

Vandana sets her sights on Mrs Universe 2018 title

VANDANA FEELS AT HOME IN HER UNIVERSE ONCE AGAIN

- *Indian mother & businesswoman tells her story leading her to an empowering global contest*

Edinburgh-based Vandana Sharma, a former architect and now a successful businesswoman with her own online jewellery company, is to fly the flag for Scotland at a global contest celebrating, not just beauty, but the “whole allure of a person.”

[Mrs Universe 2018](#), to be held in Cebu Island in the Philippines in December 2018, is an intensive seven to ten day long competition for women between twenty five and forty five years of age, who are married, have a family, and also a career.

It's one of a series of contests held all over the World which bring women of various ages together to compete in public speaking, catwalk, and supporting their nominated causes and charities.



Already the Holder of three prestigious titles – Mrs India UK – a title she won in April of this year in London on her very first time of entering – Mrs Scotland Universe, and Winner of Style Icon, Vandana, who is of Indian origin and a British National since 2014, explains why these competitions should not be dismissed as beauty pageants of old.

She said : “I’m aware that many people still do not approve of competitions where looks are judged – but the whole concept of the beauty contest has changed, led by this organisation, and others, which hold these contests in lots of different locations, and now have specific ones for grandmothers, for mothers like me, for children, including even boys, and for younger single women, which obviously was once the only category there really was.

“They have really widened it out now to include many more groups, it’s far more inclusive.

“I believe the idea behind these different competitions is all good and positive. It’s trying to empower individuals, and we should all be more open minded about them. I had very personal reasons for starting on the path which is now leading me to this competition in the Philippines. It’s going to be an

amazing life affirming journey for me.”



Vandana was enjoying her career as an architect when it was cut short by stargardt's disease, which gradually causes a loss of sight. A huge blow for her, she immediately felt she had lost many of her life goals in one fell swoop.

She explained : "I was pretty devastated, and once I came to terms with the news, which was hard, I knew I couldn't go back to my former career. I tried working in Pensions for a few years, but there are still major issues in the workplace for those with disabilities. It is still a real challenge to compete with able-bodied people, and some personnel I worked with struggled to understand and empathise with my condition. Plus, I felt no real passion for the job.

"A major life change that like affects everything, After much soul searching, I decided I had no option but to consider becoming self employed. I launched my jewellery company five years ago, called Signore-Signori, which certainly helped re-engage me, and was a positive focus, as I wanted to see it grow and succeed, and I still do. It's now been on Amazon for five years. I'm in the process of launching another one called Kiarah."



Vandana Sharma

As both businesses are run online, Vandana found she still missed the social interaction of the workplace, and realised that she was still looking for something else in her life to reconnect her with her old self.

“I had my daughter, who is now three years old, and like many women felt a bit cut off and depressed afterwards. I put on weight and had to take myself in hand to get back into shape and feel good about myself again. Everything that had happened to me had taken its toll -I thought my sparkle had gone!”

Having modelled on occasion in her younger years, Vandana was then attracted to enter the Mrs India UK competition in 2018.

“Although I was altogether happier, and had regained my self esteem, I still felt there was something missing in my life. I

wanted to challenge myself further," she said.

"The Mrs India UK competition was new, only in its second year, and really appealed as it was specifically asking for older married women like me to enter. It wasn't just a beauty contest, there was so much more to it, and I liked the idea of improving at public speaking."

Vandana went through the rigorous selection process for the Top Thirty finalists, being chosen from 200 entrants. Then she had to travel down to London for the final, competing against thirty other females from all over the UK.

"I remember feeling really daunted about having to travel down to London on my own during the selection process and grooming sessions.

"Since losing my sight, something like that was a huge deal to me but I did it, and was very proud of myself, as previously I had relied on my husband to come with me. I couldn't read any signs around me and was embarrassed to use my sight aids in public. I travelled on my own for the first time in eight years. It was the first of many positive steps on what became the road to a new me. I was delighted with the new person that was emerging.

"I am so glad I took the plunge and entered, as it was amazing to win a competition like this on my first time, beating all those other contestants."

Vandana is also keen to pay tribute to her husband who looked after their daughter while she took part in the competition, and will do again when she travels to the Philippines.

She said delightedly : "Nothing would have been possible without him, and he has enabled me to follow my dreams, which is something I will be telling my own daughter to do when she is older.

“Now it will once again be daunting to travel overseas on my own for the Mrs Universe contest, but I know that I can do it!”

To take part at Mrs Universe, Vandana will have to compete against eighty five other women from around the world, who are independent, have a specific career, and are working towards a social cause. The seven day programme includes a one to one interview with a panel of judges, a question and answer round with an audience of approximately 1500 people, a talent round and a fitness round!

“I’m more than ready for this,” she said. “I have become so much more confident and have my own radio show on an Asian network, and am in the process of becoming a volunteer speaker for one of my adopted Charities, Care International UK. Winning [Mrs India](#) certainly opened doors for me.”

“The causes that Mrs Universe adopt are serious such as female empowerment,” said Vandana. “We won’t just be paying lip service to these issues, we have to carry out significant work to support the cause. The judges are with us constantly for the ten days seeing how we can cope with the challenges – it is intense.

“I have been actively involved with charities supporting women, such as Care International UK, Plan International UK, and NKS Edinburgh. I also support the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind), another sight charity, the Macular Society and am involved with the 20,000 steps campaign.

“I also want to encourage female education in India and raise my voice against female foeticide. I have already been promoting charities like Nanhi kali to support girl education and now will be using the power of my crown to spread even more awareness about the cause. Like a very famous saying – “when you educate a man you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman you educate a nation!”

Vandana explained that whilst most friends and family had been supportive, some were still dubious about her choosing to enter these competitions, and spending time away from her husband and daughter.

“Yes it hard to face criticism but that is life sometimes, everyone has their own opinions and I am only doing what I feel is right for me,” she said, “I also believe that through entering these pageants I am encouraging people with disabilities not to consider their ill health, whatever their condition, as a barrier towards achieving their dreams. Being partially sighted myself, I did not let my health rule over my life. I overcome all the challenges that came along in fulfilling my dreams.”

Vandana quotes inspirational actor Christopher Reeve: “A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.”

Vandana is now hoping to attract some local business sponsors for her trip to Cebu Island in December.

Further details can be found [on her Facebook page.](#)

