

The Honorary Graduand: Subitha Bhagirath

Subitha Baghirathan is to be awarded the Honorary Doctor of Science.

I am Sri Lankan, born in Colombo in 1974. My ethnic and family heritages matter deeply to me. I also take pride in my identities as a mother to 2 daughters, a published author and poet, and a practising Buddhist.

My schooling began in Indonesia, at the local village school. We moved there for my father's engineering job. I arrived on Day 1 with no Bahasa- the language spoken there. Survival instinct kicked in, I soon was fluent enough to play with friends and settle into the class. My sage mother taught me English after school, as my parents planned to move to England in the future.

Over my past 5 decades, I have studied 9 languages so far, based on these foundations. I have clocked up a quarter of a century of race equity activism in Bristol- always within the not-for-profit community sector- with no intention to stop. My first years were spent in early years' education, when the city bloomed with initiatives due to the Government's Sure Start programme. My eyes opened to how much bias there had been in my school experiences in England from the age of 8. The fulfilment and satisfaction I felt through running anti-racist training for early years teachers and childminders, to affect change for the next generations, was immense. I have the privilege through my work- sometimes paid, often unpaid- of regularly feeling like this at the end of each day.

My most pivotal and meaningful education is ongoing, through activism particularly for Caribbean and South Asian communities. My inspiring and valuable educators have been my mentors- mostly other People of Colour who commit their time- like me- to disrupting discrimination, improving equity, initiating change. I deliberately chose to shift from generic community development to a focus on health equity in 2015. Being stubbornly specific like this equates to constant job insecurity and low pay.

I usually work freelance, seeking commissions, or am in short-term posts within community organisations, with funding applications taking up some of my time and thinking. Flexibility is crucial; I move into different health areas when there are paid opportunities, as long as I never spin into 'mission drift', veering from my commitment to health improvements for Caribbean and South Asian people in the wider Bristol area. Over the past decade, my topics have included dementia, diabetes prevention, healthy weight, chronic pain, menopause, falls prevention and physical activity. This enriches me, ensuring I am learning constantly, working more holistically in a way that benefits ordinary people more, and I have an ever-growing team of fabulous health- based colleagues across various sectors.

Applied research is an essential thread within my activism. I eagerly take any opportunity to carry out, or collaborate on, research studies which I believe expresses voices of those historically not

heard in health research, or aims to improve health services. Personally, I also savour the 'academic rigour' that this allows me; using and developing a different skill set.