

11. When I Was Secretary of The Kayastha Pathshala

It is a far cry from 1900 to 1948, when I was appointed Secretary of the Kayastha Pathshala, by the then President, Munshi Govind Prasad Saheb, who was, at that time, a leading member of the Allahabad Bar. I had settled down at Allahabad in November 1896, when I was also enrolled as an advocate of the High Court. Munshi Ram Prasad was then the second President of the Kayastha Pathshala; his predecessor, and the first President of the institution, having been Munshi Hanuman Prasad, one of the acknowledged leaders of the Allahabad Bar, until his death in 1888. Munshi Ram Prasad was not only a leading lawyer in the High Court; he was also the Government Pleader. A few months before I came to Allahabad to live there permanently (as I have done since). Munshi Rama Prasad-along with Sir Sunder Lal, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Mr. Jogendra Nath Choudhari-had been admitted as the first batch of vakils to the status of advocates, which was until then open to barristers only. Munshi Ram Prasad thus occupied the most prominent position amongst the Kayasthas at Allahabad at that time. His high position at the Bar was a great asset to the Kayastha Pathshala, which was then teaching up to the Intermediate standard. But he was an intensely busy man, and could not give adequate time to the work of the Pathshala. In June, 1900, when the High Court was sitting in the morning, for the first time, Munshi Ram Prasad died after a very short illness. The Trustees of the Pathshala soon met to elect a successor to him, and the choice fell upon the late Munshi Govind Prasad, who had been a Professor of Mathematics at the Aligarh College, and who had built up a large practice in the High Court, by the time he was elected President of the Pathshala. His election proved, however, unpopular with the local Kayastha community, as he was an outsider at Allahabad.

Munshi Govind Prasad was not only a sound lawyer, and a successful practitioner, but he was something more-a man with a rare capacity for administrative work, a man of liberal and progressive views, a man gifted with strong common sense, and great strength of character. But these qualities did not appeal to the mentality of the Kayastha community of Allahabad at that time. The first thing he did was to re-constitute the Executive Council by importing into it a good deal of new blood, and by appointing me the Secretary, and also the editor of the only monthly organ, in English, of the Pathshala, called the *Kayastha Samachar*, which had been conducted for one year (from July 1899 to June, 1900) by that veteran journalist, Babu Ramanand Chatterjee, the then Principal of the Pathshala, and long since famous as the editor of the *Modern Review*. He had, however, given up his work as editor at the end of the first year, and Munshi Govind Prasad, therefore, entrusted me with that work also. My tenure of office as Secretary lasted for four years, and came to an end in June,

1904, with the expiry of the term of office of Munshi Govind Prasad himself, and the election as his Successor of the late Munshi (afterwards Mr. Justice) Gokul Prasad.

The *Kayastha Samachar* had in less than two years come to be so well-established, and so well-known all over India it being then the only English journal, issued from Allahabad that it received an invitation to Lord Curzon's famous Delhi Durbar, of January, 1903; it being the only monthly invited out of a large number of news-papers and journals, which were recipients of invitation. As a result of it, the Executive Council agreed to the journal being called the *Hindustan Review* and *Kayastha Samachar*. On the election of Munshi Gokul Prasad as the President, there was unfortunately a deal of unpleasantness between him, as the President, and me, as the editor of the *Hindustan Review*, mainly in regard to the policy to be pursued by it, by not departing from its previous policy as a general record and review of public affairs in the country. With a view to outwit me, Munshi Gokul Prasad offered the editorship to a well-known journalist who was the editor at the time of an English weekly, which I had started in January, 1903, soon after my return from the Delhi Durbar of that year. But Munshi Gokul Prasad had, in doing so, reckoned without his host, for I immediately issued a prospectus of a new monthly to be edited by me, called the *New Hindustan Review*. Naturally feelings were roused, between the supporters of Munshi Gokul Prasad, and those who were sympathisers of the policy, which I had pursued till then, and which I proposed carrying on through the medium of the *New Hindustan Review*. At last, through the good offices of some friends, it was arranged that the Pathshala should transfer to me the proprietary rights and the good-will of the *Hindustan Review*, for a sum of Rs. 1,000/-, which amount I willingly paid to make the Review my own, and which I have conducted since single-handed from Allahabad, Calcutta and Patna, till it completed, in June, 1947, forty-seven years of its existence, being one of the oldest periodicals in the country.

The reference I have made above to the facts and incidents, connected with the *Hindustan Review*, will have conveyed to the readers the impression that there were even at that time feuds and factions amongst the Kayastha Pathshala Trustees, specially amongst those living at Allahabad-who naturally constitute a very important factor, being not only numerically large, but also always in a position to influence the decisions by reason of their being able to muster strong at the meetings of the Trustees-as against those coming from outside this city. The two parties at that time followed the lead of the late Choudhari Mahadeo Prasad Saheb, and Munshi Govind Prasad respectively-the former constituting the orthodox group, so to say, and the latter the liberal and progressive group. It will serve no useful purpose now to recall the details of the various points in controversy at that time. Suffice it to say that the differences were due to the mentality of the two leaders-the Choudhari Saheb, leading the

creedal party, so to say, on all social questions, and Munshi Govind Prasad, the non-creedal one. The Choudhari Saheb wielded very great influence with the local Kayastha community. His old connection with the Allahabad district and the city, his great wealth and fortune, his rigid orthodoxy, and his social influence, all contributed to his strong position in any matter that he undertook to support, as against Munshi Govind Prasad, a mere middle class man from the Shahjahanpur district, who could not bring any adventitious aid in support of his views or work with only myself as his right-hand man, and coming from Bihar.

Now weak and subdued, now strong and vehement, the eternal conflict in the Kayastha Pathshala administration, like the problem of the eternal triangle, ran its full course during the four years of the term of my office as the Secretary. Until Munshi Govind Prasad became Preseident, no such conflict had appeared in a marked degree, for the simple reason that the first two Presidents (Munshi Hanuman Prasad and Munshi Ram Prasad) were local men, who were regarded in the light of elderly relations by the Choudhari Saheb. But though no duly qualified local man being available at the time, the Allahabad Trustees put the best face upon the matter, they could not bring themselves to approve of, or to support, Munshi Govind Prasad, the new President, and his policy of reform and progress. Since then various changes have come about in the institution, and it has been for several years past a college, affiliated to the Allahabad University. But the unhealthy rivalry, between outside Trustees, still persists in diverse shapes and forms, and, at times, becomes almost a menace to the stability of the institution, which must be constantly guarded against by all well-wishers of the community. This warning is not unnecessary when the bursting of a storm may come about, sooner than later.

As Secretary of the Institution I made extensive tours throughout northern India, from Calcutta to Lahore, accompanied by the late Munshi Ram Prasad Varma, who was a very eloquent speaker, and whose co-operation was of very great assistance to me in the interest of the Kayastha Pathshala. I managed to collect, during my term of office, quite a large sum of money, by way of donations. But there were stormy meetings of the Trustees when the deputation accounts were placed for being passed, as the local Trustees strongly objected to certain items in the travelling expenses of the members of the deputation, one of whom happened to be the present President of the institution-Dr. Narayan Prasad Asthana-the Vice-Chancellor of the Agra University. But good sense, however, prevailed, and the accounts were duly passed, by an overwhelming majority, the minority (all local Trustees) vowing eternal protest. Later, at the prize distribution ceremony which was held in the old Pathshala grounds on a magnificent scale; and at which the then District Magistrate, Mr. Harrison, presided, I presented a long statement showing the record of work done by Munshi Govind Prasad during his four years' term of office as president. Mr.

Harrison in a felicitous speech, declared that he was bound to say that he found the record of Munshi Govind Prasad's administration satisfactory. The opinion of a District Magistrate, expressed in 1904, carried much greater weight than does that of the Governor-General, or a Governor, in 1948, and so the result of Mr. Harrison's declaration was that the local Trustees had no alternative left but to surrender and to own defeat. But both Munshi Govind Prasad and I felt that it was desirable in the interest of the Pathshala that the successor in the office of the President should be a duly qualified local man, and we decided to run Munshi Gokul Prasad. We, however, kept our secret. In the circumstances, brisk and active canvassing went on to elect some one else as Munshi Govind Prasad's successor.

There was a rule in those days that any Kayastha could become a Trustee of the institution, for one year, on payment of Rs. 12. This was a palpably bad rule, as it led to much intrigue and low device on the part of average contestants for an election, or their supporters. Taking advantage of this rule, large amounts of money used to be received by me daily, brought by the amlas of the Choudhari Saheb, with long lists of names of persons whose only recommendation was that they were members of the local Kayastha community. In this way the Pathshala received at that time no less than fifteen to twenty thousand rupees. These new members were all expected to vote for someone, who was to be run as a rival to Munshi Govind Prasad. At last the date of election arrived and the Trustees—the small number of the outside ones, and the very large number of the newly enrolled ones—met face to face in the old hall of the Pathshala. The accommodation in the hall was wholly insufficient for so large a number, and so there was an overflow meeting improvised in the grounds, where *sharbat*, ice-cream, *pan*, cigarettes and *birees* were being supplied to the new voters, free of cost. They had been asked not to bother themselves about the speeches made inside the hall, but to be ready to lift up their both hands, when a certain member of their party lifted up his first. But though the meeting lasted the whole day, and broke up late in the evening, the time of lifting up hands never arrived; for when all the work on the agenda had been finished, Munshi Govind Prasad quietly rose and declared that he did not seek reelection, and moved that Munshi Gokul Prasad might be elected his successor, which proposition was carried *nem com*.

If I so desired, I could recall from the repertory of my memory many other interesting incidents during the term of my office as the Secretary of the Kayastha Pathshala; but I refrain from doing so advisedly, as I trust that the few incidents I have recalled might not only interest the readers of this journal, but might even now point a moral to the present day Trustees.