

Speech delivered by Dr. Rami Ranger on 26th September 2013 at the British Sikh Association Annual Dinner.

Excellences, Commissioner of Police, Ministers, Members of Parliament, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my proud privilege to welcome you to our annual dinner.

I am indebted to the Executive Committee Members for their hard work in making this evening possible.

This dinner is dedicated to the men and women in uniform as without them, we wouldn't be able to go about our lives unhindered.

We are honoured to have Sir Bernard as our Guest of Honour who delivered us the best Olympics without any incident.

We are thankful to Mr Sukhdev Sidhu, Minister Coordination at the High Commissioner of India for representing our country of origin.

We Indians are the products of a secular and democratic country and as a result, can integrate into any society easily and quickly and become assets.

We are taught to use merit and not race or religion to surge ahead and those who do, cannot go far.

Tonight we are paying tribute to Drummer Lee Rigby, a brave soldier who was murdered by terrorists in the name of their religion.

Religion is a force for good and should be used to unite and not divide mankind.

The role of religion is to help us lead a life of high morals and no one should use it to turn people into murderers and killers.

A community is as great as its leaders as no one is born fanatic or killer.

However, selfish leaders often use race or religion to drive a wedge between us to further their own personal agendas.

They turn vulnerable people into suicide bombers with a promise of paradise.

There can be no better paradise, than to be with your loved ones on earth.

These fanatics must realise that he who rides a tiger can never dismount.

Sooner or later they and their families too will be engulfed in their own hatred.

Tonight we wish to remind ourselves of the sacrifices our men and women in uniform make for us.

Let's spare a thought about some of our soldiers who are living away from their families and friends in places like Afghanistan.

They are working in the heat and dust wearing 20kg kits, in fear of live bullets which can come from any direction and under constant threats of land mines exploding around them.

Tonight we will also be supporting the Charity, Combat Stress which helps psychologically traumatised soldiers.

Mental agony can be even worse than losing an arm or a leg.

Just imagine the trauma of a young soldier of 20 or 21 who sees his comrade blown up by a landmine and he has to pick up the pieces.

Or if a soldier loses a leg, arm or has his face scarred, then I am afraid the mind of that soldier can also be scarred.

Mental agony can repeatedly disturb the soldier which can lead to depression.

Expert counselling is needed to rebuild the life of a soldier and this is where "Combat Stress" comes in.

Just to show that we are a community of grateful people, the British Sikh Association will donate £5000 to Combat Stress.

The Chief Executive of Combat Stress, Commodore Andrew Cameron will later explain how his team is working to alleviate the suffering of so many.

I urge you to donate generously in line with the teachings of our Gurus.

The pledge cards have been placed on your tables.

Please complete them and support a very worthy cause.

This is how over 60,000 Sikh Gurdwaras around the world are serving free food to over 6 million people every day regardless of race, religion, colour or gender.

Those who help fund these free kitchens on a daily basis have never gone short themselves as God gives to those who give to others.

We are proud of our Gurus for giving us an ideology to benefit mankind.

Our Gurus were the first to give equality to all including gender equality.

The founder, Guru Nanak Dev Ji said over 500 years ago, "why consider someone inferior who gives birth to prophets and kings"

Our Gurus paid supreme sacrifices for human freedom.

The 9th Guru, Tej Bhadur Ji accepted martyrdom to uphold religious freedom for Hindus in India.

This is a unique example of someone who laid down his life, not for his own faith, but for the faith of his fellow Indians.

The 10th Guru, Gobind Singh Ji established the Brotherhood of Khalsa, not to conquer anyone, but to liberate those who were being oppressed and suppressed in the name of their faith.

The Guru gave the Sikhs, turban, ceremonial sword and beard as symbols of human freedom.

If people do not respect us, then there can only be two reasons.

Firstly, we have not explained our faith to them.

Secondly, we have stopped following the teachings of our Gurus and instead, started following self-proclaimed leaders with their selfish agendas.

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

Our relationship with the British Armed forces goes back centuries.

The Sikh regiment was the most decorated regiment in the entire British Empire and until today it remains the most decorated regiment in India.

84,000 Sikhs sacrificed their lives and 109,000 were wounded fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Brits for world freedom, more than any other community in comparison to their numbers in the two Great Wars and changed the course of many battles.

The free world owes the Sikhs a debt of gratitude.

I have brought special calendars for you to take home, highlighting the Sikhs in the British Armed Forces.

Everyone who lives in Britain becomes a part of Britain and must move in the same direction to build a cohesive society to benefit everyone including our next generations.

Besides, we now have one country and Queen as a result, have become one.

Let us all work together to make Britain stronger and India proud of our achievements.

Jai Hind.