

FULL COURT REFERENCE HELD IN THE HIGH COURT OF KERALA ON 23rd JANUARY 2026, ON THE OCCASION OF THE RETIREMENT OF HONOURABLE MR. JUSTICE V. G. ARUN.

Speech by Sri. K. Gopalakrishna Kurup, Advocate General

Hon'ble the Chief Justice of the High Court of Kerala, Mr. Justice Soumen Sen; The Hon'ble Justice V.G. Arun; The Hon'ble Judges of the High Court of Kerala; The Hon'ble Former Judges of the High Court of Kerala; The President of the Kerala High Court Advocates Association; The Chairman of the Bar Council of Kerala; The President, Kerala High Court Senior Advocates Association; The President, Federation of Women Lawyers, Kerala High Court Unit; Law Officers of the State; Deputy Solicitor General, Senior Central Standing Counsel (Taxes) and other Law Officers of the Central Government; Law Officers of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep; Senior Advocates; Esteemed Fellow Members of the Bar; Registrar General, Registrars and Staff of the High Court of Kerala; Family members of Justice V.G. Arun; Staff of the Advocate General's Office; Advocate Clerks; Ladies and Gentlemen; And all other dignitaries joining online.

According to Socrates, the four qualities of a fine judge are to hear courteously, to answer wisely, to consider soberly, and to decide impartially. In practice, there is no fixed formula by which these virtues may be attained. Yet, over the course of a judicial life, these ideals reveal themselves through

temperament, restraint, and an unwavering commitment to fairness. Today, with a solemn sense of poignancy, we have assembled here to bid farewell to Justice V. G. Arun, demitting office on attaining the age of superannuation, after a distinguished and remarkable career, eminently exemplifying the Socratic concept of judgeship. You listened with patience, you drew the Bar into the process of reasoned adjudication, and you never curtailed an argument. For the Bar, appearing before My Lord was an experience in judicial courteousness.

My Lord was born on the 25th of January, 1964, at Thrissur, as the son of Shri T. K. G. Nair, a renowned writer and journalist, and Smt. Sulochana V. Nair. Your father, Shri T. K. G. Nair, was also a profound public speaker, and I had the good fortune, during my days as a young activist, not only to listen to his scholarly discourse but also to share the dais with him at public meetings held at Kottayam. Your mother, Smt. Sulochana V. Nair, was the sister of Justice V. Sivaraman Nair, who was a distinguished Judge of this Honourable Court. Justice Anu Sivaraman, former Judge of this Honourable Court and presently a Judge of the Karnataka High Court, Senior Advocate V. Rajendran, former Judicial Member of the Kerala Administrative Tribunal, and (late) Advocate Anil Sivaraman are your cousins. Indeed, several men and women from your family have chosen to don the black robes and have successfully charted their professional journeys in courtrooms. I may quote your own words, reflective upon this rich familial legacy: *“My family can boast of having the maximum number of lawyers, mostly inspired by my uncle Justice V. Sivaraman Nair.”*

My Lord had your schooling at St. Joseph’s Convent and M. T. Seminary High School, Kottayam. After completing

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graduation in Economics from Basелиos College, Kottayam, you pursued law at the Kerala Law Academy Law College, Thiruvananthapuram. To quote your own words: “*I joined law not by design, but as decided by destiny.*” At the time when college admissions were underway in Kerala, you were with your uncle and aunt in Delhi. By the time you returned, admissions had closed in all other institutions, save for a few seats at the Kerala Law Academy, where you secured admission. In hindsight, it is evident that destiny had indeed reserved those seats for a future erudite lawyer and a most revered Judge of this Honourable Court. Even as a student, your leadership qualities and public spirit were manifest when you served as the Chairman of the College Union of the Kerala Law Academy Law College. You also represented the Kerala Law Academy Law College at the International Jessup Moot Court Competition held at Pondicherry.

My Lord was enrolled as an Advocate on the 8th of January, 1989. You commenced practice at Kozhikode as a junior colleague of Advocate B. Sreekumara Menon, a doyen of the civil Bar in that region. In December, 1990, you shifted practice to this Honourable Court. You had the privilege of beginning your professional career at this Court under the guidance of the legendary Senior Advocate Shri T. R. Raman Pillai, a doyen of the Kerala Bar—an association that profoundly shaped your legal outlook, professional discipline, and ethical foundations. Recalling that formative phase, you had observed thus: “*Within no time, I was taken into the T.R. fold and made a member of that family. Everything I have achieved in this profession is attributable to the guidance and help rendered by my late Senior and his son, Justice T. R. Ramachandran Nair.*”

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Subsequent to the elevation of Justice T. R. Ramachandran Nair as a Judge of this Honourable Court, you continued to carry forward the legacy of the T.R. fold, along with your close friend, Advocate T. R. Hari Kumar, and other colleagues. I had witnessed you as a lawyer measured in submissions, unfailingly courteous to the Court, marked by a calm and composed demeanour; yet persuasive, and thoroughly effective. Even when faced with interruptions at the behest of the opposite side or with queries from the Court, you never permitted yourself to be perturbed, responding instead with poise, precision, and quiet confidence. As a lawyer, you, with exemplary efficiency and diligence, conducted matters across the entire spectrum, including writ, criminal, and civil cases, and was particularly renowned for unmatched expertise in co-operative society laws.

My Lord also contributed significantly to legal literature. In 2005, you were selected by this Hon'ble Court as the Editor of the Kerala Series of Indian Law Reports and continued as such till your elevation. You were also closely associated with the Kerala Law Journal, reflecting your deep commitment to legal scholarship.

My Lord was born in Thrissur, brought up in Kottayam, educated in Thiruvananthapuram, commenced legal practice in Kozhikode, and ultimately settled in Ernakulam. Your matrilineal roots trace back to North Malabar. This unique life journey has afforded you first-hand exposure to the diverse cultural traditions of different regions of the State, which has undoubtedly shaped the cosmopolitan and inclusive outlook that you have consistently upheld.

My Lord was elevated as an Additional Judge of this Honourable Court on 5th November 2018 and was appointed

as a Permanent Judge with effect from 14th September 2020. Having regard to your resourcefulness in the legal profession and profound legal scholarship, I am of the considered view that the elevation came somewhat late. I am confident that the Bar will also share this view and hold that you could have had the benefit of a longer tenure on the Bench, to the immense advantage of this Court and the justice delivery system.

As a Judge, My Lord has been a resolute adherent to the principle of judicial independence, has ensured that both your decisions and the decision-making process were marked by absolute impartiality, has treated all who appeared before the Court in pursuit of justice with complete equality, and has consistently ensured that judicial duties took precedence over all other activities—thereby scrupulously adhering to the standards of judicial conduct expected of a Judge of a constitutional court.

My Lord's judgments reflect a steadfast commitment to constitutional values, human dignity, individual liberty and right to free speech. You upheld the right of citizens to be recognised as "non-religious" in official records, affirming that no individual can be bound by imposed identities. You further held that individuals are entitled to change the religious affiliation recorded in school documents, observing that no one can be tied down to a religion against one's will. You held that conviction does not deprive a person of dignity or intellectual freedom, observing that freedom of thought is an extension of human dignity itself, and thereby permitted a convict to publish a book authored in prison. You reinforced the sanctity of the home by restraining late-night police surveillance visits to alleged history-sheeters, grounding reasoning in the constitutional guarantees of dignity and personal liberty under

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Articles 19 and 21. You issued guidelines to ensure fairness to accused persons in medical negligence cases. You affirmed that a woman's right to reproductive choice is an inseparable component of her personal liberty under Article 21, and while examining challenges to age limits under the Assisted Reproductive Technology Act, you sensitively addressed restrictions affecting older couples seeking parenthood. You highlighted the prohibitive cost of life-saving breast cancer medicines, emphasising the emergent need for compulsory licensing in the interest of the right to life. and also directed the formulation of proper guidelines for compensating families of those who suffered vaccine-related fatalities - decisions that reflect judicial empathy blended with constitutional responsibility.

Beyond the courtroom, My Lord's public reflections revealed a progressive and deeply constitutional conscience. Speaking at a public event, you observed that children raised without the burden of religion or caste are "the hope for a good future", as they remain unbound by inherited social divisions and are better equipped to challenge outdated societal norms. You warmly commended parents who choose to educate and nurture their children without attaching caste or religious labels to their names, noting that such an upbringing fosters critical thinking, moral courage, and fearless engagement with social realities, even in the face of resistance.

My Lord is married to Smt. Darshana Arun and have been blessed with two daughters Janaki Arun and Malavika Arun. Your daughter Smt. Janaki Arun and son in law Sri. Aayush Sood, lawyers at Delhi, are carrying forward the family's legal legacy. Your younger daughter Miss Malavika Arun is a business analyst with Citi Group at Bengaluru.

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The retirement of My Lord signifies the conclusion of a judicial career marked by learning, composure, and deep human sensitivity. On behalf of the legal fraternity of the State of Kerala, I extend to My Lord and Your Lordship's family my earnest wishes for good health, happiness, and continued intellectual fulfilment in the years to come. May the next phase of Your Lordship's journey prove to be as distinguished and fulfilling as the one that draws to a close today.

Thank you

Jai Hind.

Speech by Sri. Peeyus A. Kottam, President, Kerala High Court Advocates' Association.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice A.K. Jayashankaran Nambiar; Mr. Justice V.G. Arun, and other companion judges of this Honourable Court, Learned Advocate General, Sri. Gopalakrishna Kurup; Learned Deputy Solicitor General of India, Smt. O.M. Shalina; Director General of Prosecution, Sri. T.A. Shaji; Additional Director General of Prosecution, Sri. Gracious Kuriakose; State Attorney, Sri. N. Manoj Kumar; Vice President, Senior Advocates' Association, Sr. Adv. Dr. K PSathisan, Chairman, Bar Council of Kerala, Sri. Ajith T.S.; Secretary, Kerala High Court Advocates' Association, Smt. Nima Jacob; Members of the Executive Committee of the Kerala High Court Advocates' Association; President, Kerala Federation of Women Lawyers (Kerala Unit); Legal Retainer and Senior Central Government Counsel for Lakshadweep Administration, Sri. R.V. Sreejith; Respected Senior Members of the Bar; Registrar General and Registrars

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of this Hon'ble Court; Court Officers, Advocate Co-ordinator, High Court Mediation Centre; Court Officers and Advocate Clerks; Family members of Justice V.G. Arun My esteemed colleagues at the Bar; Ladies and gentlemen ;

Today, we assemble with profound gratitude and a deep sense of emotion, for our institution bids farewell to one of the most fragrant roses from our garden of justice, and to one of the most radiant smiles ever to grace the Bench, as Justice V. G. Arun retires on attaining the age of superannuation. His Lordship's presence in this Court was marked not merely by the authority of office, but by grace in conduct, warmth in approach, and an abiding humanity that endeared him to the Bar and to society at large.

Before adorning the Bench, Your Lordship was a distinguished member of the Bar since 08.01.1989—respected for clarity of thought, intellectual depth, and unwavering fairness in advocacy. Even after elevation, that intimate understanding of the Bar never left him. He remained a truly Bar-friendly judge, approachable in demeanour, courteous in conduct, and a gentleman in the noblest sense of the word. His court was a forum where discipline prevailed without severity, and authority was exercised without intimidation.

It is often said that the ideal judge is one who wears authority with humility and exercises power with restraint. Independence of mind and impartiality in approach ensure that justice is not only done, but is manifestly seen to be done—echoing the timeless words of Lord Hewart, I quote "***justice must satisfy the appearance of justice***" unquote. Fearless in conscience and firm in conviction, Justice V.G. Arun

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rendered bold and principled judgments, uninfluenced by public opinion or passing pressures, thereby exemplifying true judicial courage rooted in fidelity to the Constitution.

A person of unwavering integrity and profound legal learning, Your Lordship made significant intellectual contributions to the law. Many of the judgments authored by him are not only legally sound but deeply inspiring—decisions of far-reaching consequence that will continue to guide courts, counsel, and litigants alike. As Aristotle observed, I quote “*a judge must be a living embodiment of justice*” unquote, Your Lordship’s court, the law was always illumined by wisdom, balance, and fairness.

Beyond learning and courage, what endeared Justice V. G. Arun most to the Bar was his gentle and ever-present smile. His Lordship presided over the court with calm composure; never did anger, tension, or impatience cloud his countenance. That reassuring smile transformed the courtroom into a space of confidence and comfort, reminding us that justice can be firm without being harsh, and authoritative without being austere.

Young members of the Bar, in particular, found in Your Lordship a source of encouragement and confidence. Junior advocates were given the freedom to participate fearlessly, to speak without hesitation, and to grow without anxiety. Seniors and juniors were treated with equal respect, and encouragement flowed generously towards the young—often with patience, kindness, and quiet guidance. Many lawyers will carry forward in their professional lives not merely memories of appearing before Justice V. G. Arun, but the confidence and self-belief nurtured in his courtroom.

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As Justice William O. Douglas so wisely reminded us, I quote "*The true function of a judge is not merely to punish, but to do justice*" unquote. In every sense, these defining ideals found quiet and consistent expression in the judicial life of Hon'ble Mr. Justice V. G. Arun. As Your Lordship demits office today, you leave behind not an empty chair, but a luminous legacy—of integrity without compromise, firmness without fear, dignity without distance, and justice tempered with grace.

Wherever Your Lordship may be, you will remain forever etched in our hearts and in the collective memory of this institution.

On behalf of each and every member of the Kerala High Court Advocates Association, and all those gathered here in this august assembly, I respectfully bid farewell to Hon'ble Mr. Justice V. G. Arun and his family. With profound gratitude for Your Lordship's distinguished service, and with warm and heartfelt wishes for the years ahead, I say farewell, My Lord.

Thank you.

*Speech by the Honourable Dr. Justice A.K.
Jayasankaran Nambiar*

The Hon'ble Mr. Justice V.G. Arun, Brother and Sister Judges of this Court, the learned Advocate General Sri.Gopalakrishna Kurup K., Sri. Peeyus A Kottam, President of the Kerala High Court Advocates' Association, Former Judges of this Court present here, Mrs. Darshana Arun and family members of Justice V.G. Arun, Registrars and staff of this Court, the Law Officers of the Union and State

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Government, Advocate Clerks, esteemed members of the bar, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Strange indeed are the ways of providence. Never had I imagined that the unexpected absence of the Chief Justice today would present me with this rare honour and proud privilege of presiding over a Full Court reference being held to honour and bid farewell to Justice V.G. Arun, a very dear friend and brother judge, who demits his judicial office tomorrow. Justice V.G. Arun's association with this institution has spanned three decades and more, and during that period we have seen him transition quite effortlessly from an erudite, eloquent and effective lawyer to an equally, if not more, erudite, eloquent and effective judge of this Court. His intellectual mastery, discipline and grace have so guided him in the discharge of his judicial functions that even a casual reading of his judgments would remind us of that memorable couplet from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* that posits that:

**“True ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance
As those move easiest, who have learned to dance.”**

Justice V.G. Arun's retirement from the High Court of Kerala marks the conclusion of a distinguished career defined by clarity of thought, intellectual rigour and an unwavering commitment to justice. Known for his incisive reasoning and elegant articulation of legal principles, Justice Arun consistently enriched the jurisprudence of this Court while remaining deeply sensitive to the human dimensions of the law. His judgments reflected a rare balance between doctrinal precision and practical wisdom, inspiring confidence in the rule of law among the Bar and the public alike. On the administrative side his contributions to the

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Kerala Judicial Academy and the Indian Law Reports were immeasurable. The young judicial officers of this State were indeed lucky to have been able to interact with Justice Arun at close quarters and observe what ideal judicial conduct and etiquette ought to be. As he demits office, the High Court bids farewell to a jurist whose integrity, independence and dedication have left an enduring imprint on the institution and whose legacy will continue to guide future generations of lawyers and judges.

Retirement, it is said, is not an end but a transition to new horizons. Those who know Justice V.G. Arun beyond the Bench are well aware that beneath the composure demanded by judicial office lies a warmly humorous and fun-loving spirit, long held in respectful check by the discipline of the robe. I cannot help but recall the many instances when during committee meetings held to discuss alleged acts of misconduct of either staff members or judicial officers, Justice Arun and I would hide our smiles and exchange furtive glances from across the room as though to ask “since when did that become a misconduct?” The years on the Bench required restraint where wit came naturally, and silence where laughter might otherwise have found voice. With retirement, that gentle self-imposed shackle is finally lifted, allowing the lighter side of his personality - his easy humour, affable warmth, quiet mischief, and joyful companionship - to re-emerge in full measure. One suspects that, while the court may miss his gravity, friends and family are about to rediscover his laughter and inherent mischief.

Justice Arun’s family is here with us this afternoon. To his charming wife Darshana, his loving daughters Janaki

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and Malavika and his son-in-law Ayush, I say thank you for the love and support you provided to our dear brother throughout his judicial tenure. You have every reason to be proud of him for he will always be remembered as the gentleman judge that served this great institution with distinction. On behalf of all assembled here, I wish you my dear brother and your family the very best in the years to come.

Thank you, Jai Hind.

Reply speech by the Honourable Mr. Justice V.G., Arun.

Dr. Justice AK Jayasankaran Nambiar, my Esteemed brother and sister Judges, Distinguished former Judges of this Court, Senior Advocate K. Gopalakrishna Kurup, the Advocate General, Adv. O.M. Shalina, Deputy Solicitor General of India, Adv. Peeyus A. Kottam, President of the Kerala High Court Advocates Association, Senior Advocate T.A. Shaji, the Director General of Prosecution, Adv. N. Manoj Kumar, the State Attorney, members of the Registry, Senior Advocate N. Nandakumara Menon, the President of the Senior Advocates Association, Adv. Karthika S., the President of the Kerala Federation of Women Lawyers, respected Senior Advocates, the Law Officers of the State and the Union of India, Mr. Prathapan, the President of the Kerala High Court Advocates' Clerks Association, my dear members of the Bar, the staff of this Court, the media, friends and family, ladies and gentlemen, a very good afternoon to all.

At the outset, I wish to place on record my profound gratitude for the kind words of appreciation spoken by my

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dear friend and brother, Dr. Justice A.K. Jayasankaran Nambiar, as also the learned Advocate General and the President of the Advocates' Association. Their words are all the more special because we have walked the corridors of this great institution together for more than 30 years. Even though they went a little overboard out of affection for me, I am happy that my family witnessed this, as I can pull along on its steam for a few months.

Whatever was spoken and whatever little I could achieve is in no way a singular feat, but the result of a collective effort of many, starting from my late parents who are my role models in life, my wife, daughters, and son-in-law, who are my pillars of support and have been with me through thick and thin. I have also received support in abundant measure from my sisters, brothers-in-law, my mother-in-law, aunts, uncles, cousins all of whom I hold close to my heart. I would be remiss if I do not take a moment to especially thank my brother, friend and close confidante, Adv. Anil Sivaraman, whom we lost a few days back. A special mention to my friends who have been by my side through my life journey, reminding me that some relationships are not merely measured in years.

My foray into the legal profession started at the Office of Adv.V. Sreekumara Menon, a venerable senior at the Calicut Bar. My progress in the profession happened after I shifted my practice to this Court and joined the office of Sr.Adv.T.R. Raman Pillai. It is through the affectionate and firm guidance of Sir and his son, Justice T.R. Ramachandran Nair, that I learned the nuances of the law and the art of advocacy. I cannot for a moment forget the support offered by my partner T.R. Hari Kumar and

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the wonderful team at T.R. Raman Pillai Associates. Another turning point in my career happened when I was selected as the Editor of the ILR (Kerala Series). Being the editor of ILR for almost 13 years, I had the opportunity to read and understand the art of judgment writing. After my elevation, I learned the art of balanced judging sitting with Justice C.T. Ravi Kumar and Justice Vinod Chandran, former and sitting Judges of the Supreme Court of India. I also learned a lot from my brother and sister Judges and was also fortunate to share the Bench with the then Chief Justice, A.J. Desai.

Today is the day when the Bar decides on the performance of the Judge. If the judgment is positive, then the credit goes to my wonderful team of personal staff. To my Private Secretary, Sijitha Sivadas, who anticipated needs before I voiced them and turned chaos into order, to V.G. Sarasan, my former Private Secretary who was equally efficient. To my court officers, Manu P.V and Ashwathi Radhakrishnan, who handled the pressure in court with equanimity, and to Sumaya K.A., Neethu B., Sugandhi P.V, Aparna and Simi C.L, my personal assistants, as also Surya Anil, my computer assistant, listing officer, Devi Priya and Research Assistants Keerthi, Ashik, Navya and Asha. A special mention to my Escort, Suresh Kumar A.N and Office Attendant, Nimmi Elizabeth for their exemplary service. Gratitude is also due to my chauffeur, Bijumon K.K. who was my safe passage on long journeys and unpredictable hours. I will be doing a disservice if I do not mention my personal security officers, Jayesh P.S. and Kalesh K.K. Their vigilance, courage and discipline allowed me to do my work without fear. The

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young guards at my residence, Vishnu, Najil, Akhil and Nikhil, also rendered yeoman service. I also wish to thank Geetha, Sindhu and Mini, the staff at my residence, for their warm presence, and the delicacies that they served with love. Last but not the least, I wish to thank my friends at the Bar, many of whom I have known for decades.

The Kerala High Court can boast of an erudite and scholarly bar, at par or even above the other High Courts. I take pride in the fact that I could nurture a few among the young lawyers, whom I am certain have a bright future in this noble profession. I should say that I am a bit perturbed by the fact that, even though we have excellent lady lawyers, their representation on the Bench is minuscule, and hope this will change in the near future. My interaction with young judicial officers as the portfolio judge of Wayanad, Thalassery and Alleppey judicial districts gives me immense hope for the future of the Kerala judiciary, which has always been a cut above the rest of the country. The Registry of the High Court, led by Registrar General, G. Gopakumar, is the backbone of this hallowed institution. The protocol team captained by Ashok R. and the Public Relations Cell headed by Kausalya Ramachandran also deserve special mention for their tireless service.

As a Judge, my guiding light has always been the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the core of our great democracy. As Dr. Ambedkar often stressed, these three principles form the union of trinity; divorcing one will defeat the purpose of democracy. I step down from this venerable institution confident that my brothers and sisters

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on the Bench and my friends at the Bar will continue their unstinting efforts to uphold these principles and render justice equitably.

Retirement, I am told, is not an end but a punctuation mark; perhaps a semicolon rather than a full stop. I look forward to reading judgments without having to write them, to revisiting books long neglected, and to discovering whether life beyond courtrooms is as orderly as the cause list never was.

On that note, I take leave of this Court, grateful once again to my colleagues on the Bench, the members of the Bar, and with enduring respect for the institution I was privileged to serve.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.
