

H.M. Seervai – His Life, Book & Legacy

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LIFE

The common law system, followed in most countries that at one stage in their history were part of the British Empire, is as dependent for its success upon leading advocates and fine scholars as it is on great judges. In India, one such advocate and scholar, of world renown, was Hormasji Maneckji Seervai, born in Bombay on 5 December 1906.

As every Indian lawyer knows, Seervai was the author of the great test book (3 volumes) *Constitutional Law of India*. But first and foremost, he was a brilliant advocate who won spectacular success before the Supreme Court of India and other courts.

* Formerly Justice of the High Court of Australia (1996-2009). The author acknowledges the assistance of Mr Adam Sharpe, legal research officer in the Library of the High Court of Australia, in assembling materials upon which this article was based. The article derived from the H.M. Seervai Memorial Lecture which was delivered to the Bench and Bar of the Bombay High Court in Mumbai on 9 January 2007. In its original form, the lecture was first published in London in (2007) *27 Legal Studies* 361.

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It is a privilege for me, an erstwhile judge and advocate from Australia, to offer these reflections on Seervai, whose centenary was celebrated in 2006. My remarks are based on a lecture that I delivered at the Bombay High Court in January 2007, the penultimate year of my judicial service in Australia, as a member of the High Court of Australia, the nation's apex court.

I approached my task with a great love of India, a respect for its Bench and Bar and an admiration for my subject. I spoke of Seervai, of his life, of his work and of his legacy.

Most advocates and judges, however great, walk for but a short hour on the stage of the law. They play their parts. Their voices are raised and the pages of the books are filled with their learning. But then they depart. They are remembered by their loved ones and a few friends or grateful litigants. But soon they are forgotten.

Not so with Seervai. He was the advocate's advocate. He lived in tumultuous times for India. He was an example and an inspiration for lawyers and law students in India, and thus for all of us in the company of the common law scattered to every corner of the globe. Seervai was not without faults, as I shall show - for all human beings are flawed. But he was a mighty advocate and a fine scholar. He was an example of courage at the Bar without which the common law's peculiar system of law and justice does not work. Lawyers of the next generation strengthen themselves by rekindling the memories of Seervai's life and

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by reflecting on the lessons that we must learn from the existence of this master spirit of our discipline.

By family tradition, the name Seervai derives from Persian words meaning 'like a lion'. Lion-like he was to become as an advocate - although Fali Nariman in his essay, "Last of the Serjeants", likened him during his seventeen years of service as Advocate-General for the Government of Maharashtra to a "bull-dog" - "guarding [the law] with erudition, fine advocacy and high integrity"¹. His faithful disciple, Tehmtan Andhyarujina, reminds us that the great warrior was once a little boy growing up in the faith of his Zoroastrian religion not far from the then newly arisen Bombay High Court, learning the tenets of "*Humata, hokhta, hvarshta*": Good thoughts, good words and good deeds. His family, middle-class Parsis, saw to his education with meticulous care. Although his father died when he was still a boy, he matriculated from Bhada New High School and entered the famous Elphinstone College in 1922. Four years later he graduated with a First Class degree in Philosophy, a student, as his wife Feroza was later to be, of the illustrious teacher of logic and philosophy, Professor J C P D'Andrade.

¹ F Nariman in F H Seervai (ed) *Evoking H M Seervai - Jurist and Authority on the Indian Constitution* (Universal, New Delhi, 2005) (hereafter "*Evoking*"), 48 at 50.

Seervai studied law in the Government Law College. In 1932 at the age of 26, he joined the Chambers of Sir Jamshedji Kanga, also later to serve as Advocate-General of Bombay.

Although Seervai's family had no connections with the law and although he spent many years - amazing to think of it - as a semi-briefless barrister, he never doubted his own capacity or calling². He had an effortless command of the English language and its classics. He was quick, logical and incisive. He hated superficiality. Gossip, which is often the cement that binds together close professions working in fraught circumstances, was not his interest. He lived at home with his widowed mother until he was nearly forty. She inspired in him a respect for the ability and equality of women - a lesson reinforced when he married Feroza, mother to their three children, Meher, Shirin and Navroz. They became helpers in his scholarly output and fierce guardians of his memory and legacy.

As Seervai's legal practice grew, he was conspicuous in the Bombay Bar library. His pronouncements on cases and on the issues of the day were confident and ever emphatic. His self-assurance and conviction in his own judgment were "remarkable". In short, he had courage "like a lion", and the fearlessness that one would hope for in a leading surgeon, a brave soldier or a senior advocate. Reportedly, he

² T.R. Andhyarujinain in *Evoking*, 20 at 23.

was not at first interested in constitutional law. Doubtless in his early years, in the turmoil of the slow death in India of the British *Raj*, that field of law must have seemed unstable, unsure, unpromising to a lawyer who liked to see things clearly. But it was his fate to live through, and to chronicle, the extraordinary events that, just over sixty years ago, brought freedom and independence to the teeming millions of this Indian subcontinent. Moreover, by the hand of fate, he was to play an important part in the elucidation of the Constitution that the newly founded nation of India gave to itself for its governance. In court, and in the pages of his writings, he was to help clarify the meaning of the Constitution; to contribute to what he saw as its orthodox interpretation; and to extirpate any deviation from what he regarded as true constitutional doctrine.

After years in private practice, Seervai, briefless no more, was by the early 1950s, much in demand for briefs junior to the then Advocate-General for the Government of Bombay. His moment was soon to arrive when it fell to him to defend the *Bombay Prohibition Act*. It was a cause he could embrace with neutrality. Although he was not a moralist or a fanatical believer in alcoholic prohibition, his only encounter with alcohol was for rare medicinal purposes. His closing speech in defence of the law earned the admiration of the government.

His first chance in the Supreme Court of India arose in a defence of the Government of Bombay's decision to ban prize competitions, in the nature of lotteries³. Seervai's argument was rewarded with spectacular success. The judgments and orders of the Bombay courts were unanimously set aside with costs. A year later, Seervai began his service of seventeen years as Advocate-General. In such a post, coming from such a Bar, he was assured of involvement in many of the leading trials and appeals of the State and the Indian nation.

Seervai was to prove fearless and independent in the advice he tendered, relatively indifferent to the income and opportunities which the post offered and detached from the politicians and the government of the day, carrying on in this country the traditional role of the best of the counsellors of the Crown - fearless, honest and politically neutral. This is a great tradition. As lawyers in India, and in Australia, get further away from that tradition in time and memory, it is essential that we keep it alive, for it is most beneficial for effective and honest government, conforming to law.

The memories of Homi Seervai, recorded by members of his family in the two books that have been published in his honour since his

³ *Ibid*, at 24 referring to *R M D Charmorbaugwala v State of Bombay* (1957) SCR 930; AIR 1957 SC 699.

death⁴ are moving and tender, as one would expect of family recollections of a loving husband, father and grandfather. They tell of his brilliant recall of the poets and historians from Thucydides to those great Imperialists, Winston Churchill and Rudyard Kipling. His laughter, kindness, family-centred life and comparative indifference to worldly things, like fine clothes and food, strike a chord with all of us who have known the upper echelon of A-type personalities - obsessive, fastidious, punctilious yet often with warm personalities struggling occasionally to shine upon the world.

Those who work in the busy professions of life know and respect such personalities with their little obsessions (Homi, for example, would tell cricket scores from ages past out of his memory⁵). His letters of love and postcards and notes, recorded in the texts, remind us that behind the public man was a living, breathing human being, with a private zone that was closed and guarded and into which few outsiders could enter. Every human being of great achievements needs such a zone. Blessed is the achiever who can come home to candid criticism and loving support when things get rocky.

⁴ F H Seervai (ed) *Evoking H M Seervai* (above) (2005); V Iyer (ed), *Constitutional Perspectives - Essays in Honour and Memory of H M Seervai*, Universal (2001).

⁵ F H Seervai in *Evoking*, 95 at 101.

Yet it is in the memories of prominent, and not so famous, lawyers, that we get clues about Seervai the public man and the motive forces that lay behind his public life. We also get insights into what Seervai's contemporaries of the Bench and Bar saw as his essential characteristics, worthy of encouraging in new generations, so that they might emulate the best of the traditions of the past, cutting away those that are no longer relevant for the present and the future.

In the early 1950s, Seervai was faced with a move to abolish the dual system of solicitor and counsel that had been inherited from England - a system that survives in many countries to this day, including Australia, but was then under threat in Bombay. According to another great advocate, Anil Divan⁶:

"Seervai and K T Desai at great personal cost in terms of time, energy and work, went from table to table in the Bar Library persuading young counsel like me that the dual system had great virtues. They also worked out a scheme by which advocates in good practice would voluntarily designate themselves as seniors and would desist from accepting a brief unless briefed with junior counsel. ... As a result the resolution moved to recommend abolition of the dual system in the Bar Association was defeated and the dual system remained current for many years. Many of us were beneficiaries of that continuation. One does not know who would have made good or even continued at the Bar if the dual system had been abolished".

⁶ A B Divan, "H M Seervai: Random Memories and Recollections" in *Evoking*, 53 at 58.

In Australia, and doubtless elsewhere, the strictness of the dual system has changed. But, from my own life as a young solicitor, I know that in most cases the gruelling work of the advocate can only be done to best advantage by someone who is freed from the time consuming tasks of issuing subpoenas, tracking down witnesses, chasing for costs and with the other essential responsibilities from which leading advocates need to be protected so they can concentrate on what they do best: persuading.

Justice R S Pathak saw in Seervai a man "extremely jealous of protecting [the courts'] public reputation, anxious to see that the stream of justice flowed unpolluted, and ensured that no deviation which came to his knowledge, remained uncorrected"⁷. Justice Sujata Manohar, one of the first women Justices of the Supreme Court of India, told of Seervai's resignation as Advocate-General of Maharashtra in 1974 when the Law Minister appointed two advocates whom Seervai described as "party lawyers" to advise him - a move he interpreted as undermining his independent authority⁸. His true friend, Tehmtan Andhyarujiana, in his youth a devil and junior to the great man, describes his "commitment in life" and "total sincerity, honesty and devotion" which was his "great strength as a lawyer"⁹. Laced with his ebullience and confidence, these

⁷ Justice R S Pathak in *Evoking*, 14 at 15.

⁸ Justice S Manohar in *Evoking*, 17 at 19.

⁹ T R Andhyarujina, in *Evoking*, 20 at 21.

were a concoction of personality that were to be a potent combination, spiced with courage¹⁰. Atul Setalvad concluded that, whilst there were others who as advocates were superior, "what made Seervai unique was his profound knowledge of the law ... [for] he was an expert in almost all branches of civil law"¹¹.

Soli Sorabjee, another doyen of the Bombay Bar, later Attorney-General and Solicitor-General of India, recalls how kind Seervai was to juniors who opposed him in Court and how he gave them generous guidance and encouragement¹². But he acknowledges that "Seervai had strong likes and dislikes"¹³. Occasionally, one suspects, he allowed his commitment to his case to colour his view of the judges who reached a different conclusion¹⁴. Fali Nariman, another supreme example of the Bombay Bar, confessed to having been the beneficiary of Seervai's criticism of Supreme Court judges when, once, Seervai devoted many closely printed pages of his third edition to a biting critique of the *Escorts Case* that Fali Nariman had lost in the Supreme Court. His castigation was a kind of vindication for the smarting advocate - confirming once

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

¹¹ A M Setalvad, "H M Seervai" in *Evoking* 41 at 43.

¹² S J Sorabjee, "Homi Seervai - A Personal Tribute" in *Evoking*, 45 at 45.

¹³ *Ibid*, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 46. His views on Justice P N Bhagwati were a case in point.

again that there is an appellate court over apex courts, even the House of Lords, called the *Law Quarterly Review*.

In a wise and measured comment, Fali Nariman remarks¹⁵:

"Do harsh words about judges and their judgments *have* to be used? Well, not always - perhaps only occasionally: because of what that great economist Lord Keynes used to say: 'Words have sometimes to be harsh since they represent an assault on the thoughts of the unthinking'. It shakes people up - and it is good for the soul to shake up some people some of the time!".

Seervai himself admitted that he sometimes exceeded prudence in his criticisms of the judiciary. But he would not compromise on what he saw as truth or courage. And with such a man, allowing for the hurts, you had to take the bitter with the sweet.

Iqbal Chagla, another great advocate and son of a great judge, acknowledged that Seervai "set for himself the highest standards of moral integrity and in that he was totally inflexible and uncompromising, at times unreally so"¹⁶. It made him *sui generis*, but sometimes hard to stand with.

¹⁵ F S Nariman, "Last of the Serjeants" in *Evoking*, 48 at 52.

¹⁶ I M Chagla, "Full Court Reference" (Address as President of the Bombay Bar Association) in *Evoking*, 7 at 8.

Ashok Desai, also a former Solicitor-General of India, observed how sometimes Seervai made submissions "which were too detailed for the case"¹⁷. But that was just the high standard he always set for his advocacy. He was single-minded and blessed with unwavering concentration and the sharpest of focus. He was prudent and modest (even frugal) in the spending of public moneys. He always wanted to give his all.

Whereas the verbal flights of most advocates disappear into the ether of the courtroom, unless they find their mark in the mind and pen of an attentive judge, it was Seervai's decision to write his monumental text *Constitutional Law of India* that put him on the map so far as the judges and lawyers of India and of other lands are concerned. This work passed through four editions. The last, a *Silver Jubilee Edition* in three mighty volumes, was completed just hours before Seervai died in Mumbai on 26 January 1996. It was as if the analysis and dedication and passion of the book had kept him alive, with the loyal support of his wife Feroza and the encouragement of his publishers, until the last word on the last page of the final volume was penned.

Seervai wrote other texts, including his *Partition of India: Legend and Reality* and *The Position of the Judiciary Under the Constitution of India*. But it was his text on constitutional law that was his masterpiece.

¹⁷ A H Desai, "Some Reminiscences" in *Evoking*, 64 at 66.

For it, the British Academy in 1981 honoured him as by electing him a Fellow. Lord Mackay of Clashfern rightly observed¹⁸: "It is 'a permanent memorial to his massive erudition'. It is not a 'mere commentary of the usual kind'".

The book is a "searching, appreciative but at times scathing, analysis of what went into the judicial dicta" about the precious constitutional text that Seervai regarded as being held in special trust. As the author of the best known, most widely used and prize-winning book on the Constitution of his country, Seervai felt it to be his duty to speak out, with sharpness and candour, even with personal criticism, of those judges who strayed from what he saw as the straight and narrow path of constitutional doctrine.

It is a blessing of my life that a full set of these precious volumes was sent to me soon after my appointment to the High Court of Australia. There are differences, and similarities, between the Constitutions of Australia and India. I have described them before¹⁹. This is not the occasion to do so again. The commonalities of the legal

¹⁸ Lord Mackay, "Memories of H M Seervai" in *Evoking*, 16 at 17.

¹⁹ M D Kirby, "Constitutional Law: Indian and Australian Analogues" in V Iyer (ed) *Essays in Honour and Memory of H M Seervai* (2001), 166; M D Kirby, "To Midday's Children in India - The Bright Tomorrow" in S J Sorabjee (ed) *Law and Justice Vol 4* (1997), Supreme Court Golden Jubilee Issue 79; M D Kirby, "A Neglected Transnational Legal Relationship: A Plan of Action for Australia" (1997) *Australian International Law Journal* 17.

tradition, the selected similarities of the constitutional text and the mutual respect that existed between Seervai and the first comprehensive chronicler of the Australian Constitution, Dr Anstey Wynes²⁰, often make it useful for me to plunge into Seervai's book. In several of my judicial reasons I have referred to it as the source and inspiration for my ideas²¹. And I was not alone in my Court²². As it is said so often, the book is not an ordinary text on constitutional law. Here one will not find merely the Constitution's words, a cold analysis of the judicial elaboration and presentation of the winding course of authority as if it were the inevitable, consistent out-growth of the words. Instead, leaping from every page is an opinionative, engaging, controversial, often upsetting collection of opinions, praise and castigation of a type that makes Seervai's book entirely his own.

²⁰ W A Wynes, *Legislative, Executive and Judicial Powers in Australia* (5th ed, 1976).

²¹ *Newcrest Mining (WA) Ltd v Commonwealth of Australia* (1996) 190 CLR 513 at 659 (fn 510); *Pearce v The Queen* (1998) 194 CLR 610 at 644 [106] (fn 173); *Egan v Willis* (1998) 195 CLR 424 at 493 [133] (fn 355).

²² Thus Murphy J quoted from it in *The Commonwealth v Tasmania (The Tasmanian Dam Case)* (1983) 158 CLR 1 at 165.

BOOK

Seervai explains in the Preface to the first edition, how the writing of the book began with a link to Australia. In words which he put on paper, in February 1967, he confessed²³:

"In the manner of speaking, this book has got itself written. It all began fifteen years ago when I read with admiration and delight Dr Wynes's critical commentary on the Australian Constitution. As I laid down his book I could not help expressing to myself a wish that someone would try to do for the Constitution of India what Dr Wynes had done so well for the Constitution of Australia, and I believed then that one at least of the eminent lawyers who had helped to fashion our Constitution would undertake the task".

Listening to the powerful dissent of Justice Kapur in the *Nanavati Case*²⁴ in September 1960, convinced Seervai that the time had come to embark on the project himself. The first edition engaged him over six years and some part of every day of the remainder of his life was devoted to the task. The lawyers of India, Australia and all the lands of the common law, are the beneficiaries.

The size of the work, and the intensity of the treatment of the subject, really speak for themselves. Who else, well into his eighties,

²³ Preface to the First Edition, republished in H M Seervai, *Constitutional Law of India*, xxiii (hereafter "Seervai, *Constitutional Law*").

²⁴ (1961) 1 SCR 497.

would have devoted such loving care to the decisions of judges and to fitting those decisions, as they emerged from the courts, into the mosaic of constitutional doctrine? Who else at such an age could have produced a three volume work running to more than 3,250 pages? Little wonder that successive volumes of the work were honoured in India and far away as examples of scholarship and learning that require a special kind of brain to comprehend, digest and put on paper.

Professor Sir David Williams, later Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, wrote of the third edition that it was a "massive undertaking", demonstrating care and detail which the subject matter deserved. He acknowledged that the trenchant criticisms were not typical of British law journals, in their commentary on judges. Perhaps this was because the British still muddle along without a comprehensive written Constitution and look with wonderment at countries of the new world, such as India and Australia, that have enshrined great political questions in a legal text, the enforcement of which is entrusted to advocates-turned-judges in deciding constitutional cases. Professor Williams explains Seervai's trenchant criticisms as the inevitable product of his desire to delve deeply into constitutional questions and to wrestle with the constitutional quandaries of a great democratic country. And yet he comes out at the other end usually with optimism, tinged with reality²⁵.

²⁵ Sir David Williams's review appears in [1985] *Cambridge Law Journal* 149.

There are many excellent reviews of Seervai's *Constitutional Law of India* in its successive editions, some of them recorded on the fly-leaf in the distinctive, vivid, familiar colours of navy blue, white and green²⁶. The British, who must now witness their judges performing openly the work of human rights law in the wake of the *Human Rights Act* 1998 (UK), may gradually move to a more robust and candid assessment of judicial work. But for those of us who have lived with written national constitutions, as in the United States, Canada, Australia, India and South Africa, the sharp-tongued critic is a feature of legal life that we know in our hearts helps to dispel the illusions of grandeur and the delusions of infallibility that those elevated to the Bench can sometimes fall victim to in our tradition - often encouraged by the leaders of the Bar, who may see themselves as the Bench-in-waiting. Seervai would have none of this. Plain-speaking was his *forte*.

Seervai reportedly rejected judicial preferment, both in the Bombay High Court and even (so it is said) in the Supreme Court of India. Reasons are suggested: his dislike of travel, his love of his family, his preference for living in Mumbai. But if it is true that he rejected the Bench, perhaps the reason lay in his growing realisation of the fallibility of all judges, even those whom he liked, admired and loved the most. Perhaps, doubting that he could reach his own exacting standards, he preferred to exercise his influence on doctrine by

²⁶ See eg Wilson [1967] *Cambridge Law Journal* 258; Gledhill (1968) 84 *Law Quarterly Review* 279.

advocacy and by the pages of his text. His influence, in all probability, exceeded that of most judges, including on the Supreme Court. Advocate and judge, scholar and student alike leapt at a new edition to see what the author had made of the controversial decisions of the past decade. In a sense, the book became the last word on many topics

John Keats, a poet whom Seervai loved, drew inspiration on first looking into Chapman's *Homer*. So what does one see today, in the twenty-first century, ten years after his death, on looking into Seervai's *Constitutional Law*?

First, there is the uniquely opinionative character of this text. This is not accidental. Seervai claims a desire to be constructive whilst taking care to "separate the statement of the law and my submissions on it"²⁷. He accepts that sometimes his criticisms "may be mistaken". But he is unrepentant²⁸:

"The cause I serve is that of a correct and coherent interpretation of our Constitution. If any of my criticisms are found to be correct, the cause is served; and if any are found to be incorrect the very process of finding out my mistakes may lead to the discovery of the right reasons, or better reasons, than I have been able to give, and the cause is served just as well".

²⁷ Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Preface to the First Edition, p xxiv.

²⁸ *Ibid*, Preface to the First Edition, p xxiv.

Of course, today there would be many who admit to a doubt that *any* written text yields but a single interpretation. It is of the nature of words, and particularly words in the English language with its dual linguistic streams, that they are often ambiguous²⁹. Values will help the reader to reach the construction that seems apt to the text and the context. Perhaps we are more aware of these features of interpretation today than we were when Seervai learned his law and wrote the successive editions of his great book. Perhaps the judges whom he criticised were sometimes those who tried to search behind the words and, disdaining original intent, sought to give those words meaning so as to fulfil the functional purposes of such a precious document as a nation's Constitution: intended to operate indefinitely for the good governance of a great country³⁰.

Secondly, Seervai's prose is not only opinionative. Often, it is brutal to the point of administering a deliberate personal sting. Rarely does one see, in other books on constitutional law, commentaries such as those of Seervai. What that great judge Justice Khanna might call an "odd" result, Seervai describes as "startling". The exclamation marks and the denunciation of decisions as "a travesty of justice" single his text out amongst the respected books of law tradition. Indeed, it is a source of regret that Seervai did not live to witness the recent language written

²⁹ *News Limited v South Sydney District Rugby League Football Club Ltd* (2003) 215 CLR 563 at 580 [42] per McHugh J.

³⁰ cf *Lawrence v Texas* 539 US 558 at 578-579 (2003).

by Justice Scalia in the Supreme Court of the United States which, when speaking of his colleagues, sometimes reminds me of Seervai's prose, although usually at its most understated³¹.

Thirdly, there are many instances where Seervai tackles controversy that others might have been inclined to allow to pass. Thus, in the preface to his fourth edition, there is a prolonged coda on the attempted impeachment of Justice V Ramaswami, a judge of the Supreme Court³². For four closely printed pages, the author cannot let it rest. The affront to his sensibilities is plain. Occasionally a reader, trained in our tradition, thirsts for the expression of the contrary view. Ever the advocate, Seervai states his own view, bluntly.

Fourthly, it is clear that, to the end, Seervai was greatly influenced by traditions of the law in the India in which he grew up. These left him with a deep respect for English law, English literature, English history and the high professionalism of the British courts. To the very end, he was closely watching the *Spycatcher* litigation in the United Kingdom³³ and the leading cases of the House of Lords, such as *Pepper v Hart*³⁴.

³¹ eg *Lawrence v Texas* 539 US 558 at 598 (2003).

³² Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Preface to the Fourth Edition, p xvii.

³³ *Ibid*, Preface to the Fourth Edition, p xxi.

³⁴ [1993] AC 593; see Seervai, *Constitutional Law of*, Vol 2, liv.

He respected the stability of the Privy Council as a judicial tribunal and what he saw as "the predictability of its decisions"³⁵.

As growing decades separate Indian and Australian lawyers from the formal links to that distinguished imperial tribunal, it is as well to be reminded of its strengths, so long as we do not forget its weaknesses. Seervai condemns the "desire for justice in individual cases which converts the judicial process into a gamble"³⁶. He thirsts for unbending adherence to the law, though the heavens may fall. Yet allowance must always be made for the oath that judges take to do right to all manner of people. The underlying principle of our tradition is justice under law. We should never forget the "justice" part of that equation. Clearly, Seervai was sensitive to the justice of legal expectations. He was affronted whenever, in controversial cases, the court strayed from what he saw as their duty to the letter and tradition of the law. This led to his spirited attacks on the Supreme Court for its rulings in, amongst other cases, *R C Cooper v Union of India (the Bank Nationalisation Case)*³⁷ and *Golak Nath v State of Punjab*³⁸. And even those who disagreed with his "truly remarkable capacity for incisive analysis" acknowledged the force and persuasiveness of his positions³⁹.

³⁵ Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Preface to the First Edition, p xxv.

³⁶ Preface to the First Edition, p xxvi.

³⁷ (1970) 3 SCR 530.

³⁸ (1967) 2 SCR 762.

³⁹ V Iyer, "My Recollections of Homi Seervai" in *Evoking*, 68 at 68.

Seervai's work is sprinkled with references to the great English lawyers of his age. He singles out his special hero Lord Reid and that other great judicial craftsman, Lord Denning. Professor Sir William Wade and the other respected writers on public law are repeatedly cited. He was not a narrow Indian nationalist in legal doctrine. In constitutional law, especially, it is important for all of us to keep in touch with the great movements that are happening in other jurisdictions similar to our own.

Fifthly, Seervai repeatedly demonstrated his love of history, and respect for it, as the necessary setting for constitutional elaboration. The fourth edition of his text contains a most fascinating review, extending over 170 pages, of the history behind the mighty struggle for national independence in India. Of the fitful steps towards devolution of British power to a United India. Of the fateful manoeuvres that led to the partition of India. Of the blood spilt and the energy devoted to the creation of the new nation's Constitution, written in sacrifice but with optimism for the future.

It is clear in the preface to the First Edition, and made clearer in his later writings, that Seervai saw the division of India as an unnecessary result of uncompromising egos amongst all the participating parties. The one participant who emerges unscathed from his history is Lord Wavell, elevated in wartime from Commander-in-Chief to Viceroy. One learns from Seervai's legal text, why he warmed to this "rugged, straight-forward soldier void of verbiage and direct both in

approach and statement"⁴⁰. Here was the kind of man, rather like Seervai himself: "Not devious like a politician but [who] came straight to the point".

Not everyone has the stomach for such directness of approach. To many, both of the Indian and English cultural traditions, it is a confronting one. It sometimes leaves little space for accommodation, compromise and adjustment for conflicting viewpoints. It is like a purgative for the body politic. It is surely good for overall health. But sometimes it can be painful when it is administered.

Sixthly, and this is clear from Seervai's family reminiscences, he reflects a narrower view than would often now be held concerning the importation of political, economic and social concepts into the task of constitutional interpretation. In the preface to his first edition, he cited at length Chief Justice Latham of Australia in the *Communist Party Case* as rejecting such imputations⁴¹:

"It is sometimes said that legal questions before the High Court should be determined upon sociological grounds - political, economic or social. I can understand Courts being directed (as in Russia and in Germany in recent years) to determine questions in accordance with the interests of a particular political party. There the Court is provided with at least a political standard. But such a proposition as, for

⁴⁰ Azad, cited in Seervai, *Constitutional Law of India*, (4th Ed), 115.

⁴¹ (1951) 83 CLR 1 at 148-149.

example, that the recent *Banking Case*⁴² should have been determined upon political grounds and that the Court was wrong in adopting an attitude of detachment from all political considerations appears to me merely to ask the Court to vote again upon an issue upon which Parliament has already voted or could be asked to vote, and to determine whether nationalisation of banks would be a good thing or a bad thing for the community. In my opinion the Court has no concern whatever with any such questions. In the present case the decision of the Court should be the same whether the members of the Court believe in communism or do not believe in communism".

Whilst there is obviously great truth in the need for judicial detachment - and overall it has been a precious hallmark of our shared legal and judicial traditions - the notion of ignoring values, broadly described as "political" or "social" or "economic", is not now one that is universally espoused. A Constitution is a political document. Decisions about it are always, in a broad sense, political. Ignoring the way the polity should work under the Constitution, can lead to a rigidity that, fortunately, the majority in the High Court of Australia avoided in the *Communist Party Case*. In that decision, Chief Justice Latham was in sole dissent. All the other participating Justices agreed that the federal legislation in question there, designed to ban the communist party and to deprive communists of civil liberties, was constitutionally invalid. Justice Dixon extracted from the Australian Constitution an implication, deep and powerful, of adherence to the rule of law, always binding on Parliament and the Executive Government⁴³. In fact, in many of his

⁴² (1948) 76 CLR 1.

⁴³ (1951) 83 CLR 1 at 193; cf *Plaintiff S157/2002 v The Commonwealth* (2003) 211 CLR 476 at 513-514 [103]-[104].

comments on Indian cases, Seervai shows a Dixon-like commitment to limited governmental power rather than a Latham-like acceptance of the fiction that regular visits of citizens to the ballot box justify everything thereafter that a government does within its term of office.

Let us have no more talk in India or Australia of the "sovereignty of Parliament"⁴⁴. This is a notion, right enough perhaps in England in the nineteenth century, but totally out of keeping for a government of limited powers which the Indian and Australian written constitutions apply in both our countries. For us, sovereignty belongs only to the people. All government is limited and subject to law.

Seventhly, Seervai recognised the necessary limitations of conventional textbooks and casebooks. He was no mere reporter and did not want to be. He knew that citation of foreign authority had to be discerning because, in his day, access to foreign casebooks and texts was strictly limited in India, like everywhere else⁴⁵. Now, through the Internet, lawyers and judges can search and Google and discover great riches in the leading courts of our tradition everywhere. Seervai's fascination with foreign analogues was correct, but ahead of its time.

⁴⁴ Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: the Indian Experience* (Oxford, 1999; fifth impr 2001) 498. "Parliamentary supremacy" is a more accurate expression; but even then Parliament is supreme, subject to the law as declared by the courts.

⁴⁵ Preface to the First Edition republished in Fourth Edition, Vol 1, p xxiii.

Technology now opens up the learning of the Supreme and High Courts of India to judges and advocates everywhere. With that learning comes Seervai's analysis, criticisms and opinions.

Eighthly, throughout his analysis, one can see Seervai's deep commitment to the secular principle that is stated in the added language of the 42nd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1976⁴⁶. It is secularism that leads Seervai to criticise all the leaders of the Independence movement - not just Jinnah (another leading Bombay barrister) but also Gandhi and Nehru - for what he describes as the "crime to mix up religion and politics". Seervai declares "there is a price to pay, and in India we paid it in full with the partition of India"⁴⁷. He is sharp and unforgiving in his judgment on this point. His introductory historical essay, and the Appendix to volume 1 of the fourth edition, stand as monuments to what might have been if only the times had been a little different and the players had exhibited greater detachment and willingness to compromise. Of course, there are many views about these issues. Seervai states his opinions with force and persuasiveness.

⁴⁶ The words "Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic" were inserted by the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution (1976), s 2.

⁴⁷ Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Fourth Ed, Vol 1, 951.

Ninthly, despite the sharp words, sometimes directed at greatly respected judges and even his friends⁴⁸, the predominant mood of Seervai's book is one of optimism⁴⁹. He was, after all, operating in a free country, sustained by the very Constitution over which differences could be held and strongly expressed. He was not liable to be dragged away at midnight to answer to a government or religious or party official angry with his criticism. Nor was there any real chance that he would be punished for contempt of court. Nor was it ever likely that he would be arrested by the opinionated military or security police.

Seervai was foremost in his condemnation of the weakness of the courts in responding to Mrs Indira Gandhi's Emergency. He was the first to recognise the critical importance of responding to overweening governmental power⁵⁰. In doing so, he drew, as usual, on the earlier failings of the House of Lords in England in the wartime decision in *Liversidge v Anderson*⁵¹. In the current age, his exercise of the freedom

⁴⁸ His comment in Vol 1, 610 (par 9.2.79) on Justice Krishna Iyer's reasons in *Akhil Bharatiya Soshit Karmachari Sangh v Union of India* (1981) 2 SCR 185 are an example. See also in Vol 1, p 2240 his comment on Justice P N Bhagwati; cf S J Sorabjee in *Evoking*, 45 at 46.

⁴⁹ As Sir David Williams concluded [1985] *Cambridge Law Journal*, 149.

⁵⁰ See Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Appendix to Vol 2 in Fourth Edition, p 2235; cf Granville Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: The Indian Experience*, Oxford, 1999 (Fifth impr, 2001), 293ff.

⁵¹ [1942] AC 206 in *ibid*, 2230.

to criticise serious error bears lessons for us all as anti-terrorism measures sometimes press up against the constitutional limits.

Tenthly, Seervai was not totally inflexible, unbending or incapable of changing his mind. Even in fundamental things, Seervai could be shifted, could alter his opinions. Thus, he came around from his earlier strong inclination against the Basic Structure doctrine to see how important that constitutional implication would be for the defence of the foundations of government and the protection of the rights of all people in India - a country where it was much easier than in most to change the constitutional text⁵². He thus had strong opinions, strongly expressed. But he was not a lifeless rock. He was, instead, a practical and highly experienced lawyer. He could see that, from time to time, doctrine needed to shift with the needs and operation of the Constitution as a living instrument of government.

Never has this idea been better expressed, in my view, than by Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Lawrence v Texas*⁵³, when striking down, as unconstitutional, the anti-homosexual criminal provisions of the law of Texas, similar to s 377 of the *Indian Penal Code*:

⁵² T R Andhyarujina in *Evoking*, 20 at 27 ff.

⁵³ 539 US 558 at 578-579 (2003).

"Had those who drew and ratified the Due Process Clauses of the Fifth Amendment or the Fourteenth Amendment known the components of liberty and its manifold possibilities, they might have been more specific. They did not presume to have this insight. They knew times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress. As the Constitution endures, persons in every generation can invoke its principles in their own search for greater freedom".

Although Seervai never quite embraced this functional concept of constitutional interpretation, he did acknowledge (as the cases say) that the Constitution of India is to be given a liberal interpretation⁵⁴. He accepted the principle obliging an harmonious construction of the whole text⁵⁵. Times change. Constitutional needs change. Though faithful to his view about basic doctrine, Seervai, ever the lawyer, saw great changes happen in independent India. Like everyone else, his mind was carried along with the largest changes, for every lawyer knows that the Constitution must endure and serve the peace, order and good government of successive generations of the people.

⁵⁴ Seervai, *Constitutional Law of India* (Fourth Edition). Vol 3, 2306, 2312, applying observations of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in *James v The Commonwealth* [1936] AC 578; cf Gwyer CJ in *Central Provinces Case* [1939] FCR 18 at 37.

⁵⁵ Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Fourth Edition, Vol 3, 2318 applying *Madras v Boddu Paidanna* [1942] FCR 90 at 105 per Gwyer CJ.

LEGACY

In his will, it is said, Seervai forbade other authors (even some whom I could name who shared his basic philosophy of law) to update and revise his great text. Yet, a perfunctory glance at the reports of the Supreme Court of India will show, that it continues to be held in the highest esteem and to be cited repeatedly as an authoritative source of legal principle and analysis.

Thus in *Chairman, Railway Board v Chandrima Das*⁵⁶, Justice Saghir Ahmad refers to a criticism of the earlier decision in *Kasturi Lal's Case*⁵⁷ "by Mr Seervai in his prestigious book". He concludes in consequence that the "efficacy of this decision as a binding precedent has been eroded".

In *State of Karnataka v State of Andhra Pradesh*⁵⁸, Justice Pattanaik reviews counsel's argument with its reliance on Seervai's book concerning the power of courts to resolve the entire dispute between the parties - a beneficial and necessary power in a land of over-burdened court lists.

⁵⁶ [2000] 1 SCR 480.

⁵⁷ [1965] 1 SCR 375; AIR (1965) SC 1039.

⁵⁸ [2000] 3 SCR 301 at 389.

In *Pradeep Kumar Biswas v Indian Institute of Chemical Biology*⁵⁹, Justice Ruma Pal quotes Seervai's book at length to teach the lesson that "the governing power, wherever located, must be subjected to fundamental constitutional limitations".

In *Harish Uppal v Union of India*⁶⁰, Justice Variava quotes the words of Mr Seervai, described there as "a distinguished jurist" to support the proposition that the courts will "not tolerate any interference from any body or authority in the daily administration of justice".

In *NTR University of Health Sciences, Vijaywada v G Babu Rajendra Prasad*⁶¹, Justice S B Sinha cites at length Seervai's "classic treatise" to teach the lesson that "in India there are castes. But castes are anti-national". Moreover, they are alien to the constitutional commitment to fraternity, equality and liberty.

In *State of West Bengal v Kesoram Industries Ltd*⁶², Justice R C Lahoti, giving the reasons of the Supreme Court, quotes at length from Seervai's text and specifically his treatment of the legislative power to tax. The book becomes the touchstone for the opinion of the Court, such is the respect in which it is held.

⁵⁹ [2002] 3 SCR 100.

⁶⁰ [2002] Supp 5 SCR 186 at 208.

⁶¹ [2003] 2 SCR 781 at 796-797.

⁶² [2004] 1 SCR 564 at 642, 657, 689, 664.

In *Commissioner of Police v Acharya Jagadishwaranda Avadhuta*⁶³, Justice Dr A R Lakshmanan, in the course of his analysis uses one of Seervai's criticisms of earlier decisions of the Supreme Court as *obiter* and contrary to mainstream reasoning.

In *Chain Singh v Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board*⁶⁴, Justice B N Srikrishna cites at length from Seervai's treatment of governmental acquisitions and the relevance of the amendment of the Constitution to the change of the pre-existing law.

In *Godfrey Phillips India Ltd v State of Uttar Pradesh*⁶⁵, Justice Ruma Pal cites Seervai as teaching the uniqueness of the Indian Constitution and the care that must be observed in invoking judicial authorities from other federations such as the United States, Canada and Australia. It is an intellectual comment, not a xenophobic one. It is based on textual differences not on any sense of local superiority.

In *Yashpal v State of Chattisgarh*⁶⁶, Justice G P Mathur commences his interpretation with a reminder of some basic principles

⁶³ [2004] 2 SCR 1019 at 1052D.

⁶⁴ (2004) 12 SCC 634 at [22].

⁶⁵ AIR 2005 SC 1103 at 1115-1116 [40].

⁶⁶ AIR 2005 SC 2026 at 2035 [11].

derived from Seervai's book. More recently in *Bal Patil v Union of India*⁶⁷, Justice Dharmadhikari quotes large parts of Seervai's book to emphasise, in the context of that case, the non-theocratic and secular character of the Union of India and the importance of protecting, within it, Muslims and Christians as "children of its soil".

In *Rameshwar Prasad v Union of India*⁶⁸, Chief Justice Y K Sabharwal expressed himself in support of Seervai's view on the general legal immunities of a State Governor. In *Ashok Lenka v Rishi Dikshit*⁶⁹, Justice S B Sinha invokes Seervai's text in his consideration of aspects of the law on intoxicating liquor restrictions.

In *State of Rajasthan v Rajasthan Chemist Association*⁷⁰, Justice Arijit Pasayat resolves the issue of tax law before him by referring to a principle "succinctly stated" in Seervai's book. In *Surendra Prasad Tewari v Uttar Pradesh Rajya Krishi Utpadan Mandi Parishad*⁷¹, the Justices constituting the Supreme Court Bench invoke Seervai's "in his celebrated book" to emphasise the importance of the principle of

⁶⁷ AIR 2005 SC 3172 at 3177 [22].

⁶⁸ AIR 2006 SC 980 at 1035-1036 [168].

⁶⁹ AIR 2006 SC 2382 at 2390 [26].

⁷⁰ 2006(7) SCALE 330 at 3314 [21].

⁷¹ (Appeal (Civil) 3981 at 2006, G P Mathur & Dalveer Bhandari JJ, 8 September 2006) at [20].

recruitment by open competition which, "was first applied in India and then applied in England".

In *Nagaraj v Union of India*⁷², Justice S H Kapadia, resolves the issue under Article 14 of the Constitution then before the Court by reference to Seervai's instruction⁷³ that the equality principle, enshrined in that constitutional provision, is not violated by mere conferment of a discretionary power. It is the arbitrary exercise of such a power that may attract constitutional intervention.

I have cited these cases at some length to demonstrate what is, in any case, well-known and abundantly clear. Seervai's text is still a living document. It continues to be in daily use in courtrooms throughout India and beyond. An intellectual monument for a life in the law is splendid; but not enough. Prizes and honours are fine. But the greatest prize for a scholar and practitioner like Seervai, is the continuing use of his work. I have demonstrated that it is a work still frequently cited by the Supreme Court, with obvious respect, celebration and appreciation. This is also true in the High Courts of India and indeed at every level of the judicial hierarchy. Yet for all this it is inevitable that, with the passing of time, new decisions and fresh insights will render the book out of date. So it

⁷² Unreported, Writ Petition (Civil) 61 of 2002, Y K Sabharwal CJ, K G Balakrishnan, S H Kapadia, C K Thakker and P K Balasubramanyan JJ, 19 October 2006 at [70].

⁷³ Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Fourth Edition, 546.

was in Australia with Dr Wynes's book on the Australian Constitution. So it will be in India, unless Seervai's book is brought up to date.

No author, even one so great as Seervai, is entitled to speak beyond the grave and to forbid a new edition to a work so important, basic and instrumental in the life of Indian democracy. If I can use an analogy that would have been understood by Seervai: no Parliament can pass a law that purports forever to bind its successors who, in their wisdom and need, decide to strike out on a different course⁷⁴.

There are many precedents for this course in great legal publications. In 1888, the famed historian of English constitutional law, Professor F W Maitland completed a course of lectures on constitutional history. He asked himself the question "Do I publish it?", to which he gave the public answer "No"⁷⁵. Yet in 1908, in consultation with many great scholars including A V Dicey, Professor H A L Fisher overruled Maitland's wishes, the latter having since died. The text was published to universal acclaim. It continues to be used and treasured as a work

⁷⁴ *British Coal Corporation v The King* [1935] AC 500 at 520 (PC); A V Dicey, *The Law of the Constitution* (10th ed, 1959), 88. Introduction by E C S Wade, xlix.

⁷⁵ F W Maitland quoted in "Preface" to F W Maitland *The Constitutional History of England*, Cambridge, 1950, v (First Edition, 1909).

"fully worthy of the author and the subject"⁷⁶. So it should be with Seervai's text.

In Australia, the last edition of Dr Wynes's book was the fifth edition published posthumously. Dr Wynes died in July 1975. Like Seervai, Wynes had completed the revision of all the galley proofs of his text just before his death⁷⁷. For thirty years, the book remained a kind of time capsule of the thinking and understanding of the Australian Constitution. This is a sad fate for such an influential work. Now it is rarely cited. The greatest monument that we could leave to Seervai's life in the law of India is a living one; one that is constantly renewed.

No doubt, in a newly edited fifth edition, some of the opinions would lack the sparkle, sharpness and combativeness of Seervai's opinions. On the other hand, it should surely not be beyond the accumulated brilliance of the Bar of India, to establish a committee of advocates and scholars who are in general harmony with Seervai's dedication to the Constitution of India to share the faithful obligation to

⁷⁶ H A L Fisher, "Preface" in F W Maitland, *ibid*, v at vii. There are many other instances. When in 2003 Professor Sir John Smith CBE QC died, there was a danger that his classic text on English Criminal Law (then in its 10th edition) would be the last. However, Professor David Ormerod of the University of Leeds has taken on the role of editor and produced an eleventh edition in 2007 aspiring "to remain true to Sir John Smith's ideals". The new edition has been acclaimed.

⁷⁷ W A Wynes, *Legal, Executive and Judicial Powers in Australia* (5th ed, 1976), Publishers note, p vii.

update and annotate his text so that it continues to live and breathe. Although this proposal did not find immediate favour with his family who naturally desire to observe Seervai's express wishes, it is my hope that Mrs Seervai and the family come round to agreeing to this course, even allowing that it would change somewhat the contents and unique character of the work.

There can be no doubt that there are critical issues of constitutional doctrine that need to be considered and updated as we embark on a fresh century of democratic constitutional governance in India and in Australia. As I read once again the precious pages of Seervai's book, I could see how many of the cases and commentaries are relevant to the issues with which we in Australia have struggled with in recent times.

In the last years of my judicial service the High Court of Australia delivered a number of very important decisions – several amongst the most important - in the century-long history of the Court. *New South Wales v The Commonwealth of Australia (The Work Choices Case)*⁷⁸ is a good example. The case concerned the power of the Federal Parliament to enact laws under the grant the power to make laws with respect of trading and financial corporations. The laws in question, on one view, were also laws on industrial disputes - a subject of law-making

⁷⁸ (2006) 81 ALJR 34; 231 ALR 1.

until now substantially regarded as governed only by the qualified conciliation and arbitration power and shared with the States. As I read Seervai's analysis, commanding a liberal construction of legislative heads of federal power, but one that one that gives meaning to every part of the constitutional document, I could see displayed many of the issues which we tackled in the Australian apex Court and which are inevitably faced by every federal constitutional court - even one, as in India, with a different division of powers and less rigid federal structure⁷⁹.

Likewise, we saw in Australia an important challenge brought to the growing practice of appointing temporary or acting judges to State courts - it cannot be done in federal courts. This practice, which began as an emergency expedient for *ad hoc* and very special needs, has grown quite rapidly into a new institutional arrangement by which a significant cohort of State judges, including in the highest State court, hold their appointment from year to year, dependent on confirmation by the Executive Government: *Forge v ASIC*⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ cf I Copland and R Rickard (eds), *Federalism: Comparative Perspectives From India and Australia* (1999). See in particular the articles by H P Lee ("Emergency Powers in Australian and Indian Federalism"); J A Thomson ("Australian and Indian State Constitutional Law: Some Comparative Perspectives"); and G Parthasarathy ("Federalism and Constitutional Processes").

⁸⁰ *Forge v Australian Securities and Investments Commission* 2006) 229 ALR 223 at 257ff [127].

The majority of the High Court of Australia saw no offence to the Constitution in these arrangements. I dissented. Re-reading Seervai's treatment of the dramas that surrounded the Indian experience during the Emergency, and the way acting judges in India were treated at that time, confirmed me in the correctness of my dissent⁸¹.

A truly independent and uncorrupted judiciary is a most precious governmental resource belonging to the people. Its neutrality, courage and manifest integrity is the coinage in which its reputation is purchased every day. Many lands, perhaps most, have judiciaries that do not enjoy the reputation for independence of the courts of India and Australia. We must guard that independence to the utmost of our power. If ever it is lost, it is difficult, and may for a long time be impossible, to win back the confidence of the people⁸². Seervai knew this instinctively and never failed to make the point. Other branches of government are sometimes very jealous of the high reputation and respect which the judiciary generally enjoys amongst the people. We cannot always count on the legislature or the Executive, least of all the media, to safeguard these precious virtues. The Bench and Bar themselves must ever be vigilant, as Seervai was, to do so.

⁸¹ Seervai, *Constitutional Law*, Appendix, Vol 2, 2235 ff; Vol 3, 2717-2719, 2761.

⁸² See also Preface to the Second Edition, p vii in Vol 1 (4th Ed) and M V Chandramathi, "Overview of Appointment of Judges" in G Manohar Rao, *Constitutional Development Through Judicial Process* (2006) 228.

In both India and Australia, our courts are increasingly looking to international law, which is the context in which national constitutions are read today. The willingness of the Supreme Court of India to tackle constitutional doctrine with this new insight bears lessons for us in Australia where unfamiliarity with, and even hostility to, international law are part of the general legal culture⁸³.

As a servant of the provisions of the Indian Constitution upholding fundamental rights, Seervai was not antipathetic to the use of such sources. With such universal ideas in the Indian Constitution, it is inevitable that the writings of other courts and by other scholars on the meaning of common phrases should be, and become, part of the staple content of international law, especially because of the terms of Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution. The adjustment of our municipal Constitutions to the new reality of international law is a great challenge before all lawyers of the common law world today⁸⁴. This is a further reason for proceeding to a new edition of Seervai's text so that the new generations of Indian judges, advocates and students can continue to read its pages with timely instruction and be brought up to date with

⁸³ See eg *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004) 219 CLR 562 at 589 [62]; cf 617 [152]; and *QAAH v Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs* (2006) 231 CLR 1 at 56-59 [9]-[18].

⁸⁴ M D Kirby, "International Law - The Impact on National Constitutions" (Grotius Lecture), 21 *American University International Law Review* 327 (2006).

great new movements that stimulate and influence contemporary public law throughout the world. The advocates and scholars of India should urge it. The law students of India should demand it.

I am sure that if Seervai were here to read this article he would strongly disagree with things that I have said. He would not hesitate to say so. He would fix me with his eye, and tell me where I had got it wrong.

I know this because, as a young lawyer and judge, in 1977, I travelled to Edinburgh. I sat in the austere Scottish hall at the plenary of the Commonwealth Law Conference. I saw Seervai mount the platform to remind his listeners from all parts of the Commonwealth of Nations the importance of the law officers and of their need for independence, integrity and candour as a vital supplement to the essential qualities of the Bench and Bar. I remember being transfixed with the capacity of this man, speaking without notes, talking from principle, examples, anecdotes and poetry in a way that very few could do. His strong opinions came through. But so also did his strong principles.

I have been brave enough to write in honour of one of the foremost servants of the law of India - a fearless upholder of the common law tradition. Whether I would have been so brave if Seervai had been around, I can only leave it to others to imagine. Brave as a lion was Seervai. His legacy lives on to strengthen and nurture the traditions of one of the great Benches and Bars of the world.
