Abstract of Ph.D Thesis

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Topic: A Study of Parliamentary Committee system in India with special reference to Estimates Committee in Punjab
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Parliamentary Government is the popular form of Democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government; it is a way of life, an act of faith in the dignity and freedom of the individual. It is now accepted that one of the important function of the Parliament and state legislature is to control the executive. Legislature is the embodiment of the popular will and it must be able to see the way in which public policy is implemented and public money is spent by the Executive. The enormous range and complexity of legislation and administrative functions of a modern state make it almost impossible for the legislature to adequately scrutinize legislative proposals and Oversee administrative actions. The enormous volume of work which comes before a legislature and a limited time at its disposal for its consideration make it impossible that every matter should be
considered at length on the floor of the House. To overcome its difficulties a Legislature takes the help of the Committees. A Committee is a body of persons appointed for special functions by a larger body.

Financial Committees in particular should have a special importance and they are instruments of Legislative control over Public Expenditure in India. There are three Financial Committees in India like Estimates Committee, Public Accounts Committee and Public Undertakings Committee. The credit of the origin of the institution of Parliamentary Committees goes to the British Parliament. The first Parliamentary Committee was constituted in 1571. The Public Accounts Committee was established by Mr. Gladstone in 1861. After Independence the first Public Accounts Committee was constituted in April 1950. The Estimates Committee was first created in England in 1912. The idea of setting of Estimates Committee in India was mooted in 1938 by Dr. John Mattahi. The first Estimates Committee was constituted in 1950 and demand for separate Committee on Public Undertakings goes back to 1953. The Committee on Public Undertakings setup in India on the pattern of the Select Committee on Nationalized industries of the British Parliament. The first Public Undertakings Committee in India was setup in 1964.

There are various Committees framed in the Punjab Legislative Assemblies. These Committees are classified into two categories. One is Financial and other is Non-Financial Committees. The members of Financial Committees are elected from amongst the members of Punjab Legislative Assembly through proportional representation by means of single transferable vote. The tenure, strength i.e. 13 and election
procedure remains same. Among the Non-Financial Committees the Committee on the welfare of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe is elected whereas remaining Committees are nominated by the Speaker and the strength and tenure of these Committees are quite different.

In Estimates Committee the educational qualification criteria is not fixed for the election of members, as major portion of population comes from the rural and agricultural background. Though with change in times, we are seeing an increase in level of education among the members. Now even professionals are being attracted in the political arena, though the number is very less and the members who are elected, rarest of them have any Financial knowledge. Punjab being an agricultural state and major population belongs to rural dominated areas and due to lack of facilities members are shifting their basis to urban areas. The number of female member representation in Estimates has been very less which constituted 7.18 percent because the number of female members elected in the House had been very less. The members of Committee are outnumbered by Sikh religion and Jatt Community. These factors play important role in election of the members in Estimates Committee in Punjab.

Estimates Committee was setup in Punjab in 1952. It consists of 13 members, no minister shall be elected as the member of the Committee. The Estimates Committee of Punjab from 1992 to 2007 held 738 meetings out of which 66.3 % of meetings were held at Chandigarh and 33.7 outside Chandigarh. The meetings held at Chandigarh had an advantage of easy accessibility of information. The Committee also made 51 on the spot studies. The Quorum which was required for the meeting
was 13 and the Committee meetings were adjourned 42 times and their attendance in Estimates Committee was also very less.

The Committee selects 3 or 4 departments for scrutiny and the concerned department is asked to furnish detail information for the same. It is not possible for the Committee to scrutinize all the departments in one year due to short tenure. After studying the material the Committee adopted different methods for examination. The Committee appointed 5 sub-Committees for the in-depth study of various cases. 35 members resigned from the membership of the Committee before the completion of their tenure because they were appointed as ministers, deputy secretaries etc. This affected the smooth working of the Committees. The Estimates Committee submitted 31 reports and made 784 recommendations during the year 1952 – 2007. Out of these recommendations 748 recommendations have been implemented and 36 have been still outstanding. The Estimates Committee lacked the expert assistance of Comptroller and Auditor General as provided to the Public Accounts Committee. During the period 1996-97, 2001-02 and 2006-07 no report was submitted because members were busy in their constituencies due to elections and no Action Taken Report was published throughout the period.