The enormous volume of work before a Legislature and the limited time at its disposal make it impossible that every matter should be discussed at length on the Floor of the House. If the work is to be done expeditiously and with reasonable care, some of its responsibilities have to be entrusted to some other agency in which the whole House has confidence. The most practical method so far devised for this purpose is the Committee System, composed of a small number of members of the legislative body. In all the Parliaments and in US Congress, the formation of Committees for detailed preliminary discussion of all important matters, specially of legislative projects, has been an established practice.

The Committee System in Sri Lanka is based on its mother Parliament, the House of Commons. From its inception, the Sri Lanka Parliament too has employed a number of committees to relieve Parliament from the heavy burden of its work and to transact on its behalf a great deal of its business.

The power to appoint committees has been recognized under Article 74 of the Constitution which empowers the Parliament to make Standing Orders for regulating, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, its business, the preservation of order at its sittings and any other matter for which provision is required or authorized to be so made by the Constitution. Under this Article, when framing the Standing Orders of the Sri Lanka Parliament, taking advantage of the experiences elsewhere, provision has been made in the Standing Orders for the appointment of various Parliamentary Committees.

Types of Committees

The Committees of Sri Lanka Parliament can be classified into two broad categories. They are Standing Committees and Ad-hoc Committees. The Standing Committees are appointed by the Speaker in pursuance of the Standing Orders and continue to remain in office irrespective of the completion of their business. There is a little permanence in their tenure. They deal with specific business of the House. The Ad-hoc Committees are mostly temporary and cease to exist after completion of their work. These Committees perform such specific functions as are assigned to them from time to time. They may also be called Select Committees.

According to the Standing Orders, the Sri Lanka Parliament, apart from the Committee of whole Parliament, has four types of Committees: