

## The Face of M, an Interview With...



**Kavita Baba**

### **Sulphur Recovery Engineer, Martinez**

As a chemical engineering student at Cornell University in New York State, Kavita Baba searched for a “hands-on” application for her love for science. She found what she was looking for during an internship at Global M’s Martinez refinery. After graduating from Cornell in 2009, Kavita went back to Martinez and the manufacturing environment that she calls the epitome of chemical engineering.

**Q:** Why was Shell such a good fit for you?

**A:** What sealed my decision to take up an internship offer with Shell was my feeling that I could get a lot of in-depth, practical experience that would complement my college work. During my internship, one of my projects was to evaluate the catalyst life at a hydrogen plant, which exposed me to the many work processes and procedures managed at the refinery. The other project was to develop a database to track furnace efficiency and emissions, in preparation for California’s AB-32 monitoring requirements. This was really where I first felt as if my work added value and utility for the site. This opportunity to give back as much as I got out of my time here ultimately influenced my decision to come to work at Shell full-time.

**Q:** What was your first assignment at Martinez in 2009?

**A:** My first assignment was to support the hydrotreaters around the cat cracker, where I was fortunate to be involved in turnarounds on both units and support start up, shutdown, and maintenance activities. In some sense it was like resetting the clock from my internship, as my new experience involved significantly more responsibility and ownership. Seeing the process in so many different conditions really improved my understanding of the way everything functions, and prepared me well for my next (and current) assignment as the Sulphur Recovery Engineer.

**Q:** Do you feel like your work makes a difference at Martinez?

**A:** I believe so. As an Operations Support Engineer (OSE), I’m tasked with providing day-to-day unit support and monitoring, but I’ve been most enthused when we’ve been able to implement something novel, such as a new process to regenerate our DEA system, or identify and mitigate the various threats to reliability and safety. Ultimately, though, it’s a team effort that allows us to manage the routine, new, and unexpected successfully.

**Q:** Describe the sense of teamwork at Martinez.

**A:** I'm fortunate to be part of a dynamic group where people with all manner of backgrounds and levels of experience are working towards the same goals, and get along really well both inside and outside the workplace! It's a pleasure for me to work here because everyone is an equal contributor to the team and is not afraid to challenge one another. It's very cross-functional.

**Q:** Do you believe that M is an innovative, exciting place to be?

**A:** You do not get more 'typical' chemical engineering than being in a manufacturing environment. For me, the excitement comes from being able to take what I found in a textbook and actually see it in real life. I wouldn't call it routine and boring when I'm here at 3:30 in the morning, in my pyjamas, in a column, with all my gear for entry and inspection. There's an added challenge because it's a tight environment for anyone in the manufacturing industry-how do you turn something perceived as unprofitable into a profitable enterprise? I don't see M running out of challenges any time soon.

**Q:** Are you involved with Shell networks?

**A:** Yes, I'm one of the co-chairs of the Shell Asia Pacific Network at Martinez. There's really that sense of community and passion for D&I here, and with the diversity networks, people look forward to getting together and learning about new cultures and traditions. I'm fortunate to be a part of a network that is so engaged.

**Q:** What do you like to do outside of work?

**A:** Since moving to California, I've been swept up in a lot of the outdoorsy activities-I've gotten into running and hiking, and my next goal is to get the hang of skiing. I'm also active in the local and national boards of the Society of Women Engineers. There are a group of French clubs in the area that I participate in when I have the time-after ten years of French lessons, I'm not in any hurry to forget it all! I also try to stay involved with the local South Indian community, as it's much trickier to keep up with a lot of our traditions (such as South Indian classical music) with my family 8000 miles away.