Introduction

The importance of parliament in upholding the value of democracy is well recognized. As a representative institution parliament provides a channel for legitimately representing diversity and difference in various forms and manifestations within a democratic political system. The thrust of representation is at the heart of democracy which permeates the institutional form of parliament. This is not restricted to only one kind of institutional form of parliament but extends to its various forms. The institution of parliament appears as one of the most legitimate institutional forms of representation. This is one of the underlying strengths of parliament and parliamentary institutions that informs their increasing role and relevance across the polities. Affirmation of relevance of parliament and parliamentary institutions, however, is not intended to be prescriptive about any one specific institutional form of democracy so to say parliamentary form of democracy and its allied institutions. The basic emphasis is placed on the relevance of the parliament as an institutional form of representative democracy. It is perhaps the recurring relevance of the parliament and parliamentary institutions that has renewed interest in the study of the institution of parliament during the last three decades. It is important to note that there has been proliferation of parliamentary institutions over the years in different parts of the world. The new and emerging democracies have their own context in which parliamentary institutions are being given shape. We find variety of experiments and innovations in case of parliamentary institutions. The Committee System is one of the most important institutional innovations.
The Committee System adds up value to the institution of Parliament. Parliamentary committees across the polities- covering both parliamentary and presidential systems- play important role in upholding the pristine value of the parliament as institution of democracy. Parliamentary committees as integral institutions of Parliament have come to occupy a significant place across the countries. There are numerous committees across the political systems that discharge the specified responsibilities assigned to them by their respective legislative bodies. There are both commonalities and differences in the nature, role and functions of the parliamentary committees in different countries. One of the most important and oft quoted commonalities is the intent of offloading responsibilities of the parliament and creating a more accountable system within the parliament. Among others one of the most important intended functions of the committee system is to secure parliamentary control over executive. This is exercised through the functional domain specification of the committees in securing governmental accountability. This is one of the most important and common denominators of parliamentary committees across the polities. Besides the functional responsibilities assigned to the parliamentary committees for securing governmental accountability, the parliamentary committees also play important role in the process of law-making. Despite certain amount of commonality in the functional domains of the parliamentary committees, they vary considerably in terms of their effectiveness. The well established tradition of committee system in the USA and western countries is a case in point. The committee system in other parts of the world has yet to take
deep root not only in terms of experiences but also in terms of their functioning and effectiveness.

The nature and composition of the committees also vary. However, the most important variation can be identified in the realm of competence and effectiveness of the committee system. Needless to add the committee system varies considerably in terms of their competence from the one country to another. The competence and effective working of the committee system largely depends on the way the idea of committee system has been conceived. If committees in a particular context are conceived as effective mechanisms of securing governmental accountability, obviously they have to be empowered with corresponding competence. The nature of the committee system itself becomes important in adjudging the effectiveness of committee system. The committee system could be advisory in nature. In other cases their decisions are binding. In other words committees in some of the cases are expected to play the role merely of advisory body. In other cases the decisions of the committees are binding. Similarly, the recommendations of the committees are not taken uniformly. The advisory and binding recommendation power of the committees determines their effectiveness. It hardly needs additional emphasis that the committees empowered with the competence of binding decisions power turn out to be more effective than the context in which they function merely as advisory institution of parliament.

Parliamentary committees in India have their own trajectory of creation. Committees in India have been created with the intent of offloading specific responsibilities and facilitating effective and efficient working of the Parliament. The number of
parliamentary committees in India today is huge. Sometimes it is considered as limitation in the way of effective and efficient functioning of committee system. It may be recalled that the number of parliamentary committees in India in initial years of the establishment of the republic was mainly limited to financial committees. There was no exclusive provision of the committee with well defined jurisdictional competence. In fact there is no exclusive and elaborate provision included in the text of the constitution. Though there were provisions of committees during the colonial rule, the committees were primarily extension of the central rule. There was hardly any autonomy or competence made available to them. They were just subservient to the central rule. The elaborate form of committee system in India is a later addition.

Despite the fact that the committee system in India in its present form is a later addition, the parliamentary committees have made their presence felt within a short span of time. Even a cursory glance at the engagement of the committee unequivocally affirms the increasing role and recurring relevance of the committee system in upholding democracy and promoting democratic governance.

The number of parliamentary committees in India has increased substantially over the years. The establishment of 17 Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) in 1993 was a significant development in the expansion of the parliamentary committee. Many functional responsibilities of the parliament, such as parliamentary surveillance over the executive and in-depth examination of legislative proposals, got offloaded to the DRSCs. As a logical realization of the relevance of the DRSCs, the number of Departmentally Related Standing Committees was increased to 24 in 2004.
A causal relationship is generally established between the increasing number of the committees and the increasing volume of work of the parliament. A logical connection could also be identified between increasing number of the committees and the increasing relevance of the committees. One of the explanations given in the context of increasing numbers of parliamentary committees is that the parliament finds it difficult to carry out the parliamentary functions on time. The efficiency of the parliament is limited due to the increasing volume of work. The committee system provides the most appropriate alternative mechanism to ensure efficient and effective discharge of parliamentary responsibilities. Since parliamentary committees are representative institutions of parliament in terms of both composition and membership, it is premised that all the views and shades of opinion of the parliament get reflected through the parliamentary committees. Despite various limitations of the committees in India especially their non-binding decisions and recommendations, the committees play important role in securing governmental accountability and also in the process of law-making. Recommendations of committees are not just ignored. Most often they are taken into account. In many cases committees succeed in securing governmental accountability to a large extent.

**Statement of the Problem**

The increasing number of parliamentary committees in India could be an important indicator of its relevance but cannot be conclusively argued that committees in India have performed as per their expected role. The efficient working of the committee is an important requisite of an accountable institution of parliament. To what extent, the parliamentary committees have been able to discharge their responsibilities is one
of the questions that needs to be addressed. The second important issue of examination is the effectiveness of the committees in the cases involving vital decisions. It is yet to be established as to what extent they have emerged as effective institution of parliament.

In the Indian case committees are important parliamentary institutions which can play important role in policy making and ensuring governmental accountability in governance. This can be ensured at various levels. The role of the committee in the legislative process is important in many respects. So far as governmental accountability to the parliament is concerned the four important functions in the case of DRSCs need special mention. These are: (a) examination of Demands for Grants of the related ministries/departments; (b) in-depth examination of bills referred to them; (c) review of annual reports; and (d) review of policy documents by the committees. In all the four cases certain amount of accountability is built in the process. Despite the fact that the competence of the committees in India is limited to recommendatory power, the committees have succeeded in ensuring accountability of the executive to the legislature. The have also influenced the public policies through the mechanism of review. The contribution of the committees in legislative process is also visible. Similarly the financial committees are expected to play the role of ensuring financial accountability. The available literature highlights the considerable work done by these committees over the years of their existence. The Public Account Committee has been under the public view for the simple reason of their role in highlighting financial irregularities in the past.
Effective working of the committee system in India depends on variety of factors. Leaving the structural and competence related limitations apart there are many factors that contribute to efficient working or deficient working of the committee system. If the members of the committee take the work of the committee seriously and attend the meetings of the committee regularly the committee may be able to deliberate on the issue seriously resulting into significant contribution of the committee and timely submission of report. Sometimes effectiveness and working of the committees is also attributed to the chairperson and members of the committee. If a chairperson is active and dynamic there could be greater possibility of effective working of the committee both in terms of timely work and mandate of the committee. However, this could be just general remark. The role and working of the committee cannot be just restricted to the nature of the chairperson or the members. The work is not intended to examine the issue from the lenses of personal attributes of the chairperson. Moreover, this is not an exclusive area of inquiry of the work. The work attempts to understand the role and functioning of the parliamentary standing committee in India from different perspectives.

**Objective of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to evaluate the role and working of the parliamentary committees in India. For the purpose of understanding the role and working of the parliamentary committees, the main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To map out the types, composition and role of the parliamentary committees in India
• To evaluate the role of the parliamentary committees in terms of their functional responsibilities in general and Departmentally Related Parliamentary Standing Committees in particular.

• To evaluate the working of the parliamentary committees on generic parameters and working of the Departmentally Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on specifically identified variables which could help in evaluating the role and working of the committees.

• To find out the possible ways and means of strengthening the role of Departmentally Related Parliamentary Standing Committee.

Research Questions

Generic: What is the role and functions of Parliamentary Standing Committees in India and what is the status of their working?

Specific:

• What is the role, competence and status of the Departmentally Related Parliamentary Standing Committees in securing governmental accountability?

• What is role and contribution of the Departmentally Related Parliamentary Standing Committees in legislative process?

• What are problems and limitations in the effective and efficient working of the Parliamentary Standing Committees in general and Departmentally Related Parliamentary Committees in particular?

• What could be possible steps for improving the working of the Departmentally Related Parliamentary Committees?