

# Polar opposites

## Husband and wife bring different skills, strengths to New Delhi business firm



By Brian Cox

“If you’re going to answer,” Mani Gupta instructs her husband after being asked during a Zoom interview how the two lawyers first met, “then I think we should agree on a protocol.”

“Okay,” says her husband, Abhishek Tripathi, the founding partner of Sarthak Advocates & Solicitors in New Delhi, India. “I think you should answer, and I will comment later.”

Which is exactly the protocol his wife had in mind.

“You can keep yourself on mute,” she tells him.

Abhishek and Mani, who have been married for 15 years and have two young children, demonstrate a depth of comfortableness and familiarity with one another that can only be found in a relationship that has spanned decades.

“We’re like those penguins who mate for life and get stuck with each other,” says Mani with a laugh.

She is a litigator. He is a transactional attorney. She is direct and outspoken; he is milder and more congenial. They complement each other’s strengths and offset the other’s challenges.

“It’s a case of opposites attract,” says Mani, “but at the core we are actually the same person. I don’t think we disagree on the fundamental values of life.”

The delightful couple met in law school in Bangalore when Mani wasn’t yet 18 and Abhishek was almost 22. She was a first-year student at the National Law School of India University and he was in his final year, serving as president of the student union. Abhishek says Mani was energetic, bubbly, and confident.



**Newlyweds Mani Gupta and Abhishek Tripathi visited the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt on their honeymoon in 2008.**

“First years are typically intimidated by fifth years,” says Abhishek, “but Mani was not. She was fearless. She was willing to take on the world without batting an eye.”

The early days of their courtship consisted of hours-long walks around campus, an occasional movie, and studying together in the library. They spent as much time together as possible because at the end of the year Abhishek intended to join a law firm in New Delhi, which is a 2-1/2-hour flight from Bangalore, and they would likely see far less of each other after he left.

“We knew that there was a very limited period of time when we would be physically together,” recalls Mani. “I think that made everything all the more sweet. Each moment needed to be cherished and savored.”

The next five years were difficult for the couple as they worked to maintain a long-distance relationship while Mani finished her schooling and Abhishek began his career at Luthra & Luthra Law Offices, a large and prominent corporate law firm in New Delhi. Mani often stayed up late to wait for Abhishek to finish at the law office so that they could talk on the phone. As a young associate, Abhishek regularly worked until well after midnight and he remembers falling asleep with the phone to his ear as Mani told him about her day. They exchanged views on life, plans for the future, and traded confidences.

“He’s the person I can say anything to about anyone and I know that it’s not going to get repeated because I sometimes say some of the most obnoxious things about people,” says Mani.

“Mani is somebody who is not shy about expressing herself in all situations,” says Abhishek, “and I think that is the reason why she has the closest friends. All manner of people are willing to confide things in her.”

They don’t remember ever specifically speaking about marriage, but Abhishek says it was implied fairly early on in the relationship, and when Mani graduated from law school in June 2008, they got married six months later in December.

At the time, the majority of marriages in India were still “arranged” by the future bride and groom’s parents. Love marriages like Mani and Abhishek’s were less common. Abhishek’s

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**Abhishek and Mani and their two children, Aniruddh and Radhika, celebrate Holi, a popular and significant Hindu festival also known as the Festival of Colors.**

father, in fact, did not approve of them getting married. Abhishek was the first in his family going back generations to have a love marriage to an inter-caste spouse, and it took a while for his father to come around.

“Mani grows on you,” says Abhishek.

After she graduated from law school, Mani accepted a position in the same large corporate law firm where Abhishek worked in New Delhi. She was upfront with the partners when she was hired about their relationship. A year later, in July 2009, Abhishek left the firm to reassess his career goals with a thought that he might enter politics.

“I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do with my life,” he says. “I wanted to do something meaningful.”

After concluding that a political career was too expensive a proposition, Abhishek decided to start a law firm that would reflect his values and priorities. He called the firm Sarthak, which means “meaningful” in Hindi. The full-service firm focuses on corporate and commercial law in emerging sectors such as energy, roads and highways, technology, education, data protection, and arbitration.

In 2011, Mani joined her husband’s firm, first working on corporate transactional law before discovering her passion for litigation in 2014. She now heads up the firm’s litigation department. The division between litigation and transactional

work has proved successful for the couple and management of the firm benefits from their different personalities and approaches to problem-solving.

“I’m like blue cheese. You’re either going to love me or you’re going to hate me unless you spend sufficient time with me,” explains Mani. “But with him, I feel that he is immediately likeable. He’s like chocolate.”

For their honeymoon, the newlyweds traveled to Egypt, a destination that raised many an eyebrow among friends and family. Who goes to Egypt for their honeymoon, people wondered. Other trips abroad have taken them to Jordan and South Africa where they have been able to engage their shared interest in history.

“Everyone keeps asking when we’re going to take a romantic trip,” says Mani, adding with a laugh, “I think the stereotypically most romantic place we’ve gone is Paris during the Primerus Global Conference.”

But for Mani and Abhishek, their travels are emblematic of the nature of their marriage, which is rooted in deep and abiding friendship.

“First and foremost, he is my best friend,” says Mani of Abhishek. “After that he is a lover, after that he is a husband, after that he is the father of my kids, and last of all he is the partner in the same law firm as me.”

“She is fearless and expressive and can fight the world if she believes in you, which is something I think I cherish the most,” says Abhishek of Mani. “She brings a smile to my face.”



**Attorneys Abhishek Tripathi and Mani Gupta met in law school and now work together at Sarthak Advocates & Solicitors in New Delhi. Abhishek started the firm in 2009.**