

The Impact of the Proportional Representation System on Presidential Powers in Sri Lanka

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The executive presidential system and the proportional representation (PR) are the cardinal aspects of the Second Republican Constitution (1978) of Sri Lanka. In the 1977 parliamentary general election, the UNP came to power with a huge five sixth majority and brought about drastic changes in the previous constitution (1972), under the leadership of J.R. Jayewardene. He emphasized that the Executive presidential system and the proportional representation (PR) are very essential to maintain political stability and to further the economic development of the country. These reasons were particularly put forward for the introduction of the executive presidential system and the PR. However, political parties and individuals had strongly criticized the UNP government when they effected these changes. The main criticism against the changes was that the presidential system would create a situation where all powers would be vested with one individual at the expense of parliamentary sovereignty. Also they were of the view that these changes have given more weigh to JR's personal interests as well as to his arbitrary decisions. This dissatisfaction continued even after two decades of the working of the existing constitution.

As far as the PR system is concerned, the UNP was of the view that the PR system would rectify the demerits of the previous election method of the First – Past –the Post – System (FPP) that was followed up to 1978 in Sri Lanka. However, this system also has inherent deficiencies. They are the creation of a weaker parliament, unstable government, violation and interruption in the use of presidential powers etc are the major drawbacks in the electoral system that need rectification to maintain a healthy democracy. As a result of the drawbacks of the PR and the executive presidential power, there was no consistency in political development in Sri Lanka. Particularly the function of parliament has been affected by its weaker position. Political instability and confrontational politics have been the two major issues in the recent past and also in the present situation. As a result, political parties, scholars as well as the majority of the public have opted for changes in these particular aspects of the existing constitution.

The main argument in this context is whether the successive Sri Lanka presidents are enjoying their actual powers, even though they have enormous powers according to the constitution. To date experience shows that the parliamentary strength also influences the presidential powers in practice. In the light of these facts the purpose of the study is to examine: how far the electoral system is making an impact on the presidential powers and whether the PR electoral system consistently or inconsistently helps in the implementation of the presidential powers. The remedy to these will be pursued in the method of investigation, which will give more weight to empirical analysis. However, descriptive aspects are also necessary to strengthen the arguments of this study.

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