meaningful choices among different alternatives in his seminal work on democratic theory as early as in 1956, asserting that the alternative with the maximum support gains prominence even as others enjoy an element of legitimacy.⁷ A few decades later, expanding on this theme, Dahl

argued that in polyarchal democracies, citizens enjoyed the right to be critical of the conduct of government.⁸ Clearly, 'opposition alongside participation'⁹ was seen as the mainstay of democracy. One of the key features of liberal democracies and which made them distinctly different from non-democratic regimes was the legitimacy and presence of the opposition. Shapiro has rightly asserted that democracy 'is an ideology of opposition as much as it is one of government'.¹⁰

Thus within a democratic framework, the legitimate space of the opposition has always been recognized with varying degrees of assertiveness. Three dimensions need to be factored into this analysis. Firstly, the nature and structure of the democratic political system assumes significance. Does the system provide for institutional and political opportunities for the voice of the opposition to be heard? Is the opposition accommodated in the legitimate space available within the political institutions that exist or do they need to get themselves heard through more ingenious ways by accessing other available platforms in the democratic political process? These questions are critical to understanding the role of the Opposition in the Indian democratic context. A tangential aspect that merits focus is whether the constitutional arrangement provides for a presidential, semi-presidential or a parliamentary system of government. In a parliamentary system of government, the role and space for the opposition is often distinctly defined. Comparisons across established democratic political systems have found that in 'institutional terms, the Westminster systems are still at the bottom of the league table when it comes to opposition influence on parliamentary decision-making'.¹¹ In these parliamentary democracies, the opposition within the elected legislature many a time sees its legitimate role as being one of criticizing the ruling party and the government often with an eye on the next elections.¹² Yet, when this criticism is within the larger framework of accountability, it is a 'powerful reminder of the great capacity of parliamentary democracy (to balance) . . . competing public demands for political stability and change.'¹³ Helms identifies three tasks of the opposition, especially in a parliamentary democracy:¹⁴ a) criticizing the government; b) scrutinizing and checking government actions; and c) representing a credible alternative to the government. It has often been argued in western parliamentary democracies that, within the elected legislature, when the ruling party is strong, the opposition takes recourse to parliamentary debates and committees to assert its presence.¹⁵ We would argue that in parliamentary democracies like India, a strong ruling party presence in the legislature often forces the Opposition to establish its presence more outside elected Chambers than within it.

Secondly, the nature of the party system plays a critical role in establishing the contours of the influence of the opposition. It has often been argued that where coalition governments are the norm, the blurring of the clear divide between what constitutes the ruling and the opposition impacts on the influence of the opposition. In a one-party dominant system, the opposition could often be pushed to the margins.¹⁶ The role of the opposition in traditional two-party systems is often more unambiguous whereas in a competitive multi-party system one could often witness bipolar or multi-polar contestations.¹⁷

A third dimension that assumes significance is the difference in the influence of the opposition in federal and unitary systems. The territorial distribution of powers coupled with the nature of the party system also influences the strength and status of the opposition within elected legislatures in both federal and unitary parliamentary systems.¹⁸ This facet is critical when the role of the opposition in India is assessed.

While discussing the patterns of opposition in western democracies, Dahl referred to the 'ends and means' of the opposition. While regard to the means there was no single pattern and varied from one political system to another, the end invariably was coming to power or ushering in change, at times of a radical nature. The means varied according to their strategies, distinctiveness, choice of sites for encounter, nature of competitiveness in the system, and the focus of their concentration.¹⁹

Within the broader theoretical context outlined, this chapter will assess the role of the opposition in the Lower House of the Indian Parliament (*Lok Sabha*) over the last quarter century, especially after 1989. For many, the 1989 Parliamentary elections heralded the end of one-party domination and the ushering in of a competitive party system.²⁰ This election also saw the commencement of a phase of coalition and minority governments on the one hand and a clear emergence of a formal and legitimate opposition in the Lok Sabha.

The opposition in the Lok Sabha: an overview

As per the conventions and practices that have defined the working of the parliamentary system of government, the party that secures a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha becomes the ruling party and its leader, the Prime Minister. Those political parties which are opposed to the ruling party are in the opposition and the opposition party with the largest number of seats and has more than 10 per cent of the strength of the House is declared as the official Opposition and its leader as the Leader of the Opposition.²¹

If one were to trace the history of the first fifteen Lok Sabhas (1952–2014), in the first three Lok Sabhas (1952–1967) no opposition party was accorded the official status of the Opposition as none of them had 10 per cent of the members of the House. This was clearly the phase of one party-domination, when the Congress party was in power not merely at the Centre but in most of the states. The Opposition was not merely limited in its numerical strength but was also deeply divided. It has often been argued that the real opposition to the Congress party was not so much on the Opposition benches but within *the ranks of the Congress party*. Much before the first General Elections in 1952, when the Constitution was still being drafted, it was argued that the real Opposition leader to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was his own Deputy Prime Minister, Vallabhai Patel.²² Manor asserts that the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was committed to liberal values and a dominant Congress saw very little threat from the opposition. Manor elaborates that Nehru 'treated opposition parties generously, unlike many of his contemporaries elsewhere in the developing world'.²³

It is interesting to record that the first time a party was formally recognized as the official opposition in the Lok Sabha, was when the Congress party split and the Congress(O) emerged as an opposition party against the Congress(R) and its leader Ram Subhag Singh became the first Leader of the Opposition. He had a tenure as Leader of the Opposition for just over a year as the Fourth Lok Sabha was dissolved. Once again the Fifth Lok Sabha (1971–1977) saw no opposition party securing the minimum required 10 per cent of the seats. This was also a phase when the relationship between the government often became tenuous especially on account of the central government misusing the provisions of the Constitution to destabilize the opposition-led state governments.²⁴

The Sixth Lok Sabha saw the Janata Party emerging as the ruling party and the Congress being relegated (for the first time) to the benches of the opposition. The Congress emerged as the official opposition and Y.B. Chavan became the official Leader of the Opposition to be soon succeeded by C.M. Stephen when the Congress party split and saw a leadership change on the floor of the House. When the Janata government collapsed and Charan Singh formed the government with the outside support of the Congress, the Janata Party emerged as the official opposition and its leader Jagjivan Ram became the Leader of the Opposition.

When the Congress returned to power in 1980, the Seventh and Eighth Lok Sabhas once again saw a situation for a decade, wherein

no opposition party secured the minimum 10 per cent of the seats and thus there was no official opposition party or Leader of the Opposition.

The 1989 polls that led to the constitution of the Ninth Lok Sabha was a watershed election in more than one way. This election heralded the end of one-party domination and the emergence of an authentic multi-party system.²⁵ For the next quarter century the country saw coalition and minority governments at the national level with no single party being able to secure a majority on its own in the Lok Sabha. This development also saw an element of stability in the ranks of the opposition and during this two-decades-and-a-half period there has always been an official opposition and a Leader of the Opposition. The party which emerged as the official opposition was linked to the politics of coalition formation and support to minority governments.

The 1989 elections saw a five party National Front coalition government to power with the outside support of the BJP and the left parties. The Congress, which was the single largest party in the House preferred to sit in the opposition and given its numerical strength its leader, Rajiv Gandhi became the Leader of the Opposition. When the National Front Government collapsed in December 1990 and a splinter group of the Janata Dal (S) led by Chandrashekar formed the government with outside support of the Congress, Rajiv Gandhi had to give up the position of the Leader of the Opposition as his party was supporting the new government and the BJP emerged as the official opposition and its leader L.K. Advani became Leader of Opposition.

The 1991 elections saw the Congress forming a minority government and the BJP emerged as the official opposition party and first L.K. Advani and later Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Leader of the Opposition. After the 1996 Lok Sabha elections when Vajpayee formed the thirteen-day BJP government, the Congress was accorded the status of the official opposition with its leader P.V. Narasimha Rao becoming Leader of the Opposition. When the thirteen-party United Front government came to power with the outside support of the Congress and the Left parties, the BJP once again became the principal opposition with Vajpayee being appointed Leader of the Opposition.

The Twelfth Lok Sabha had one of the briefest terms of a little over a year. The BJP-led coalition government was in power with the Congress being the official opposition led by Sharad Pawar. The Thirteenth Lok Sabha saw the BJP-led NDA return to power and the Congress retaining its position as the official opposition though with Sonia Gandhi as the new leader. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Lok Sabha saw the Congress-led UPA emerging as the ruling coalition with the BJP being

the official opposition first under the leadership of L.K. Advani, who later handed over the leadership to Sushma Swaraj.

Thus, clearly, the ninth general election in 1989 is the touchstone when the position of an official opposition and its recognized leader in the Lok Sabha got stabilized and the Lok Sabha has always had a Leader of the Opposition since then till the sixteenth general election in 2014 when the Congress returned with only forty-four seats in the Lok Sabha that less than 10 per cent of the strength of the House. In any case the development till then has a direct corollary to the emerging competitive multi-party system in the country and the fact of coalition governments at the national level. What have been its wider implications for the discharge of responsibilities by the party which occupied the status of the official opposition in the Lok Sabha will be the focus of the next section.

The opposition and parliamentary accountability

When analyzing the role of the opposition as a party and as individual members in the Lok Sabha, in ensuring parliamentary accountability in particular and playing the role of a parliamentary opposition, the following six roles are often outlined: a) Representing their individual constituencies; b) Holding the government of the day to account; c) Seeking information from the government as and when required and warranted; d) (Re)Interpreting government actions from the perspective of the opposition and their perception of the public good; e) Supporting the government on matters that require a national consensus; and f) Providing the nation with a viable alternative to the existing ruling party. One could debate strategies to prioritize these roles. Further, each of these roles and their relative importance and impact needs to be viewed in the specific context of the wider developments of national politics. Different opposition parties and members could also privilege one role as against another in a specific context. Over time, a judicious combination of these roles would do justice to an opposition party/member to the role assigned to it. In this section, an evaluation of the opposition in discharging these roles is dilated upon.

While focusing on the role of the opposition in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, it is useful to provide a wider context in terms of both popular perception of the working of Parliament and more specifically the opposition on the one hand and the assessment contained in the body of literature on the working of the Lok Sabha and the opposition therein.

Data from the National Election Studies, India Component of the World Values Survey²⁶ and the State of Democracy in South Asia (SDSA) Studies would indicate that among common people, two important political institutions suffer from a serious trust deficit: Parliament and Political Parties. The comparative chart below succinctly illustrates the point. In the five surveys, highlighted, Parliament has remained in fourth or third position, in terms of trust. What would be heartening for those who support Parliament is that it is consistently ranked above the political parties, the police, and the bureaucracy (see Figure 9.1).

The first SDSA report (2005) clearly indicates that public trust in non-elected institutions is much higher than elected institutions.²⁷ However one also notices a silver lining in this regard. When it specifically comes to Parliament, the second round of the India segment of the SDSA study (2013) indicates that the trust in Parliament witnesses a dramatic increase by as much as thirteen percentage points.²⁸ Further, the first round of the Tracker Poll conducted by Lokniti-CSDS in July 2013, in the run up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, specifically sought the response of people to their level of satisfaction with the main opposition party over the last four years (2009–2013).²⁹ Close to half the respondents were either fully satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the way the main opposition party discharged its responsibilities. While around one-fourth of the respondents were dissatisfied, around three of every ten respondents preferred not to express an opinion. One would immediately need to add a caveat at this point. The public perception of the opposition in 2013 could be a direct corollary to the strong level of disenchantment with the government, a fact that was clearly expressed the very next year in the Lok Sabha elections. However, both the second round of the India segment of the State of Democracy study as well as the Tracker Poll seem to indicate that the intensity of distrust in the Parliament seems to have declined as well as there appears to be a vote of confidence in the way the main opposition has discharged its responsibilities in the recent past.

Studies that have focused attention on the working of the Indian Parliament have drawn attention to the general decline in terms of the time spent by the Lok Sabha on deliberations as also the quality of those deliberations. Verma and Tripathi,³⁰ in their analysis of the decline of the Indian Parliament amidst democratization, indicate that there has been the following: a) a steep fall in the number of days that the Lok Sabha has spent in deliberations;³¹ b) a progressive increase in the working hours lost in the Lok Sabha on account of disruptions;³² c) a sharp decline in the duration of the sitting hours

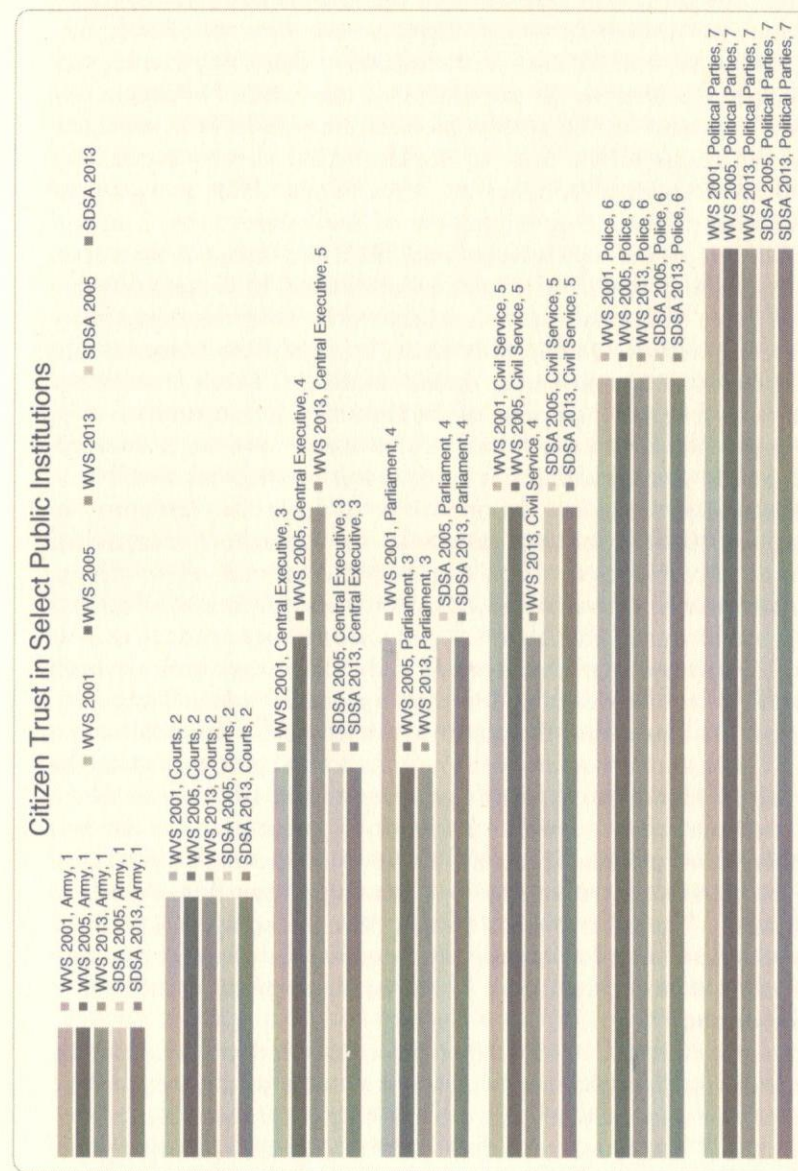


Figure 9.1 Citizen trust in select public institutions

Source: NES and SDSA Data sets, Lokniti-CSDS, World Values Survey Data set

of the House;³³ and d) a progressive reduction in the number of bills passed and time devoted to discussion of the budget and passing of legislation. The study also indicates that this decline has been especially steep over the last two decades, ever since one saw the rise of a competitive multi-party system, a series of coalition or minority governments.

Much of the analysis on the decline of the Indian Parliament has focused attention on the perceptible deterioration in both the quality of the debate on the floor of the Lok Sabha as well as the time and effort devoted to conduct its deliberations. After every forced adjournment of the House on account of disruptions, there is an animated debate on the huge waste of both fiscal and human resources on account of the elected chamber not being allowed deliberate and function. A game of mutual blame is unleashed by both the ruling party and the opposition. On the other hand, it has also been argued that the regular interruptions and deviations in the Lok Sabha proceedings and ever-so-frequent disruption of the House are a 'consequence of its progressive democratization'³⁴ and a reflection of the larger developments and fundamental changes in the Indian political process.³⁵

Reflecting on the role of the opposition in the Indian Parliament in general and the Lok Sabha in particular, Manor makes the argument that ever since the phase of coalition politics and multi-party democracy, parties which have sat in the Opposition have often believed that at they stood a good chance of winning the mandate at the next elections.³⁶ This may have often decided and defined their strategy both on the floor of the House and in their approach to Lok Sabha proceedings. He also makes the point that much of the deliberations of the Lok Sabha are not so much through the formal proceedings on the floor of the House but through Parliamentary Committees at which both members of the ruling and opposition participate actively and often shed their political colours.³⁷ However, studies have also argued that the committee system and its functioning often leave much to be desired.³⁸ The other dimension that Manor highlights is that the reduced misuse of constitutional provisions in the phase of coalition politics could have contributed to less combativeness on the part of the opposition.³⁹

Attention must also be focused on the argument that the Lok Sabha (both ruling and opposition benches) is witness to a change in the social profile of its members and the widening of the social base of representation.⁴⁰ It is also argued that the increasing presence of regional political parties in the Lok Sabha could also be a contributing factor to the changing contours of the relationship between the government and the opposition.⁴¹ However, there is very little empirical evidence to

prove that the changing social profile of membership and the increasing presence of state-based parties could truly explain the reduced time that the Lok Sabha spends on its deliberations.

This chapter makes the argument that the changing quality and content of debates on the floor of the Lok Sabha and the opposition's participation in the same, coupled with the frequent disruptions on the floor of the House, need to be viewed from the prism of perception of members of the Lok Sabha as individuals and political parties as groups in how they have redefined their roles as elected representatives. The present phase of competitive party democracy and the nature of our electoral system may have contributed to a searching second look by both parties and especially those elected to the Lok Sabha on their tickets, to re-define the role of an elected member.

Discussions with members of elected bodies across political parties indicates that, elected representatives are increasingly redefining their role as both people's representatives and members of a deliberative chamber.⁴² Elected representatives from both the ruling party and the opposition benches often see their role on the floor of the Lok Sabha as being just one (and not necessarily the most critical and important) platform they can employ to discharge their responsibilities.

While it is true that the time spent by the Lok Sabha for its sittings and in debate and discussions is steadily declining, do member of the House see the chamber as an arena for debate, dialogue, and discussion, or do they see their roles as members (including those from the ranks of the opposition) as being more critical outside the House and believe that informal networks are more critical in fulfilling their roles as elected representatives?

This would also help explain the increased recourse to disruptions of proceedings and the need to adjourn the House without the conduct of regular business. Given the presence of a 24/7 media, the visibility that members (and parties) gain by such actions could make them believe that the more effective way of holding the government of the day to account is by such visible and vocal means of protest. Today, prime time discussion on electronic media often involves representatives of both the ruling and opposition parties sparring on important and contentious issues of the day.⁴³ This tends to be more in the limelight than the actual deliberations on the floor of the House. In the range of corruptions cases involving the UPA, the debate, in which opposition leaders and government ministers took an active part, was clearly much more outside Parliament than on the floor of the House. The India Against Corruption Movement, which focused on the need for an important legislation, occupied much of the spotlight of attention

in 2011. This debate was however much more vibrant in the public domain rather than on the floor of the Lok Sabha.

The key question that one needs to address is that for the opposition is the 'real theatre' of politics and political debate not on the floor of the Lok Sabha but in the public domain amongst the people. Is the floor of the House more seen as a space for protest,⁴⁴ with the real action of holding the government accountable happening more on the streets and other public forums amongst the people?

In lieu of a conclusion

If one were to view the role of the opposition in ensuring parliamentary accountability, keeping in mind the way elected representatives (from across the political spectrum) perceive their roles, the issues fall into a clear perspective. The floor of the Lok Sabha is no longer seen as the principal site for challenging the government or holding it accountable. The real scene of action is either outside the House in the public domain or what grabs media attention on the floor of the Lok Sabha. Why disruptions and stalling of proceedings becomes the order of the day is the visibility and attention it provides the opposition and the fact that it is often a more effective way of embarrassing the government of the day. More importantly, given the multiple roles that elected representatives see themselves playing, especially in order to win another election, the focus of attention gets dissipated among multi-track activities, of which one of them (often reduced to a lower order of preference) could be participation in formal parliamentary proceedings.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is a developed version of a paper presented at a conference on 'The Indian Parliament and Democratic Transformation' (New Delhi; 9–11 April 2013). I would like to thank all academicians, political leaders and social activists for their inputs with whom I discussed the theme at length. I especially benefitted in discussions with Dr. Ajay K. Mehra, Dr. Suhas Palshikar, Professor Yogendra Yadav, Mr. Rahul Verma, Mr. Srikantha Murthy, and Dr. M.K. Sridhar among others. I, of course, take full responsibility for the views expressed in the chapter.
- 2 One could have chosen statements on the role of the opposition by many other prominent leaders. The statements of these two leaders were specifically chosen because not only did both occupy the position of both Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, they have done it in the phase of coalition politics/minority governments.

- 3 Devesh Kapur and Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Indian Parliament as an Institution of Accountability*, Democracy: Governance and Human Rights Programme, Paper No. 23, 2006, United Nations Institute for Social Development, Geneva; Ajay K. Mehra and Gert W. Kueck, *The Indian Parliament: A Comparative Perspective*, New Delhi: Konark, 2003; Arthur Rubinoff, 'The Decline of India's Parliament', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 4(4), 1998, pp. 13–33; A. Surya Prakash, *What Ails Indian Parliament*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1995.
- 4 B.L. Shankar and Valerian Rodrigues, *The Indian Parliament: A Democracy at Work*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011; Balveer Arora, 'The Indian Parliament and Democracy', in Mehra and Kueck (eds.), op. cit., 2003, pp. 14–41; Sandeep Shastri, 'Parliamentary Committees in India and Legislative Control Over Administration', in Mehra and Kueck (eds.), op. cit., 2003, pp. 206–232.
- 5 Rahul Verma and Vikas Tripathi, 'Making Sense of the House: Explaining the Decline of the Indian Parliament Amidst Democratization', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 1(2), 2013, pp. 153–177.
- 6 James Manor, 'Government and Opposition in India', *Government and Opposition*, 46(4), January 2011, pp. 436–463; Sandeep Shastri, 'Department Related Standing Committees in Indian Parliament: An Assessment', *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 54(2), 1998, pp. 184–200.
- 7 Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- 8 Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971; Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- 9 Ludger Helms, 'Studying Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies: Issues and Perceptions', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1–2), March–June 2008, pp. 6–19.
- 10 Ian Shapiro, 'The Fallacies Concerning Minorities, Majorities and Democratic Politics', in Ian Shapiro (ed.), *Democracy's Place*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 51.
- 11 Andre Kaiser, 'Parliamentary Opposition in Westminster Democracies: Britain Canada, Australia and New Zealand', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1–2), March–June 2008, p. 36.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ludger Helms, 'Studying Parliamentary Opposition in Old and New Democracies: Issues and Perspectives', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1–2), March–June 2008, p. 8.
- 14 Ibid., p. 9.
- 15 A. King, 'Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations: Great Britain, France, West Germany', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 1, 1976, pp. 11–16; G. Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracies: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 102–109.
- 16 This point is elaborated on in detail in the Indian context in the next section.
- 17 M. Laver and N. Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998; Peter Mair, 'Political Opposition and the European Union', *Government and Opposition*, 42(1), 2007, pp. 1–17; L.W. Martin and G. Vanberg, 'Policing

- the Bargain: Coalition Government and Parliamentary Scrutiny', *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(1), 2004, pp. 13–27 and Vladimir Gel'man, 'Political Opposition in Russia: A Dying Species?', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 21(3), 2005, pp. 226–246.
- 18 Kaiser, 2008, op. cit.; King, 1976, op. cit.
- 19 Robert Dahl, 'Patterns of Opposition', in Robert Dahl (ed.), *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 332–347.
- 20 Sandeep Shastri, 'Republic of India: Emergence of a Competitive Party System and Civil Society Space', in Wolfgang Renszsch, Klaus Detterberg and John Kincaid (eds.), *Political Parties and Civil Society in Federal Countries*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 121–146; Sandeep Shastri, 'Party System and Democracy in India: Distinctive Features at the National, State and Local Level', in Ajay K. Mehra (ed.), *Party System in India: Emerging Trajectories*, New Delhi: Lancer, 2013, pp. 159–179.
- 21 Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament, Act 1977.
- 22 Sandeep Shastri, 'Nehru and the Congress Party: The Nurturing of a Nascent Democracy', *Journal of Karnatak University*, 24, 1988–91, pp. 12–17.
- 23 James Manor, 'Government and Opposition in India', *Government and Opposition*, 46(4), January 2011, p. 439.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 440; Sandeep Shastri, 'Article 356: Victim of Political Opportunism', *Mainstream*, 2 January 1993, pp. 14–15; Sandeep Shastri, 'Indian Federalism and National Integration', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 51(2), April–June 1990, pp. 125–136.
- 25 James Manor argues that one could discern three phases in the party system in India: Phase I – 1947 to the late 1960s when the Congress was in power at the centre and in most of the states and the opposition was small and disunited; Phase II – late 1960s to 1989 when the Congress party largely governed but did not dominate the political process and once saw splits in the Congress and rise of regional parties; and Phase III – 1989 to present when one saw the emergence of a competitive party system with coalition governments at the centre. This analysis has important implications for the role and position of the opposition in the Lok Sabha. Manor, 2011, op. cit., pp. 436–463.
- 26 Sandeep Shastri and Reetika Syal, 'Understanding Popular Perceptions of Democracy: Findings From the State of Democracy in South Asia Study and World Values Survey', *Chanakya Journal of Political Science*, 1–3(2–4), January 2016, pp. 3–25; Sandeep Shastri, 'Citizen Confidence in Political Institutions and Processes', *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 63(1), 2002, pp. 142–147.
- 27 SDSA Report, *State of Democracy in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 57–58.
- 28 Lokniti-CSDS, *Democracy in India: A Citizens Perspective*, New Delhi: Lokniti-CSDS, 2013.
- 29 While fifteen per cent said they were fully satisfied, thirty-one per cent said that they were somewhat satisfied. Ten per cent expressed that they were somewhat dissatisfied and fourteen per cent stated that they were fully dissatisfied while thirty per cent had no opinion. The exact question asked was this: Are you satisfied with the performance of the BJP as the main opposition party at the centre over the last four years?

- 30 Rahul Verma and Vikas Tripathi, 'Making Sense of the House: Explaining the Decline of the Indian Parliament Amidst Democratization', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 1(2), 2013, pp. 153–177.
- 31 Merely 76 days in 2012 as compared to a high of 156 days in 1956.
- 32 The Fourteenth Lok Sabha lost thirty-four per cent of its time for deliberation on account of disruptions. In the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, twenty-four per cent of the time was lost, in the Thirteenth Lok Sabha it was nineteen per cent, and in the Twelfth Lok Sabha, ten per cent.
- 33 In 2012, the Lok Sabha sat for less than 250 hours.
- 34 Arora, 2003, op. cit., p. 15.
- 35 Shankar and Rodrigues, 2011, op. cit.
- 36 Manor, 2011, op. cit., pp. 457–458.
- 37 This point is also made in the context of other parliamentary systems by scholars. See King, 1976, op. cit.; Powell, 2000, op. cit.
- 38 Arthur Rubinoff, 'The Decline of India's Parliament', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 4(4), 1998, pp. 13–33; Shastri, 1998, op. cit.
- 39 Manor, 2011, op. cit., p. 459.
- 40 Shankar and Rodrigues, 2011, op. cit.; Arora, 2003, op. cit.; Verma and Tripathi, 2013, op. cit.
- 41 Manor, 2011, op. cit., p. 461.
- 42 Interviews conducted by the author with MPs across political parties were conducted as part of the ICSSR Project on 'States as the New Centre of Indian Politics'.
- 43 James Manor makes a similar point in his article. See, Manor, 2011, op. cit., pp. 457–458.
- 44 One senior MP packed sarcasm in reflecting that a colleague from the opposition was often seen in the Lok Sabha only in the well of the House and possibly he had assumed that this was his real seat as he was hardly seen in the formal seat allotted to him by the Speaker.