

Speech delivered by Dr. Rami Ranger on 14th November 2011 at the British Sikh Association Annual Dinner.

Distinguished guests, ladies & gentlemen,

Welcome to the British Sikh Association's annual dinner which is held to celebrate the vision of the Sikh Gurus for the greater good of mankind.

After 9/11 it has become even more important to host these high profile events to enlighten the public about the Sikh faith as many still think Sikhs are relics of the past.

Regrettably, Sikhs are facing inconvenience at many airports due to their Turbans.

As a result, we need to educate people as to why Sikhs wore Turbans in the first place.

They wore Turban not to oppress anyone or to commit terrorist acts against anyone.

Instead , it was worn to liberate those who were being oppressed and terrorised in the name of their religion.

In two great wars 84,000 turbaned Sikhs sacrificed their lives and many more were injured fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Brits more than any community in comparison to their numbers and help changed the course of history.

If the Sikh Turban was good enough then, it must be good enough now, unless of course, we are ungrateful.

The world owes Sikhs a debt of gratitude and, therefore, the Sikh Turban should be recorded in the United Nations as a symbol of human freedom and accorded full dignity and respect throughout the world.

People need to be educated that Sikhs are modern, progressive and a peace loving community who punch above their weight to benefit society.

According to the Office of National Statistics, 82% of Sikhs in Britain own their own homes, more than any other community.

Those who own their own homes pay higher taxes and claim less from society.

Above all, Sikhs believe in the universal brotherhood of mankind.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder, was puzzled to see disparity in society.

He could not understand the difference in the status of people based on religion, caste or gender.

He found it hard to believe that to find God people had to divorce themselves from their normal family life and endure extreme hardships for long periods of time in jungles and mountains.

In any case, if God was the creator of us all, then surely he must reside within us and surely all his children must all be equal.

Guru Nanak travelled the length and breadth of India and beyond, in search of truth and to discover the true meaning of life.

He even travelled to Mecca the holy place for Muslims in his quest to find answers.

During his travels, he met many holy and wise men which led him to the conclusion that no one religion could have a monopoly on truth.

He said whatever was fundamental and right, must be the language of God and should be adopted without hesitation to realize the benefits.

So he brought teachings of Saints and Holy men and helped compile the most appropriate and relevant book on truth, the Guru Granth Sahib.

It includes the teachings of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslim Saints as well as that of ordinary learned men regardless of their caste or social status making it a truly inclusive holy book based on interfaith teachings.

The result, the Sikh holy book enables the followers to lead fuller lives, thereby making them the most progressive and prosperous in the world.

Let's see how progressive the founder was.

First against gender inequality and gave equality to women over 500 years ago.

First against religious conversion.

First against the caste system.

First against ritual and outdated practices.

It is also on record that the Sikh Gurus dedicated their lives for the uplift of mankind and above all, human freedom.

They realized that if people are suppressed either by state or religion, then they then cannot develop wholesomely.

As a result, they cannot contribute much to society except for behaving like obedient servants.

They championed religious freedom as a fundamental right for every individual to practice faith of their choice for peace of mind.

They said,

Identity must be accepted, respected and if need be, it must be defended.

As a result, the 9th Guru, Teg Bahadur Ji, accepted martyrdom to uphold the rights of Hindus to worship their faith freely, a unique example in history where a faith leader sacrificed life for the freedom of people of another faith.

The 10th Guru, Gobind Singh Ji, established the brotherhood of Khalsa to liberate those who were being persecuted in India in the name of religion.

I shudder to think what would have been the future of India and that of mankind if it wasn't for the Brotherhood of Khalsa.

It was His followers who established the first secular Kingdom in India under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The Sikh regiment was the most decorated regiment in the entire British Empire and until today, the Sikh Regiment is the most decorated regiment in India.

His follower, the late Sqn. Ldr. Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon, is a recipient of the highest gallantry Award, Param Vir Chaker, from the Indian Air Force until today.

He single handedly repulsed the attack of 6 supersonic American made Saber Jets with his outdated British made Folland Gnat plane in the 1971 war and saved Srinagar airfield and changed the course of that war.

His follower, Marshall of the Indian Air Force, Air Marshal Arjan Singh DFC, is the most decorated and senior five star general in the entire Indian Armed Forces until today.

His followers were responsible for the Green revolution in India and made India self sufficient in food production.

His followers Dr Manmohan Singh and Montek Singh Ahluwalia are giving shape to modern India.

His followers are also at the forefront of technology as Suneet Singh Tuli has developed the cheapest tablet computer for just \$35 to make technology accessible to the most poor in society.

His followers like Abhinav Bindra, Harbhajan Singh, Youvraj Singh, Jeev Milkha Singh have reached the pinnacle of success in sports and the list is endless.

We will also be honouring a few tonight who have lived up to the ideals of our Gurus and brought honour and pride to the community and their country, India.

Finally, it is worth remembering that as long as we follow the philosophy of the Sikh Gurus, we will be respected throughout the world and regrettably, if we ever follow the ideologies of self proclaimed leaders, then we will be shunned everywhere.

Sikhs were created to defend the unity, integrity and the basic human rights of every Indian and not to break India up.

When Sikh Gurus never proclaimed a Kingdom for themselves, then why should some of their followers need to demand one themselves?

Surely they cannot be greater visionaries.

Loyalty is a prerequisite for success and Sikhs are and must remain loyal to their mother India and their adopted country Britain according to the teachings of their Gurus.

Thank you.