

Sam King KC chats to Mani Singh Basi for Race Equality Week

[Sam King KC] I remember interviewing you and you telling us an amazing story about your family background? Will you share it and tell us a bit about yourself?

[Mani Singh Basi] My parents are from India and came to England at a very young age. In particular, my mum came to England aged 12 and on her own and made a life for herself here. My family were shopkeepers but unfortunately lost their business when I was 1-years old and we had to move around a bit. I was ultimately raised in a small town in Nottinghamshire and went to a state catholic school where I was one of a handful of ethnic minorities. I was the first in my family to go and study A-levels and attend university. As a university student, I was a carer for my parents who had long-term health conditions and my grandmother who was diagnosed with dementia.

[Sam King KC] What made you decide on the bar as a career?

[Mani Singh Basi] I never thought I would even make it to A-levels let alone join the bar. When I was studying my A-Levels, I was introduced to a teacher who had a similar cultural background to myself who was a solicitor before he became a teacher. I found him to be inspiring. At this stage, I was not academic at all. During my A-levels, I was motivated to do well as I clung onto the dream of becoming someone and I thought law was for me. At university, again I did not really think I could ever make it as a barrister and it did not cross my mind until I think my third year. Ultimately, my mother was the one who said I could become anything I wanted and when I actually thought about what I wanted to become, I was attracted to the bar. I was particularly attracted to the prospect of being a voice for those that required it. I also regarded myself as somebody who could relate well to others and be rather persuasive when required. Therefore, I felt my skill set would be suited to becoming a barrister.

[Sam King KC] Why family law?

[Mani Singh Basi] My first ever mini-pupillage was in family law at a time I was studying the module at university. I really enjoyed the fact that family law is a wide-ranging area of the law. As I gained further insight into family law, I felt it was an area where I could meaningfully impact people's lives through my advocacy and secondly, I enjoyed the fact that it was an area of the law where I knew I would meet people from all walks of life on a daily basis.

[Sam King KC] Do you feel that there have been obstacles in your way as a result of your race?

[Mani Singh Basi] Many. Growing up, I had no real role models other than my parents. My first role model who was a professional was my A-level teacher who was from a similar background to me. As a child and young teenager, direct racism is something that I endured which had an impact upon my self-esteem and confidence. Further and at a deeper level and having reflected now in my adulthood, I have come to realise I was treated very differently and sometimes, unfairly by people in positions of power and I do think my race contributed to this. Not only this, I also saw my parents treated different and unfavourably in various situations. During my university time, again I think the biggest obstacle was having role models. I did not believe I was capable of being a barrister in circumstances when I did not see many in the profession who had similar backgrounds to me.

[Sam King KC] I have described you as the busiest man at the bar. You volunteer for everything! Is there a theme to how you pick your projects? Where does racial equality fit in?

[Mani Singh Basi] I feel very lucky to be a barrister and to be part of a fantastic set. Now that I am a barrister, I appreciate that I am in a very privileged position and therefore, there is an onus on me to give as much as I can to others. As a member of the bar, there is a real opportunity as well as a responsibility for me to do anything I can do to assist in eradicating any obstacles that many barristers / aspiring barristers from ethnic minorities may face. Accordingly, over the years, I have mentored for various charitable organisations and during my time as an elected member on the FLBA I embarked upon outreach work, co-developed a mentoring scheme and I continue to be part of the scholarship and diversity committees. Being busy is good, especially if I can do some good, particularly when it comes to racial equality.