

## **Dr. Narain Prasad Asthana**

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It is not the span of life of 94 years, which Dr. Asthana had, but it is the richness and fulness of his life which has left a mark on the pages of history. The versatile genius of Dr. Asthana was an asset not only to the profession of law but to the society-nay to the nation at large. The example which he set forth to his younger generation did not remain only theoretical and legendary but is living and practical. The Allahabad High Court was established in the year 1866 at Agra. Eight years later, Dr. Asthana was born at Agra in the year..1874. Who knew at that time that the new born child would be one of the greatest stalwarts of the recently-created High Court, and will live to see the Centenary Celebrations of the High Court. Dr. Asthana's life was almost co-extensive with the life of the Allahabad High Court. The profession of law is said to be a hard task master. Starting his career at the Bar in 1896 he soon rose to eminence by sheer dint of his labour and merit and began commanding recognition. The importance which he had achieved at the Bar caught the public eye, and his services were solicited by the public of Agra who elected- him a Member of the Agra Municipal Board, and, slowly and steadily, Dr. Asthana commanded a lucrative practice at Agra on the original side and was engaged in all important cases at Agra.

In 1915, he shifted to Allahabad and practised in the High Court, rubbing his shoulders with eminent lawyers in the High Court. To name a few of them Pt. Moti Lal Nehru, Sir Sunder Lal, Mr. Jogendra Nath Chaudhary, Dr. Satish Chandra Banerji, Dr. Kailas Nath Katju, Mr. O'Connor and others. His experience in the district courts and his learning and deep knowledge of law in affairs human conduct attained for him a distinct position amongst the members of the Bar of his time. In 1916, he was elected Member to the U. P. Legislative Council and to the Council of State in 1927. He became the Vice-Chancellor of the Agra University in 1929, and, in 1932, the said University conferred upon him the Degree of LL.D. Honoris Causa. The Congress Party came into office in 1937, when Dr. Asthana was appointed the first Advocate-General of U.P. The said post came to him not because he was a member of the Congress Party but in recognition of his position as a lawyer.

Since Dr. Asthana began his life in the High Court in 1915, he saw upheavals of political, social and economic nature. Many men came to the world and disappeared. Institutions had crumbled and have been replaced; but Dr. Asthana's life was unchanged and his amiable nature and his steadfastness continued the same. People who had seen Dr. Asthana in the year 1915 would have found in him even up to his last days the same cool and collected temperament which was not affected by success or failure of a particular undertaking. The one reason which pervaded the entire life of Dr. Asthana was his goodness, which, even in the changing panorama of life, was not affected. The goodness being one of the fundamentals of life does not change with the change of environments. Dr. Katju, in his "Reminiscences and Experiments In Advocacy", published in the year 1952, wrote about Dr. Asthana as below:

### "Dr. NARAIN PRASAD ASTHANA-A MAN OF VERSATILE TALENTS

"Dr. Narain Prasad Asthana is now, I think, the senior most member of the Bar in the United Provinces, in active practice for over 52 years. His is an honoured name in the profession as well as in the public life. He was our first Advocate General and held that high office from 1937 to 1945 with great distinction and ability. He is a man of versatile talents. As a legislator his name shall live for many years as the author of the Agra Pre-emption Act. As an educationist, he is one of the builders of the Agra University, and he is held by the people of Agra in the greatest regard and esteem. His advocacy is gentle and sober and painstaking and he soon won and has since retained the confidence, the trust and high opinion of the Bench and Bar alike."

The abovenoted compliment given by Dr. Katju is true to every letter. The scholarship and depth of learning was well recognized by great contemporaries. His creative faculty as also the interpreting genius in the domain of law were par excellence.

In the field of education also, Dr. Asthana did not lag behind. Even in his early days, while he was yet a student, he organized free tutorials, and his keen interest in the educational field got him absorbed as a member of the Senate of the Agra University, and he was one of the eldest trustees of the well-known Kayastha Pathshala Trust, having been enrolled as a trustee on the first of July 1901. Several times he was elected the President of the Kayastha Pathshala, and the position that this institution has acquired is largely due to its association of Dr. Asthana and his keen interest in the field of education.

At the completion of his 60 years practice, the members of the Advocates' Association High Court presented a commemoration volume to Dr. Asthana on 3rd April 1955. The said commemoration volume contains messages from Judges, lawyers and publicmen. Mr. B. Malik, Ex-Chief Justice of the High Court of Allahabad, wrote: "We, the junior members of the Bar, were very much impressed by Dr. Asthana's kindness and courtesy. He always encouraged the junior section and liked to give them the opportunity to argue the case if they were willing to do so. . He never took advantage of the fact that the other side was represented by a junior member whose knowledge of case law and experience of court-craft might be found wanting, and he never tried to hit below the belt." Dr. Panna Lal, I. C. S., on the same occasion, wrote: "After leaving the Bar, though I worked in different fields, I have had frequent opportunity of coming in contact with him, and I have watched with admiration his method of work in such different spaces as a member of Provincial and State legislatures and as a Vice Chancellor. After many years when he was the Advocate-General and I was an Advisor to the Governor, I had many opportunities of personal discussion with him. I was always impressed by his attitude and effort to understand the other man's case with sympathy and fairness." Dr. Asthana was only an embodiment of the past traditions and culture and had imbibed in him the culture of the present generation. It was only in 1966, about two years ago, that his sons, grandsons, grand-children and great grand-children had organized a party in his honour. The party was full of joy, frolic and fun. 93 balloons and the glistening array of 93 candles and the children around shining brighter than the candles rejoiced and clustered around him to see him many many happy returns on the same. Dr. Asthana not only mixed with elder people but at the same time had the full share of the younger generation and his face shone with health, age and achievements.

Dr. Asthana's health began to fail for some time since the middle of 1967; but he did not miss attending the High Court and performing his duties as the President of the High Court Bar Association with the same traditional way; and whenever he did not attend the High Court, every member of the Bar-senior or junior-made anxious enquiries about his health. Lately, at the advent of the year 1968, he became irregular in his coming to the High Court, and since February last he was confined to bed; and, although he was not allowed, or he became physically unfit, to move about, he retained the same calm and unruffled temperament which he always possessed. He left his mortal coil on 30th March 1968. .

The philosophy of Dr. Asthana's life can be described in the words of Shakespeare—

“To thine own self be true,

It must follow as the night the day,

Thou canst not then be false to any man.”