Neutrality of the Speaker

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- There are numerous instances in our polity where the Speaker of the Assembly has precipitated a political crisis by seemingly political decisions.
\n
- There is a need for building up systematic neutrality to the position.
\n

\n\n

What are the ways by which a Speaker compromises neutrality?

\n\n

\n
- **Election -** The position of the Indian Speaker is paradoxical.
\n
- They contest the election for the post on a party ticket.
\n
- Yet they are expected to conduct themselves in a non-partisan manner, while being beholden to the party for a ticket for the next election.
\n
- **Political Aspirations -** The position is often used to woo the political parties by favouring them to harbour political ambitions.
\n
- The need for re-election also skews incentives for the Speaker.
\n
- The fear of losing the position in case of not favouring their political parties also pushes them to compromise neutrality.
\n
- **Anti-Defection Law -** The absoluteness of the Speaker’s decisions can also be an incentive for potential abuse.
\n
- The determination of whether a representative has become subject to disqualification, post their defection, is made by the Speaker.
\n
- This offers ample scope for Speakers to exercise discretion.
\n

\n\n

What are some International practises?

\n\n

\n
- Ireland has a parliamentary system close to India.
\n
- There the position of Speaker is given to someone who has built up credibility by relinquishing his or her political ambitions.
\n
- The Westminster system considers it a taboo to induct a Speaker into the cabinet.
\n
- No sitting Speaker of the House of Commons in Britain has lost his or her seat. This is because of the convention of not fielding candidates in the Speaker's constituency.
\n
- In comparison, in India, there are many Speakers who have lost their seats in general elections.
\n
- Also, Indian Speakers are not made members of the Rajya Sabha after they demit office.
\n
- But the British Parliament automatically elevates the Speaker to the House of Lords.
\n
- Only the U.S. allows the Speaker to openly engage in active politics.
\n
- But this is compensated to an extent by their rigorous separation of powers between the judiciary, executive and legislature.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- Some of the above mentioned international practises should be adopted.
\n
- The Committee, headed by V.S. Page, suggested that if the Speaker had conducted himself or herself in an impartial and efficient manner during the tenure of his or her office, he or she should be allowed to continue in the next Parliament.

\n
- Anyone seeking the office of the Speaker might be asked to run for election on an independent ticket.
\n
- Any Speaker should be barred from future political office, except for the post of President, while being given a pension for life.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n