



## Asian Women in business: Experiences from UK and India

*Flamingo Bar and Grill, Leicester on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2009*

Asian Foundation for Philanthropy (AFP) was proud to host 'Asian Women in Business: Experiences from UK and India', an event purely for women who are working with, or thinking of doing business in UK and in India.

As Bala Thakrar, Director of AFP mused, "Why an event only for women? Because when women are in business, they are still the mothers, the cook, the cleaner and also, one of the breadwinners. **Women are so busy working they forget to celebrate themselves, or get an opportunity just to put their feet up**". This event was an opportunity for women to network, engage and listen to other experiences.



L-R: Bala Thakrar and Subhu Kumar

The first speaker was Subhu Kumar, who from the young age of 18 has always been in some form or the other of business. She spoke fondly of the time in the 1970's when she had a small stall at the then famous Kensington Market. Always the innovator, she capitalised on the fashion of the time, buying razor blades to make into earrings, as well as putting hooks into fresh chillies to sell as accessory items.

Her penchant and eye for fashion and accessories led her to starting up her own business selling accessories to stores across the UK. It was through this she was approached by top end London store Harrods. She now successfully supplies over 80 stores in the UK, and does it with only one staff. Subhu puts her success down to [ten tips](#), which include embracing competition as it is healthy for business, learning from mistakes and above all, never taking NO for an answer! Subhu also emphasised that any stock left over she gives to a social cause, either for them to resell or as gifts. Her ethos has always been to support orphanages in India regularly.

In conclusion, she mentioned that she had tried working with India, but got her fingers burned. What was agreed was never what was delivered, but she was really interested in reconnecting with India again.



L-R: Helen Deas and Priti Mattani

The next speaker, Helen Deas from East Midlands India Business Bureau (EMIBB) allayed those fears by talking about India, the opportunities available, as well as signposting people to the right sources.

Helen engaged the audience in an interactive 'What do you know about India' quiz which included fun questions such as 'What links flying, beer and whisky?' (Ans: Kingfisher) to more economic questions such as 'In which city is the

highest concentration of multimillionaires? (Ans: Mumbai). Helen's main message was *'don't underestimate India'*, and outlined the basics of doing business with India. She provided [tips](#) for trading with India, especially cultural ones that we can overlook living in the UK. These included simple things such as being clear and concise in delivering a message, as well as remaining diplomatic in all situations. EMIBB is on hand to provide one to one support for businesses that are looking to branch out to India.

Helen was then followed by Bala, who talked about having a **'business with a heart'**. When working in India, one should not neglect its staff, the local environment, the local community that one works with and overall, the consumers who are increasingly demanding that businesses should be concerned about where they source their products from. AFP's DFID funded project Sudarshan provides support for businesses wanting to become more responsible, as well as signposting to ethical sources.

The talk then led to fabulous dinner kindly given by Flamingo Restaurant and a networking opportunity where attendees got the chance to meet other likeminded women, as well as hear more about the different options available to each. The night ended on a buzz, with many attendees asking for a similar follow up event which looks more in detail at ethical sourcing, as well as more in depth tips on how to branch to India.



L-R: Raakhee Modha and Shradha Lakhani



Attendees listening intently to our speakers

Interested in ethical sourcing and being a responsible business? Get in touch with AFP:  
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Interested in working in India and need more information? Get in touch with EMIBB:  
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