

Department of Public and Social Administration

Postgraduate Work Display

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Parliament & Government Accountability in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Parliamentary Committees in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka

This thesis is, above all, about the role of parliamentary committees in securing executive accountability, particularly after the restoration and resumption of the parliamentary system of government in Bangladesh in 1991.

Since 1991 in Bangladesh, in an attempt to strengthen the role of parliament *vis-à-vis* the executive, some alterations were brought forth to the formal arrangements of parliament in general and the committee system in particular in Bangladesh. What are the implications of these new arrangements for ensuring executive accountability in Bangladesh within a more congenial political atmosphere? For better comprehension of the influence and role of legislative committees in securing executive accountability in Bangladesh, a comparative study of parliamentary committee systems in two other major South Asian democracies (India and Sri Lanka) is also attempted.

A cultural-institutional approach as a macro analytical framework is adopted for this study. In analysing parliamentary committees, a critical context is the parliaments themselves. A strong parliament is believed to fare better to hold the government to account. Hence the study strives to investigate the ways in which scholars have sought to capture or measure parliamentary strength and weakness. On this basis, it presents a series of basic typologies of legislatures.

However, as these typologies are rather crude, it then focuses on additional factors that are relevant in determining parliamentary strength. In this regard, it is necessary to recall that parliament cannot be insulated from the effects of wider social, economic and political contexts and that in a democracy the functioning of parliament is inexorably linked with the functioning of other key institutions. The study then looks closely into parliamentary committees which are generally conceived to be the most significant internal instrument of a legislature, and attempts to work out the salient factors that help determine the strength of committees to influence or constrain the government.

This study is based on extensive fieldwork in all three parliaments. On the basis of interviews and a questionnaire survey of key parliamentary committee officials (MPs and committee staffers), the study seeks to review the strength of contemporary parliaments in these three South Asian democracies in the light of the theoretical framework adopted. The questionnaire will be semi-structured/ open-ended leaving the respondents the latitude either to choose to answer from among a set of predetermined options or add new ones. The interviews and questionnaire survey will be complemented by documentary data from secondary literature reviews, parliamentary libraries and parliamentary secretariats.



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