



## 'Parliamentarianism' of Somnath Chatterjee

### What is the issue?

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- Somnath Chatterjee who formerly held the office of Speaker in 14th Lok Sabha passed away recently.
- The contributions made by him to the parliamentary practices in Indian democracy are worth remembering.

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### What are the noteworthy contributions?

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- **Telecast** - His tenure was replete with people-centric parliamentary innovations.
- He wanted to extend the visitors' gallery of Parliament to every household in the country.
- It began with the live telecast of the "zero hour" proceedings.
- He personally monitored the evolution of the Lok Sabha television channel.
- It is the world's first 24×7 TV channel to be owned and operated by Parliament.
- Its purpose is to inform people of the goings-on in Parliament on a real time basis.
- **Knowledge** - He opened up the rich Parliament Library to researchers and media persons.

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- A new museum and children's corner in the Parliament Library building was created.

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- A parliamentary fora on diverse subjects was set up and a lecture series was introduced.

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- This was to equip the members with knowledge on emerging trends.

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- The institution of parliamentary research fellowships, Hiren Mukherjee Memorial Lecture were some of the many initiatives under his leadership.

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- **Legislature** - The dearest to Chatterjee was the principle of accountability.

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- Also, the constitutionally-guaranteed supremacy of the legislature in its own sphere.

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- His noteworthy bold steps in parliament in this regard include -

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- i. enhancing the number of Standing Committees for improved oversight

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- ii. directions for the compulsory presentation of action taken on Standing Committee reports

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- iii. admission of probably the highest number of calling attention notices

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- iv. his insistence on short discussions and adjournment motions

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- **Parliamentary diplomacy** - This is another innovation that took shape under his leadership.

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- Visits by Indian parliamentary delegations abroad were encouraged.

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- This was done in alignment with the country's foreign policy orientation and significantly benefitted India.

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- E.g. India's election to the position of Chairman of the Executive Committee of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

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- **Judiciary** - He held the judiciary in the highest esteem.  
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- He did question the constitutional validity of judicial orders regarding the conduct of the floor test in the hung Jharkhand legislature.  
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- However, his advice to the people who mattered was to honour the order of the Supreme Court.  
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- He emphasised the dignity of all institutions, including the judiciary.  
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- **Decisions** - He has disposed of, a record number of Tenth Schedule (anti-defection) matters in the shortest possible time, in a fair and judicious manner.  
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- Not one of his many quasi-judicial pronouncements was ever challenged.  
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- The orders passed by him have set benchmarks in the adjudication of anti-defection matters.  
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- The events and achievements, and the debates generated during his period shall guide leaders in all institutions.  
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- It is undeniable that Somnath Chatterjee has been one of India's brightest and the most outstanding parliamentarians.  
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**Source: Indian Express**

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