

15. Nearly Nine Years of Vice-Chancellorship (1936-44)

I worked as the honorary Vice-Chancellor of the Patna University during four successive terms extending over a period of nearly nine years, between 1936 and 1944. Soon after the inauguration of the province of Bihar and Orissa, in 1912, the Provincial Government constituted a University Committee, composed of educational experts and non-official representatives of the two provinces, but then one administrative unit of Bihar and Orissa, under the presidentship of Mr. (afterwards Sir) Robert Nathan, a distinguished and capable member of the Indian Civil Service. The Committee met many times and ultimately submitted to Government a practically unanimous report suggesting the establishment of a University at Patna, unitary in character so far as the local colleges were concerned, but with powers of affiliation in regard to colleges situated within the province, but outside Patna. The report was not accepted by the Government of India who adopted a scheme of their own which was embodied in a Bill introduced into the Imperial legislative Council by the then Education member, the Hon'ble Sir Sankaran Nair.

The Government's scheme was so hopelessly reactionary that although it was praised with faint damns by some of the Bihar and Orissa representatives in the Imperial Legislative Council, it aroused considerable opposition not only in the Province concerned but also in other provinces, as it was regarded as a very reactionary measure which, if adopted, would cripple higher education. Accordingly, a very strong protest was organised against it by the then leading public men of the province. I was one of the chief organizers of the movement, and I was fully supported by several prominent persons, the most notable amongst whom was Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Our opposition to the Bill, as introduced, was effective in the sense that the first Bill was withdrawn, and a revised Bill was introduced which, with many amendments in favour of popular demands, was ultimately placed on the statute book and became the Patna University Act of 1917. This Act came immediately into force, and the Patna University became an accomplished fact towards the close of the same year. I was nominated by the Provincial Government, of which Sir Edward Gait was the Head at that time, as a Fellow or Senator for a period of five years.

It was declared in that Act that the University would have a Vice-Chancellor but nothing was mentioned in it as to whether that office would be honorary or stipendiary. It was also laid down that the first term of office of the Vice-Chancellor would be for a period of three years, but that the subsequent terms (to which there was to be no limit) would not extend to more than two years each. Under these provisions the first two Vice-Chancellors were appointed by the Chancellor (who was the head of the provincial administration) and

they were both British Members of the Indian Educational Service. The first Vice-Chancellor, Mr. J. G. Jennings, had long been known to me as the Principal of the Muir Central College at Allahabad. He was a scholar of Oxford, highly cultured and a gentleman in the best sense of that-term. He had been brought to this province as the Director of Public Instruction and was promoted to be the first Vice-Chancellor of the Patna University. His successor, Mr. V. H. Jackson, was taken from the Science side, he being a member of the staff of the Patna College at the time of his appointment. Both of them served for only one term each.

Meanwhile a strong feeling was growing in the province that it was not desirable to continue the system of having stipendiary Vice-Chancellors, and that on the analogy followed till then in the Universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, the office should be held in an honorary capacity. A resolution was moved on the subject during the term of my office as President of the Bihar and Orissa legislative Council and was carried in spite of Government Opposition to it. Lord Sinha, who was the Governor of the province at the time, consulted me about it, and I advised that his Government should accept that resolution. Accordingly, it was announced that the next Vice-Chancellor, in succession to Mr. Jackson, would hold the post in an honorary capacity and the choice of the Government, to which I was a party, fell on Mr. (afterwards Sir) Syed Sultan Ahmed, who was at the time the Government Advocate in the Patna High Court. The appointment was welcomed with satisfaction throughout Bihar and Orissa, and Mr. Sultan Ahmed continued to be the honorary Vice-Chancellor of the University for three successive terms, extending over a period of nearly seven years, that is, from 1923 to 1930.

Mr. Sultan Ahmed, though he was a busy lawyer in extensive practice, and had also (as the Government Advocate) to do a good deal of work for the Crown, yet he managed to put in much good work in the interest of the Patna University. His two predecessors, who were members of the Indian Educational Service, had naturally paid attention to developing the administrative side of the University. Mr. Sultan Ahmed introduced many reforms tending to make the University popular, and when he retired at the end of his third term, he certainly left a record of which he could justly be proud. The question arose at the time of his retirement as to who should succeed him. The Minister of Education at the time was the late Sir Mohammed Fakhruddin, a good and sound man of liberal and progressive views, but, unfortunately, the head of the Education Department, namely the Director of Public Instruction, had come to acquire by that time a predominating influence with the head of the Government, i.e., Governor. This highest Educational officer in the province, namely the Director, was undoubtedly a very capable man, and possessed great administrative capacity and experience, but he was narrow-minded in the sense that he could not rise above the trammels of departmentalism. He did not

mind the nomination, term after term, of Mr. Sultan Ahmed since, though a non-official, he was also, as Government Advocate, a high law officer of the Crown, but he opposed tooth and nail the appointment of any non-official Indian public man with the result that the Vice-Chancellorship was ultimately offered to a British Judge of the Patna High Court, who was a member of the Indian Civil Service.

Naturally the announcement of this appointment provoked hostile criticism in the press and amongst the public. I was at that time the Leader of Opposition in the Bihar and Orissa Legislative Council, and letters and telegrams poured in upon me from all sides suggesting that the matter should be agitated in the Provincial Legislature in proper form. Accordingly, during the debates on the budget in the Legislative Assembly I tabled a cut motion to the effect that the amount asked for by Government for their educational work be cut down by rupee one. I thus brought my motion in strict conformity with Parliamentary form and usage. I explained at the outset that no racial controversy was involved in the discussion, the sole question for the consideration of the House being whether in view of Government's declaration that no official of the State would be appointed to the office of the Vice-Chancellor in future, it was right and proper to have appointed a High Court Judge to that office, it being immaterial whether the said official was British or Indian. I pressed this point home and the Education Minister felt that, if pressed to a division, my motion was likely to be declared carried, in spite of the block of the Governor's nominees, comprising both officials and non-officials, who naturally used to vote invariably on the side of Government.

A man of great tact, Sir Mohammad Fakhruddin suggested to me the withdrawal of my motion on the ground that my object had been served, that Government now realised that public opinion was against the nomination of an official Vice-Chancellor and did not favour it, and that on the happening of the next vacancy my suggestion would be kept in view. On these assurance I withdrew the motion, as I felt that I had gained the point I desired to make, but the new Vice-Chancellor found the work of the University, in addition to his own exalted judicial duties, rather exacting and retired from the Vice-Chancellorship before putting in the full term of three years. Living far off from the college area, and apart from college staffs and students, he seldom came into personal contact with them, except at the meeting of the Senate and the Syndicate, and I suspect that he also did not find the work quite congenial. Be that as it may, he submitted his resignation before his term was over. Sir Mohamed Fakhruddin had passed away in 1933, and his successor in the education ministry was a person with no will of his own. The Director of Public Instruction, who was even more influential now than before, still ruled the roost with the result that (brushing aside Sir Mohammed Fakhruddin's assurances made in the course of the debate I had raised on the subject) he got another High Court Judge,

but an Indian, appointment as Vice-Chancellor, The new Vice-Chancellor-Mr. Khwaja Muhammad Noor-was a gentleman who was held in very high esteem throughout the province for his judicial independence and fair-mindedness. He managed the affairs of the University with great tact and sympathy, with the staff and the students, with the result that this administration of three year was quite popular. His term was to expire in the fullness of time in August 1936, and the question of his successor began to agitate the public mind, great pressure being brought to bear upon the Hon'ble Education Minister for the appointment of a genuine non-official public man.

The Education Minister at this time was the late Mr. Syed Abdul Aziz, (1885-1947) who was a member of the English Bar, and who previous to his appointment as Minister had enjoyed an extensive and lucrative practice. He was made of sterner stuff than his predecessor, but he also had to face the opposition of the redoubtable Director of Public Instruction, who had been responsible for the nominations of two High Court Judges in Vice-Chancellors. The Director of Public Instruction had, for some reason or other, special preference for High Court Judges for being appointed Vice-Chancellors of the University. Having succeeded in his effort on the two previous occasions, he tried to play the same game again, and took up cudgels on behalf of another Indian Judge of the High Court, who was a member of the Indian Civil Service, but he met with formidable opposition from Education Minister, Abdul Aziz, for which he was wholly unprepared. He was surprised to find that the latter was not only inexorable against the appointment going once again to a High Court Judge, but that he had a plan of his own, which was that a genuine non-official, wholly unconnected with Government, at the time of his appointment should be installed as Vice-Chancellor. Fully aware of the responsibility in making such a definite proposal to the Governor, the Educational Minister formally submitted my name and wrote in support of his recommendation a very strong note.

The struggle between the Director of Public Instruction and the Education Minister lasted over my appointment as Vice-Chancellor for a fairly long period of some months. The file was tossed about between the Education Department of the Secretariat and the Director's Department, and was submitted to Governor time after time. The then Governor, who was the ex-officio Chancellor of the University, tried to bring about a reconciliation between the departmental head and the Educational Minister, but each of the two was stubborn in support of his own view. Meanwhile, time was pressing and the date for the announcement of the name of the new Vice-Chancellor came nearer and nearer. Having failed to bring about a compromise between the two combatants, the Governor had no other alternative but to make up his mind to accept the recommendation of the one or the other. Whatever his personal views or preference might have been, he chose for the sake of keeping up constitutional appearances the

recommendation of the Education Minister that I should be appointed the next Vice-Chancellor.

This was a great blow to the Director of Education. On two previous occasions, he had carried the day against two of the Education Ministers. He was, therefore, unprepared for the Governor throwing his suggestion over-board. For no less than eighteen long years, he had not only regarded himself, but had come to be looked upon by others also, as the uncrowned king of the educational world and services in the province. He felt his position had seriously changed by the action of the Education Minister as endorsed by the Governor. He, therefore, made up his mind to go on long leave, preparatory to retirement from educational service, having already earned his pension. He did me the honour of sending me a long letter of congratulations and good wishes. On his return from long leave-the longest he could have taken under the rules-he was appointed to a higher post as the first President of the Public Service Commission of the three provinces of Bihar, Orissa, and the Central Provinces and Berar. On the breaking out of the war he resigned and retired without completing the full term of his office of the President of the Commission.

I remained in office as Vice-Chancellor From August 1936 till December 1944, i.e., for nearly eight years and a half. The tenure of my office extended over four terms - the first for the statutory period of three years and the subsequent three of two years or less than two years, as provided in the University Act. Till now it is the longest period of any Vice-Chancellor's tenure of office. I had to work in this capacity with four Governors, who were *ex-officio* Chancellors of the University. The first of these, who was responsible for my appointment, was Sir James Sifton, but he retired even before the first year of my tenure of office had ended. He was succeeded, in March, 1937, by Sir Maurice Hallett, of whom I have written at some length elsewhere in one of these articles. My first term of three years expired in August 1939 when Sir Maurice was the Governor and the first Congress Ministry was in power. As my first term was coming to a close I thought best to tell the Prime Minister and the Education Minister that, if they so desired they should choose my successor, as I was not willing to continue in harness at the then advanced age of sixty-eight. The Education Minister, Dr. Syed Mahmood, did not listen to it, and he insisted that I should continue in office. Finding me unwilling to do so and knowing my friendly relations with the Governor, Sir Maurice Hallett, he sought the intervention of the latter. Accordingly, Sir Maurice put it to me, not only on his own behalf but of his Council of Ministers, that I should take another term and I agreed to do so.

When my second term was about to expire in August 1941, Sir Thomas Stewart was the Governor and *ex-officio* Chancellor of the University. I told him that I had already put in my first term of three years and the second one of two years, and I thought it was time that His Excellency should choose my

successor. He said he had done so already. I said that, provided it was not confidential, I would like to know the name of my successor. He said "O yes, I shall tell you immediately. It is yours and I shall take no refusal. I can think of no one qualified enough to take charge from you". And so the matter was concluded, and I was in for a third term of office which was to expire in August 1943. But there had been a change in the office of the Governor (Chancellor). Sir Thomas Stewart had gone home on four month's leave. But not long after his arrival in London it was announced that His Majesty the King-Emperor had been pleased to allow him to lay down the reins of his office, and he was forthwith succeeded by a member of the Indian Civil Service who had been till then serving in the Madras Presidency, Mr. (afterwards Sir) Thomas Rutherford, to whom also I conveyed, in due course, that as I had served for three terms, covering a period of seven years, it was time he looked out for my successor. Very probably, he did make an effort in that direction, but, evidently, he was not successful. In June 1943, a few weeks before the expiry of my third term, I wrote to him the letter which I am printing below. On receipt of that letter I went to Ranchi to meet him, and I explained to him that while in deference to his wishes I would carry on the work for another term, the duration of it should be curtailed by a few months so that it might end on the last date of the year 1944. This was agreed to, and I continued in office for a fourth term and vacated it on the 31st of December, 1944. Except, perhaps, in the case of so great an educationist as Sir Ashatosh Mukerjee, no other person had the privilege of serving as the honorary Vice-Chancellor of any University in India for four terms, extending over a period of nearly nine years-a long period in all conscience.

Indian Universities are now of two types, unitary and residential and affiliating and examining. The Patna University belonged in my time to the latter type. It was only possible to affiliate colleges scattered throughout the province or areas under its jurisdiction, prescribe courses of studies, examine the candidates and declare the results. Though when the Patna University Bill was enacted in 1917, there was a clause in it which might have enabled the University authorities to develop the institution from a purely examining body into a teaching university, yet, during the time of one of my predecessors, the local Government, under the influence of the Director of Public Instruction to whom I have once referred before, brought in an amending Bill to repeal that particular clause, as they thought it might lead later to an agitation on the part of the Senate of the University for the conversion of the examining university into a teaching institution. I was at that time the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislature of the province, and I offered a most strenuous opposition to the enactment of that amending Bill. But this was in the good old days of dyarchical administration, when Government had at their disposal a fairly large block of Governor's nominees, both official and non-official, to keep the Government on the transferred side, i.e., the Ministry in power. The subject of Education

was in charge of a Minster, and it was he who had brought the amending Bill. Accordingly, with the votes of the Government block of nominees, he was able to carry through the Legislative Council the amending Bill, and thus the last ray of hope for the conversion of the Patna University into a teaching one was gone, if not for ever, at any rate for a very long time. That being so, in the earlier years of my Vice-Chancellorship, my work during my first term of three years, was purely mechanical. It was not part of your duty to discuss any question of educational policy, or to search the trend of educational force even in the country, to say nothing of other countries abroad. We met once or twice a month at the meeting of Syndicate to transact business which was, more or less, of a formal nature, as, for instance, to grant permission to candidates desirous of appearing at certain examinations without having attended lectures in colleges, to prescribe text-books, to appoint examiners and co-examiners, to arrange to hold examinations at various centres throughout the provinces of Bihar and Orissa, and to declare the results. There were various other things that we did, but all of them were equally mechanical; and there was no room for the exercise of any brain power either on my part, or on the part of my esteemed and worthy colleagues, the members of the Syndicate, who were known as Syndics. When, therefore, I entered upon the second term of my Vice-Chancellorship, I thought I should develop an intellectual side of our work to some extent, instead of carrying it on purely mechanical lines. It was not easy to do so as by far the larger number of Syndics had got accustomed to work on the old mechanical lines and the intellectual aspect of the work was absolutely new to their very conception of things. Slowly, but steadily, they had to be indoctrinated into new ideas and new lines of thought before the suggested new policy came to appeal to their mind, but once their outlook was changed they began to appreciate my efforts and gave me their fullest support from time to time, as for instance, the establishment of research scholarships, the foundation of a few fellowships, the development of the literary languages of the province, inviting experts and specialists as lecturers, and some other matters of a similar kind. The progress was slow but steady, and considerable advancement had been made by the time my tenure of office came to an end in December 1944. Meanwhile, the mechanical aspect had been forging ahead. A fairly large number of colleges, not only at the head quarters of several districts but also at the chief towns of some sub-divisions, had been established and affiliated to the University. The number of candidates appearing at different examinations had more than doubled during the period I held office. The work in other departments also had very largely increased, and consequently the staff had to be appreciably increased. In arranging for lecturers to address the annual convocation of the University to which the successful candidates received their diplomas, I tried to dignify and exalt the office of the convocation lecturer by choosing some of the most eminent men in the country who had distinguished themselves in various

branches of knowledge and learning or in public work and administration. Thus the efficient working on the mechanical side and the development side by side of an intellectual element resulted in conducting to the reorganization of the University on new lines, in spite of the stringency contemplated in the amended University Act against any departure from mechanical work.

When the Congress Ministry were in power during the years 1937 to 1939, I had succeeded in inducing the Governor, (Chancellor) His Excellency Sir Maurice Hallett to nominate Dr. Rajendra Prasad as a Fellow of the Patna University. Not long after his nomination, Dr. Rajendra Prasad moved a resolution in a meeting of the Senate to the effect that Government be requested to appoint a representative committee to submit a scheme to Government for the re-organization of Primary, Secondary and higher education in the province. This resolution was unanimously adopted by the Senate and the Congress Ministry gave effect to it immediately by appointing a committee of officials and non-officials, under the presidentship of Professor K. T. Shah of Bombay. Of this committee I was appointed an *ex-officio* member as the Vice-Chancellor of the University. The Committee met frequently over a long period and ultimately submitted its report in the three bulky volumes-the first devoted to the reorganization of primary education, the second to that of secondary education and the third to that of higher education. I took immediate action in connection with the recommendations made by the Committee in the volume dealing with the reorganization of higher education, i.e., the education imparted in the University. I got the recommendations considered by the different bodies, and ultimately a joint meeting of the faculties concerned was held under my presidentship, which turned out to be a pretty stormy meeting which required all my tact and long experience of public life to keep it in order. Later, all these reports were considered by the Syndicate and the Senate and a well-considered scheme was submitted to Government for consideration. But just about that time the war conditions had developed and the Bihar Government were in no mood even to consider the Recommendations of the Shah Committee, as approved by the Senate of the University. They directed, therefore, that the consideration may be postponed until the war conditions were over. My successor in the office of Vice-Chancellor was luckier than I was in this particular respect, for, by the time he assumed office, in January 1945, the war conditions were more favourable to the Allies, and post war planning was in the air. The Government had by that time been able to tap some new sources of income, and so while previously they used to higggle and haggle about a few rupees, they were now launching big schemes of post-war reconstruction in almost all departments of administration and were providing for them not in hundreds or thousands or even lacs of rupees, but crores and crores. It was not surprising, therefore, that in his very first address to the Senate of the University my successor was able to announce on the authority of the Governor-Chancellor, that the

University might look forward before long to the immediate establishment of teaching University at Patna. But India under the British was the India of the bureaucracy, where nothing could be done except under great pressure of public opinion, while the “National Government” that succeeded it (in Bihar) on 15th August 1947, had not yet been able to rise above political party trammels-with the inevitable result that not a step forward was taken till the end of 1948.

