

REFERENCE TO LATE SHRI K. T. DESAI
BY THE HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE

Members of the Bar :

Last week darkness descended on the judicial horizon of our country. I am referring to the clouds that have cast their deep shadows of gloom and sorrow on judicial firmament in the western hemisphere of the country and to no other. It was with profound sorrow that my colleagues and I learnt from Sunday's morning paper about the sad and sudden demise of Shri K. T. Desai – familiarly known to many of us as 'Kantibhai' an eminent Judge of this Court and the retired C. J. of Gujarat High Court.

After graduating at an early age of 21 Mr. Desai took his law degree in 1926 and had the distinction of passing the examinations of Attorney as well as Advocate (O.S.) in 1928 and 1930 respectively. Soon after joining the Bar on the Original Side of this court in 1930 he gathered lucrative practice achieving great distinction as a brilliant lawyer in various types of legal work, particularly in commercial law. An eminent draftsman, a sound and subtle lawyer he always had practical approach to the solutions of various complicated legal problems which were presented to him for his opinion. In 1957 he was persuaded by the then Chief Justice of Bombay Mr. M. C. Chagla to accept a seat on the Bench of this Court and he responded to the call of duty by sacrificing his large and lucrative practice and he brought his great qualities of head and heart to the new sphere of his activities and in a short time acquired the reputation of being one of the ablest Judges of this Court. By his unfailing courtesy to the members of the

bar he earned their respect and affection and discharged his duties to the entire satisfaction of every one. On the bifurcation of Bombay State in May 1960 he was appointed as a Judge of the Gujarat High Court and in January 1961 he was appointed as the Chief Justice of that Court, an assignment which he held with great distinction till he retired in 1963. He maintained the highest traditions of the Bench – traditions of honesty, integrity, impartiality and hard work. He also worked as one-man President of the National Bank Tribunal and the award which he made in that capacity has become famous as 'Desai Bank Award', which has given satisfaction to both the Management as well as the employees in the Banking field.

I would also like to mention that he was a Director on the Board of the former Press Trust of India Ltd. But, in my view, no greater tribute could have been paid to his abilities than was paid when he was appointed the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bennett Coleman & Co. pursuant to the orders passed by one of the Judges of this Court at a time when the affairs of that Company were in great mess and it must be said to his credit that during his 7-year tenure as the Chairman of that Board he successfully endeavoured to put the affairs of that Company on a sound footing. As the Chairman of that Board he also took keen interest in various cultural and fund-raising activities that were undertaken by that Company to render help to the country in times of drought and distress. He was also the President of the Asiatic Society, Bombay, one of the premier libraries of the country.

Personally I mourn the loss of a revered and respected friend. His passing away is a loss of a many faceted personality both to the Bench

and the Bar. May I on behalf of my colleagues and myself extend our deep
condolences and heart-felt sympathies to his widow and 3 daughters in their
sad bereavement.

May his soul rest in everlasting peace.

February 1, 1977.