



G.M.C. BALAYOGI



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Shri Ganti Mohana Chandra Balayogi was born in a farmer's family in the tiny village of Yedurulanka in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh on 1 October 1951. Balayogi had his primary education at Guttenadivi village as there was no school in his native place. He did his graduation from Kakinada and obtained his post graduation and Law degree from Andhra University, Visakhapatnam.

Balayogi started his career as a lawyer in Kakinada and was in the Bar Association from 1980 to 1987. He was selected as a First Class Magistrate in 1985 but resigned from the service after undergoing the requisite training and returned to the Bar to resume his legal practice. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh came under the sway of the "NTR wave" in 1982 when N.T. Rama Rao, matinee idol of the masses, entered politics and formed the Telugu Desam Party. At that time, many young and educated people were moved by this wave and Balayogi too enrolled himself as an activist of the newly-formed party. Political recognition and responsibility came to Balayogi early enough when he took over as the Vice-Chairman of the Cooperative Town Bank of Kakinada in 1986. In 1987, he was elected as the Chairman of the East Godavari Zilla Praja Parishad and remained in that position till 1991 when political fortune pushed him for a higher position that very same year.

Balayogi's association with Parliament began in 1991 when he was elected to the Tenth Lok Sabha from the Amalapuram constituency in Andhra Pradesh. A first timer in the Lok Sabha, Balayogi took keen interest in learning about the Rules and Procedures of the House and also actively participated in the proceedings of the House. In 1996, he was elected to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly in a bye-election. Subsequently, he was appointed as the Minister of Higher Education in the Government of Andhra Pradesh. As a Minister, he made sincere efforts to streamline and strengthen the education system. He believed that the type of education imparted should correspond to the societal tasks and economic roles to be played by the individual in later life.

Balayogi had functioned with quiet efficiency and utmost equanimity in every position he held. It was his firm belief that ethical norms must be observed by all those who are in public life. It was because of this conviction that owning moral responsibility; he voluntarily tendered his resignation as Minister of Higher Education in Andhra Pradesh in the wake of a controversy over the alleged leakage of question papers in the Intermediate Examinations in the State, a decision widely acclaimed as an example of integrity and probity in public life. The Chief Minister, however, did not accept his resignation as he felt that Balayogi's services were required in the Ministry of Education and he was asked to continue in the same position. Balayogi believed that work should speak about the person rather than the person speaking about his work. Believing in the Biblical adage that good makes no noise and noise does no good, Balayogi went about his work with quiet efficacy and firm commitment in the discharge of his duties.

Suave and soft spoken, Balayogi was a person who took pride in making himself accessible to the people at large. This was evidenced by his readiness to attend functions small and big alike. A man blessed with indefatigable energy, he could be on the move the whole day and yet remain fresh, alert and agile. His proximity to the people brought him into contact with various social and cultural organisations, particularly in the Konaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. This close association with various social and cultural bodies led Balayogi to organise relief and medical camps for the poor and the cyclone affected in the East Godavari district which had often been ravaged by natural calamities. He sincerely worked for the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden. Apart from concentrating on rural development programmes, he strived hard for solving the drinking water problem in the villages, improving communication and transport facilities and providing employment to teachers and legal heirs of deceased government employees in his constituency. Balayogi was not a man of words but of deeds. He once said: 'I am committed to the principle of doing an honest and efficient job without attracting unnecessary attention. The work one does must be felt by the people concerned than be read in the newspaper columns by people unconcerned. This has been my philosophy'.

In 1998, Balayogi again contested the General Elections to the Lok Sabha and was returned from the Amalapuram constituency for the second time to become the Speaker

rather unexpectedly. Balayogi was elected as Speaker, Lok Sabha on 24 March 1998 at a critical juncture in the country's political history. The Telugu Desam Party to which he belonged was not part of the ruling coalition, but had been extending support from outside. There were as many as 40 political parties having representation in the Twelfth Lok Sabha. The election of Balayogi as Speaker was, indeed, a precedent-setting event in many respects. It was for the first time in the history of free India that a Dalit leader had been elected to the Chair. It was also for the first time that a member belonging to a regional party had become the Speaker of Lok Sabha. Thirdly, it was also for the first time that a person born in Republican India had presided over the Lok Sabha, which made him the youngest Speaker of the largest democracy in the world. Given the composition of the House, with the ruling coalition and the Opposition almost equipoised in terms of numerical strength, Speaker Balayogi, the youngest till date to occupy the office, found himself in a tight situation. The manner in which Balayogi conducted the proceedings of the Twelfth Lok Sabha endeared him to all sections of the House. Therefore, on his re-election to the Thirteenth Lok Sabha in the 1999 mid-term Elections, Balayogi was unanimously re-elected as the Speaker on 22 October 1999. Ganti Mohana Chandra Balayogi became the fifth Speaker to be elected for a second time. The House had a diverse composition and was represented by as many as thirty-nine political parties. The presence of a large number of regional parties displaying a wide spectrum of socio-political shades had obviously made it quite a daunting task to preside over such a House. But, Balayogi conducted himself and the House with a great deal of dignity and grace. Through deft handling, he dealt with many ticklish situations with a remarkable ease, thereby earning rich encomiums from one and all.

Balayogi's stint as the Presiding Officer of Lok Sabha was remarkable in many ways. He observed that as Speaker his first and foremost duty would be to uphold and maintain the dignity and honour of the House. He assured all sections of the House that as the Presiding Officer, he would be guided by the concept of collective wisdom and his actions would be non-partisan. To achieve that objective, he sought the cooperation of all sections in setting new standards and conducting the House with a sense of fair play. Within a short span, Balayogi left an indelible impression with his affable manner and humble demeanour on the office of Speaker, Lok Sabha and became immensely popular among political parties of various hues.

Balayogi was very sensitive to the need for maintaining the dignity and decorum of the House. His efforts led to the formulation and addition of a new provision to the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha providing for automatic suspension of those members who come to the well of the House and create disorder. During his tenure, an all India Conference of Presiding Officers, Chief Ministers, Ministers of Parliamentary Affairs, Leaders and Whips of Parties on 'Discipline and Decorum in Parliament and Legislatures of States and Union Territories' was held in New Delhi on 25 November 2001. The Conference adopted a Resolution encompassing a Code of Conduct for members of all Legislative Bodies in India. Balayogi had observed that the image of Parliament and its credibility as a representative institution depends largely on the role and functions of its members. He was a staunch advocate of probity and standards amongst the holders of public offices. To Balayogi goes the credit of constituting the First Ethics Committee of the Lok Sabha.

Another major initiative taken by Balayogi was the setting up of a Committee on MPLAD Scheme (Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme) with a view to streamline the functioning of the Scheme and make it more effective. Balayogi believed that professional training of legislators was one of the surest ways of improving the standards of legislators in the discharge of their duties as elected representatives. To better equip members in their duties and responsibilities, he strived to further streamline and strengthen the Orientation Programmes organised from time to time for the new members of Lok Sabha and State Legislatures.

The Speaker leads Parliamentary Delegations to foreign countries, meets high dignitaries during such visits and helps build understanding and goodwill through parliamentary diplomacy based on a people-to-people contact. Balayogi travelled widely all over the world, quietly attending to his various obligations with patience and perseverance. Balayogi was honoured with the decoration "WISSAM ALAOUITE OF THE ORDER OF GRAND OFFICER" during his visit to Morocco as leader of the Indian Parliamentary Delegation. While leading Parliamentary Delegations abroad, he addressed the Russian State Duma and the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Balayogi received many visiting Parliamentary Delegations in India and played host to them. He also facilitated the holding of some major Conferences of Parliamentarians. The Conference on 'Parliament and Media: Building an Effective Relationship', New Delhi, February 2000 and the Eighth General Assembly of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians' Conference on Environment and Development, Hyderabad, November 2000 were held during his tenure.

Balayogi was fully aware of the work done by his illustrious predecessors like Vithalbhai Patel and G.V. Mavalankar in the matter of ensuring the independence of the Legislature Secretariat and showed great wisdom in upholding the autonomy of the Secretariat. He showed foresight and maturity by consulting leaders of political parties and securing a broad approval from across the political spectrum in this regard. In this, as in many other respects, Balayogi's legacy as Speaker was unique and historic in the annals of our Parliamentary democracy.

When Balayogi was at the height of his popularity, he was snatched away by the cruel hands of destiny. Balayogi died in a helicopter crash in Kolleru Lake, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh on 3 March 2002. In his death, the country had lost a young and dynamic parliamentarian with a promising future.

In the obituary reference made in the House on 4 March 2002 on the sad and untimely demise of Speaker Balayogi, the Deputy Speaker, Lok Sabha, Shri P.M. Sayeed observed that Balayogi's functioning style in managing the business of the House was moulded by a common sense approach, demonstrable fairness, equality of treatment of all parties within and outside the House and an unfailing and bold urge to uphold the Constitution not merely in letter but also in its true spirit.

Balayogi lived up to the faith reposed in him by the House with his courage of conviction, dynamism and humility. Thus, he joined the ranks of his illustrious predecessors who adorned the august Office of Speaker, Lok Sabha and strengthened parliamentary traditions and conventions with their rich contributions.