To be born in Tanwer (Tomar) clan of the Chandravanshi lineage meant that you either became a soldier or a farmer. Vijay Kumar Singh, like his grandfather Daffadar Mukhram Singh, and father Jagat Singh, became a soldier and ended as India’s 26th Chief of the Army Staff, though the Air Force was his first preference.

“Courage and Conviction” is an absorbing life story of a distinguished soldier who created history by taking the government to court for tampering with his date of birth to put in place its 'line of succession' plan, as argued by the Attorney-General in the Supreme Court. An elegantly produced book, it begins with a quotation from Robert F Kennedy’s Day of Affirmation speech which says, “Few men for the right cause brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues and the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change which yields most painfully to change.”

Gen VK Singh was motivated by Ecce Homo to share internal life experiences for writing his autobiography, a must read for anyone interested in knowing the strange ways of working of the Defence ministry and its babudom. In spite of the entire establishment ganging up against him and using a considerable section of the media to besmirch his reputation, there is no rancor or bitterness in his narration of the eventful two years he was the COAS.

The first commando to become the chief of the Indian Army, he was awarded the Commando Dagger and the prestigious Sam Manekshaw Trophy at the Young Officers Course in Mhow.

Written with Kunal Verma, son of a fellow Rajput Regiment officer and author of “The Long Road to Siachen” and the “Northeast Trilogy,” the book “Courage and Conviction” brings out various facets of army life, how postings are at the mercy of uninformed bureaucracy and career prospects are subject to the whims and fancies of senior officers. The book gives revealing accounts of the Bangladesh war that liberated East Bengal from Pakistan; Operation Blue Star, Operation Meghdoot, code name for the 1987 operation to occupy Siachen; IPKF misadventure in Sri Lanka where the Army went to protect the Tamils and ended up fighting them; Operations Brasstacks and Trident and Operation Parakram that brought to light how the Army is ill equipped to fight a war.

In a prologue to his autobiography under the heading 'The moment of truth,' Gen. VK Singh narrates his meeting with then Union home minister, Palaniappan Chidambaram, a week after taking over as the COAS. Maoists had ambushed and killed 76 CRPF jawans near Chintalnar village in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. Without beating about the bush, Chidambaram asked: “You know the Naxal problem is a major national issue. Why do you oppose the deployment of the Army in Naxal areas?”

The General answered that it was a socio-economic and governance issue and not a secessionist movement. Therefore it would not