

DISCIPLINE AND DISCUSSION: ON JAGDEEP DHANKAR DIRECTIVE TO PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

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On Monday, [Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar directed the Privileges Committee](#), headed by Deputy Chairman and JD(U) Member of Parliament Harivansh, to investigate the “disorderly conduct” by 12 Opposition Members of Parliament that had led to multiple adjournments during the first leg of the Budget session. All through Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 85-minute address, the Opposition kept raising slogans, which Sansad TV that does the live telecast of the proceedings blacked out — the camera did not pan towards the Opposition benches. Earlier, acting on a complaint filed by a BJP Member of Parliament, Mr. Dhankhar suspended Congress Member of Parliament Rajani Patil for allegedly recording the proceedings on her mobile phone. The Congress cried foul that due procedure had not been followed and that she had not been served a notice giving her a chance to explain her position. Mr. Dhankhar interjected the speech of Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge’s 88-minute speech during the Motion of Thanks to the President’s Address several times. The Opposition has protested the Chair’s repeated direction to “authenticate” remarks made during speeches. Mr. Kharge has pointed out that “it would be [an] inversion of the system of government if the opposition members are expected to carry out complete investigation, gather evidence and then raise the matter on the floor of the House”.

Six portions of Mr. Kharge’s speech were expunged from the Rajya Sabha records, while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi’s Lok Sabha speech got 18 cuts. Parliament is the platform where the Opposition has the responsibility to ask questions of the government, which the Council of Ministers has the responsibility to answer. There are parliamentary rules and norms that have evolved over time to achieve this objective. It will be a travesty of parliamentary democracy if the Opposition is penalised for seeking accountability from the government, which in turn is allowed to hide behind rules and obfuscate the issue. It is the government that is in custody of all the information, over which queries are raised in Parliament. The authenticity, or the lack of it, of any assumption that a Member of Parliament may express in the House must be clarified by the government, which is its duty. It is a strange situation that the government has not responded to the serious allegations that it faces of protecting private business interests at the cost of public interest, while those who are raising the questions face suspension in the name of discipline. Parliamentary discipline must ensure that discussions take place, and the government provides the answers.

[To read this editorial in Telugu, click here.](#)

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