

The world of Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty

Shami Chakrabarti, 37, has been the director of the civil rights group Liberty since 2003. She lives in London with her husband, the city lawyer Martyn Hopper, and their son.

Morning routine On an average day the alarm goes off at six and I get up, followed by my husband and four-year-old son. We have breakfast at about eight (usually I don't eat anything, though I know I should) and then we do the school run. The mornings are generally a happy time. About once a week I get up extra early to go on the radio or TV or to travel out of London for a speaking engagement. I don't feel as nervous about media appearances as I used to.

Question Time is definitely the most nerve-racking, though, because there is a live studio audience. I might have to talk about subjects that aren't my core territory and because of the gladiatorial dynamic.

Travel essentials My

Reading To Kill a Mockingbird made me want to become a lawyer

BlackBerry, keys, my mobile phone, a notebook and a little bit of make-up. I use Clinique, but only because years ago I went into a department store and someone at the Clinique counter offered to show me what products to use.

Favourite book *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, which I first read when I was 12 and then studied at school. So much of what I believe about people and values is promoted in the simple but powerful story of the lawyer

Atticus Finch, who defends a black man in the Deep South on the false charge of rape. It's really about three basic values: dignity, equality and fairness. As a child it was that book and the film *12 Angry Men* that made me want to be a lawyer.

Favourite film The 1966 film version of Edward Albee's play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. I first saw it when I was in my early teens. When I was a law student at LSE, I used to bunk off contract lectures to go to the National Film Theatre on the South Bank. At that time I wanted to be a screenwriter and planned to get a swanky job as a trader and save up the money to go and study in the States. Instead I went to bar school and became a barrister. Now I'm a governor of the British Film Institute, which is a great organisation.

Best gift received Last Christmas my husband gave me the complete DVD box-set of *The West Wing* (pictured). It's an idealised version of American politics but that's not a bad thing. In Britain we have some excellent satire, such as

The Thick of It, which is so funny it's painful. But part of me wishes there could be a British *West Wing* that took a more idealistic view of British politics, even if that's not a true reflection of how things are.

Musical instruments As a kid I had violin lessons and played the tuba – it was about the same size as me. My son has several toy instruments (pictured) given to him by his grandparents – parents don't tend to buy drum kits for their small children. He'll get out his



guitar and ask my husband to dance while he plays.

What makes you angry?

The complacency that some people have, particularly people in power, towards democracy, rights and freedoms. But I'm less frustrated than I used to be, because having the privilege of being able to do something about it in my job channels that anger.

Question you are always asked Are you related to the BBC correspondent Rita Chakrabarti? The answer is no.

Favourite homecooked meal Curry, cooked by my mum. My husband is a great cook, too.

Favourite painting The artist Tess Barnes wrote to me when I was not long in my job and quite stressed, and asked if she could paint my portrait (pictured). I met her, we chatted, and I decided to sit for her because I wanted to spend more time with her. For several months we spent an hour together every couple of weeks. It was like therapy.

Collections I'm not a collector. But I have many photographs of my little one and I keep all his drawings. My husband and I have lots of law books (pictured) in the study and bookcases full of novels.

Heroes I have lots. My husband is one. So is the human-rights lawyer Helena Kennedy, who has been my role model for more than 20 years. I first heard her speak when I was a student and now she is a friend. Vivienne Westwood is another of my heroes. A few years ago, she signed a Liberty petition against control orders, which mean people can be under house arrest indefinitely without being charged. I wrote to thank her, and she asked if she could find out more about Liberty. When Andrew Marr interviewed her for her damehood he asked questions about fashion, but instead she spoke about Liberty.

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