

Asian Lite

Women

In the spotlight

BY HARIKA CHADHA



Lord Mayor Manjula Sood

Lord Mayor Manjula Sood, the first female Asian Lord Mayor in the UK and elected City Councillor for Latimer in Leicester, talks exclusively to Harika Chadha at Asian Lite.

* Describe a day in Manjula Sood's life.

A normal day is very busy for me! With my family and Lord Mayor commitments I am always busy. When I leave home I carry out my Lord Mayor duties – a recent day has involved me meeting the Leicester Student Chef of the Year and tasting their award winning food, opening a refurbished play roof for children at one of Leicester's Hospitals, presenting a citizen of Leicester with an Honoured Citizen Award and then off to the Women of Achievement Awards in the evening. My work never stops; when I arrive back at home I look after my mother or spend time with my family.

* How was the response to the British troops' homecoming parade in Leicester?

The response from the crowd was overwhelming, and it was such a great day for everyone who was involved from the 9th/12th Royal lancers themselves to the people who helped organise the event. It was wonderful to see the multicultural citizens of Leicester together, celebrating such an important event.

* In your years of serving as the Lord Mayor what has been your biggest highlight and what comes next?

The biggest personal highlight for me, in Leicester's 800th year of Mayoralty, is being the first female Asian Lord Mayor. There have been many other highlights in my year I cannot simply choose one, but the ones that come to mind at the moment are the visit from her Majesty the Queen in December, the Freedom Ceremony which will be taking place at the end of this month, and of course the Homecoming Parade itself.

* You are an inspiration to a lot of young Asian women in the UK who want to join politics - how did you make your mark?

I joined politics and became a Councillor after the sudden death of my husband, who was a Councillor himself. I felt it was the right direction for me to turn at this point in my life. My family and friends all told me that they thought this was the best career to go

for.

* How does it make you feel to be a part of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women [Councillors Taskforce?]

Of course, I am extremely proud. I feel a great commitment to inspire more Black, Asian and other Ethnic Minority group women to join politics and to take up a leading political role in their societies.

* What do you aim to achieve at the BAME Women Councillors outreach event in Leicester later this month?

I aim to inspire Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority women to follow their dreams and importantly to see that it is possible!

* How did you get involved with the Special Olympics?

As the Lord Mayor of Leicester I was able to choose the Special Olympics for the Lord Mayor's Appeal. I wish to bring awareness to the plight that many people with learning disabilities have, and also to celebrate their achievements through sport.

* Manjula Sood plays many roles at once: daughter, mother, carer, community activist, Lord Mayor and councillor - how do you juggle such a hectic career and home life?

I aim to achieve everything in my life with passion, dedication, commitment and a smile.

* How have your children supported and inspired you in your career?

I am an extremely proud and lucky mother as my two sons support me in everything I do, also my daughter-in-law, who is also the Lady Mayoress. I view them all as my best friends.

* Do you see your children following in your footsteps?

Yes, and they already are. My eldest son, Manish, is a Leicester City Councillor. My youngest son works in the City of London and also does lots of community work in London.

* And finally, what would you say to Asians interested in entering politics?

It is important to have confidence and to empower yourself – set a goal and aim for it.



SHORT TAKES

* **Shahrukh Khan or Amitabh Bachchan?**

Amitabh Bachchan

* **Sari or salwar kameez?**

Sari

* **Palak paneer or aaloo gobi?**

Palak paneer

* **Cricket or football?**

Football

* **iPhone or Blackberry?**

Blackberry

* **Ludhiana or Leicester?**

I simply cannot begin to choose!
Both places are very special to me

Women fast making inroads into male dominated professions

BY RUCHIKA KHER

From driving taxis to tending bars, an increasing number of women in India are breaking into male bastions and asserting that they can be as good, if not better, at jobs that were traditionally perceived as being only for men.

Shanno, a widow and mother of three children, broke free from a stereotypical job and became a part of an all-woman cab service called Sakha in the national capital.

"I used to do stitching before becoming a cab driver, but doing this (driving) gives me more happiness. I feel that I can easily compete with men. I am no less," said Shanno.

"I don't know why women are always expected to do things like making jams and pickles, and stitching. I wanted to do something different but higher income jobs are still male dominated," said Shanno's colleague Chandani.

Megha, a successful Mumbai-based disk jockey (DJ), said people in the beginning did not take her seriously since the profession was not considered an option for women. However, she soon proved her competence.

"Initially, because I was a girl, no one took me seriously. Everyone was extra critical of me. People thought that I would just come and go and not survive for so long but I was adamant about proving myself," said the 28-year-old.

"Six months down the line, I had mastered the art and had started doing well. That is when people started taking me seriously because I proved my capability through my work," she added.

With the society warming up to women with alternate professions and families supporting them with their decisions, today women have a plethora of career options to choose from.

Chennai-based S. Muthulakshmi is one of the increasing number of women not opting for a 9-5 job.

"One day I saw an article in the paper on bartending and I got interested. I was a little skeptical in the beginning, but when I showed the article to my husband he was all for me to take up a job as a bartender. He said that I could do whatever I want to as long as I like it," Muthulakshmi said.

"Everyone in my family too supported me with this decision because they had faith in me," she added.



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