

FAREWELL SPEECH

Hon'ble the Chief Justice G. Rohini,
my esteemed brother and sister Judges,
Mr. Sanjay Jain, Additional Solicitor General of India,
Mr. R.S. Chauhan, President, Bar Council of Delhi,
Mr. Murari Tiwari, Secretary, Bar Council of Delhi,
Mr. Rajiv Khosla, President, Delhi High Court Bar Association,
Mr. Jatin Singh, Vice President, Delhi High Court Bar Association,
Mr. Abhijat, Honorary Secretary, Delhi High Court Bar Association,
Ms. Zubeda Begum, Delhi Government Standing Council (Civil),
Mr. Saleem Ahmed, Delhi Government Standing Council (Criminal),
Senior and Junior Members of the Bar,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am extremely grateful and humbled by the sentiments expressed about me. I truly wish I deserve the complements showered upon me with such magnanimity, but I know in my heart of hearts that they are more an indication of your never-failing kindness and love towards me. I thank you for having gathered here on this occasion to bid farewell to me on a day which I consider to be a precious one in my life, for today I retire from this august institution which is considered by all to be the most premiere institution in the country. I have had the honour and privilege of being a Judge of this Court for nearly 9 years and prior to that of being a Judge of the Court of Sessions for over 15 years. As this chapter ends, I think of the famous quote that life is not about the destination but the journey. Though many positive feelings come to my mind, the two that overpower me are that of gratitude and honour. Gratitude for the great friendships I have enjoyed with my colleagues at the bench and the bar, and the honour of having been a Justice of this Court a spoke in the wheel of the justice delivery system.

At this milestone in my life, I think back to the beginning. **I learned law first at the dinner table.**

My revered father Shri P.C. Khanna always said "You must speak the best of your profession in front of your children" and he practised that for all my childhood. Never did he complain about the trials and tribulations of the profession but always spoke about the most interesting parts of his day and with a jovial spirit played the role of Socrates by narrating to me and my siblings the highlights of his day. In his demeanour, I saw a man who respected the greater calling of his profession – it was not about fees; it was always for him about learning from the law and using that learning to seek justice for his clients. **He spent his life trying to right a difficult world's wrongs. In him, I saw what I aspired to be.**

When I married, I almost left the profession but for the encouragement of my husband, father and mother, whose own father and brothers were members of the bar and bench. And so it began The years passed. At first, working for my father and acting as a Government counsel, then venturing as so many young lawyers do, to build an independent practice. And to be frank in those years I was too busy balancing work and family to think about any grand ambition or to dwell about where exactly the road might take me.

My judicial career was the usual mix of agony and ecstasy, ups and downs. I endeavoured my best to do justice according to law. If I have been guilty of any abrasion or

misdemeanour, wittingly or unwittingly, towards any member of the bar on said things which I ought not to have said from my place on the bench, I have only one excuse, that it was done with the best of intentions and there was nothing in my heart. I hope and pray that if any such incident occurred, the members of the bar will find it in the largeness of their heart to forgive and forget those things, and to remember me in good light.

There are countless cases, conversations and interactions that stand out in my mind in the many years I have spent in the legal profession and as a Judge, but in the last year of my judicial career, there was one case that truly shocked me as a Delhi – woman, lawyer, Judge and as a human being. I refer of course to the Nirbhaya case. Just when you think that there is a ray of hope that society is improving, you are reminded that the barbaric side of society is an ever-present sleeping demon that only the law can contain. This is why our profession as lawyers and Judges exists. To be part of that resolute force of good that stands firm, looks the barbaric side of humanity straight in the eye and scream silently at it:

- There IS a difference between right and wrong.
- There IS a difference between good and evil.
- And MOST importantly there IS a difference between the JUST and the UNJUST.

As the sun sets on my judicial career, I look around this room, and am filled from pride to be part of such an august brother and sisterhood. The stars of the past are only being outshined by the stars that I see rising on the horizon. In all of them, I see not only great wisdom and humility, but also a deep morality. I am conscious of the fact that much work remains to be done – the right of women to be safe and equal members of our society in reality as well as in law; the role of law itself in protecting rights of the underprivileged in the tidal wave of economic growth; and most dear to my heart, the responsibility of justice in safeguarding children from any and all abuse. The burden of this I leave upon the capable shoulders of my eminent colleagues, all of whom I feel are more than equal to the task. To me, the future indeed looks bright.

I leave with a few words of advise which I offer to the young brigade of upcoming lawyers:

- **NEVER** doubt in choosing what you believe in your heart to be Right Versus Wrong.
- **NEVER** avoid the deep responsibility given to you by your predecessors and that you owe to your successors,
and lastly and most importantly
- **NEVER ever** cease to remember that though justice is blind, you cannot afford to be.

Finally, I thank the Almighty for giving me this Hon'ble calling in life and helping me to deliver justice in whatever little measure that I did. We are fortunate in having the most compassionate Chief Justice who is not only learned in law but has sterling qualities of the head and heart. I thank Hon'ble the Chief Justice for having treated me **always** with affection and kindness. I am also deeply indebted to many of my predecessors and doyens of the Indian Judiciary, who served as inspirational sources and guiding spirits to me all through my judicial career. At this time, I remember with reverence, all my senior Bench-mates, who gave me guidance, support and immense courage in discharging my duties, and in particular Dr. Justice Mukundakam Sharma, Justice Mukul Mudgal and Hon'ble Mr. Justice Arjun Sikri. I thank my junior bench-mates, who unstintingly dedicated themselves to their work

and put up with all my whims and idiosyncrasies, without grudge or complaint, and here I mention Justice Sunita Gupta, Justice Pratibha Rani and last but not the least Justice S.P. Garg.

The bar and then bench are complementary in the discharge of the divine function of dispensation of justice. I, therefore, take this opportunity to thank Mr. Sanjay Jain, learned Additional Solicitor General, the President and the executive members of the Delhi High Court Bar Association and the President and executive members of the Bar Council of Delhi who have always been more than kind to me. I also express my profound thanks to my brother and sister Judges who have made such a place in my heart that today I am loathe to part with them. The Registry and Administration of this Court is an efficient one and I thank all the Registrars for their kind cooperation, as well as the staff of this High Court, and in particular the Protocol Section, which toils day and night without specific working hours. My thanks in particular to Mr. S.K. Banyal, who always made all my journeys very comfortable, and Mr. S.P. Singh, who stood by me night and day during my mother's illness, from which she unfortunately never recovered. I also thank all members of my personal staff and my law researchers, who never failed me and toiled day and night whenever called upon to do so. On a personal note, I would like to remember my father and mother on this occasion for their unequivocal love and support of me and for having been my personal pillars of strength. Unfortunately, they are with me no longer. I also at this moment want to thank my husband without whom not one aspect of my life would have been possible – I am humbled by the love and support he has shown me in all these years. Thank you Arvind, my two daughters Nidhi and Nikita are today members of this bar and through them under God's guidance the most important of my ambitions has been fulfilled – that of raising two compassionate human beings. I thank them for allowing me to steal precious time from them in order to make it available to my calling.

Most importantly, I shall cherish the memories of the time spent with you and of this day, till the end. With these words, I bid you farewell and hope and pray that you shall keep up the glory of this institution.