

Mr. Kripa Narain

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A saint walking into the profession of law" is how the Advocate-General of U. P. " Shri K. L. Misra, described Shri Kripa Narain on the unveiling of his portrait at Agra on 18th of December, 1966. Perhaps there cannot be a truer description of his personality than what is conveyed in these remarks. Rarely do combine in any life, sublimity and distinction, in such equal portions, as in that of the late Shri Kripa Narain. So learned, yet so humble, so unerring in his conduct, yet always forgiving, he belonged to that class of lawyers who breathed, into the sphere of law, the quality it needed most-the quality of lofty and instructed moral fervour. He was born in September 1893 at Karnal, in the State of Punjab, and on completion of his college career he started practice at Ghaziabad. After a short stay there, he shifted to Meerut and within a span of two years he reached the top on the civil side. With a scholastic bent of mind, his proneness to civil law was very natural. Little did anyone imagine that with such a lucrative practice, at a young age of forty, he would think of retiring from the profession. But that is what happened. In 1932 he left for Dayal Bagh (Agra) to serve his spiritual Guru, the late Sir Saheb Ji Maharaj of the Radhaswami faith. Left to himself he may never have resumed his practice at the Bar, but on being enjoined by Saheb Ji Maharaj he started attending the Civil Courts regularly. In the beginning, the advent of this stranger in the Agra Bar was not taken seriously by its leaders. He himself did not aspire for more than a bare sustenance, but that was not to be. Just after his first appearance in the court of the Civil Judge there was a stir in the Bar and one who had remained unnoticed so far, came to be regarded as their formidable rival by the people at the top. He was soon acknowledged as one of the leaders of the Agra Bar, a position that he continued to enjoy unto his last day. Nay, he shed that lustre on the Bar of Agra which none in the past had done. It can scarcely be doubted that his association with the Agra Bar made it the despair of almost every district Bar of the State. The seniors and juniors alike accepted him as their leader and he was unanimously elected President of the Agra Bar Association in 1946.

To say that Shri Kripa Narain belonged wholly to the Agra Bar would not be true; he rather belonged to the Bar of every western district in the State of U. P. There was hardly any civil case of importance which he did not argue for either side or was not consulted' therein. In 1948 he argued for the appellant a very important first appeal (Madho Prasad vs. Seth Tara Chand) which lasted for about a month before the Division Bench consisting of Malik, C. J. and Bind Basni Prasad, J. So arresting were his arguments that several litigants, implored him to accept their briefs in the High Court, but he gently declined them. In the Supreme Court he appeared in several cases and the last one was the Civil Appeal of Malludora vs. Setharathnam from Andhra, reported in A. 1. R. 1966 S. C. 918. That a lawyer of his merit and potentialities should not have chosen the arena of the highest Court in the State or the Republic and confined his professional career within the bounds of the district Court is a phase of his life that makes for a thought. It is perhaps to be regretted that he denied his career the dizzy heights it could have easily reached. But then a large income at the Bar was not his aspiration. It was devotion to his Guru and service to the religious institution of Dayal Bagh that was his ultimate ambition. To the service of this institution he dedicated his life and soul and its wellbeing was uppermost in his mind throughout his wakeful hours.

In 1956 he was the only Advocate from the Mufassil Bar in U. P. who was co-opted as one of the members of the Law Commission presided over by Shri M. C. Setalvad. The other co-opted member was Shri Jagdish Swarup, one of the leaders of the Allahabad High Court Bar.

Kripa Narain had a passion for teaching law, and for several years he imparted honorary lectures in the law classes of the Radhaswami Educational Institute, Dayal Bagh. His solicitude for his juniors was indeed exceptional and perhaps traceable to his tenet of life that success limited to one's own self was a poor success; it was a real one when shared also by those who had come to him with the aspiration of getting it. The chambers of seniors are, more often, disappointing places to the young and aspiring entrants, who look for many things and hardly find any. The experience of juniors in his chamber was otherwise. It was a place of opportunities for them in more than one way. The effect that Shri Kripa Narain produced upon the great mass of his pupils was

remarkable; they fell completely under his sway and responded like wax to the glow of his influence. Most of his juniors have flourished in the profession. Some of them are alive, and a few of them, unfortunately, are no more. One of them is Mr. Justice' G. D. Sahgal on the bench of our court. Of the years that I spent in his Chamber I will only say that to have worked as his junior, was to have warmed my hands at the noble fire of life. As I look back upon those years, I feel there is nothing more worth aspiring in life than to be blessed with the supreme gift of association with men like him. What I learnt from him stands for me as of inestimable value, and I remember those lessons with the undying gratitude of a pupil for his preceptor.

Shri Kripa Narain's distinction as a lawyer was by no means...,an accident, nor was it imposed on him by favourable circumstances; it was rather a conquest. All the virtues that are the warp and woof of a great lawyer harmoniously combined in him. He was learned without being pedantic, and in his arguments he was always direct, obvious and emphatic. Erudition often tends to bring with it abstraction and abstruseness, but the learning in Kripa Narain had escaped these dangers. From the very accuracy and steadiness of his analytical powers, he was able to carry his point to its logical conclusion. His faculty of luminous exposition and his clarity of language never left in doubt the meaning of what he wanted to convey. To play to the gallery or to confuse an issue by torrent of words was disdainful to him; he was eloquent only to the extent of developing a proposition of law or fact and not beyond it. His wit was piquant but without a sting in it. He had a rare art of quiet cross-examination. He would rather win the confidence of the witness than offend him and in a few questions he was able to elicit the truth. His manners were winsome but beneath his meek and humble deportment he had an indomitable will. His religiosity had brought about him a sense of splendid austerity of the truth. It was not merely that he did not lie. There are others of whom it may be so. But it was also that he did not trifle with truth. Perhaps the ethics of Emerson that there are seasons when we may even conceal truth could never be acceptable to him. There was no price upon his convictions, nor personal ambition could ever deflect his righteousness. Never seeking to make principles bend to the necessities of the occasion, nor benefiting from the foibles and follies of men, he enjoyed the esteem that belongs to the man who wants nothing, asks nothing but would do everything for others.

This is the tale of a life so nobly lived and which came to a close on the 25th of August, 1966, at the age of seventy-three. His death was widely mourned in the western districts of the State, and for the Agra Bar it was an irreparable loss. The Civil courts at Meerut and Agra remained closed for a day. In his tribute to the memory of Shri Kripa Narain, it was aptly said by Shri Gopal Behari, one of the prominent members of the High Court Bar, "His was the masterly isolation of a broad humanitarian mind; yet he had drunk deep. at the various fountains of human experience and, with his death, has passed away a bright star of the legal firmament and upon the bosom of the legal profession here at Agra lies in eternal sleep one of her sweetest and most beloved child".

For strangers, Kripa Narain may have been nothing, for superficial observers, perhaps, less than nothing, but for those who had known him in the intimacy of close friendship, he was truly great. A noble character so emblematic of the Evangelical piety, further ennobled by sacrifice and dedication recalls to my mind the lines of Walter Scott in his introduction to Ivonhoe :

"But a glance at the great picture of life will show that the duties of self-denial and sacrifice of passion to principle are seldom thus remunerated and the internal consciousness of their high minded discharge of duty produces in their own reflections a more adequate recompense in the form of that peace which the world cannot give or take away."