

# South Asian Heritage Month Interview-20230717\_160350-Meeting Recording

This year the underlying theme for South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM) is “Stories to Tell”, which aims to empower individuals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to share their stories and promote their events. Chosen by public selection, this year’s theme reflects a collective desire to amplify diverse narratives and experiences.

[IP & ME](#) want to highlight some of those narratives and experiences within the IP industry by inviting people of South Asian heritage to interview. This article covers our interview of [Lianne Da-Cunha](#), a trainee patent attorney. Take a look at our podcasts on SAHM for full interviews.

[Training to become a patent attorney](#) involves a number of exams, with the quickest route to becoming qualified taking a minimum of 3 years of work and study. We asked Lianne about her experiences of study and work, as well as about her heritage, culture and religion.

## **Lianne Da-Cunha**

Hi, I'm Lianne. I'm a trainee patent attorney at Forresters. I work in the London office and in the Tech and Engineering team. I joined the profession about two years ago, in September 2021, and I'm taking my foundation exams at the moment to become UK qualified.

### ***On Heritage, Culture, and Religion***

My parents are both originally from Goa in India, so my surname is Portuguese. Lots of people get thrown off by it, but Goa used to be a Portuguese colony, so that's where I got my surname, Da-Cunha, from. My mum grew up in Mumbai, India, and my dad grew up in Mombasa, although his parents grew up in India and then moved here when he was a kid. So, my family are from all around the world, but I was born and brought up here.

There is definitely, for me, a difference between my culture and my heritage. Being born and brought up in the UK, my first thought is to say “I'm British” and “India is my heritage and I have a lot of appreciation for it”. Although we have lots of Indian food at home, and I visit my family in India, I sometimes wonder “do I have to put myself into a category?”.

I was brought up Catholic and I'm still practising it. My experiences at university compared to now, being at work, are very different. I'd say at university it was more natural to show my full true self. All of my friends knew about my religious identity because I was living as well as studying at university, so they saw the full me, and could see that I would go to church on Sundays. As I'm not required to practise or pray during the day, my Catholicism is not something that comes up in the usual conversation at work. I remember telling some other trainees at work that I was Catholic, and they were surprised, as you would be if it had never been mentioned before. That surprise is probably because there seems to be fewer people our age actively practising. Personally, I don't know that many people practising Catholicism who are my age. So, when I get the opportunity to share my religion, it's always a nice thing to be able to do.

### ***On University***

At university, I studied Engineering and I'd say it was a very diverse degree to do. I don't think I noticed being in an ethnic minority at all. If anything, the student demographic may have been more Asian dominated and, in that sense, it was being a 'woman in engineering' that was the bigger minority.

Now, working in IP, the same applies. I've never consciously thought that I'm in the minority here and that it affects my work. That's what is quite nice about my job; I don't have to worry about that. I'm part of the Equality and Diversity Group at Forresters and, similarly to IP&ME, we try and raise awareness to make sure work is welcoming to everyone.

### ***On Entering the Profession***

I didn't know anyone personally that I could talk to who was South Asian in this job. It's such a niche job that knowing anyone in the profession is a good step. That being said, I did look up websites when I was applying for jobs. I would look at the 'Our People' page and definitely find it helpful to see pictures of people and to put a name to a face. Even if subconsciously, an 'Our People' page does affect one's view of the company and of the profession. I think if you only saw men in the role, as compared to men and women or a whole diverse workforce, you do ask yourself "can I see myself fitting in there?".

Hopefully I can be that role model for someone one day.

### ***On South Asian Heritage Month***

If people can learn something about South Asia and learn about the different cultures within the countries making up South Asia, that can only be a good outcome. There's always something to be gained.