

TRIBUTE TO LATE DR. L.M. SINGHVI
SENIOR ADVOCATE
FULL COURT REFERENCE – OCTOBER 11, 2007

MY LORD THE CHIEF JUSTICE, YOUR LORDSHIPS,
MR. P.P. MALHOTRA - ADDITIONAL SOLICITOR
GENERAL OF INDIA, MR. K.K. MANAN - CHAIRMAN,
BAR COUCIL OF DELHI, MR. J.R. MIDHA AND MS.
MUKTA GUPTA, STANDING COUNSEL FOR GOVT. OF
INDIA AND THE GOVT OF NATIONAL CAPITAL
TERRITORY, MR. J.P. SENGH AND MR. KIRTI UPPAL,
VICE PRESIDENT AND HONY. SECRETARY
RESPECTIVELY, AND OTHER OFFICE BEARERS OF
DELHI HIGH COURT BAR ASSOCIATION AND OTHER
BAR ASSOCIATIONS, RESPECTED SENIOR MEMBERS
OF THE BAR, MY COLLEAGUES AT THE BAR,
RESPECTED RELATIVES OF LATE DR. SINGHVI,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Today, we are here to pay our homage to Dr. Laxmi Mall Singhvi, a man who lived with honour, dignity, charity and equipoise – mental as well as spiritual. Every one has one's alter ego, but for Dr. Singhvi, it was he who was the master and not his ego. He has been many things in his time – a dedicated law student who was ever questioning, an unorthodox administrator and statesman, a learned lawyer, an eminent jurist, parliamentarian, scholar, litterateur, etc., etc. I would not dare cite his career details for the sole and simple reason that the entire time we have reserved for this Reference would not suffice even to deal with one fourth of that. By qualifications and positions held, Dr. Singhvi was a king in every category. We can only sing his praise.

Dr. Singhvi's name is a byword in India's legal world. Beyond the confines of law, he has crossed with ease into numerous other fields. His life-work as evidenced by the various positions he held and by his writings bears testimony to his passionate commitment to public causes. Generously and unsparingly he has given of himself and his talents to the society and the nation.

The saying is that there are three kinds of people – the few who make things happen, the many who watch things happen and the great majority who live with no idea of what is happening. Dr. Singhvi, undoubtedly, belonged to the class of the choice few.

I have been fortunate to have known him from my days as a baby lawyer and learnt from him not only in law, but in life as well. Around my fifth year at the Bar, I had to advise a foreign client on a joint venture in India and the matter seemed too complex for me. I went to Dr. Singhvi to seek help. He was at his dinner and amidst that, he heard me and gave me the required advice, with a pat for having graduated at such a young stage itself to handle a brief of such complexity. Another incident still green in my memory is that of my calling on him when he was India's High Commissioner, in London. When I conveyed my intention of meeting with him, he, somewhat in a hurry, told me to call on the next day and fix the time. I was a bit wondered for I could not know why he could not fix the time that day itself. I got in touch with him the next day and got the time fixed. When I went for the meeting at the appointed time, he was there, all smiling and what followed was a hearty introduction to the who's who of London. He made the interaction a memorable one. His ability to level with effortlessly and with human warmth, would be in the mind of every one who had had a chance of meeting with him.

His extraordinary legal acumen enabled him to rise to the top of the profession. However, the spirit within Dr. Singhvi wanted to do more than just the practice of law. He had a passion for politics and started his active political career early in the sixties or late fifties. Fiercely independent as a lawyer, he was equally fierce about his convictions in politics and statecraft. He was also a visionary, and a man of convictions. I could not ascertain whether he suffered any prison term for any political reasons. Now a days many of our elected Members are in and out of prison, and for that matter alone in the news, but not for any national cause and instead, for serial murders, human trafficking, etc. etc.

Dr. Singhvi was a prolific writer and opined on a range of national and international issues, religious and literary themes. His utterances on the problems that India faces today would be relevant for ever. He was a strong communicator with effective means. It was he, who influenced the Queen of England and got the lease of the Indian High Commission premises in U.K. renewed, which otherwise was not being done.

Another personal note I would reminisce is about his guidance in a matter of trust and its trustees, in this very Hon'ble Court. This happened last year. He chose me to appear in a matter where he himself was a trustee. When I was on my legs, he appeared, sat next to me and guided me. In the end, the satisfactory smile he gave me was an unforgettable appreciation from him. But nothing like my first briefing session stands out in my memory. When he was at his dinner, I thought I too would get an offer to share a bite. It did not happen and instead, I was served with a bowl of 'moong dal.' I thought one day I should ask him why he did not offer me dinner. And the question was with me like a sweet reminder and I was waiting for a fit moment to ask that. When I was with him, the question either escaped my memory or the opportunity was not fit; when the question surfaced in my mind, Singhvi Saheb was not near. Now he has failed me and left without leaving an iota of chance. However, I am left with a sweet acknowledgement of the greetings I sent to him last year. It ran "what a beautiful and thoughtful letter you wrote to me on November 11. Many thanks. Because of my femur bone fracture, I however, bade a temporary farewell to the celebration my wife and son had planned on 11th November. My warmest good wishes." The farewell, though meant temporary, was not so. That celebration never took place. A well known cartoonist had prepared a caricature of Singhvi Saheb to present on that occasion. That also remained undone and was presented for public in last Sunday's newspaper.

We are at the cross-roads now. The judiciary, which is the common man's only hope in his search for justice, is seen and treated as it never ought to have been. Media is

devastatingly hungry for sensationalism. And we, the people, are happy with not knowing and not concerned with what is happening. We need to nurture a nation which caters to the needs of each one of us as honourable citizens of this country. If we are not relieved of our historical and/or political biases and prejudices, our downfall is more than certain. True liberalism is to rise above these prejudices and the only way to do this is to strengthen the foundations of society through education and the sense and substance of equality that our Constitution fosters. Dr. Singhvi's words from his book 'Democracy and Rule of Law,' are worth remembering here: "The world may be in the throes of a crisis, but it is also at a threshold of a new opportunity to resolve the crises of the past and to create a new confidence in the future. These hopes are based on the proposition that justice and peace are indivisible. The time has come for us throughout the world to work for our vision of a just and humane society. Without such a vision, the world may perish."

Dr. Singhvi's vision would continue to guide us, his words would continue to encourage us, his deeds would continue to inspire us. His achievements would motivate us and though invisible, his presence would surround us

Today, we have with us Kamla ji, Dr. Abhishek Singhvi, Mrs. Amrita Singhvi and Ms. Abhilasha. Abshishek is following the footsteps of his father and needs no comment from any quarter to let know his professional competency. Politically, he is the spokesperson of the oldest party, which is always spoken about.

Time will heal the sorrow of bereavement, but memories will stay on. Our condolences and prayers are with Kamla ji, Abhishek ji Amrita ji and Abhilasha ji. May God grant them enough strength to bear the loss and may Singhvi Saheb's soul rest in peace.

Thank you.

A.S. Chandhiok
October 11, 2007.