

I have virtually grown with the Court

Hon'ble Mr. Justice J.L. Gupta

Former Chief Justice of Kerala High Court

The building at the foot of the Shivalik hills, designed by the famous French architect, Monsieur Corbusier, is imposing. The steel and cement frame is massive and monolithic. Symbolic of the majesty of law, it provides a befitting home for the goddess of justice. Standing at the threshold, a man can only feel small. In fact, totally dwarfed. I did, when I entered this temple of justice.

In Feb. 1963, I was enrolled as an advocate and had entered the portals of the Punjab High Court. In October, 2002 I had left the Court to report for my assignment in Kerala High Court. During the interval, I saw the Bar grow from a mere hundred and odd to more than four thousand. The Court had moved from less than ten Judges to more than thirty. The building had started with a mere nine court rooms. Today, there are more than thirty. Personally, I had moved

from being just a junior member of the Bar to be a Senior Advocate and then to the Bench. These years were enjoyable. Also eventful.

Today, more than forty two years have passed. Rather fast. Almost imperceptibly. In the interval, a lot has happened. I feel nostalgic. For just a peep into the recent past.

The year 1947 had brought us Independence. Also the partition of the country. In the aftermath, the High Court was initially shifted from Lahore to Shimla. Then, in the year 1955, it was given its permanent home at Chandigarh . The reorganization of States in 1956 had resulted in the merger the erstwhile state of PEPSU with Punjab and resultantly of the High Court too. In 1966, the Punjab Reorganisation Act made it the High Court for the States of Punjab and Haryana as also the Union Territory of Chandigarh. Happily, this position continues.

I have had memories of the days I have spent in the court. As a beginner, I recall that the seniors were

always helpful. Generous. Very hospitable. They were always kind and caring. Hostile? Never! And the Judges? Always patient and persevering. Overlooked faults and guided graciously. The words of encouragement brought the best out of even a 'halting and hesitant' beginner. As a result, despite the limited nature of litigation in the area, the Bar has grown. The best amongst us have been and are as good as the best anywhere in the country. And it is no wonder that two out of the only four direct appointments made from the Bar to the Bench of the Supreme Court of India have been from the High Court at Chandigarh .

I have virtually grown with the Court. I remember the first day. It is etched in memory. A well meaning Senior Advocate had affectionately put his hand on my shoulder and told me that the profession is overcrowded. You must compete for the Services. The advice was repeated by a few others. Including my father. Yet, I was not discouraged. And there has not been a moment when I may have regretted my

initial choice. Today I can look back with satisfaction and say with confidence 'There is always room. You have to persevere to move on the road to success. And the result of sweat is always sweet'. Every young person who has just joined the Bar shall do well to remember this. You have to work your way up and make room for yourself.

A noticeable feature has been the strong feeling of brotherhood and cordiality all around. In a moment of sorrow, you were never alone. Nor lonely, I recall an instance. Ch. Suraj Mal, a former Minister and a member of the Bar had suffered a grave tragedy. The car in which his family members were traveling had met with a serious accident. The injuries to the occupants had unfortunately proved fatal. The funeral procession had reached the cremation ground before 5 PM . The close family members had yet to reach Chandigarh . Every member of the Bar and the Bench had quietly waited and remained present on that cold, wet and windy evening till well past 9 P.M. No one moved until the last rites had been

performed.

Today, it may seem a small matter. Yes! People waiting till the last is nothing big. But it clearly symbolizes the close ties between the Bench and the Bar. Also the fact that people considered it necessary to take care of even small things. Still more, it bears testimony to the fact that the Bar and the Bench are two wheels of the chariot. Goddess of Justice rides it. She would move fast and straight only when there is complete harmony between the two. Otherwise, the cause of justice shall be a casualty.

At the Bar, there were binding bonds of brotherhood. True, there was competition. But no criticism. People commended. They did not condemn. Everyone made an effort to excel. There was a word of encouragement for the deserving. A pat for all those who preserved the object was to promote the good. Not to pull down anyone. There was praise. No pamphlets. The environment was conducive to work and promoted talent. I hope and wish, it continues to be so.

Bricks and mortar never make an institution. It is the men who man it. Their deeds define development as well as destruction. Good deeds set the ground for good conventions and traditions.

I think the judges and lawyers of this court have set healthy traditions.

These have to be continued. It would need a combined and continuous effort. The cooperation of all, the young and the not so young. The Bar and the Bench. Shall we be able to see it happening? I am an incorrigible optimist.