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When Mary Verghese-Dipple finished her UK law degree in the late 1980s, she got out the Yellow Pages and started making lists of banks to which she could apply. “I thought about law firms, but they seemed to be full of white middle-class men, and it didn’t appeal. It also didn’t seem possible with no family history (in law)” she says today. JP Morgan was one of the banks to which she wrote “at least three times” before they gave her an interview, and a job. It turned out to be a very good start.

“I remember saying to my Dad I have an interview with JP Morgan – who are they? But I was 21 and it was a foot in the door” she says, looking back from her position today as Head of Legal, UK for Aberdeen Asset Management, the global investment management group.

Born in Kerala in India, she came to Britain as a baby with her family in the 1960s – when “the Indian dream was to go to New York or London” she says. They were “strict Catholics” and like her sister, she went to a convent school and attended church every Sunday.

“We were very much part of the Irish community, and my school was 70-80% Irish. There was one Asian in my year. But we never felt different or badly treated – it was a normal environment for me” says Ms Verghese-Dipple. In the Sixth Form the convent had to close, so she went to a school that was not Catholic “and met the rest of the world.”

Talking about her father’s decision to come to Britain, she says: “He didn’t appreciate the difficulties. I can’t imagine what he went through.” But if British Asians have anything in common, it may be parents who fiercely want the best for their children, and instil a deep work ethic.

“There was no plan for me other than ‘you have to do well.’ My parents didn’t understand career paths. As a teenager I thought about teaching or going into fashion

– and at 16 I wrote to the editor of Vogue. I got an interview, and someone very patient interviewed me. It was suggested I start at the bottom and make tea” she says. With the choices seemingly art, fashion, teaching or law, her father felt “there was only one option.”

Her subsequent law degree at North Staffordshire Poly (now Staffordshire University) was also her first experience of living away from home. “Indian parents tend to be very protective” she says, in what appears to be characteristic understatement. She became very interested in criminal law, and was later - supported by her employer NatWest Capital Markets- to qualify as a barrister with an MA in Business Law from London Metropolitan University.

At JP Morgan, she originally started in a very junior role in the trade finance team, assisting with shipping documents. “I found it very dull. So I asked to be moved to a legal role. They put me in a unit supporting the very new swaps team – derivatives hadn’t been invented yet, and the market was just developing” she says. It was excellent timing.

“What I liked about JP Morgan was that it was very multicultural, and you had people from all over the world. I felt very comfortable, and I could fit in easily. But they were also very high calibre, and sometimes I felt I had come in through the back door. Some of them were also very aggressive” she says today.

Moving on to NatWest Capital Markets, she found herself in her first management role in her late 20s, heading up a team. As her reporting line changed, she was also mentored by a male boss and sent on a course for female executives. A broad range of derivatives and capital markets legal experience followed as she started a family and also moved on, to the European Bank For Reconstruction And Development (EBRD) and then Tokai Capital Markets (UFJ).

The importance of having a human relationship with an employer was highlighted for Ms Verghese-Dipple when she joined Carr Futures, amid the personal upheaval of moving house. The interview was scheduled for 9/11, the day Carr Futures lost 69 employees in the attack on the World Trade Center. “The person who was

interviewing me still came to London from Paris on Eurostar. It all felt very strange. It turned out to be such a human organisation, with a very supportive culture” she says. Carr Futures was later rebranded as Calyon Financial which merged with Fimat in 2008 to create Newedge.

Her preference for an open, supportive culture was fulfilled when she moved away from banking and brokerage to join Aberdeen Asset Management three years ago. “Everything is open plan. Culturally you would never see that in an investment bank” she says.

“I have only been here for three years and in that time Aberdeen Asset Management has become a FTSE100 company, and we have had so many acquisitions – it has been a whirl.”

Ms Verghese-Dipple credits Aberdeen’s Chief Investment Officer (CIO) Anne Richards with finding ways to ensure that people – from graduate interns up - are developed and mentored. “People recommend you for things that wouldn’t happen otherwise. We help people to grow and move on” she says.

And that is how she finds herself on the shortlist in the ‘professional’ category for the Asian Women of Achievement Awards 2014, announced in London on the evening of June 4th.