

28 March 2018, APPG Jains,
Mahavir Janma Kalyanak Celebration
“Jains Should Play a Greater Role in Public Life”

Namaste and Jai Jinendra.

It's an honour to be asked to address you today ahead of Mahavir Jayanti *tomorrow*....an important and auspicious day for the Jain community.

I would like to add my own congratulations to Manharbhai Mehta and Jayantbhai Doshi as worthy recipients of the OneJain Lifetime Achievement Award. They both embody the spirit of public and community service which is so characteristics of Jains.

Over the last year, I have had the pleasure of engaging with the Jain community on multiple fronts.

Last June, I was asked to address a gathering of Jain leaders on facing future challenges and engaging the next generation – so I am particularly pleased to see more young people in the audience today.

Then last October, I was delighted to participate in the *hugely successful* meeting of the Jain International Trade Organisation or JITO – a reminder of the economic and entrepreneurial proWess of the global Jain community.

And *most* recently, in my role as Patron of the UK-India Year of Culture, it is was a pleasure to support the UK tour of the award-winning drama *Jugpurush*, which reminded us of how Jain philosophy, and the teachings of Shrimad Rajchandra influenced Mahatma Gandhi - and through him the very destiny of India.

So the Jain community is increasingly visible and proactive. And I am pleased to see this contribution also being recognised publicly. I was delighted to see Mehool receive an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to the Jain Faith as well as Education. We should take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge once again this notable achievement with a warm round of applause.

So, in being asked to speak to you on how Jains can play a greater role in public life, it is certainly not a *critique* of Britain's dynamic Jain community, but an invitation to do *yet* more.

Jain leadership in public life means sharing your values, not just with other British Indians, but the country more widely.

Jains - and Indians more broadly – far from being a disadvantaged minority are seen as a well-integrated community often making an outsized contribution in a number of fields.

Last year, the Cabinet Office published data on the Race Disparity Audit which revealed that a staggering 32% of Indians work in professional industries compared to an average of 20% across the population. Indians, including Jains, *therefore* provide the human capital engine of large parts of the economy.

The fact that 12% of doctors and almost 20% of pharmacists are of Indian origin - for a community that makes up *less than 2.5%* of the population is truly extraordinary – and all the evidence that I see at the Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy confirms that you “*ain't seen nothing yet*”

But events this week remind us all that we should NOT take anything for granted. Purely economic and professional contributions to this country are not enough.

This is not intended to be a partisan point. BUT witnessing the anxiety of the Jewish community gathered here in Parliament Square earlier this week to make a cross-party stand against anti-Semitism reminds us ALL that we need be ever vigilant against divisive forces.

This is frankly not something which I had expected to see in Britain in 2018. It is particularly pertinent as parallels are often drawn between the Jain and Jewish communities. It is fair to say that British Indians as a whole often look to Jewish organisations such as the Board of Deputies or the Jewish Leadership Council as role models for unity of purpose and effective participation in National Life.

So if the Jewish community is in this position, we need to take heed. Although on the positive front – the extent of the mainstream support they have received also provides some comfort and encouragement.

So against this important and timely backdrop, I would like to make the following five points:

1. The first contribution which British Indians, including Jains, can make to public life is to provide an example to other ethnic communities of how you can integrate and still preserve your traditions, values and identity. A diverse society doesn't mean a divided society.

It is clear from all the evidence that the British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities have struggled on this front and too often lead a segregated existence. The Government's Green Paper on Integrated Communities, which Lord Bourne referred to, highlights these issues and offers some remedies such as a new community-based English language programme.

I would urge our community to think about how we can help deliver more cohesion and examine the Integration Innovation Fund which the Green Paper proposes to bring people together around shared activities and community spaces.

2. The second is to fix some of the issues where we are still lagging and can do more ourselves. I would highlight two: we should look at our own approach to gender diversity – *all too often* we see events in our community with all male panels or participants, which is not acceptable.

I recognise the need to respect certain religious protocols and sensitivities – but where these don't apply we don't have an excuse.

We need to acknowledge that the next generation is focused on values not rituals and we should live up to these ideals.

The other area for self-help is access to public services. Despite our significant economic contribution, the Cabinet Office data shows that Indians do not share the same patient-user experience and access to health and social services as the rest of the population, which is of increasing concern as the first generation grows older and requires greater support.

3. My third point is to find ways to express our values that can achieve national impact. One of the reasons *why* we have been *so* successful in this country – is that we are *anchored* in strong intrinsic values which chime with the *very best* of British values. The pioneering move, now 28 years ago, to publish the Jain Declaration on Nature is an example of this. It would be a great achievement for the Jain Community to be associated with some major national programmes which directly benefit the environment, such as recycling – a very topical theme given today’s announcement on a deposit return scheme for single-use bottles.

4. The fourth suggestion is to provide more local leadership in our communities. Sometimes the focus is on national office and what happens here in Westminster. We should certainly be ambitious and it is heartening to see so many young people from our community now stepping forward. But it's not an easy path and we should be honest about the practical challenges of elected office.

So we should not just think about conventional Westminster politics but public service more broadly. There are multiple ways to serve society. Many of you already volunteer at your local Derasar or Mandir or serve on a community organisation. Sometimes it is *even* more effective and rewarding to become a Local Councillor, a Magistrate, a School Governor or NHS Trustee. There is a deficit of deep community engagement and local leadership and that is something which the Jain community, *with all its talents*, could do more of.

5. And fifth and finally, as we move towards leaving the European Union we stand at a crossroads in our relationship with the rest of the world. The Prime Minister has spoken about Global Britain - a country that is outward looking, a magnet for international talent, a global trading nation that goes out into the world to build new relationships. Whereas Brexit still divides people, this more expansive agenda is capable of unifying both sides. It plays naturally to the strengths of Jains and British Indians more widely.

A globally connected community of 1.5 million British Indians – many of whom *also* have deep experience of Africa - will be of ever greater value as we forge *new trading relationships* with the rest of the world.

So in conclusion, it is not enough for Indians to succeed in Britain - it is now time to lead.

As we celebrate Mahavir Jayanti here in Westminster today, we are surrounded by symbols of how much this country has changed and continues to change. As many of you know, the childhood name of Mahavir – was *Vardhamana* which means the “the one who grows”.

It is now time for us to grow.

We are beginning to lead the way in government, the City of London, and cultural exchange. Something that would hardly have been imaginable when I first arrived in this country over forty years ago.

Our new place in society will come with our leadership, not just in high-status positions, but also in local communities.

All of us, including this country’s Jains must help shape what it means to be British in the future.

Thank you for listening to me and Jai Jinendra