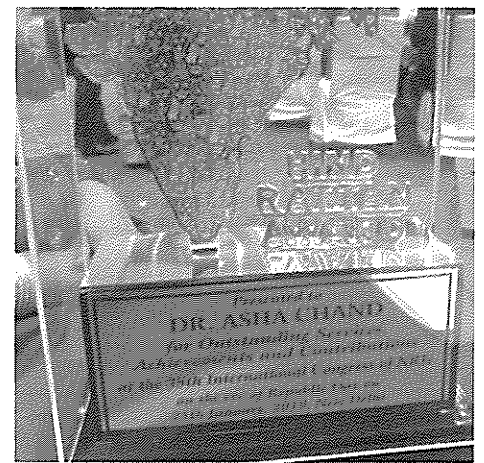




House of Commons, London: Dr Chand receives the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award



The Hind Rattan Award

# Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award for Dr Asha Chand

*(Extracted with permission from a feature article by Christine Khan)*

The House of Commons in London, England is a long way from Tavarau, a small fishing village tucked among rolling hills, facing the open sea, in Ba, Fiji. Dr Asha Chand, Associate Dean International for South Asia in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at Western Sydney University, who was raised in Tavarau, was in London in October 2018 to receive international recognition for her work in many spheres, including journalism, teaching and her research work.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) is the highest honour conferred on overseas Indians.

PBSA is conferred by the President of India as a part of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Conventions organised annually since 2003 on a Non-Resident Indian, Person of Indian Origin or an organization or institution established and run by the Non-Resident Indians, who has made significant contribution in any one of the following fields:

- Better understanding abroad of India;
- Support to India's causes and concerns in a tangible way;
- Building closer links between India, the overseas Indian community and their country of residence;
- Social and humanitarian causes in India or abroad;
- Welfare of the local Indian community;
- Philanthropic and charitable work;
- Eminence in one's field or outstanding work, which has enhanced India's prestige in the country of residence; or
- Eminence in skills which has enhanced India's prestige in that country (for non-professional workers).

An icing on the cake was added on the eve of India's Republic Day in Delhi, on 25 January 2019 when Dr Chand was honoured with a Hind Rattan award for her continued foray in the fields of education. The Hind Rattan, which means 'Jewel of India', is one of the highest Indian diasporic awards granted annually to non-resident persons of Indian origin (NRIs) by

the NRI Welfare Society of India. The award is granted at the Society's annual congress on the eve of India's Republic Day in conjunction with national Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations.

The award ceremony is attended by senior members of the Government of India and of the Supreme Court of India. The number of awardees varies each year, but is generally about 25 to 30. Criteria for award selection are not published by the Society; award selections are made among the Society leadership and awardees are invited to attend the conference in New Delhi to accept their awards. This award is considered the highest award for NRIs, PIO.

It was in Sydney in October last year that Asha received an email to say that she was to receive the Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Samman award. Thinking it was a hoax, she asked the university's IT department to investigate. She received an all clear.

Not satisfied with one source, she verified with a few others including her husband, children and a close-knit circle of IT experts, including the Australian High Commission in Delhi, India.

The award, given each year to 30 Indians from a diaspora of 16 million from around the globe, is for her journalism work in Fiji where she managed the then News Corporation owned Fiji Times newsroom as chief of staff for five years until 1998, when she migrated to Australia, her teaching in journalism and other areas and for her research.

Rory Gibson, who was editor-in-chief of *The Fiji Times* at the time, had this to say about Dr Asha Chand:

Asha was a fearless journalist who understood journalism, working for the wider society and not promoting cultural norms. She had a steely personality; she was a strong person and wouldn't be pushed around. In her role as chief of staff at *The Fiji Times* she wasn't going to take 'hit from anyone. She shaped the newsroom and did the job brilliantly and won the respect of her doubtful co-workers. She instilled discipline in the newsroom.

Dr Chand, who is also journalism area convener at WSU, completed her PhD research titled *The Chutney Generation: Fiji Indian Migration, Match-making and Media in Sydney*, in 2012. She curated a three-month exhibition, 'The Chutney Generations', giving the community a lively platform to express its identity through song, dance, food, fashion, kava and chutney making at Liverpool Museum as part of her research. Liverpool, Sydney is home to the largest Fiji Indian population outside of Fiji.

Her students have in turn stamped a mark on the international reporting scene with some working as crime reporters in New York, editors in Turkey, producers at the BBC, international correspondents tracking the mafia in Italy to working as media advisers to federal and state ministers and premiers. Other students are making a huge difference through journalism at the local and national fronts while others are using journalism skills to make contributions to society on many other fronts.

"I am happy and proud to have taught every single student in my classes," Dr Chand has commented.

Says Mark McKeown, Channel Manager for Sky News on WIN:

Dr Chand has been a great mentor and friend to me for more than a decade. I have never met anyone with as much energy, enthusiasm and passion for journalism and education as Asha has. She taught me that journalism is not about following a formula or trying to sound clever; it's about people. And that's what makes her different. She genuinely cares about the people she teaches and the stories they have to tell.

Dr Chand has come a long way from the 10-year-old girl who took her mother's chickens to Globe Theatre in Lautoka, Fiji's second largest city, to exchange for a movie ticket. 'I didn't even know the value of free range chickens! I could have seen two movies,' she says reminiscing how her childhood was carefree and full of adventure in her village, where the family lived off the farm, growing all the food they ate, at home.

