



Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy



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An illustrious son of India, Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, was an ardent nationalist, an eminent freedom fighter, a great statesman, an able administrator and one of the shining stars in the constellation of Indian Democracy. Dr. Reddy was a parliamentarian of high standing. He was deeply devoted to the Parliamentary institutions and made a sterling contribution as Presiding Officer by conducting the House with a consensus by dint of his astuteness. He left an indelible mark in the fields wherever he served.

Dr. Reddy is the only Speaker since Independence who after assuming the office of Speaker formally resigned from his political party. He also had the distinction of being the only Speaker who was later unanimously elected as the President of the Republic of India. His distinguished public life was marked by high standards of performance in several capacities in which he served the country with deep commitment to parliamentary democracy and its essential norms.

Born on 19 May 1913 at Illur village of District Anantapur in the State of Andhra Pradesh, Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy belonged to an enlightened middle-class family. He had his primary education at the reputed Theosophical High School, Adayar, Madras. The spiritual atmosphere of the school left a deep impact on the mind of young Reddy. Later, he joined the Government Arts College at Anantapur for his higher studies. However, destiny had something else in store for him.

Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Anantapur in July 1929 was the turning point in Dr. Reddy's life. Like many other young people of his generation, he too came under the profound influence of Gandhiji's thoughts, words and actions. He discarded his foreign clothes and took to Khadi as his dress. He gave up his studies and threw himself into the freedom struggle. He never regretted the decision of leaving his college.

Dr. Reddy actively participated in various Youth Congress activities and in 1937, at a young age, he became the Secretary of the Andhra Provincial Congress

Committee (APCC). True to his character, he managed the affairs of the APCC meticulously and methodically. It was a testimony to his qualities of leadership and his organising ability that he remained in that post continuously for a long span of ten years. During 1940-45, he underwent imprisonment several times for participating in the freedom movement.

Dr. Reddy's legislative career began in 1946 when he was elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly and became the Secretary of the Madras Congress Legislature Party. The following year, he was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly of India and actively participated in the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, which was shaping the destiny of the nation for the generations to come. In 1949, he was back in the State politics and from April 1949 till April 1951, he served as the Minister for Prohibition, Housing and Forests in the then Madras State.

In 1951, Dr. Reddy was elected the President of the APCC where he served for a year before returning to the Centre as a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1952. However, he remained a member of the Upper House only for a short while. In 1952, in recognition of his political sagacity, drive and dynamism, he was appointed the Deputy Chief Minister of the new-born State of Andhra and played a very important role in the formation of the Andhra State. Subsequently, following the reorganisation of the States in October 1956, the State of Andhra Pradesh was constituted and the choice for the Chief Minister of the newly-formed State fell on him.

As Chief Minister, Dr. Reddy realised that democracy could function effectively only when the people at the grass-root level were politically educated, trained and equipped. He had a vision of an era of decentralised power and he always strove to strengthen democracy at the grass-root level. His creative leadership and progressive outlook, coupled with his pragmatic approach to the multifarious problems of the newly set up State, were widely appreciated.

Soon, Dr. Reddy began to emerge as a political leader of national stature. In 1959, he resigned as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh to take up the post of the President of the Congress Party. To him, power was never an end in itself but only a means to an end, that being the welfare of the people.

After serving for two terms as the President of the Congress Party, Dr. Reddy went back to Andhra Pradesh for a second term as the Chief Minister. In February 1964, when the Supreme Court made certain observations in the Bus Routes Nationalisation case against the Government of Andhra Pradesh for not filing an affidavit, he voluntarily tendered his resignation from the office of the Chief Minister, thus setting an example of high standards in public life.

On 9 June 1964, Dr. Reddy joined Lal Bahadur Shastri's Government as the Minister of Steel and Mines. In the same year, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha. He also served for a very brief period as the Minister of Transport, Aviation, Shipping and Tourism in Indira Gandhi's Government in 1967.

Dr. Reddy was elected to the Fourth Lok Sabha from the Hindupur constituency in Andhra Pradesh. On 17 March 1967, he was elected the Speaker of the Fourth Lok Sabha, amidst widespread acclaim and admiration. He was very particular about maintaining the independence and impartiality of the august office as he considered them to be indispensable for the successful working of parliamentary democracy. Immediately after his election as the Speaker, he resigned from his 34-year-old membership of the Congress Party, thus becoming the first Speaker since Independence to have formally severed his party affiliation. He believed that the Speaker belongs to the whole House, he represents the totality of members and as such he should belong to no party or rather he should belong to all parties.

Though Dr. Reddy remained the Speaker only for a little over two years, he lent dignity and distinction to the office by the exemplary manner in which he presided over the deliberations of the House. He possessed a large measure of personal authority, a willingness to appreciate the others' point of view and a deep understanding of the sense of the House which enabled him to conduct the parliamentary business in an orderly and effective manner. With his vast experience of men and matters, he tactfully handled delicate situations within the House by his commendable patience and common sense. He conducted the proceedings of the House with such dexterity that there was not even a single occasion when the Opposition resorted to staging a walkout from the House. Also, no member was named when Dr. Reddy was in the Chair.

During Dr. Reddy's Speakership, many significant rulings were given and conventions laid down which have enriched the parliamentary traditions and practices. He for the first time, allowed a No-Confidence Motion to be taken up for discussion on the same day when the President addressed both the Houses. He believed that urgent matters should not be delayed by taking recourse to traditions and precedents.

Dr. Reddy was always conscious of affording equal opportunity to each and every member of the House to express his or her views. He defended, with utmost concern, the rights and privileges of the members both inside and outside the House. It was during his tenure as Speaker that for the first time in the history of the Lok Sabha, the House sentenced a person to imprisonment for committing contempt of the House by shouting slogans and throwing pamphlets on the floor of the House from the Visitors' Gallery.

The setting up of the Committee on the Welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was another significant innovation during Dr. Reddy's Speakership. Inaugurating the first sitting of the Committee on 18 December 1968, he hoped that the Committee would ensure that the measures taken by the Union Government for the advancement of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were effectively implemented.

On 19 July 1969, Dr. Reddy resigned the Speakership of the Lok Sabha to contest the Presidential election which he lost by a narrow margin. After a period of voluntary exile from politics, Dr. Reddy was back in the Sixth Lok Sabha. On 26 March 1977, he was unanimously elected the Speaker of the Sixth Lok Sabha. However, this time too, he could not complete his full term as the Speaker and after serving for four months, he again resigned from the high office to file the nomination for the President of India.

Dr. Reddy achieved the pinnacle of glory when he was elected the President of India on 25 July 1977. During his tenure as President, he took various historic decisions on crucial issues.

By his long years in public life and by virtue of his close association with leaders of all sections of opinion in the country, President Reddy could steer the destiny of the nation at a critical stage in its history. His sagacious leadership, affability and accessibility endeared him to people belonging to all walks of life. He also lent a rare distinction to the highest office in

the land by his pragmatism, idealism and patriotism. As a world statesman, Dr. Reddy articulated the nation's views with utmost finesse in the international fora.

Following the completion of his term, Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy retired to private life in his home town, Anantapur. The eventful life of Dr. Reddy came to an end when he breathed his last at his native place on 1 June 1996 at the age of 83.

The entire nation mourned the sad demise of Dr. Reddy. Condoling his death, the then Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Shri K.R. Narayanan, said:

“....In the passing away of Dr. Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, the country has lost an eminent freedom fighter, a distinguished parliamentarian, an able administrator and a sagacious statesman.”

The then Speaker, Lok Sabha, Shri P.A. Sangma, said:

“.....In his death, the nation had been deprived of a statesman of rare quality, a veteran freedom fighter, true democrat, able parliamentarian and above all, a gem of a person. Though, Dr. Reddy is no longer in our midst, his memories will be with us for many years to come.”

The then Prime Minister, Shri H.D. Devegowda, said:

“....the nation has lost an eminent freedom fighter, an able administrator, a clean politician and an elder statesman.....The public life of India is poorer by his departure, but he will always remain one of the prime examples of public life for all of us to emulate.”

Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the former Prime Minister of India, said:

“....He left his mark wherever he served.....he made a distinguished contribution to the office of Speaker by running the House with a consensus by dint of his sheer common sense and skilful astuteness.Today his demise has created a great void in public life.”

Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, the former Prime Minister of India, said:

“....As the President of India, he showed that he need not necessarily and without demur sign on dotted lines. He had the courage to say that in his humble opinion what was being proposed by the Cabinet does not appear to be correct, would the Cabinet look at it again”