

FAREWELL SPEECH JUSTICE SANGITA DHINGRA SEHGAL

Hon'ble Mr. Justice D. N. Patel, Hon'ble the Chief Justice,

My esteemed brother and sister judges,

Smt. Maninder Acharya, Ld. Additional Solicitor General,

All standing counsels for the Central Government,

Mr. Rahul Mehra, Ld. Standing Counsel (Criminal),

Mr. Ramesh Singh. Ld. Standing Counsel (Civil),

Other counsels of the Govt. of NCT of Delhi,

Mr. K.C. Mittal, Chairman, Bar Council of Delhi and Mr. Piyush Gupta, Co- Chairman, Bar Council of Delhi

Mr. Mohit Mathur, President, Mr. Jatan Singh, Vice President, Mr. Abhijat, Hony. Secretary and all other office bearers of High Court of Delhi Bar Association,

Ld. Senior Advocates and other members of the bar,

President, Hony. Secretaries and office bearers of District Bar Associations,

District and Session Judges,

My Family Members, Friends and Staff Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very good afternoon to all.

Today, as I demit office, and bid adieu to all my colleagues at the bar and the bench, first and foremost, I would like to say that, to this place and to the kindness of everyone, I owe absolutely everything. I have always believed in ways of Almighty, for if not for that, I could never have imagined to be blessed with such a great opportunity to serve this institution.

I stand here today, with my heart full of gratitude, trying to comprehend how this 38 year long journey, which began as a lawyer in the year 1982, has finally come to an end. It is taxing to express the experiences of this journey in a few words, but still, I will make an effort to share moments which shaped me into the person that I am, today.

I was born to Sh. P.C. Dhingra & Ms. Swarna Lata Dhingra, who hail from present day Pakistan. My father had joined the Lahore High Court before partition of the country and then moved to the East Punjab High Court at Shimla. Thereafter, he moved to the Punjab High Court at Chandigarh when it was established in the year 1955. Finally, upon the establishment of the High Court of Delhi pursuant to the enactment of Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, he came to Delhi in January 1967 and served as Secretary to the three Chief Justices of this Court namely Justice I. D. Dua, Justice H. R. Khanna and Justice Hardayal Hardy.

Since my mother was the Principal of Central Government Crafts Institute for Women, Sector- 11, Chandigarh, I along with my brother stayed back for completing studies. During my childhood days, I developed a close association with my maternal uncle, who was an advocate at the Punjab & Haryana High Court. I always noticed him working constantly and engrossed with books which intrigued me to get into depth of the subject. I started spending time in his office and gradually developed interest. At the same time, my father used to share his courtroom experiences and narrate instances. The experiences shared by him were nothing less than fairytales for me, which played a major role in my decision to consider pursuing Law.

This is how I came to join the Campus Law Centre, Faculty of Law, University of Delhi in the year 1978. On the completion of my law school, I enrolled as an Advocate and joined the Chamber of Late Justice O.N. Vohra, who specialised in Criminal and Land Acquisition matters. He had also served as an Additional Sessions Judge as well as an Additional Judge of this High Court and his valuable guidance helped me in preparing for the Delhi Judicial Services Examination. I also happened to assist Justice Anil Dev Singh in few civil matters who was also practising during those days.

With the grace of the Almighty, I joined the Delhi Judicial Services in the year 1985. On completing probation, I was given the additional charge of Secretary, Legal Aid & Advise Committee at Tis Hazari Courts. I was blessed with chance to do legal aid work along with my posting as a Metropolitan Magistrate. Thereafter, I went on deputation as the Competent Authority, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Although I was required to discharge judicial functions as Competent Authority, Mr. Manjit Singh, then Commissioner, MCD gave me additional charge of Joint Director, Mobilisation Community Development. This was an opportunity to visit the slums in Delhi and get first-hand experience of the practical difficulties faced by the people living in the slums. This assignment inspired me to write a book titled as “*An Exhaustive Guide to the Slum Area (Improvement & Clearance) Act, 1956*”.

On my return from deputation, I was posted as Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) for three years at Patiala House Courts and then as the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Delhi (CMM). In those days, the ACMM was conferred with the exclusive jurisdiction under the Customs Act, 1962, Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1973 and Official Secrets Act, 1923. Delhi, having only one ACMM and CMM, the heavy workload was natural and the courtrooms were always filled with advocates. Legal stalwarts

such as Sh. P.N. Lekhi, Sh. K.K. Luthra, and Sh. D.C. Mathur used to regularly appear in bail matters and make complex arguments. I soon realised that it was almost next to impossible to win an argument against them. Therefore, in order to save time, I learnt to quietly make notes while they addressed arguments and finally dismiss the bail application. I cannot but forget to name Sh. Satish Aggarwal, advocate, who appeared on behalf of custom authorities and opposed the said bail applications with equal force.

I was also entrusted by the High Court of Delhi with the mammoth task of bifurcation of Delhi District Courts into Five zones. The work of all Metropolitan Magistrates of Delhi was to be rationalized to secure equal distribution of criminal cases in the capital and supervise functioning of 110 MMs in Delhi including Special Municipal Magistrates dealing with Traffic Challans and cases of Municipal Corporation Act. During this tenure for the first time special courts in Jail were organized for under-trials involved in petty cases.

In the year 2004, I was selected as Secretary for the Press Council of India. I had hardly worked for about 4½ months when Hon'ble Justice B.A. Khan, then Executive Chairman of Delhi Legal Services Authority decided to appoint me as Member Secretary, Delhi Legal Services Authority.

I joined the Delhi Legal Service Authority in December, 2004 where I worked for about little less than 5 years. I am extremely grateful to Hon'ble Justice B.A. Khan for providing me this opportunity to personally experience the problems faced by the poor and the general public at large being deprived of basic right of access to justice. Seeing the gravity of the hardships faced by the poor, we at Delhi Legal Service Authority launched the Mobile Legal Services, set up 24 Hours Permanent Legal Services Clinic, started summer and winter internship programs for students pursuing law and opened the Legal Aid Centre at the Tihar Jail for the first time. All this was possible under the guidance and endless support of the two Executive Chairman of DLSA, Hon'ble Justice Vijender Jain and Hon'ble Justice T.S. Thakur, and their art to administer.

After having short stint as District Judge, South- East, Saket, I was appointed as the Registrar General of this High Court in 2013 for which I am thankful to Hon'ble Justice D. Murugesan and all the other Judges who gave me an opportunity to head the administration of this Court.

Shortly after I took over, I faced challenge of enhancement of the pecuniary jurisdiction of this Hon'ble Court to deal and entertain the original side matters. This issue led to massive strikes in the High Court. The then executive committee of Delhi High Court Bar

Association including Mr. A.S. Chandhiok, President, Mr. J.P. Sengh, Vice President and Mr. Mohit Mathur, Secretary rendered great assistance in order to successfully implement the notification for enhancement of pecuniary jurisdiction.

During my tenure as the Registrar General, I had the privilege of working under Hon'ble Justice N.V. Ramana, now Judge, Supreme Court of India, the then Acting Chief Justice Justice B.D. Ahmed, and then Chief Justice Hon'ble Justice G. Rohini.

On being elevated as Judge of this Court in the year 2014, I had the privilege of being guided and showered by the wisdom of my brother and sister Judges of this Court whom I would like to thank:

Hon'ble Justice Gita Mittal, my first bench partner who is an affectionate and thoughtful person. Coincidentally, we have also shared the same bench at the Campus Law Centre where both of us were pursuing law;

Hon'ble Justice G.S. Sistani (Retd.) a person who sparks brilliance & from whom, I learnt many lessons of administration and judicial work and remained on the Division Bench for the longest period with him;

The then Hon'ble Chief Justice G.Rohini (Retd.) under whom I worked as Registrar General and also shared the bench. I

shall always remain indebted to her for her affection showered on me;

Hon'ble Justice Hima Kohli, whom I know not only as a judge but my association with her goes way back to our lawyer days;

Hon'ble Justice Siddharth Mridul, who has always been extremely encouraging and accommodating with his brotherly presence;

Hon'ble Justice Manmohan, who is knowledgeable, prompt and a compassionate person and has always been very appreciative of my work;

Hon'ble Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw, who has always motivated me with his unflinching dedication towards his work and guided me with his precious acumen;

Hon'ble Chief Justice D. N. Patel, to whom I'm grateful for giving me an opportunity to head the Delhi State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission.

I cannot but forget to thank my vacation bench partner **Hon'ble Justice C. Hari Shankar** with whom I have unforgettable experience of working till midnight during summer vacations in 2018.

I would also like to thank all my brother and sister judges for making my tenure memorable and worthwhile. I will be carrying fond memories shared with each one of you.

I must also thank each member of the bar without whose assistance, it would have been difficult to discharge and perform my duties as a Judge.

It would not have been possible to reach so far without the relentless support of my family members.

I'm grateful to my late mother for all the sacrifices she made for me and the values and virtues inculcated by her; To my father who even today at this age is the first person from whom I can solicit the best advice & who is my torchbearer; To my brother Sh. Sandeep Dhingra who made huge amount of sacrifices for my sake;

To my late husband Sh. Ravi Sehgal who had always been a pillar of strength and support to me and had always contributed to my achievements; To my children Keshav and Kamakshi Sehgal who are a constant source of inspiration to me. I have never seen a sigh of dismay on their faces due to my absence, be it at home, or their school or college or any social function but always a glimmer of pride in their eyes.

I must also thank my entire court staff who have put in great effort and have stood by me in thick and thin. Their unconditional

dedication has enabled me to discharge the duties bestowed upon me. My secretary, Kamlesh Sharma, who joined me when I was elevated, is now part of the family. I would like to thank my former Court Master Sunita Gosain, Assistant Court Master, Nijesh Kumar and Judicial Assistant, Amit Singh Rawat, who have been with me since my appointment as the Registrar General of this Court.

I am also thankful to Girish Rawat, Personal Assistant and Upender Yadav, Court Attendant, who have been attached with me since my district court days and also to Baswanand Rawat, who has been with me for the last 20 years. I am also thankful to my present Court Master Pradeep Kumar, Senior Personal Assistant, Shalini, Personal Assistant and Court Attendants, Naveen, Hema Bisht, Cook Pradeep Kumar, Abhishek Sharma and Bhupender Gaur.

I would also like to thank my chauffeur, Billu who served me for many years and unfortunately, passed away in March this year, I also thank my present chauffeur, Radheyshyam for services extended by him.

I am thankful to my present Law Researchers, Dhruv Arora, Kashish Bajaj, Shivkrit Rai and former namely Anas Ali, Aman Bakhshi, Kamakshi Verma, Priyanka Solanki, Rishika Saraff, Manas Syal for their continued assistance and determination towards the expeditious disposal of work assigned.

Even though I am confining myself to the aforesaid names, nevertheless, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to each and every officer and member of the High Court staff, at each level, for their continuous support during my tenure as the Registrar General and also after my elevation.

I hope during this indelible journey, I have not hurt anyone, and if I have, the same would have been purely unintentional.

Thank you all, I pray that may all of your lives shine bright with ever glowing happiness, and shimmer with countless blessings of Almighty. I also hope that we overcome these difficult times of covid and resume normal life at the earliest. Till then, be safe, healthy and take care.

Jai Hind!