



P.A. SANGMA



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In a significant departure from the 49-year-old Indian parliamentary tradition, the Eleventh Lok Sabha unanimously elected a member from the Opposition, Purno Agitok Sangma, as the Speaker in May 1996. From a humble beginning in a small tribal village in Meghalaya, Sangma rose to be the Speaker of the Lok Sabha which was the culmination of an eventful political career characterised by persistent hard work and popular support. Affable, friendly and informal in disposition and endowed with a spontaneous sense of wit and humour, but firm when it came to ensuring orderly conduct of the House, Speaker Sangma had a charming personality which gained him unstinted cooperation and support from all sections in the House. His stress on decorum, dignity and autonomy of the House, earned him accolades across the country and established his image as an able Speaker of Lok Sabha.

P.A. Sangma was born on 1 September 1947 in village Chapahati in the West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. He did his graduation from St. Anthony's College and then went to Dibrugarh University in Assam for his Masters degree in International Relations. Subsequently, he also obtained a degree in Law.

Sangma had been a man of many parts, having been, in the course of his career, a lecturer, a lawyer and a journalist before he joined politics. He started his political life as a grass-roots worker of the Congress Party and his gradual rise through the ranks of the party was admirable. In 1974, he became the General Secretary of the Meghalaya Pradesh Youth Congress; he also remained its Vice-President for some time. In recognition of his deep commitment to the party's ideals and also his organizational skills, he was appointed the General Secretary of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee in 1975 and remained in that post till 1980.

Sangma came to the national political scene in 1977. In the General Elections to the 6th Lok Sabha, he was elected from the Tura constituency in his home State on the Congress Party ticket. In his very first innings, the active and articulate Sangma made an impact in the House as a sincere and hard-working member.

In the mid-term elections of 1980, Sangma was re-elected to the 7th Lok Sabha from the same constituency. Sangma moved up fast in the party hierarchy too, and became the Joint Secretary of the All India Congress Committee in 1980. He was inducted into the Union Cabinet and assumed the office of the Deputy Minister in charge of Industry in November 1980. After two years, he was allocated the Ministry of Commerce as Deputy Minister and held that post till December 1984.

Sangma was elected to the 8th Lok Sabha in the General Elections of 1984 and this time he was inducted as a Minister of State holding charge of Commerce and Supply. For a short while, he also functioned as the Minister of State for Home Affairs. Sangma took over as the Minister of State for Labour with Independent Charge in October 1986. During his tenure as the Labour Minister, there was a sharp decline in industrial strikes and lock-outs.

Known for his meticulous homework, complete mastery of the subject at hand and phenomenal memory for facts and details, Sangma was one Minister who could reply to a heated debate in Parliament without the aid of officials' slips from the Officers' Gallery. His amiability, thorough knowledge of the functioning of his Ministry and an inimitable sense of humour enabled him to tackle all challenges in Parliament. The Question Hour particularly brought out the best in him, when he handled the most ticklish matters with consummate ease. Throughout his Ministerial tenure, he retained the image of an honest and conscientious performer and always steered clear of any controversy.

Sangma had a remarkable understanding of the political realities of the North East, particularly of his home State. Though he was in Delhi since 1977 and active in national politics, he never lost touch with political developments in his home State. It was his thorough understanding of the State politics which made the Congress Party leadership requisition his services for Meghalaya in 1988. That year, he returned to Meghalaya, this time as the Chief Minister of the State heading a Coalition Government in a tumultuous scenario in the State's politics. In 1990, following the resignation of his Government, Sangma became the Leader of the Opposition in the State Legislative Assembly.

Developments at the national level brought Sangma back to the Centre soon. He returned to the 10th Lok Sabha in 1991 following the General Elections and was inducted into the Union Cabinet. Sangma was given the Independent Charge of the Ministry of Coal. In February 1992, he was given the additional responsibility of assisting the Prime Minister in the Ministry of Labour.

Sangma assumed the Independent Charge of the Ministry of Labour in January 1993. He was elevated to the Cabinet rank (the first tribal to be elevated as such) in the Ministry of Labour in February 1995. As the Union Labour Minister, he headed the Tripartite Indian Delegation to the International Labour Conference in Geneva six times where he proved his mettle effectively. He was also elected the Chairman of the Asia and Pacific Region for the International Labour Ministers' Conference, 1994-95. Sangma, as Labour Minister, organized a Conference of Labour Ministers from Non-aligned and other Developing Countries in 1995. As Labour Minister, he initiated several social security measures for the working class. In September 1995, Sangma took over as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, a post he held till the General Elections to the Eleventh Lok Sabha in 1996.

Sangma was elected to the 11th Lok Sabha, for the fifth time from the Tura constituency in the 1996 General Elections. On 23 May 1996, he was unanimously elected the Speaker of the Eleventh Lok Sabha winning support across all political parties. In half a century of Indian parliamentary history, he became the first member from the Opposition to hold the office of the Speaker and also the youngest one to assume the office of Speaker.

Speaker Sangma, undoubtedly, had all the credentials for the august office—legal training, long experience as a parliamentarian as well as a Minister, reputation for impartiality, transparency, humility and wit and wisdom. From the time he assumed the office of the Speaker, he executed his responsibility with such assurance, it seemed that expertise on the job came to him instinctively. As the Speaker, he ensured that rules were observed by the members even in the midst of stormy debates. Parliamentary democracy, he observed, meant free debate, objective deliberations and healthy criticism and it was for the Speaker to ensure that these objectives were achieved.

Speaker Sangma won the admiration of both the ruling Coalition and the Opposition within a short span of time. During his Speakership, he guided the formation of a Standing Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women and also the constitution of a Joint Parliamentary Committee for considering the Constitution (Eighty-first Amendment) Bill, 1996 which sought to provide  $33\frac{1}{3}$  per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies.

In order to maintain high traditions in parliamentary life, Sangma believed that members of Parliament were expected to maintain certain standards of conduct, both inside and outside the House. During Sangma's tenure as Speaker, an eight-member Study Group of the Committee of Privileges was constituted to report on Ethics and Standards in Public Life. The Study Group's report was considered by the Committee of Privileges and adopted with some amendments. The report was later presented to the Twelfth Lok Sabha.

Another major initiative taken by the Speaker Sangma was the convening of a Special Session of both the Houses of Parliament from 26 August to 1 September 1997 as part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of India's Independence. The Session took stock of the achievements of five decades of Independence and also set a National Agenda for the future by unanimously passing the Resolution entitled, 'AGENDA FOR INDIA'.

A widely travelled person, Speaker Sangma also led Indian Parliamentary Delegations to the 42nd and 43rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conferences in Kuala Lumpur in August 1996, and in Port Louis in September 1997. He also led Indian Parliamentary Delegations to the 96th Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Beijing in September 1996 and the 98th Conference in Cairo in September 1997. Sangma headed Indian Parliamentary Delegation to the Second Conference of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians held in Islamabad in October 1997 and chaired the Inter-Parliamentary Specialised Conference of the IPU on the theme "Towards Partnership between Men and Women in Politics", hosted by the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in February 1997. The first ever Conference of the Chairmen and Members of the Public Accounts Committees of SAARC Parliaments was also held in New Delhi in August 1997 during his tenure.

Sangma was an extremely popular Presiding Officer, respected for his knowledge of rules and even more for

his innate understanding of parliamentary traditions. He participated in many social gatherings and intellectual discourses organised by activist groups, with great enthusiasm, initiated objective and non-partisan debates on national issues adding new social and cultural dimensions to the office of the Speaker. Indeed, he was a man of the masses with an international outlook. In a short span of less than two years, Sangma left an indelible impress of his personality on the office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha.

As an avid champion of Parliamentary democracy, he was made a member of the Commonwealth Observer Group to the Zimbabwe Parliamentary Elections held in 2000 and was Leader of the Commonwealth Observer Group for the Presidential Election in Gambia in 2001.

Sangma was later elected to the 12th, 13th, 14th and also 16th Lok Sabha. A co-founder of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in May 1999, he was elected to the 13th Lok Sabha as an NCP member. He was elected to the 14th Lok Sabha under the banner of the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). On 10 October 2005, he resigned from the Lok Sabha as a member of AITC and was re-elected to 14th Lok Sabha on 23 February 2006 as an NCP candidate. He resigned from the 14th Lok Sabha in March 2008 so as to spend more time in the politics of his home State, Meghalaya. He was elected member of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in 2008. In July 2012, Sangma contested for the 14th Presidential Election. In January, 2013 he formed the National People's Party (NPP). In the elections held to the 16th Lok Sabha in May 2014, he contested and won as a candidate of the NPP from the Tura Parliamentary Constituency. A nine-term Member of the Lok Sabha, Sangma was one of the three senior most members in the 16th Lok Sabha.

As a seasoned parliamentarian, Sangma was active in several Parliamentary and Consultative Committees. He was a member of the Standing Committees on External Affairs, on Labour and Welfare, on Home Affairs, Committee on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions, Parliamentary Consultative Committees on Home Affairs, External Affairs and a Sub-committee on External Affairs. He was also a member of the National Commission to Review the working of the Constitution, constituted in February 2000. In the 16th Lok Sabha, he was a member of the Standing Committee on Energy and also of the Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. He was also

a Member of the National Committee for the Education of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Persons with Disabilities.

An activist to the core, Sangma was closely associated with various social organizations and educational institutions. During 1998-2004, he served as the Vice-President of the Indian Institute of Public Administration. He was the Editor of a Meghalaya daily, *Chandambeni Kalrang*. He had also edited two volumes of the book *India in ILO*. Another book of his titled, *Into the Third Millennium: A Speaker's Perspectives*, contains a representative section of speeches delivered by P.A. Sangma as the Speaker of the Eleventh Lok Sabha on issues of national and international importance. Yet another book titled, *A Life in Politics: Selected Speeches and Lectures, 1979-2004* of P.A. Sangma was published in 2012.

A champion of the labour and working class, Sangma received the '*Michael John Roll of Honour*' of the Tata Workers' Union for "Distinguished Contribution to the Cause of Labour and to the Parliamentary System" in March 1997. He also received from the President of India, in May 1997, the Golden Jubilee Award of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) for outstanding contribution to the cause of the working class. Sangma was nominated 'Man of the Year' by the magazine, *Competition Success Review* in 1998. He was also honoured with the "Saraswati National Eminence Award" in the category of Public Leadership by the South Indian Education Society, Mumbai, in January 2003.

Shri Sangma passed away on 4 March 2016. Glowing tributes were paid by dignitaries, including the President, Vice-President and the Prime Minister and leaders of various political parties.

Condoling the passing away of Shri P.A. Sangma, the President, Shri Pranab Mukherjee said:

Shri Sangma was a veteran Parliamentarian and able administrator who served the nation in different spheres. His distinguished service as former Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Union Cabinet Minister, Union Minister of State and Union Deputy Minister will always be remembered. In his passing away, the nation has lost an eminent public figure and multi-faceted personality who made immense contribution for the greater good of our country.

The Vice-President, Shri M. Hamid Ansari said:

....Shri Sangma served with distinction as the Chief Minister of Meghalaya and while leading the various Ministries in the Union Government. He championed the mainstreaming of the North-Eastern parts of the country and worked tirelessly for the uplift and improvement of Tribal Communities.

Saddened by the demise of Shri P.A. Sangma, the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi said:

Shri P.A. Sangma was a self-made leader whose contribution towards the development of the North-East is monumental....Shri P.A. Sangma's tenure as Lok Sabha Speaker is unforgettable. His down to earth personality and affable nature endeared him to many.

Both the Houses of Parliament paid glowing tributes on the demise of Shri P.A. Sangma.

In the Rajya Sabha, the Chairman, Shri M. Hamid Ansari referred, with profound sorrow, to the passing away of Shri P.A. Sangma. The Chairman referred to the legislative career of Shri P.A. Sangma, including the Speakership of Lok Sabha from 1996-1998, and said:

....Shri Sangma was actively associated with several social organisations and educational institutions. He worked tirelessly for the development of the North-Eastern Region and the upliftment of the downtrodden and weaker sections of the society, especially the tribals, and established night schools for the poor and the needy children of the State.

In the Lok Sabha, deeply mourning the loss, the Speaker, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, highlighted the varied facets of Shri P.A. Sangma's illustrious life, including the responsibility with which he discharged his duties as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, with great ability and distinction. The Speaker, Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, said:

A man of masses, Shri Sangma strove relentlessly for the amelioration of the marginalised sections of the society particularly the tribals.

During his long and distinguished parliamentary career, Shri Sangma represented the Indian Parliament at various international fora. He also led the Indian Parliamentary delegations to many countries.

As a mark of respect to the departed leader, who was a sitting member, the Lok Sabha adjourned for the day on 4 March 2016 after the obituary reference.