

# Interviewing Bijna Dasani by Aiste Gerdvilyte, SABBS London Magazine

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## **On Diversity From Beginning:**

“I am British—born and bred in UK, of Indian origin. I come from a Leicester, a city with a multicultural spirit; an exceptionally culturally rich society where I was used to celebrating every festival and holiday“

“I grew up experiencing so much diversity that when I came to London, I felt a natural fit. It’s probably one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. I’ve been in and out of London for eight years, and I say that without hesitation”

## **On One Million Activities:**

“I work within the financial services sector; Vice President at Deutsche Bank. Outside of my career, my spare time is spent supporting causes I feel passionate about. In some ways, much of it is event management, going out there, meeting people through different forums - whilst learning and growing myself; in other ways it’s giving something back to communities, sharing my skills and often playing the role of a connector. “

“My most recent appointment is with a local network in London - with which I’ve worked before – as events lead. My own focus is on bringing together diversity networks. Last year we hosted an event titled ‘Journeys for Change’ which was exemplifying people who surpassed adversity and barriers in their lives, had to struggle but overcame that and reached better places; often succeeding beyond the realms of their own imagination.” The event was aimed at inspiring others...after all, experience is like a piece of cake – better if you share it!”

“I’m a member of many women’s networks within financial services. We always talk familiar dialogue amongst the groups and I observe common themes such as equal representation in the boardroom and the role of women. We need to understand what the issues are and what we can do to help implement and execute changes to support women. I was at a business conference last week and there were 36 males and three females - now I have to say that’s a vast difference, absolutely incredible but not at all unusual.

“I’m involved with different diversity networks in and outside of the financial services sector. I am also a network speaker for Womankind Worldwide. We advocate for women’s right, human’s right. The concept I am keen to promote is that if you can educate a woman about basic rights and you’ll change her family (thinking about economically undeveloped regions). When you educate a woman, she will educate her family, her children, her parents. We’ve noticed that this helps women to find their voices - we know that it’s not right to be raped (albeit by your own husband), or we know that it’s not right to abort foetus just because of the sex (female infanticide). There are some very sensitive issues that

we tackle but it's the reality of life. They exist and impact a huge proportion of the world's population. Only, in developed societies like ours, it's increasingly subliminal"

"I've engaged in recent years with City Gateway. We collaborated on a project which provided them with some funding to create a bespoke program; they have hundreds of women (members), who moved here (from abroad) and have language and social barriers, or they are single mothers, or have had some sort of challenges in their lives. Some time ago we decided to create a beauty and training enterprise, we wanted to boost confidence, capability and morale, which was low due to all the obstacles those women faced in their lives. There were three components to involve – beauty therapy (competency), literacy (capability) and wellness (emotional nourishment). The women, who qualified have changed lives, some have now become trainers for the next cohort and it's amazing...when they're nurtured, they also nurture the lives of those around them; whether it be other women, their children or their families. I've witnessed the women who passed through this cycle and admire the ambition and passion they've displayed."



#### **On Motivation to Do Things:**

"I've always been this way, constantly involved in so many activities at once. As we mature we filter things which we are not passionate about. I've been fortunate enough to have incredible role models, mentors and positive people around me that helped me to believe in myself and share the energy."

"Some lessons can't be learned, they have to be lived and experienced to be understood. And sometimes you can't take all chances; you have to learn from somebody else's lessons and be calculated."

### **On Managing The Day:**

“My boss jokes I’m so organized it frightens him [smiling]. I don’t think I can survive without my iPhone and my Blackberry. I have things planned way in advance, like I know where I’ll be in particular week in November from now. I try only committing to things which I’ll be able to live up to because if you are taking responsibility, you have to do it wholeheartedly and stay accountable”

### **On Biggest Challenge:**

“When I was 16, I decided to take a gap-year from my studies to travel and enrol on a beauty therapy course in India. When I returned, I started my A level course late and I had to catch up on too many things. I decided to take some more time out... During that time I got itchy feet because everyone around me was progressing in their education and I started feeling somewhat competitive. I decided to get a day job, full time, working in an office.”

“I also then decided to study as I didn’t want to be a year behind everyone else in my peer group; it was my competitive spirit coming to light!. I thought OK, I will keep the job 9 to 5 and will do A levels at night school, 5 to 9. You are 16 years old, you really want to study, you want to keep the job and money it brings – that was challenging, and I did that for two years.”

“Whilst the rest of my peers were having a great time, I was working. It was hard work and tenacious but also one of the biggest opportunities for me to learn to focus, and that has given me great skills to get organized and prioritize. I had firm responsibilities and commitments which demanded self-discipline. While going through difficult experiences in life, if you can take them, manoeuvre and do something with them, they evolve into great tools you can utilize time and again throughout your future”

### **On Inspirations All Around:**

“It’s essential to have opportunities to observe leadership. I observe my own boss and leadership team with admiration, examining characteristics and styles they portray, that I can learn and choose to adopt with time”

“Even the lady who works here – Marianna (at our local cafeteria) – she is absolutely lovely and no matter what time of day I come here, she brings a smile to my face. She is so polite, she knows exactly how I love my tea, and this attention to details is wonderful. She could be having the hardest day herself but she always smiles, always lightens and brightens my day. I would love to be like her, always positive!”

“There are many entrepreneurs, philanthropists and famous people who inspire me. Closer to my heart, my own mother who raised three children alone with devotion, never looking away from her responsibilities – that I respect, and it taught me a great deal.”

### **On Secrets to Success:**

“My journey so far has been a little by accident, and a little by default. I knew I wanted to be in a certain place but I didn’t know how to get there so I would explore different avenues. I wouldn’t say

that it's been entirely calculated. So I always say - be open minded. Although you need a vision, sometimes things have to fall apart to make a way for better things."

"You have to embrace your successes as well as your failures. Don't let your success get to your head; don't let your failures get to your heart...maintaining an emotional equilibrium is key"

"Knowledge is power. Knowledge often comes through people and relationships; it's important to connect with likeminded people, with people who can inspire you. By observing and bringing those people together they share exchange domains and extend yours and their own knowledge, and so fuel power."

"Women go through different roles in life and sometimes we as women put ourselves under too much pressure, to fit certain prototypes (how we look, the style of mother / partner / employee we become..); my perspective is that as women, we are far more potent than we realize it's important to never lose faith, confidence and trust in oneself."

"Inner belief is key - there isn't really such thing as a failure, it's just a feedback process and you've got to live, learn and move on, to keep growing. Embrace yourself. Start on a positive note, love yourself and stay focused through your journey."

### **On Fun and Relaxation:**

"I love my gym-classes (yoga, body-balance & combat, tai chi); I run whenever I can, just put great, motivational music and run – it really clears my head."

"I chose to live in the countryside because London is just crazy-busy. When I wake up in the morning, I have a great view of the sunrise, I love just gazing. Even a few minutes of gazing gives me such relaxation."

"Yoga and meditation are very important. I meditate every single day, even if I get home 2:00am, I would not go to sleep before I do it. It's all about synchronizing your mind, body and soul to be who you are. Sometimes we get caught up in trying to be an employee, trying to be a supporter for somebody, trying to be a partner, a friend, a daughter... You playing all those different roles all day long but when are you being you? That time to meditate is my time to be 'me' without wearing any hats; that time is precious - all about reflecting on what happened today and preparing for the known that's going to happen tomorrow. It helps me with finding inner-peace, synchronising with myself and getting my battery recharged!"

"Recently I sent my friend a quote by Budha: 'You, yourself, as much as anybody else in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.' And I think that's the objective of meditation. You have to connect to yourself, otherwise you'll slowly and subliminally compromise your values, ethics and beliefs to fill the shapes of the hats you are wearing, and ultimately you might lose yourself."

"Aside from that, I love shopping [laughing]. I love dining out, trying new places, travelling, taking tons of photographs, life is a journey and I want to capture it."

### On Dressing Style:

"I love exploring Indian culture. The more dramatic, extreme and the more of a statement it makes, the more I love those clothes. I like experimenting. We are women after all; we have the opportunity to look and feel feminine, to adorn ourselves with make-up and jewellery."

"During my working day, I make an effort with semi-subtle day make-up; I'll modestly alter my hair style. I'm feminine but smart. I like that feminine element; we can bring a little splash of colour and sparkle to the office environment."

"First impressions count. We are often judged by appearance and presentation - so in a professional environment, it's important to embrace being professional."

"I attempt to wear clothes that make me feel natural; so I can do what I need to - running around in heels, speaking to unknown audiences, carrying coffee, laptop, and ten other things at once - and not have to worry about the neckline or fitting."

"I'm particular about size, and with different brands, I'm different sizes - so consistency in sizing is really lacking...time to explore bespoke at Sabbs!"

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