

Parliament is North Star of Democracy

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In news– Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar has recently said that Parliament is the “North Star” of democracy.

Key updates

- The Vice President has said that Parliament is the essence of democracy. Parliament is the North Star of democracy. It is a place of discussion and deliberation to realise the aspirations and dreams of the people and not a place of disturbance.
- Interestingly, Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud had called the basic structure doctrine a “North Star”, that gives “certain direction to the interpreters and implementers of the Constitution when the path ahead is convoluted.
- Here, both VP Dhankhar and CJI Chandrachud have used the metaphor of the North Star to refer to something constant/permanent that leads and provides direction.
- When VP Dhankhar says that the “parliament is the North Star of democracy”, he means that it is the institution that guides democratic functioning, that dictates the direction a democracy takes.
- Since it represents the ‘will of the people’, many political thinkers have always felt that as an institution, the parliament is the most fundamental in a democracy.
- On the other hand, CJI Chandrachud comes at the issue from a certain wariness towards majoritarianism and the injustice that can be carried out in the name of the ‘people’.
- For him, it is the basic structure doctrine that prevents this from happening.

What is the North Star or Pole star?

- Polaris, known as the North Star or Pole Star, is a very bright star – around 2,500 times more luminous than the Sun. It is part of the constellation Ursa Minor, and is around 323 light years away from the Earth.
- Since Polaris is **less than 1° away from the north celestial pole, almost in direct line with the Earth's rotational axis**, it appears to sit motionless in the northern sky, with all the other stars appearing to rotate around it.
- **Its position and brightness have allowed humans to use it for navigation since late antiquity.**
- Simply the elevation of the star above the horizon gives the approximate latitude of the observer.
- In the northern hemisphere, if you can spot Polaris, you can tell the north – and by extension, the other three directions as well.
- Upon crossing the equator to the south, however, the North Star is lost over the horizon, and hence stops being a useful navigational aid.
- **Polaris seems to have been first charted by the Roman mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy**, who lived from about 85 to 165 BC.
- While there is some evidence that the star was used for navigation in late antiquity, it was during the 'Age of Exploration' that it became a central part of human history.
- **Christopher Columbus, on his first trans-Atlantic voyage of 1492**, “had to correct (his ship's bearings) for the circle described by the pole star about the pole”, and the star became an invaluable aid to the European colonists seeking out far-off lands across the seas.
- **The first well known instance of the North Star appearing in literature outside of a technical treatise on astronomy or a biography of an explorer is in**

Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, where the eponymous emperor describes himself as being "as constant as the Northern Star".

How does the North Star help in navigation?

- **Its position and brightness have made humans use it for navigation since late antiquity.** It is a part of the constellation Ursa Minor and is around 323 light-years away from Earth.
- Since Polaris lies nearly in a direct line with the Earth's rotational axis "above" the North Pole, it stands almost motionless in the night sky, with all the stars of the northern sky appearing to rotate around it.
- This makes it an excellent fixed point from which to draw measurements for celestial navigation.
- Simply the elevation of the star above the horizon gives the approximate latitude of the observer and in the northern hemisphere, if you can see Polaris you can always tell which way is north (and, by extension, which ways are south, east and west).
- Upon crossing the equator to the South, the North Star is lost over the horizon and hence stops being a useful navigational aid.