

# Behind the camera with BBC's Babita Sharma



By Leigh Andrews

29 Jun 2016

Babita Sharma is the main presenter of *Newsday*, BBC World News' daily news programme presented live from Singapore and London. If you'd like to follow in her footsteps, you're in luck as she offers insight into the challenging, chaotic, but incredibly rewarding world of broadcast journalism with us.

“I remember the first BBC contract I got was at BBC Radio Berkshire where I was the traffic and travel reporter – not very glamorous, reporting on bottlenecks and traffic jams on the M25, but it was my first taste of a newsroom and it was the break I was waiting for – paid employment by the BBC. It was a definitely a highlight for me.”

That's a direct quote from Sharma. Over the years, she has been at the forefront of many incredible news stories, both in the studio and on location. These include global headline-grabbers like the Arab Spring uprising and the death of Osama bin Laden – that was one of her first big breaking stories as a presenter on BBC World News, and she soon realised it would be one of the biggest she'd cover. Speaking of further career highlights, she adds that she was also part of the BBC team reporting on somewhat happier major events like the Royal Wedding and London 2012 Olympics.



Sharma explains: “I love the adrenaline of big breaking news, especially when you're on location, and for me these opportunities are real highlights. For example, reporting in Delhi during the recent India elections or standing in a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people during the height of the Hong Kong protest in 2014. It's these career moments that really stay with you, the moments where you are living and breathing the story as it happens on the ground.”

Here, she talks us through the best and worst bits of her day job and shares exclusive career advice to budding broadcast journalists...

## 1. What sparked your interest in broadcast journalism?

**Sharma:** I always wanted to be an actress and I trained at the London Academy of Music & Dramatic Arts (LAMDA), but my parents wanted me to have what they called 'a solid career' and so I chose to study journalism at university. Even after I graduated I wasn't sure if it was for me, but then things changed when I began working in newsrooms around the UK. Getting hands-on experience as a producer and a shoot-edit (a video journalist) was great and I soon became fascinated by the news environment. I eventually made it to London and it's here – working for Europe's largest newsroom and for the BBC - that I really caught the news bug.

## 2. Who is your mentor/career idol?

**Sharma:** I'm inspired by strong women in news, especially because it still is a very white, middle-class male dominated space. One of my mentors – and now a good friend – is the BBC's China editor Carrie Gracie. I met Carrie when I was a producer for the BBC News Channel 10 years ago. She is an incredible woman, journalist and mum and has always been honest with me about life in the fast lane as a presenter. Advice from people like Carrie is priceless, especially when you're breaking into the industry.

## 3. What do you love and hate about your day job?

**Sharma:** I love news, because you never know what's going to happen in your working day. It's a real heady mix of adrenaline, curiosity and speed that becomes addictive when you have a breaking news story on your hands. I work with some incredibly talented people from producers and editors to all our technical staff and directors. It's amazing how the crazy, exciting and often pressurised newsroom can become manageable when you work with a great team. I also love the variety of my job. I spent three months last year presenting BBC World News America from Washington, and later this year I'll be heading to Brazil for four weeks for the Rio Olympics – what's not to love?

Things that aren't so great about my job – the hours. I can't remember the last time I went to sleep before 2am! Presenting Newsday on BBC World News means I'm always on Asia timing in London, so late nights are no new thing to me, but that's very much the world of broadcast journalism. I can't remember ever working a 9-to-5 shift pattern. Live television is a fast-paced environment and I often crave more time for interviews. Sometimes we get an extra 60 seconds, which can make a big difference, but more often than not the nature of what we do means we have to move on, which can be frustrating.

## 4. That's for sure! Share some advice on how to handle ageism in the industry when young reporters are seen as just not having enough experience to handle the big stories.

**Sharma:** If you have chosen to be a broadcast journalist then you are about to enter a challenging, chaotic, but incredibly rewarding world. It's not easy and sometimes long hours and hard work become the norm. My advice is to always try and keep your feet on the ground. Listening is a great skill to have as a journalist as you can learn so much from lots of talented and experienced people you work with. Work experience is key in our industry so try and grab as many opportunities as you can and, if anyone questions your ability, you can demonstrate your skills by giving examples of projects you've worked on.

News environments can be intimidating, but don't be afraid to share your views or perspectives on a story. It's useful to remember that everyone has had that nervous feeling in their career, so have the courage to be yourself - especially if you are the youngest of the team or your gender or race is not equally represented. Trust your gut instinct, if something doesn't

feel right or you feel your voice isn't being heard, then say so – you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain, so go for it!

## 5. Sound advice. What's your ultimate career goal/job title down the line?

**Sharma:** In many respects, I have already fulfilled a dream, which is to travel the world and tell people's stories. Right now I'm working on a documentary that's outside of my news commitments that has really sparked an interest in long-form storytelling. I pitched a story to the BBC about the history of the cornershop. As the daughter of shopkeepers, I wanted to unravel the story behind Britain's iconic institution and why the cornershop has a place in people's hearts. Thankfully the BBC shared my passion and agreed it was a story worth sharing. We've nearly finished filming and I'm so pleased that it will broadcast on BBC World News in September 2016. Being able to write, present and co-produce documentaries like this is a real passion and I hope I get to work on more in the future.

Follow Sharma's career highlights [on Twitter](#) and keep an eye out for her on BBC World News.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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