



PANDIT MOTILAL NEHRU



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*P*andit Motilal Nehru, an eminent lawyer, an eloquent speaker, a noted Parliamentarian and a prominent figure of the Indian nationalism in the Gandhian era, was born on 6 May 1861 at Agra. His forefathers hailed from Kashmir, but had settled in Delhi since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Motilal Nehru spent his childhood at Khetri in Rajasthan. Later the family moved to Allahabad. He passed the Matriculation examination from Kanpur and joined the Muir Central College at Allahabad.

After passing the Vakil's examination in 1883, Motilal Nehru began practice as a lawyer at Kanpur, but three years later shifted to Allahabad where his brother Nandlal had a lucrative practice at the High Court. Unfortunately, Nandlal died in April 1887 at the age of forty-two, leaving behind him five sons and two daughters. Young Motilal found himself, at the age of twenty-five, as the head of a large family and its sole bread-earner. The death of his brother not only increased Motilal Nehru's burden, but also gave a keener edge to his ambition. His legal practice was growing. A rise in his standard of living was paralleled by progressive westernization.

Motilal Nehru's early incursions into politics were reluctant, brief and sporadic. He attended the 1888 Allahabad Session of the Congress. In 1907, he presided over a Provincial Conference of the moderate politicians at Allahabad. His Presidential speech was a vigorous onslaught on

the extremist ideology. In 1909, he was elected as a member of the U.P. Council. Later, he also became a member of the Allahabad Municipal Board and of the All India Congress Committee. He was elected President of the U. P. Congress. He became President of the Allahabad branch of the Home Rule League. In August 1918, he parted company with his moderate friends on the constitutional issue, and attended the Bombay Congress, which demanded radical changes in the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. On 5 February 1919, Pandit Motilal Nehru launched a new daily newspaper, *The Independent*, which stood for 'Home Rule for India'. Its mission was to expose and attack corruption and ineptitude. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919 which was followed by Marshal Law, shattered his faith in the British Rule and he decided to enter into freedom struggle. He presided over the Amritsar Congress in December 1919. He was the only front rank leader to lend his support to Non-cooperation Movement at the special session of the Congress in September 1920.

On 6 December 1921, Pandit Motilal Nehru was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. When he came out of jail in the summer of 1922, he found that the civil disobedience movement had declined and felt that the time had come to revise the programme of non-cooperation. Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das founded the Swaraj Party in January 1923 and contested the elections at the end of 1923. The Swaraj Party was the largest party in the Central Legislative Assembly and in some of the Provincial Legislatures. For the next six years, Motilal Nehru served as the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly. With his commanding personality, incisive intellect, great knowledge of law, brilliant advocacy, ready wit and combative spirit, he seemed to be cut out for a parliamentary role.

Towards the end of 1927, with the appointment of the Simon Commission, there came a political revival. The exclusion of Indians from the Commission united Indian parties in opposition to the Government. An All Parties' Conference was convened by Dr. M.A. Ansari, the Congress President, and a Committee, headed by Motilal Nehru, was appointed to determine the basic principles of a Constitution for free India. The report of the Committee—the Nehru Report as it came to be called—attempted a solution to the communal problem.

The need for an independent Secretariat for the Legislature existed right from the time when the Legislative Assembly first met in 1921. And, on 22 September 1928, Pandit Motilal Nehru moved on the Floor of the House a resolution seeking constitution of a separate Assembly Department. The resolution, moved by Pandit Motilal Nehru was adopted unanimously by the Assembly. It, in fact, became "the source of the creation and authority of the Assembly Department".

Motilal Nehru also laid a great emphasis on the communal harmony and unity. Motilal presided over the Unity Conference which, on 26 September 1924, resolved that the utmost freedom of conscience and religion was essential, and condemned any desecration of places of worship, to whatever faith they might belong, and any persecution or punishment of any person for adopting or reverting to any faith. Motilal was a radical reformer not out of any false sentiment but because of a very cool reasoning. Motilal Nehru had a deep down faith in Indian culture and its freedom of spirit, its capacity for healing the ills of men and nations. Motilal Nehru's life was marked by an essential

fidelity to civilization, which meant respect for human dignity and craving for human fellowship.

The attributes and achievements of Pandit Motilal Nehru, his qualities of leadership and warm humanity, his patience and persistence, his determination and energy, his courage and force have stamped his mark indelibly on the public life of the country. Spinning and weaving of *Khaddar* had become obligatory for political workers. Motilal Nehru too cast aside his foreign dress and put on *Khaddar* in Indian style. He even hawked *Khaddar* in the streets of Allahabad. He joined the Civil Disobedience Movement and suffered periods of imprisonment.

Pandit Motilal Nehru had developed certain health complications due to the rigours of jail life and the heavy burden of responsibility as a leader of the Congress. On 6 February 1931, the valiant fighter for India's freedom breathed his last in the presence of all his dear and near ones.

The entire nation, mourned the sad demise of this magnificent personality who fought for the speedy attainment of full Dominion Status for the nation.

After the funeral was over, Mahatma Gandhi addressed the audience. Recalling his services to the nation, Gandhiji said:

... Panditji was a hero and great fighter. He fought many battles of the country but he also gave a tough fight to Yamaraj, the God of Death. Panditji has in fact been successful in this fight too... Only yesterday I told Pandit Motilal, 'If you gain health, then I will let you have Swaraj'.

Paying rich tribute to Pandit Motilal Nehru, Sir George Rainy, Leader of the House (Central Legislative Assembly), said:

“India is poorer by the removal of Pandit Motilal Nehru, who ... held a foremost place in the public life of the country. Of his policies and of his achievements ... so far he is concerned, the chapter is closed and record is sealed up, to await the judgement of the history ...”

Referring to the contributions made by Pandit Motilal Nehru to the legal profession, the then Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, Sir Edward Grimwood Mears said:

... He had a profusion of gifts, knowledge came easily to him and as an Advocate he had the art of presenting his case in its most attractive form. Every fact fell into its proper place in his narration of the story and was emphasised in just the right degree. He had an exquisite public speaking voice and a charm of manner which made it a pleasure to listen to him.....