

A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LEGISLATORS HOLDS THE KEY TO PEOPLE-CENTRED GOVERNANCE

Relevant for: Indian Polity & Constitution | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

Some of the rules of conduct of Parliament include strictures against laughing in the lobby, throwing paper balls in protest, tearing up documents and rushing to the well of the House. But clearly these are not adequate. This probably explains why Rajya Sabha chairman and vice-president, M Venkaiah Naidu, has called for political parties to evolve a consensus on a code of conduct for members both inside and outside legislatures. Another recommendation of Mr Naidu that anti-defection laws should be implemented within three months acquires great relevance, especially in the current political context.

In the past, too, he has cautioned MPs and MLAs against seeking shelter behind parliamentary privilege after engaging in disruptive activities. One recommendation he has made, which will find much favour with the public, is that of disposing of election petitions and criminal cases against political leaders within a reasonable time frame by constituting, if required, special benches of high courts and the Supreme Court. Many MPs and MLAs come to office with little knowledge of either the rules of the House or the process of legislation. They need to be given induction classes, as in the UK, about the workings of Parliament. In recent times, the obstructive conduct of some MPs and MLAs has caused heartburn among voters who feel that this is disrespectful to the House, those who elected them, and also a waste of public money. Genuine debate and discussion can only take place if political representatives take the pains to study different areas of governance.

A code of conduct that is agreed upon by all parties will elevate public discourse. Such a code should also include attendance of representatives in legislatures. In the Rajya Sabha, over which Mr Naidu presides, there are nominated members who hardly attend the proceedings. Many are experts in their fields and their contributions could greatly enrich the discourse in the House. Elected representatives hold the key to good, people-centred governance. Codifying the rules of the game can only help to fulfil this goal.

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