

Speech delivered by Dr. Rami Ranger MBE on 24th November 2014
at the British Sikh Association Annual Dinner.

Home Secretary the Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP, First Sea Lord Admiral Zambellas, Baroness Verma, Minister at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, Deputy High Commissioner Dr Virander Paul, Hon Richard Harrington MP, Lord Singh, General Martin Smith MBE, Dr Lalvani, Mrs Nina Amin, Mr. Rodger Broad of the IOD, Mr Surender Khandhari, Mrs Tare Naidu of Air India, Distinguished Guests Ladies & Gentlemen.

Before I speak, I would like to request you to give us your full attention for the next one hour as we have worked very hard to give you a memorable evening tonight. Thank you.

It is an honour and a privilege to welcome you all to the British Sikh Association's Annual Dinner.

This dinner coincides with the 100th anniversary of the first world war where a small Sikh community made huge sacrifices for world freedom.

They fought shoulder to shoulder with the Brits and changed the course of many battles and the outcome of the war.

As you heard from Dr Kapoor, Sikhs fought with valour and distinguished themselves in many battlefields and won many medals including Victoria Crosses.

The reason for this is very simple, the Sikh religion is based on the principles of human freedom.

The Sikh Turban was worn not to oppress or suppress anyone, but to liberate those who were being oppressed and suppressed in the name of their faith.

I shudder to think what the history of India and the wider world would have been had it not been for the supreme sacrifices of the Sikh Gurus and their followers.

We can rightly be proud of our history and heritage of being saint soldiers fighting only for just causes.

We are fortunate that our Gurus realized even then that if people were suppressed either by religion or the state ,then they would not develop wholesomely and as a result, would not be able to contribute much to society other than behave as obedient servants.

Today, we punch above our weight in every field and have become one of the most respected community in the world.

Each one of us is an Ambassador for our Gurus and we all must live up to their ideals of social and political justice in the world.

When people do not respect us, it can only be for two reasons.

Either we have not been able to explain our faith to them or we have stopped following the teachings of our Gurus and started following self-proclaimed leaders who may have a selfish agenda.

The Brotherhood of Khalsa was established to defend religious freedom in India for every Indian and not to break India up.

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

Surely, they cannot be greater visionaries than our Gurus.

The Sikhs and India are one and no one should ever try to separate children from their Mother.

Ladies and Gentleman we are honoured to have the Home Secretary as our Chief Guest tonight.

To remain the longest serving Home Secretary in 50 years speaks volumes about her tenacity and steadfastness.

We cannot progress or prosper as a country if our streets are not safe and people are living in fear.

With her fair and firm approach the Home Secretary has made us one of the safest countries in the world to live in and to go about our businesses unhindered.

Home Secretary, when our country welcomes immigrants which do not share our values, then we must work hard to instil British values in them, the very values which attracted them to come to us in the first place and which made us a great country.

Where freedom is important, duties are also equally important.

We have the freedom to drive but we must also obey the rules and regulations.

Besides, anyone who lives in Britain becomes a part of Britain and must move in the same direction to help build a cohesive society for all concerned.

In any case, we now have one country and Queen and as a result, have become one.

As a result, immigrants must be made to respect the British values of tolerance, rule of law and above all, respect for women.

The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, was ahead of his times when he said, "why consider someone inferior who gives birth to prophets and kings?"

Gender equality was enshrined in the Sikh faith from day one as well as respect for other faiths.

The strength of a community is judged by the way it treats women.

Those who treat women as unequal become unequal themselves in society as they turn assets into liabilities for themselves.

They also help create a parallel society unwittingly.

We must educate community leaders to encourage their communities to benefit from what Britain has to offer rather than encouraging them to stay on the fringes of society with dire consequence for themselves and the country as whole.

We are also privileged to have the First Sea Lord with us as our Guest of Honour along with Lady Zambellas.

The Navy is the biggest arm of our Defence Forces as we are an Island nation and depend heavily on trade with the rest of the world for our survival.

If it wasn't for the Navy we would not have been able to defend the people of the Falklands or help the people of Sierra Leone against the Ebola outbreak.

It was an impressive sight watching the First Sea Lord with Her Majesty the Queen commissioning our most powerful and state of the art aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth II.

Thank you Sir George for providing us with the Band of the Royal Marines for our entertainment tonight.

If possible, I would like our youth to join the Royal Navy and for this we would like you to invite them to Portsmouth to see the Navy's illustrious history.

We welcome our own first Sikh Peer and Minister in HM Govt. Baroness Verma of Leicester.

She has a difficult job to prevent climate change and we wish her success in her endeavours.

We are delighted to have with us the Deputy High Commissioner of India, Dr Virander Paul.

Like us, he is a Punjabi with a great sense of commitment to unite the Indian diaspora who are a loyal and hardworking community in Britain bringing honour to India.

In this endeavour he is ably supported by Mr Sukhdev Sidhu and Mr Samant Goel.

We are also honoured to the presence of Hon. Richard Harrington MP. A close friend of the Prime Minister.

He will be reporting to the Prime Mister about our special dinner tonight.

We also have with us very special guests from Dubai Mr Surender Singh and Mrs Bubble Khandhari.

They are a remarkable couple who live up to the Sikh ideals of Seva (service)

Their service to mankind will go down in history.

Tonight we will recognise their work to make the world a better place.

We will also acknowledge the contribution of our Home Secretary to public life and for the difficult and invaluable work she is doing for us.

We will be raising money for the Armed Force's Charity, Combat Stress which is doing a great job in getting people back on track after experiencing the horrors of war.

If we forget those who make sacrifices for our freedom ,then we will be a nation of, "I am alright Jack".

Please support the charity in line with the Sikh values of giving.

There are pledge cards on each table and I urge you to donate generously.

Apart from the live auction, there is also a silent one to raise funds.

Please bid generously as your money can save lives and make a difference to mentally traumatised soldiers.

Please also order the Sikh Heritage collection by the Hallmark Group as I feel it is an ideal gift for the family, one which must be kept in every home to keep our heritage alive.

We are most grateful to Air India for donating two return Airline Tickets to India for auction.

Thank you Mrs Tara Naidu we appreciate your generosity and support of Air India.

Those who have recently flown Air India will bear me out that Air India now has a brand new fleet of Boeing 777 Dreamliner.

You will fly in comfort and service second to none.

Finally, I must thank the Executive Committee Members of the British Sikh Association for their hard work in making this evening possible.

They are a group of dedicated people who work very hard to promote the vision of Sikh Gurus for a united mankind.

Please give them a big round of applause.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of the evening.