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Institutional declension

Parliamentary democratic institutions constitute the *raison d'être* of democracy. Strong institutions serve as main bulwark for safeguarding democratic norms and practices thereby providing the framework for individuals and systems to function. Collapse or breakdown of such institutions leads to the cessation of societal functioning, weakening of democracy, erosion of justice and enfeeblement of the polity. For the smooth functioning of parliamentary democracy in India, framers of the Indian Constitution have envisaged institutions like Parliament, judiciary, Central investigating agencies like CBI, NIA, IB, CVC, Election Commission and other institutional mechanism to maintain an equilibrium between executive, legislature and judiciary under the instrumentality of checks and balances.

Framers of the Indian Constitution had bequeathed a sound and strong set of institutions which have played crucial role in shaping the destiny of the nation that currently prides in its multifarious achievements in different walks of life. While establishing various institutions of governance, the Constitution also laid down norms to be observed for the smooth functioning of these institutions, overlapping of the authority and maintenance of the institutional sanctity through delineation of powers of each institution. However, over the years most of these institutions have been characterized by gradual decline.

However, developments obtaining in recent years seemingly make it discernible that a semblance of declension is gradually creeping into these institutions. The Parliament is gradually inching towards losing its sheen as country's apex legislative body in the wake of frequent adjournments thereby squandering taxpayers' money without any productive business. The Parliament, which once enjoyed pivotal position in the India polity, is now witnessing a decline in the wake of the growing dichotomy and the resultant 'cognitive hiatus' between Parliament as a mechanism of accountability and dysfunctional of its parliamentarian members thereby engendering skepticism on the validity of the claim that parliamentary system is one of the finest mechanisms to provide effective and accountable governance. The functioning of the judiciary itself has been the cause of serious concern, especially in the aftermath of four senior judges of the Supreme Court airing their grievances in the public in January last year. There have been attempts at eroding the autonomy of higher academic institutions via the reductions in budgetary allocations, anointing henchmen at the top by subverting set rules and excessive emphasis on privatization.

Growing political interference into the autonomous apex institutions by the contemporary dispensation at the helm to suit its vested interests leads to erosion of the credibility of these institutions. The sordid state of affairs afflicting the CBI in recent times is a stark example. *Tone and tenor of sordid state of affairs that has pervaded the CBI in the wake of tussle between two top most officials and placing of this spat before the Supreme Court has brought to fore the declining trends afflicting country's premier institutions of governance.*

Interestingly, the parties in Opposition often vehemently criticize the party in power for interfering in the autonomous institutions and when the same party/parties happen to be at the helm, they also indulge in similar tactics of interference because such a mechanism suits them. These institutions have come into existence by virtue of collective public trust facilitated by the Constitution. Coming into existence of the judiciary, media, bureaucracy, academia and other similar institutions over the decades has given the people confidence that these institutions will act on their behalf. However, excessive political interference leaves the people high and dry when these institutions are hijacked to serve the vested interests. Key political institutions along with judiciary, bureaucracy, and police are vital for democracy to flourish. Growing violence tends to engender serious concern about law and order. Mounting backlog of unresolved cases at lower levels of judiciary is another cause of concern. Enfeebled delivery of essential public services, especially in health, education, and water. Such developments showcase prevalence of weak governance at the state level. Onward march of the nation on the trajectory of growth entails sanguinity about improvement in political and economic institutions, thereby exalting people's aspirations and they start demanding more from their public institutions-better public services, more security and law and order, and greater political participation.

Inability of public institutions to come up to the exalted aspirations of the people brings these institutions under public scrutiny and political leadership automatically has to account for this.

— BK