Case Study: Hindu Priest - Chanda

What do you do?

During the week, I work for Leicester City Council with people who have learning disabilities. In addition to that, I am a Hindu Priest conducting mainly weddings but also funerals and other religious ceremonies.

One of the most common ceremonies I conduct is weddings. I arrange workshops to help prepare the bride and groom for their wedding, to help them to understand the meaning of their ceremony and take anxieties away. Where applicable, I have consultations with the bride's and the groom's elders.

My objective is to give the couple the wedding they want and I try to do it in a 'modern' way, yet following ancient 'Vedic' guidance and rituals.

What is your background?

I grew up in a family where my father and grandfather were Hindu Priests. Growing up in that environment, it was quite normal for me to support my father in performing Hindu ceremonies but I was told that it would be impossible for me to ever perform the role of a Hindu Priest, as I was female.

As I got older, I tried to find other women in similar roles but to no avail. Learning this made me more determined, eventually leading me to become the first female Hindu Priest in the UK.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

You need to be 100% committed to mind, body and soul. It is important to have a clean heart, pure thoughts and a non-judgemental attitude.

You have to be calm and patient but confident in what you are delivering, as many people are looking to you for guidance. You need to be a good communicator, an excellent listener, very open minded and, above all, humble.

It is also important to have family support. There is a saying that 'there is a strong man behind a successful woman.' This happens to be my husband - Manoj Vyas.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

Like any job, being a Hindu Priest has its own challenges. Sometimes, in society, a priest is expected to act like an angel and have all the answers. This in itself is a big challenge. In my experience it's not about acting like an angel or having all the answers. It is about being a good listener, being patient, calm and respecting different beliefs, values and cultures.

We live in a very diverse society and it is important to be able to offer all of the above so that I can help, guide and advise people, making their special day truly memorable.

Other challenges involve maintaining a good work-life balance. As much as I enjoy what I do, it is important for me to have social time, personal time and family time.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

I believe that this work has a lot more scope for women to get involved. I'm happy to provide guidance and support to anyone wishing to become a Hindu Priest and to serve their community at large.

What do you like about your job?

When I am performing a ceremony, I get a real sense of energy, a feeling of happiness and calmness and most...
importantly, I feel very blessed.

I love meeting people from different backgrounds and cultures and bringing them together through spirituality.

**What are your ambitions?**

My ambitions include sharing my experience and knowledge with those that I come into contact with and communicating the benefits of spirituality.

I would also like to be able to train and teach those who are passionate about performing the role of a Hindu Priest.

**A day in the life**

**A typical wedding day**

Regardless of whether the wedding is being held in the UK or abroad, preparation is key. After I have spent several meetings, phone calls and emails communicating with the bride and groom and understanding what they require, I then start to prepare myself.

The day before the wedding I make sure I have cleaned and packed everything I will need to carry out the Vidhi (the wedding ceremony). I also make sure that I have chosen the saree (traditional Indian dress) that I will be wearing, with preferred colours being traditional green, red and orange. Lastly, I carry out spiritual meditation before I go to bed to ensure that I am in the right frame of mind.

Wherever I am travelling to, I allow myself plenty of time to get to the venue. I normally arrive one to two hours before the wedding is due to start so that I can get set up.

The wedding itself can take anything between one-and-a-half and three hours, depending on what timescale and schedule was agreed with the family.

Once the Vidhi is complete, I use the rest of the time to meet and greet and have the lunch that is provided. Only when it's all over do I then make my way home.