Merits & Demerits of the Parliamentary form of Government

Merits

Harmony between Executive and Legislature:

In a Parliamentary for a government there is close harmony and cooperation between the executive a legislature. As ministers belong to the ruling party or parties enjoying majority sup the legislature, they do not face much difficulty in getting the support and approval of the legislature for the policies and programmes of the government. There is thus less of confrontation between the executive and the legislature.

Responsible and Clean:

While the Council of Ministers as a whole is responsible to the legislature, the individual ministers are also individually responsible to it for their respective acts of omission and commission. Being conscious of this, they try to remain ‘clean’. The opposition, being the watchdog of the government, will expose a corrupt / inefficient government.

People’s Government:

The Parliamentary executive has been acclaimed as the real government of people because the members of the legislature, as representatives of people, draw the attention of the House to the problems of people. Further, during elections, political parties raise various issues of people. The government is significantly influenced by public opinion.

Quick Decision Making:

Lord Bryce has praised the Parliamentary form of government for its capacity to take quick decisions. As the ruling party enjoys majority support in the legislature, it can take swift decisions to meet any contingency.

Flexible:

There is a lot of flexibility in the Parliamentary system of government to cope with changing situations and even emergencies. The system, being flexible, can easily adapt itself to any new reality. One Cabinet may be replaced by a new one without much controversy to tackle any serious situation. As Neville Chamberlain failed to lead Britain during the Second World War, he was replaced by Winsten Churchill as the Prime Minister of Britain.

Conducive to National Integration:

While trying to address the concerns of different regions and cultures of the nation, the Parliamentary form of government helps in promoting national integration

Educational Value:

The policies and programmes of the government as well as various problems of people are discussed on the floor of the legislature through speeches and questions and answers. The ministers, being the members of the legislature, have to respond to the issues raised by the members of the legislature.

Further, at the time of elections, several important and critical issues are discussed by different political parties while trying to get the votes of people. All this helps in increasing people’s political consciousness and moulding the public opinion. Thus, the Parliamentary form of government has great value from the point of view of people’s political education.

Demerits:

1. Weak Separation of Powers:

In this system, the principle of separation of powers is violated. As the ministers are the members of the ruling party or coalition, they dominate policy-making though, in principle, policy-making is the domain of the legislature.

2. Cabinet Dictatorship:

The Council of Ministers, with the support of the majority in the lower house of the legislature, tends to be authoritarian and irresponsible. Being assured of the support of the majority, it does not care for the feelings and views of opposition.

It has also little respect for the legislature as the majority is bound to supp the government. Thus, the Cabinet Government is reduced to party government, and parliamentary democracy is turned into Cabinet Dictatorship. Lord Herbert is, to so extant, right in criticizing the Cabinet system as ‘the New Despotism’.

3. Failure to Take Prompt Decision:

As the Council of Ministers does not enjoy a fixed tenure, it is not able to adopt any bold, long-term policy. The problem is compounded I in a coalition government which is often unstable. The coalition partners tend to fight among themselves. As a result, they fail to adopt any bold policy.

According to Dicey, I government fails to take prompt, bold and effective steps during a crisis or a war. The Prime Minister takes time to persuade his colleagues in the Cabinet to take a decision. Similarly, it is not easy for the government to persuade the legislature to take a prompt decision to manage a crisis. This stands on the way of taking quick decision even in I emergency situation.

4. Partisanship:

In a Parliamentary system, political parties are guided morel partisan motives than by national or people’s interests. The ruling party and the opposition I pee each other as enemies. While the ruling party seldom sees any merit in the criticism the opposition, the opposition often opposes the government for the sake of opposition.

5. Government by Amateurs:

The Parliamentary government lacks competence and effectiveness, because the ministers are mostly amateurs. As the ministers have to be appointed from among the members of the legislature, the scope for appointing talented and competent people as ministers is limited.

Many times, important considerations in appointing ministers are not skill, competence and talent but caste, religion, community faction and influence in the party.

6. Control by Bureaucracy:

While the Cabinet is powerful, more powerful is the bureaucracy. The ministers, being mostly amateurs, depend upon civil servants for expert advice and guidance. The civil servants exercise real powers in the name of minister. They do not come out to the front. They are not accountable to the legislature.

It is the ministers who are held responsible for the decisions taken by civil servants in the name of ministers. This leads to irresponsibility and redtapism. Ramsay Muir has aptly observed, “Bureaucracy thrives upon the cloak of ministerial responsibility.”

The Parliamentary form of government, no doubt, has certain lacunae. In particular, it is handicapped by immense partisanship, lack of expertise, and difficulty in taking prompt decisions during crises, but its main merit is accountability.

The government is responsible to the legislature, particularly to the lower house which is the popular chamber. In I words, the Parliamentary government is relatively more democratic then the Presidential government.

Presidential Form of Government

In the Presidential form of government the President is the chief executive, and neither he nor his ministers (or secretaries) are responsible to the legislature. The President enjoys a fixed term. So does the legislature. The best example of this type of government is the American government.