

Moti Lal Nehru as one of the Prime Architects of Nehru Reports (1928)

Abstract

Moti Lal Nehru (1861-1931) had a rational, secular and fearless outlook on life. He was a brilliant lawyer, an eloquent speaker, a great parliamentarian and a good organizer. Moti Lal Nehru was one of the distinguished personality of Indian Nationalism in the Gandhian era.

Moti Lal Nehru entered into politics in 1907 when he was prevailed upon to preside at the U.P. Legislative Council after Minto-Morley Reforms. His early incursion into politics were reluctant, brief and sporadic. It was the tug-of-war between the Moderates who were in favour of only self-government within the British Empire and the Extremists who wanted complete independence, in the aftermath of the partition of Bengal.¹ Moti Lal Nehru was present in Surat in 1907 at the time of the historic split and joined the group of the Moderates. He was a bitter critic of the Extremists led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak.² The Moderates closed the doors of the Congress to those who did not pledge themselves to its way of self-government and the methods of constitutional agitations.³ The Government offered 1909 Reforms and sought the co-operation of Moderates.

Keywords: Moti Lal Nehru, Gandhian Era, Minto-Morley Reforms, President of the Congress, Non-Cooperation.

Introduction

Moti Lal Nehru was elected President of the Congress in 1919 and again in 1928. In 1919, Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi became the national leader of the fight for freedom. He gave definite shapes and direction to the agitation against the unjust Rowlett Act on April 6, 1919. This mode of protest was peaceful, though there was unrest throughout the country. In Amritsar, a crowd of people were listening political leaders in a public garden, namely Jallianwala Bagh. Since the public meetings and assemblies were prohibited, General Dyer incensed that his orders were disobeyed, ordered his troops to fire upon unarmed crowd, without issuing any warning to the people, causing brutal killing of 379 as per Government estimate. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre stunned the nation.⁴ After this cruel act, Martial Law was imposed and people were subjected to torture as well as humiliation. "The Jallianwala Bagh horror," writes V.P. Varma, "had profound psychological and moral influence on Moti Lal and he became extreme nationalist, thus going far ahead of his former Moderate position. When the Punjab had been stricken with the prolonged horrors of the martial law, he vindicated the self-respect of the province and the country. He was appointed Chairman of the Committee to investigate into the dark deeds of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy."⁵ The Committee conducted the inquiry and submitted a two-volume report. The monstrous act of the government was severely condemned. After this brutal incident, Moti Lal lost all faith in the Government.

Disillusioned Moti Lal joined the non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhi ji. He was only one prominent Congress leader who supported Gandhi ji in the early stages. With his help Gandhi ji persuaded Congress to adopt the plan of non-cooperation, a total boycott of all things British. The response to the scheme of Non-Cooperation movement was quite enthusiastic. The stalwarts of the Congress mobilized public opinion in favour of movement. But people were neither trained nor prepared for such a mass agitation in a disciplinary manner, resulting riots at some places, besides excited mob attacked a police outpost at Chauri-Chaura and killed few policemen. Gandhi ji took upon himself sole responsibility and he called to halt the Non-Cooperation movement.⁶ Moti Lal and other leaders felt it was difficult to understand Gandhiji's strange ways.

In 1922, Moti Lal headed the Congress Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee which conceded that country was not ready for civil disobedience.

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In 1923, he became the general secretary of Swarajya Party.⁷ In the year 1924, Moti Lal and C.R. Das met Gandhi ji and expressed their views before him. The talks were fruitful and Gandhi ji gave consent to Swarajyists to function as a part of parent Organisation.⁸ C.R. Das died in June, 1925. His death weakened the Swarajya Party.

Towards the end of 1927, Lord Irwin announced the appointment of a Royal Commission headed by Sir John Simon 'to inquire into the working of the then Constitution and to find out how successfully or otherwise the dyarchy was working in the provinces. The Commission was also assigned the task to prepare a report on the functioning of representative institution as well as it was desirable or not to make further progress towards a fully responsible Government. This Commission consisted of British people only. The Indians were excluded on the flimsy excuses.⁹ Consequently a political revival came in India.

All political parties and groups of people boycotted Simon Commission and joined hands to accept the challenge to draft a constitution acceptable to all parties.

Nehru Report

The exclusion of Indian from the Simon Commission united Indian parties in opposition to the Government. The Congress called a meeting of All-Parties at Delhi on February 12, 1928. Twenty nine political parties participated in the conference. "The Conference defined the objective of the constitution to be the establishment of full responsible government and appointed a Committee to workout some important details."¹⁰ The conference again met at Bombay on May 19, 1928 and constituted a sub-committee head by Moti Lal to draft a constitution. Its members were Tej Bahadur Sapru, Ali Iman, Pradhan S.C. Bose, Shuaib Qureohi, N.M. Joshi and Mangal Singh. The Committee sought advice from all eminent quarters and held 25 sittings before submitting its report to the All-Parties Conference held from August 28, 1928 at Lucknow. The Conference approved the Report. Then some amendments were considered by the All-India Congress Committee and accepted the Report. Despite this acceptance the endorsement of the All-Parties Conference, the Muslim League and the Congress was necessary to give the recommendations of the Report the status of the national demand.¹¹

"The All-Parties Convention was held on December 22, 1928 at Calcutta and continued its sittings till January 1, 1929.Here were gathered together the most prominent leaders of the parties, most distinguished public men of India- Gandhi, Jinnah, Moti Lal Nehru, Malaviya, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Abdul Kalam Azad, Mrs. Annie Besant, Ali Imam and others. The spirit of hope, not unmixed with fear, brooded over the meeting, for the destiny of more than three hundred million human beings was in the balance."¹²

Dr. M.A. Ansari was the President of the Convention. Moti Lal presented the Report of the Committee which was constituted by the All-Parties Conference at Bombay.

The main recommendations of the Nehru Report were¹³

1. The political status of India shall be the same as that of British Dominions like Canada, South Africa, Australia and the Irish Free State.
2. The fundamental rights shall be provided in the Constitution, among them shall be the freedom of conscience, of profession and practice of religion.
3. The Lower House in the Central Legislature and the provincial legislatures shall consist of members elected by joint and mixed electorates, but there shall be reservation of seats for the Muslims in the Central Legislature and the provincial legislatures where they are in minority and similar reservation for Hindus in the North-West Frontier Province.
4. There will be no reservation for the Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal.
5. Reservation of seats shall be on the basis of population and for a fixed period.
 - a. Communities whose seats are reserved shall have the right to contest for additional seats.
6. Every person of either sex who has attained the age of 21 and is not disqualified by law shall be entitled to vote, both for Central and provincial legislatures.
7. The Provinces of Sind and Karnataka shall be separate. Any further reorganization of provinces shall be on linguistic basis.
8. The list of subjects on which the Central and provincial governments shall exercise authority will be provided in schedules."

The Conference discussed few important articles of the draft constitution. Jinnah raised some points on which he insisted to reconsider and modify. Tej Bahadur Sapru considered it a crucial matter and requested to accept Jinnah's request. But Hindu Mahasabha strongly opposed Jinnah's proposal. The amendment proposed by Jinnah 'was put to vote and lost.'¹⁴ Further the Congress met at Calcutta in December 1928. Moti Lal was president. In this meeting Congress was divided as younger people led by Jawahar Lal Nehru and Subhash Chand Bose were not ready to accept anything less than complete independence where as older people led by Moti Lal and Gandhi ji were in favour of accepting the Dominion Status. A split was obverted by a via media proposed by Gandhiji, according to which if Britain did not concede Dominion Status within a year, the Congress was to demand complete independence and to fight for it, if necessary, by launching civil disobedience. However, "The Indian National Congress at its session on December 31, 1928 accepted the Nehru Report and hailed it 'as great contribution towards the solution of India's political and communal problems' and congratulated the Committee."¹⁵

Aim of the Study

Moti Lal Nehru Ji is a personality in Indian politics. We agree with that NEHRU REPORTS was a masterly and statesman like report.

Conclusion

Thus, Moti Lal remained one of the dominating figures of Indian politics, though his political career was short. V.P. Varma rightly called him 'one of the prime architects of the Nehru Report.'¹⁶ Virtually, Nehru Report was worthy to hail for

indicating the will of the Indians regarding the 'principles of the constitution.' Hence we agree with the comments of Zacharias that the Nehru Report was "a masterly and statesmanlike report. For the first time in India's history, all the political parties laid their heads together to discuss constitutional problems and their mutually agreeable solutions. No greater tribute can be paid to it than that it supplied the blueprint of the present Indian Constitution."¹⁷

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