

Memoirs of Mr Justice Choor Singh of the Supreme Court of Singapore

Published by his family as a tribute to the eminent jurist.

Foreword by Dr. I.J.Singh*

Choor Singh is now a vigorous and venerable man in his nineties. I don't call him old for his mind is active and his wit sharp, even if the body is considerably slowed.

In this succinct memoir, he speaks of a remarkable journey that he started where he was a six-year old boy in Punjab. Even though in miles, the journey from rural Punjab to Singapore during the First World War in 1917 was daunting, not all distances are so measured. The longer, more remarkable journey was for this little boy, the son of a modestly educated night watchman, to rise to the pinnacle of society in Singapore, by becoming a Justice of its Supreme Court, with legal credentials from United Kingdom.

Choor Singh never forgot his roots and never foresook his Sikh heritage. He tells that even in his student days he spent his spare time and money collecting old books and rare manuscripts on Sikh history and religion. It is a love that has stayed with him.

His fascination recall of the travails in reaching Singapore from his native village by horse-driven Tonga, train and finally steamship after several weeks of sleeping outside a godown in Calcutta waiting for the ship, is entirely riveting.

When he graduated from school in Singapore, jobs were hard to find and Choor Singh could not become what he wanted to be - a teacher - so he worked for a lawyer and as a clerk for the Bankruptcy office. It was these that set him on the path of becoming a lawyer and the rest, as they say, is history.

He became the first Sikh and first Indian to be nominated to the Bench. Before I met Choor Singh, I had heard that in Singapore, he was often respectfully known by the sobriquet, "The hanging judge". He seems to have earned it by his no nonsense, no frills style that quickly cuts to the chase. It's a style that he also brought profitability to his writing in his legal chores, this memoir here and equally in his large body of writing on Sikhs and Sikhism.

I met Justice Choor Singh through his many books and booklets on all aspects of the Sikh existence. He wrote copiously on the 1984 attack by the Indian army on the Golden Temple followed by the state terrorism in Punjab. He wrote perhaps the first biography of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and also a very nice, brief booklet on the history and significance of the Golden Temple. His monograph, *Who Is A Sikh* has gone through several reprints and continues to find a responsive chord in Sikhs worldwide. His dismay and distress at the attack on the Golden temple was extreme and even now it is hard for him to put aside his anger at General K.S. Brar, a nominal Sikh, who led it.

Partially his anger seems fuelled by the fact that Brar belongs to his village and perhaps a distant relation.

I admire this man Choor Singh because two passions seem to have driven and defined his life. One is the pursuit of excellence in his chosen profession. This guarantees worldly success and respect, and they have been his. The second is to remain rooted to his Sikh heritage. And he has been relentless in this as well. This provides a sense of contentment and fulfillment as the since qua non of a well-lived life. His life shows this well.

The book is the measure of a life well and fully lived.



BOOKS RECEIVED

JAAP SAHIB: Vichar Darshan (Punjabi)

Dr. Gurcharan Singh Mehta (18, Guru Arjun Nagar, Rly. Colony, Saharanpur 247 001)

Published by: Desmesh Prachar Sabha, 224 New Avas Vikar, Delhi Road, Saharanpur. 247 001. UP. Pp 40. Price (Free on request)

The moral grandeur and spiritual solace of Sri Jaap Sahib has been presented, in this slim pamphlet, with rare devotion and deep perception. ■

RESEARCH PAPERS

1. Early Persian newspapers of Calcutta by Abdus Subhan.

2. The Quit India Movement by Prashanto K. Chatterji

3. Indian National Movement: Integration of Portuguese Settlements in India by K S. Mathew

Published by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, 567 Diamond Harbour Road, Kolkata 700 034. Pages 56/32. Price not mentioned.

This Calcutta-based centre for research & learning has opened new vistas on the socio-cultural diversity in the Asian continent - as a tribute to the memory of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. Each research paper opens a small window on significant aspects of Asian civilization. ■