

Harilal Jekisundas Kania – 1st Honourable Chief Justice of India



[Justice H. J. Kania]

Hon'ble Sir Harilal Jekisundas Kania (3rd November 1890 – 6th November 1951) was the first Chief Justice of India. He died while serving in office in 1951. He was the Chief Justice from 1950 to 1951.

Kania was born to a middle-class family at Surat. His grandfather had been a revenue officer in Gujarat with the British Government, and his father Jekisundas was a Sanskrit professor and later principal of Samaldas College in the princely state of Bhavnagar. His elder brother Hiralal Jekisundas was also a barrister whose nephew Madhukar Hiralal Kania became a Supreme Court judge in 1987, and subsequently Chief Justice. Kania took his BA from

Samaldas College in 1910, followed by an LLB from Government Law College, Bombay in 1912 and an LLM from the same institution in 1913. He began to practise as a barrister at the Bombay High Court in 1915, subsequently marrying Kusum Mehta, the daughter of Sir Chunilal Mehta, sometime member of the executive council of the Governor of Bombay."

For a time, Kania served as acting editor of the *Indian Law Reports*. Briefly serving as an acting judge on the Bombay High Court in 1930, he was appointed an additional judge on the same court in June 1931, serving until March 1933. Kania then returned to the bar for three months until he was promoted to associate judge in June. In 1943, Kania was knighted in that year's Birthday Honours list. By then the most senior associate judge at the High Court, he was intended to

succeed Chief Justice Sir John Beaumont upon the latter's retirement; however, as Beaumont was biased against Indians, he passed Kania over in favour of the next in line, Sir John Stone. While Stone was personally against Kania being passed over, he accepted Beaumont's nomination. However, Kania served as acting chief justice from May–September 1944 and from June–October 1945. He was promoted to associate judge of the Federal Court, then headed by Sir Patrick Spens (later Lord Spens) on 20th June 1946. Spens retired on 14th August 1947, and Kania succeeded him as Chief Justice. After India became a republic on 26th January 1950, Kania was appointed the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India. Acting as Chief Justice he read oath to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, India's first President. He died in office of a sudden heart attack on 6 November 1951, aged 61. Ed.