

Munshi Hanuman Prasad

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In the early part of the 19th century a band of pioneers from what is now known as eastern district of U. P. moved over for practice, to the Sadar Dewani Adalat at Agra, where, under the guidance of their able leader M. Man Rai, they established themselves in the legal profession. Among them was a young and ambitious lawyer, Hanuman Prasad, who drew special attention, on account of his legal acumen and mastery of the Court language which was, at that time, Persianized Urdu.

He was born in a well-to-do Zamindar family of Varanasi, and, having passed his Examination in Law, was appointed a munsif, his first posting being at Mughalsarai. After some time his services were lent by the Government to the Maharaja of Banaras, Sir Ishwari Prasad Narain Singh, who appointed him Manager of his family domains. But, due to differences with the Maharaja, he resigned from the Banaras State, as also, from Government service, and on the advice of M. Man Rai, accompanied him to Agra, where he lived at Gokulpura and started practice in the Sadar Dewani Adalat.

By a Charter granted by Queen Victoria in the year 1866, the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad came into existence.

So he shifted to Allahabad, and with the help of Mr. T. Conlan, Bar-at-Law, who was his great friend, learnt English at the age of 45 and for his part taught Persian and Urdu to Mr. Conlan. Both the teacher and the taught performed their task with the utmost fidelity and soon M. Hanuman Prasad was able to appear and argue his cases in English, which had become 'the language of the High Court.

Before a Bench of the newly established High Court at Allahabad, was, appearing a counsel clad in Achkan and turban, when the Judge remarked, "Munshiji, Yahan Angrezi Men Bahas Hoga, Urdu Ya Fharsi Men Nahin". Pat came the reply, "Yes, my Lord, I am fully prepared with the case". This surprised the Judges quite a bit. Thus appeared on the horizon of the new High Court, a luminous star, M. Hanuman Prasad.

He soon became the acknowledged leader of the Bar and established very lucrative practice and was the Chief Editor of the Allahabad Weekly Notes. The annals of the Law Reports bear testimony to his merit and ability. He was the senior most among the founder members of the Vakils' Association.

M. Hanuman Prasad was also a renowned social reformer, an erudite scholar and a great philanthropist. He became the first and also the life, President of the Kayastha Pathshala Trust, which was founded by the late M. Kali Prasad Kulbhaskar, himself a prominent and eminent lawyer of the then Avadh Bar. The institution of the Kayastha Pathshala, under the able patronage of M. Hanuman Prasad, laid the foundation for the present Kayastha Pathshala Trust, which can now boast of several Degree Colleges and Hostels including the Sampurnanand Hostel and Rajendra Chhatrawas.

Mr. Hanuman Prasad was a voracious reader. He built up a great library, not only of Law, but on various subjects, e.g. History; Literature, Religion, Urdu, Persian, Sanskrit and even a volume of Japanese dictionary can be found among his collections. He was a patron of music and himself a musician of no mean merit. He loved horses and at one time his stable could boast of as many as 30 horses of the best available breed.

Among his friends and contemporaries were eminent lawyers and jurists, namely, Sir Arthur Colvin, Nawab Abdul Majid, Mr. T. Conlan, Pt. Ajudhia Nath, Sir Sunder Lal and Sri Jogendra Nath Chaudhry.

Having amassed considerable wealth, he left behind him, as his legacy when he died in 1888, not only great fame and fortune, but also a line of worthy successors. His son M. Madho Prasad practised with him. One of his grandsons, the late Rai Bahadur M. Gokul Prasad was elevated to the Bench of the High Court on the 12th May, 1920, and was the last Hony. Vice-Chancellor of the Allahabad University. Mr. Gokul Prasad was succeeded by his son Shri Badri Narain, who made a fair mark in the legal profession and officiated as Government Advocate for some time but died at a young age of 45 years, in 1937. His son, Shri Ganesh Prasad, is a practising Advocate in the High Court and is the Honorary Secretary of the High Court Bar Association. Munshi Ambika Prasad, another grand-son of M. Hanuman Prasad is one of the leaders of the Bar on the Civil side. He is a Vice-President of the High Court Bar Association and the President elect of the U. P. Lawyers' Conference, 1966.