

**Speech of Hon'ble the Chief Justice in Full Court Reference held on March 09th, 2026, on the sad demise of Hon'ble Mr. Justice V.K. Jhanji, Former Acting Chief Justice of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh**

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1. Mrs. Neeti Jhanji, wife of Justice Vijay Jhanji
2. Vineet Jhanji, Amit Jhanji, proud sons of Justice Jhanji,
3. My esteemed Sister and Brother Judges;
4. Former Chief Justices, Justice Pramod Kohli, Justice Tashi Rabstan,
5. Former Judges, Justice Sunil Hali, Justice Bansi Lal Bhat, Justice J R Kotwal
6. Former Chief Justices and Judges of this Court joining us live from Jammu, Srinagar, Delhi, Himachal and Chandigarh,
7. President, High Court Bar Association, Jammu Mr. Nirmal Kotwal;
8. Sr. Additional Advocate General, Monika Kohli;
9. Senior Advocates;
10. Learned Members of the Bar both at Jammu and those who are joining us online from Srinagar and Ladakh;
11. Judicial Officers;
12. Ladies and Gentlemen.

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Justice Jhanji, former Acting Chief Justice of this Court, passed away on 23rd February 2026. His departure marks the end of a distinguished judicial journey defined by intellect and an unwavering commitment to the cause of justice. He belonged to a generation of lawyers and judges who regarded the law not merely as a profession, but as a solemn calling.

He received his school education at Anglo Sanskrit School, Daryaganj, Delhi. And pursued higher education at the prestigious Hindu College. Following that he enrolled at the Campus Law Centre, University of Delhi and later entered the legal profession in 1971. He set up his practice at the Punjab and Haryana High Court. And in a relatively short span of time, he distinguished himself as a lawyer of remarkable ability.

In 1991, he was elevated as a Judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court along with a distinguished group of jurists. Justice Jhanji was widely regarded as one of the sharpest judicial minds. And expected clarity, precision, and preparedness from the counsel appearing before him. In his court, arguments had to be direct and well-considered; anything less would not suffice.

At the same time, he was a fearless and extremely industrious judge who was ever willing to engage. The complexity of a case, the weight of the brief, the battery of lawyers appearing, or the time required to resolve the issue never deterred him — qualities that determine the character and commitment of a judge and reveal his true worth.

In December 2001, Justice Jhanji was transferred to this Court and during his tenure, he served with distinction and also held the office of Acting Chief Justice on two occasions.

Among his many judicial contributions, one decision stands out for its enduring significance — the Full Bench judgment in *State of Jammu & Kashmir v. Dr. Susheela Sawhney*. Justice Jhanji authored the majority opinion of the Court. And the Bench addressed a long-standing issue affecting women in the State: *whether a woman who married outside the State would lose her*

*permanent resident status and the rights flowing from it.* Recognizing and affirming the rights of women, the judgment held that such rights could not be extinguished merely by marriage outside the State. In doing so, the Court reaffirmed the fundamental principles of equality and dignity. The said decision remains a significant milestone in the constitutional jurisprudence of this region.

Many of my colleagues and senior members of the Bar often recall their experiences of appearing before him. My brother Judge Sanjeev Kumar recalls his willingness to explore even the most difficult questions of law with intellectual curiosity. My sister Judge Sindhu Sharma, who has joined us online from Srinagar, remembers the remarkable speed and clarity with which he would decide matters, while ensuring that both senior and junior members of the Bar — including young and women lawyers — were given a fair and patient hearing. Similarly, Mr. Zaffer Shah, a distinguished lawyer, also recalls his firmness, observing that the weight, standing or fame of an advocate never influenced his approach. Senior Advocate R.K. Gupta speaks of Justice Jhanji's sharp court craft and his deep engagement with the arguments advanced before him.

Like many of my colleagues here, from the time of Justice Jhanji's elevation until his transfer to this Court in 2001, I also had the privilege of appearing before him in numerous matters as a young counsel. And I still vividly remember rising in Court 5 to say, "Milord, the matter in issue is...". Justice Jhanji left lasting impressions on those who practised before him.

Even after retirement, he continued to command deep respect within the legal fraternity and remained one of the most sought-after names in arbitration.

Life sometimes unfolds in ways that remind us of the quiet continuity of the legal profession. I began my journey at the Bar when Justice Jhanji was already an established lawyer and later a Judge. Years later, when I was elevated as the Chief Justice of this Court — the very Court in which he had served — he graciously called to congratulate me. It reminds me that in this profession, journeys often intersect across generations, and what may appear improbable at one moment may later seem almost destined.

With his passing, his judgments will remain part of the legal record, but the values he embodied — discipline, intellectual honesty, and courage in decision-making — will remain an enduring part of the institutional memory of the courts he served.

To his beloved wife, we offer our deepest respect. Ma'am, your strength, companionship and support formed an essential part of his journey, and for that this institution will always remain grateful.

And to his sons, who have chosen to walk the noble path of law, your father's legacy lives on through you.

On behalf of my brother and sister Judges and all those who had the privilege of working with him, I place on record our collective respect and gratitude for the life and service of Justice Jhanji.

May the Divine grant eternal peace to the departed soul.

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