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## **One on One with Virendra Sharma**

Virendra Sharma is a British Labour Party politician and the Member of Parliament (MP) for Ealing Southall, London since 2007.

In November 2008, the Labour government assigned Sharma the role of Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of State at the Treasury and Home Office. He is a member of the parliamentary select committees on Health, Human Rights and International Development. He has extensively travelled overseas on official visits as a MP to Cyprus, Kenya, Mauritius, South Korea, and various regions of India. He is the Vice-Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tamils. He was the local councilor in the London Borough of Ealing from 1982–2010 and also served as a Mayor for part of his time as a councilor.

The interview was conducted on 10-01-2017 at 06:30 PM.

Interviewer: Harsh Singh

Interviewee: Virendra Sharma, Member of Parliament and Labour Party Politician.



**Harsh: Welcome to India. Tell us about your experience in Bangalore.**

**Virendra Sharma:** I love it. I've enjoyed my stay here. I find it that this is the place where we can pursue future education, research and development, health provisions; this is the place where you can get the growth building up for India.

**Harsh: Your Comments about today's event?**

**Virendra Sharma:** It was great and more than my expectations. Never expected that this was going to happen. I was given the impression that some board members will be having a chat with me but I was overwhelmed with the kind of reception was given to me.

**Harsh:** Your life has been quite inspiring for an Indian. You were born in 1947, the same year India gained Independence. **What are some of the earliest memories you have of the post-colonial era and how things have changed?**

**Virendra Sharma:** No. I mean that time we had very limited resources available to us, very few colleges and institution were there. The roads and infrastructure were nothing, in the areas, I come from Jalandhar. I used to live in a village near Jalandhar (Punjab - India). I was nearly fourteen when I had electricity in my village. Yes, I was fourteen years old when in the village we had electricity. My village, for many reasons, was chosen to get electricity. Still, electricity was not commonly available in the villages. Roads were not the roads like we have now; they were dusty roads.

**Harsh: Was your visit restricted to only places in Punjab or did you explore other parts of India too?**

**Virendra Sharma:** Mainly, yes I was in Punjab. I visited Kashmir and I use to visit many different places. My personal life was a little bit different then but I am this feel of the general environment of that time. It was a very poor system available. Education was, you have to go to twenty miles to go to the college. It was not at your doorstep. So if you look at since I left in the last 48-49 years, the improvement, huge improvement has taken place. Standards have increased. It is from the poor to middle classes has grown now. Everybody has education now. Whether how far they go in the system but availability is there. It's not the same. So these are the improvements I take it in the society or a country as a general.

**Harsh: Tell us about your journey from a bus conductor on the 207 route to the Member of Parliament in Britain?**

**Virendra Sharma:** (Laughs) Yeah! Look when I went to Britain, the first job I did was as a bus conductor then I got involved in the local trade union. A trade union were a fighting force for the rights of the workers, bringing equality into the society, fighting for the better wages and employment condition. So I got involved in that moment. I was fortunate that at a very early age I had the opportunity. When I went there I was 21 but I was 23 when I was first elected to what we call as an organizer for a trade union. (Was it a youth wing?) No. I was with the mature rather than the young. So I was the youngest organizer in the trade union movement. Then I got

involved in the politics over there then the Trade Union Congress gave me the scholarship to go to the London School of Economics where I have done my trade union industrial relation then done Masters in Government and Politics. Then worked for the leader of the Labour Party for 9 years, which was a national leader, who could have been the prime minister of the country. I was one of the advisers to him until 1992 when he lost the election then I've done few other jobs.

I then did similar things but by I was trying many things (along the line of Labour Party) party line, looking for something will emerge, became a counselor in the year 1982, Continue as a counselor, became a mayor of the Borough and (huh smiles) then you know that was the life and then I become the member of parliament.

**Harsh: How different is the politics in the Britain from India?**

**Virendra Sharma:** I mean basic principle are always the same. But the implementations of those principles are different. We are more grass-root oriented politicians. You emerge from the bottom out. Here, you bring from the top-down. You are handpicked to be in the politics. We are not. We have to work hard. You win the confidence of your local party members then get elected. There are a strong competition and the competition in not with the money. The competition is with your hard work, your continuation, your contribution to the debates, your contribution to the community, your contribution to the party. You don't have to please one person but you have please hundreds of people. Here, you can please one person who could be the leader of the party and then you get a place.

**Harsh Singh: How do you see the future between India and Britain, especially when PM Theresa promised to bring down immigration? A lot of Indians go there for education and work? You may comment in the general sense.**

**Virendra Sharma:** It is a standard statement. It's not - the reality. Theresa May is not, in that sense saying that she doesn't want people coming. You can make the conditions but you cannot, Britain particularly cannot survive without the support of the immigrants. Whether they are living there or the future immigrants because they need it. You are a young student and you are future of the nation, right. We are living in a global community now. We are not one Indian community; we have to participate widely in the wider world. So when you are competing in that Britain is part of that larger picture. When that is there they need people with skills and when you can't provide the skills so you are looking for the skills from the different areas. So where the skills will come from? There's always a gap in skills.

**Harsh Singh: You were associated with Fair Visa Fair Chance campaign. Tell us about it?**

**Virendra Sharma:** Yes. What we were saying that those people who wanted to come to Britain; if you are coming from India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, the rule applies differently than when you coming from Europe or the white state countries then you have your rules applies differently, right. So that's why we are saying that rule should apply fairly to all; doesn't matter whether your skin is brown, black or white.

**Abrar Bhatt :** You are associated with Labour Party which is a leftist party. Do you think there should be a concern in India about how the left ideology should grow? What's your view?

**Virendra Sharma:** Look, it's the responsibility of the political party to convince the public, to join them. They have to sell themselves. The political parties need to. We on the left believe that the particular ideological debate and let the people decide it how we put ourselves forward is the question rather than what anybody else thinks of.

**Harsh:** What are your views about India under PM Narendra Modi? Can you also sum-up the impression other MP's have about PM Modi?

**Virendra Sharma:** Mr Modi is democratically Member of Parliament then the majority of member of parliamentarian has chosen him, prime minister. It's up to the people of India to comment on Mr Modi's performance. We cannot comment. He is elected democratically; if he was a dictator then I would have said differently. He is democratically elected by the people of India, I have no vote here. I have no influence here and my comments will be seen as interfering in the politics of the other country. I am a British politician, not Indian. (Laughs)

As far as I am concern, as long as Mr Modi also looks after the interest of the Indian diaspora living who have the passion for India like me. That our safety, our security, our interest are properly looked after we have no concern. It is up to the people when the elections come and if they say that he is the wrong man, they should take him out and if they feel he is doing a good job then they should vote for him. It's up to the people.

**Harsh Singh:** An Indian Member of Parliament, **Dr Shashi Tharoor gave a powerful speech at the Oxford Union. He pointed out that "the Britain owes reparation or a mere apology would do the least for your disastrous rule in India".Your Comments?**

**Virendra Sharma:** I am not sure what the fuss was all about. Indian Politicians think they will get back Kohinoor. That's not at all possible. I spoke in the house against such move. Even if we generously want to give the Kohinoor back, hypothetically, then who shall keep it? This is a joke. Britain will not pay or return anything. For the past, politicians have expressed their solitude with India and even I have had apologised in the public. I know Shashi and I've met him few times. I think he is living in a dream world.

**Harsh:** Lastly, do you enjoy watching Indian films or listening to Indian music?

**Virendra Sharma:** Of course. I was dancing. Didn't you see me in the Bhangra? (Laughs)

**Harsh:** Thank you.

**Virendra Sharma:** Thank you. It's a pleasure.