



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the role of Speaker in ensuring effective parliamentary functioning. What reforms would you suggest to strengthen this institution? **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce by giving a brief overview of the office of Speaker
- Give Role of the Speaker in Ensuring Effective Parliamentary Functioning
- Suggest Reforms to Strengthen the Institution of Speaker
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The **Speaker of the Lok Sabha**, as the **presiding officer of India's lower house**, plays a pivotal role in upholding parliamentary democracy and ensuring effective legislative functioning.

- The position, derived from the **British Westminster model**, has evolved to include both constitutional and procedural functions that influence legislative effectiveness and democratic governance.

Body

Role of the Speaker in Ensuring Effective Parliamentary Functioning

- **Conduct of Parliamentary Business:** The Speaker's primary duty is to preside over parliamentary proceedings and maintain order in the House.
 - By providing **equal opportunities to both ruling and opposition parties**, the Speaker can foster productive discussions and reduce disruptions.
- **Certification of Money Bills:** The Speaker holds the **exclusive authority to certify a bill as a Money Bill under Article 110 of the Constitution**, limiting the Rajya Sabha's influence over financial legislation.
 - However, concerns have been raised about the potential misuse of this power (e.g, passing of the **Aadhaar Act** as a money bill), leading to calls for greater neutrality.
- **Decisions on Defection (Tenth Schedule):** The Speaker decides on matters of disqualification under the **Anti-Defection Law**, which is essential for maintaining party discipline and preventing political instability.
- **Referral of Bills to Parliamentary Committees:** Speaker holds a vital role in **referring bills to standing or select committees** for detailed scrutiny.
 - However, the number of bills referred to committees has seen a significant decline in recent years.
 - For instance, between 2009-2014, about **71% of bills were referred to committees**; however, this figure dropped to **only 16% in 2019-2024**.
- **Maintenance of Discipline and Suspension of Members:** The Speaker can **suspend members for unruly behavior**, maintaining order in the House.

- However, recent large-scale suspensions, **such as those during the winter session of 2023**, have raised concerns over the arbitrary use of this power.

Reforms to Strengthen the Institution of Speaker

- **Institutionalizing Neutrality and Independence:** To ensure impartiality, a convention could be established where the **Speaker resigns from their party upon election**.
 - This practice is followed in some countries, including the **UK**, and could **reduce political influence on the Speaker's actions**.
- **Transparent Mechanisms for Anti-Defection Cases:** A **time-bound mechanism for deciding on defection cases** would help uphold the sanctity of the Tenth Schedule.
 - An **independent panel or committee** could assist the Speaker in assessing defection matters, thereby reducing the perception of bias.
- **Reviving the Role of Parliamentary Committees:** To strengthen legislative scrutiny, it should be made mandatory for the Speaker to refer certain categories of bills such as **those impacting fundamental rights or involving significant financial commitments** to parliamentary committees.
 - This step would increase accountability and transparency in legislative processes.
- **Limiting the Power of Certification of Money Bills:** An independent panel could **review the Speaker's certification of Money Bills**, ensuring that this power is not misused to bypass Rajya Sabha scrutiny.
 - This reform would protect the integrity of the bicameral legislative process.
- **Clear Guidelines on Suspension Powers:** The Speaker's power to suspend members for disorderly conduct should be **exercised with restraint and consistency**.
 - Setting up **transparent guidelines on suspension** would help balance discipline with the rights of members, preserving the opposition's voice within the House.

Conclusion

The Speaker's role is **foundational to India's democratic functioning**, given the need to manage a diverse assembly and balance competing interests. Implementing reforms to ensure neutrality, enhance legislative scrutiny, and maintain discipline could significantly strengthen this institution, leading to a **more robust and effective parliamentary process**.

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