

SPEECH OF HON'BLE MS JUSTICE GITA MITTAL, ACTING CHIEF JUSTICE, HIGH COURT OF DELHI IN THE FULL COURT REFERENCE TO BE HELD ON THURSDAY, 14TH DECEMBER, 2017 AT 3:00PM ON THE DEMISE OF MR. KN KATARIA AND MR. SK PURI, SENIOR ADVOCATES OF THIS COURT

My esteemed sister and brother colleagues,

Sh. Sanjay Jain, Additional Solicitor General of India,

Sh. Kirti Uppal, President, Delhi High Court Bar Association,

Sh. J.P. Sengh, Vice- President, Delhi High Court Bar Association,

Sh. Amit Sharma, Secretary, Delhi High Court Bar Association,

Sh. Ramesh Singh, Standing Counsel (Civil), Govt. of NCT Delhi,

Sh. Rahul Mehra, Standing Counsel (Criminal), Govt. of NCT Delhi,

Other Standing Counsels of the Central and State Government,

Executive Members of the Delhi High Court Bar Association,

Executive Members of Other Bar Associations

Senior Advocates,

Learned Members of the Bar,

Family members of Mr. KN Kataria and Mr. SK Puri,

And everyone present

We have assembled here today to express our grief and pay our heartfelt tribute to two eminent Senior Advocates of this court, Mr. KN Kataria who passed away on 28th November, 2016 and Mr. S.K. Puri, who passed away on 2nd December, 2017

Mr. KN Kataria

Mr. KN Kataria was born in Kasur , near Lahore in May 1930. He migrated alongwith his family to Delhi after partition in 1947. Having graduated from Hindu College, Delhi University he completed his degree in law from Law Faculty , Delhi.

Mr. Kataria started his career in law in the late 1950's under the mentorship of Mr. Amar Nath Monga, a renowned lawyer. He started his independent practice in the 1960's and continued his law practice right till Oct 2017.

Enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council in Delhi in 1960, in recognition of his contribution to the development of law, Mr. Kataria was designated as a Senior Advocate by this court in the year 1990. He was appointed as the Government Counsel for this court during 1977-79.

Mr. Kataria was a man with admirable strength, knowledge, wit and humour.

Mr. Kataria acquired distinction and was highly respected in civil litigation who handled difficult cases with ease. He was a lawyer of great repute and a mentor to many.

Many of us present here like myself will recollect with great fondness the quiet strength and great dignity which Mr. Kataria exuberated. The grace with which he presented his arguments and his advocacy skills in being able to persuade difficult judges to agree with him were qualities of later Mr. Kataria which need to be emulated. We also remember his dignified presence at that dedicated table in the Bar Room as well as the Lawyers Canteen where he used to sit enjoying coffee and a meal with his many friends in the Bar.

He was an avid reader and picked up many books to read from the bookshops and libraries specially on the changing face of Indian politics, India's cultural heritage and biographies. I am told that Mr. KN Kataria was a generous patron of the arts and alongwith his wife Mrs Santosh Kataria he attended numerous recitals and plays. Mr. Kataria was also an avid traveller of a highly affable temperament. Mr. Kataria enjoyed a wide social circle outside the legal fraternity and was a regular with the Morning Walkers group at the Lodhi-Garden as well.

Mr. Kataria is survived by his wife Mrs. Santosh Kataria, his son Mr. Sandeep Kataria, his daughter in law Mrs. Namita Kataria, his daughter Mrs. Ritu Kataria, son in law Mr. Sukhbir Singh and his grandson Shiv Kataria.

On the demise of Mr. Kataria, we have lost not only an eminent lawyer, but also a noble and pure soul. His professionalism and devotion to duty is a sterling example to the legal fraternity. The best homage to his memory would be to follow his ideals and conduct.

Mr. SK Puri

Mr S.K Puri joined the Bar in Tis Hazari Courts in the year 1963 after graduating from Delhi University and worked with Sh. Bawa Shiv Charan, an authority on criminal and civil law. A first generation lawyer, Mr. Puri had humble beginnings. He actually commenced with a modest practice from a small wooden bench under a tree in the Tis Hazari Courts. In the year 1968, he shifted his practice to Delhi High Court. What made Mr. Puri special was that apart from his commitment to his law practice, he was an active member of the Bar, who was dedicated to its welfare. It was this dedication which made him extremely popular at the Bar and led him to be elected Hony. Secretary of High Court Bar for six terms between 1974 - 1985. In recognition of his legal acumen, Mr. S.K. Puri was designated as a Senior Advocate by this court in the year 2001.

Mr Puri was also an avid reader and a quick learner. Having been bestowed with a photographic memory, he had the unique ability to retain each and every word of a document and was able to recite the exact word or sentence used in a particular para or context of a document. He often pretended to forget but that was just one of his many quirks to get the truth out of an opposing party. Once his brain processed information, Mr. Puri never ever forgot anything, at least about the law.

Mr. Puri was also blessed with amazing sensitivity and an ability to share knowledge. For this reasons, Members of his office referred to him as the "Ready Reckoner". After meeting Mr Puri you came away

knowing that you had learnt something. It was always a pleasure to listen to him lay out his analysis in any given case.

In court, Mr. Puri used logic, sharp analysis and his own brand of humour to keep court engaged, making difficult cases look easy.

Mr. Puri had built a reputation for his gentle but incisive cross examination skills which brought the toughest of witnesses to their knees.

An extremely positive and optimistic person, he lived by the belief that, with grit and determination one can overcome any problem.

I have personal memories of being reassured by Mr. Puri when having been at the receiving end of some brash lawyering.

I remember his amazing bearing and his pride in his environment. Even his white fiat in the 1980s was always immaculate in total match with the high standards he set for himself.

For the past few months Mr. Puri was very ill as he was required to undergo dialysis twice a week. Even in that situation he would say that he will not die before death.

Mr Puri was particularly proud of his sons Gaurav Puri, Advocate and Sacchin Puri, Sr. Advocate and his daughters in law, Gayatri Puri and Kaadambari Singh Puri who are also Advocates. We now look upon them to carry on the traditions set by Mr. Puri.

Nani Palkhivala, in his book *We the People* wrote that “...a rare degree of equipment is needed to discharge such duties properly. A lawyer with a well furnished mind alone can be truly a counselor at law; he alone can, not merely look up precedents, but guide his client along the path of wisdom, even of generousities which may appear irrelevancies to the preoccupied client. In the hands of such a lawyer, the law represents the application of reason to noble and purposeful ends.”

It is said that everything is a habit, be it honesty, be it good manners, be it the capacity to work hard.

Mr. Kataria and Mr. Puri were two soft-spoken lawyers who epitomised the highest traditions and standards of the Bar and liberally personified all these qualities.

We remember both of them not only for their total commitment to the letter of the law but also for their total dedication to the decorum of the court and the standards of the profession. We remember both these leaders of the Bar for their impeccable dignity and grace.

There can be no excellence in the law without excellence in lawyers. Mr. KN Kataria and Mr. SK Puri, truly raised the standards of the Bar at large. They exuberated sheer brilliance and wisdom in their advocacy, remaining fair and upstanding officers of the court.

The sad demise of Mr. KN Kataria and Mr. SK Puri, two revered legal luminaries, has resulted in an irretrievable loss not only to his family but to the fraternity as a whole. I on behalf of my Sister and Brother judges and on my own behalf extend our heartfelt condolences

to the members of the bereaved families and pray that almighty bestows peace upon the departed souls.

AFTER REFERENCE IS OVER:

Acting Chief Justice : May I request you all to pay homage by standing in silence for two minutes, in the memory of late Mr. KN Kataria and late Mr. SK Puri.

AFTER TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE: All the Hon'ble Judges will take their seats for and it will be announce by Hon'ble the Acting Chief Justice as under:

Acting Chief Justice : As a mark of respect to the departed souls, the proceedings of the Court are adjourned for the rest of the day.