

MALEVOLENT DESTINY

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During my tenure as the Director of the National Police Academy, (NPA) Hyderabad, Surendra Nath, the then Governor of the Punjab, was a frequent visitor. Surendra Nath was an outstandingly successful officer of the Indian Police Service. In a glittering service career, spanning over four decades, he held many important offices with great distinction. Honour and recognition followed his footsteps. He was the youngest Inspector General of Police of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and also the first IPS, Chief Secretary of Mizoram. Subsequently, he joined the Union Public Service Commission as a Member and later on became its Chairman. The climax of his long professional career was his appointment as the Governor of Punjab, at a time, when the state was convulsed by terrorist attacks and violence. He made a noteworthy contribution in the elimination of terrorist violence in the Punjab.

Surendra Nath often came to the NPA to address the IPS probationers. He was charming, urbane and silver-tongued. He always felt that the young IPS probationers, the police leaders of tomorrow, should be infused with correct values and ideas. Future of the police service in the country hinges largely on professional

and moral leadership provided by the IPS officers. He, and his charming wife, endeared themselves to all by their unfailing courtesy and graciousness. During interaction with the probationers, he always emphasized, by quoting apt incidents and examples from his long professional career, the practical wisdom of eschewing extra legal methods and cultivating respect for human rights. I also sought his counsel in many matters and issues concerning police training in the country.

Unfortunately, while travelling by air from Chandigarh to a place in Himachal Pradesh, he died with all members of his family in a plane crash. It was a cruel stroke of malevolent destiny. It was a horrific and shattering blow to all of us, who knew, loved and admired him. Both my wife and I were left benumbed by shock and sorrow. I quoted to Gouri, the memorable lines of the Greek historian Herodotus *“Call no man happy until you hear the end of him”*. I also remembered poignant lines of AESOP describing the tragic elements of life. The joys in life, he says *“are the beautiful things in nature, the earth, the sun, the stars, the wheeling of the moon and the sun”*. But so far the rest, there are fears and sorrows and if one enjoys a little happiness, nemesis, exacts recompense.

After demitting charge as the Director of the National Police Academy, I joined as the Director General of the newly created National Human Rights Commission. This happened just before the tragic dénouement. I received a letter from Surendra Nath

dated 15th June, 1994 in which he congratulated me and wished all success in my new assignment. He said somewhat very generously "*it was a deserving recognition of your outstanding merit and qualities of character*". It was a posthumous letter.

Even now after more than two decades, whenever I recall my days in the National Police Academy, Hyderabad, the smart and trim figure of Surendra Nath, with his ever smiling face and brisk movements flashes before my mind's eyes. One cannot indeed fathom the mysterious ways of providence. A cruel stroke of malignant fate ended a bright and inspiring career of a stalwart of the Indian Police Service. But memories of association with him remain undimmed and imperishable.
