

# The Right Honourable Sir Rabinder Singh

---

Chair of Council, I present to you The Right Honourable Sir Rabinder Singh for the award of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, of the University of London.

Lord Justice of the Court of Appeal and President of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, and the author of *The Future of Human Rights in the United Kingdom* (1997) and *The Unity of Law* (2022), he is an authority on the recent development of the common law with particular reference to the field of human rights and the law of privacy. Called to the Bar in 1989, he became a QC in 2002. Appointed a High Court Judge (Queen's Bench Division) in 2011, he became a Lord Justice of Appeal and a member of the Privy Council in 2017, and President of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal the following year. He has been an Honorary Professor of Law at Nottingham University since 2007, visiting Professor of Law at the London School of Economics from 2003 to 2009, and a Visiting Fellow, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, from 2016 to 2019.

Born in Delhi, Rabinder grew up in Bristol, attending Bristol Grammar School, then a direct grant grammar school, after being awarded a local authority scholarship. He decided that he wanted to be a barrister while still at school, partly influenced by the film of Harper Lee's book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, starring Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch, a lawyer in the American South, who defends a black man accused of raping a white woman. 'Atticus Finch talks about the law as the great equaliser', he explains. 'It's clear he is a lawyer who regards himself as having a vocation. He will do his duty, even if he knows he's going to lose the case, because it's the right and just thing to do'. Rabinder says he wonders whether he has subconsciously modelled himself on Peck's portrayal of Finch. He was struck by one particular scene in which the father of the alleged victim spits in Finch's face. For an instant, Finch thinks about retaliating, before maintaining both his silence and his dignity by doing nothing other than to take out his handkerchief and wipe his face.

Rabinder read law at Trinity College, Cambridge, before being awarded a Harkness Fellowship to study and travel in the United States, where he took a Master of Laws degree from the University of California, Berkeley. In his recent book, *The Unity of Law*, he remarks on the influence his time in the States has had on his thinking about the law. On his return to the United Kingdom, however, he was unable to afford to enrol on the Bar Professional Training Course—the postgraduate course which allows law graduates to be named and practise as barristers in England and Wales—so for two years he was a temporary lecturer at the University of Nottingham's School of Law before winning a scholarship from Lincoln's Inn. Called to the bar in 1989, Rabinder completed his one-year pupillage at 4-5 Gray's Inn Square, where

---

---

he remained as a tenant for ten years. From 1992 until 2002 he was a member of the Attorney General's Panel of Junior Counsel to the Crown, and Additional Junior Counsel to the Inland Revenue from 1997 to 2002. During his time at 4-5 Gray's Inn Square, Rabinder also published a collection of essays, *The Future of Human Rights in the United Kingdom*, based on lectures he had given at Queen Mary University of London.

In 2000, Rabinder became one of the founding members of Matrix Chambers. Two years later, at the age of 38, he became one of the youngest people to be awarded silk. He was Chair of the Bar Council Equality and Diversity Committee (Race and Religion) from 2004 to 2006, and Chair of the Administrative Law Bar Association from 2006 to 2008. In 2009 he was elected a Bencher of Lincoln's Inn.

Then, in October 2011, Rabinder was appointed a High Court Judge (Queen's Bench Division). He had been a Deputy High Court Judge since 2003, and a Recorder of the Crown Court from 2004, regarding it as important 'to increase public confidence in the judiciary'. As a result of the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005—one of the purposes of which was to 'encourage diversity' in the appointment of judges—a selection process for the appointment of judges had been introduced which included advertisement, application and interview. So Rabinder applied successfully to be a High Court Judge, deeming it to be in accordance with the notion of 'serving the public' to which he had adhered since being influenced as a teenager by the conduct of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As a male High Court Judge, he automatically became a member of the Imperial Society of Knights Bachelor, and Rabinder was formally knighted on 15 March 2012. Sir Rabinder thus became the first Sikh High Court judge, which he regards as a great honour, pointing out that his late parents would have been proud that, fifty years after emigrating to the United Kingdom without a penny to their name, their son could become a High Court judge. 'I think that's an extremely positive story', he observes, 'and a very positive story about our country'.

That was not the culmination of Sir Rabinder's career, however. He was a Presiding Judge of the South Eastern Circuit from 2013 to 2016, and the Administrative Court liaison judge for the Midland, Wales and Western circuits during 2017, before his appointment as a Lord Justice of Appeal in October of the same year. Judges of the Court of Appeal—the highest court in England and Wales—are made members of the Privy Council within months of their appointment, enabling them to serve as members of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Then, in September 2018, Sir Rabinder was appointed President of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, a judicial body which investigates and determines complaints about covert techniques used by public authorities.

---

---

'I have had a fortunate career in the law', are the opening words to the Introduction to Sir Rabinder's recent book, *The Unity of Law*. 'At various times I have been an academic, a practising barrister and, for the last 10 years, a judge'. While he has enjoyed a wide and varied career, he is probably best known for his work in human rights law. I mentioned that his first book, published in 1997, was a collection of essays entitled *The Future of Human Rights in the United Kingdom*. In this second collection of essays, published earlier this year, he reflects on the defining themes of his career as advocate and judge in sections on the common law, public law, human rights, equality, privacy and national security, and international law. Taken together, then, these complementary volumes might be said to bookend Sir Rabinder's career.

Chair of Council, I present to you The Right Honourable Sir Rabinder Singh for the award of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, of the University of London.

'Since words are the tools of the lawyer's trade it is important to use them carefully'

---