

# EDINBURGH'S NEW SCHOOL NEEDS A NAME

Let's give it  
a name with a story  
a name for our future  
a name that says who we are

# BE PROUD TO BE US

COMMUNITY • DIVERSITY • EQUALITY



**SAROJ LAL**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL  
MORNINGSIDE



ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF THE NEW SCHOOL  
ON CANAAN LANE, MORNINGSIDE

# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

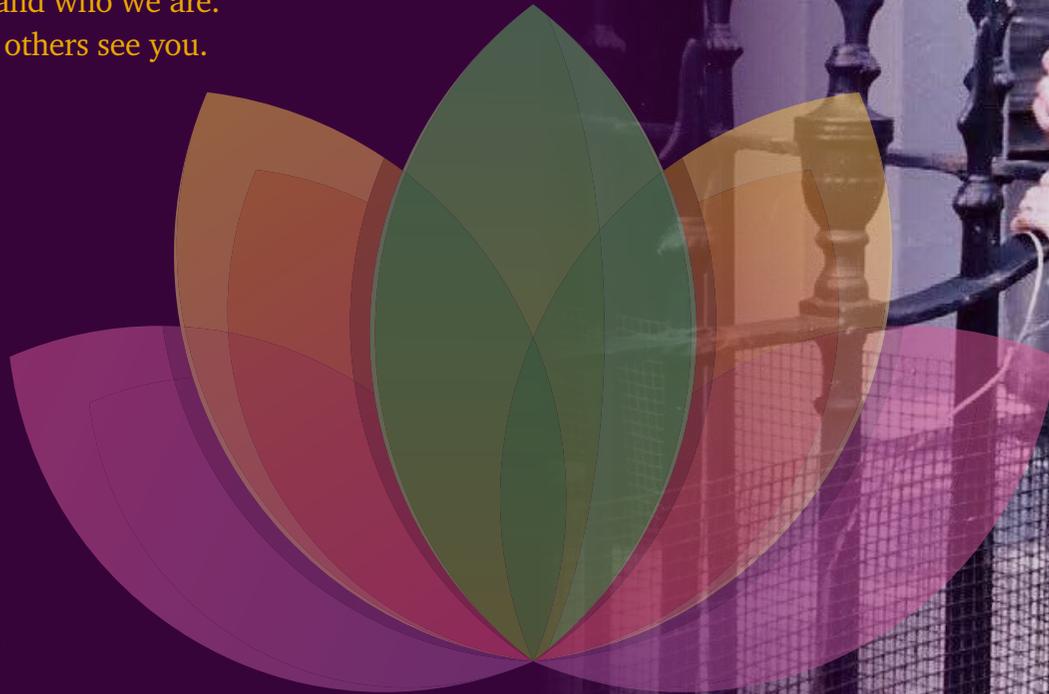
Names are really important. Think about it.  
Names say something about us, and who we are.  
Your name feels special. It's how others see you.

Now we have to choose a name for Edinburgh's new school, on Canaan Lane in Morningside, so we have to choose carefully. We could, of course, choose a name that simply tells us where the school is.

Or we could choose to be different. We could choose a name that has an amazing tale to tell. A name that tells the world about us, and what we stand for.

We could name it after someone who lived and worked on our doorstep. Who taught in one of our schools, right here in Morningside. Who laughed, and smiled, and told stories, in a classroom just a heartbeat away. Who cared about children, and their education, and their future.

Someone who cared about people having equal chances and opportunities, no matter what the colour of their skin. No matter who they were, or where they came from, or what they believed in. Who fought for our local communities, old and young, so they could have the same rights as everyone else. Who left an incredible legacy for the people of Edinburgh, and changed their lives for the better. Who did things no one had ever done before.



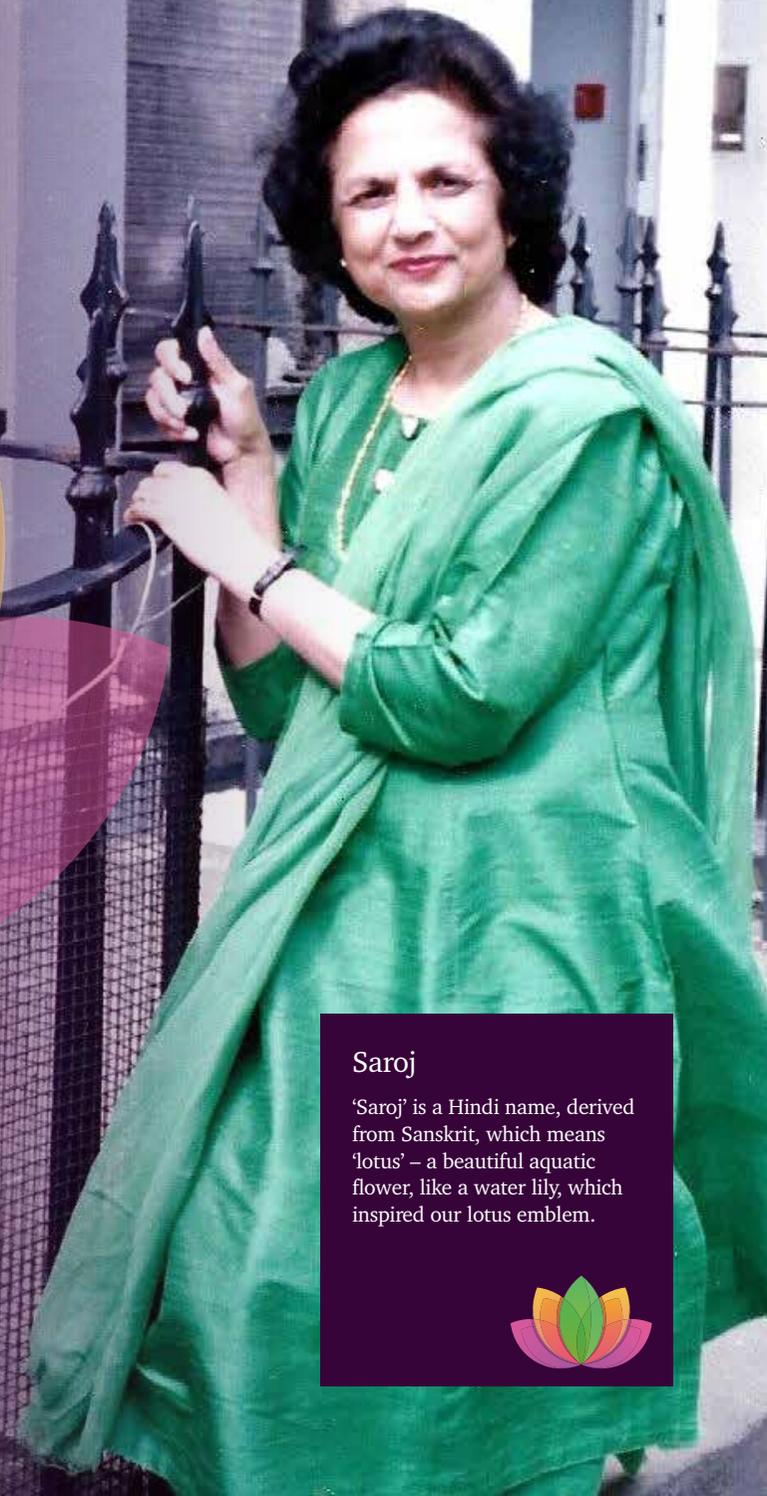
Someone who's an inspiration – for young people now, and for generations yet to come.

**Who can inspire us to dream,  
and to dare, and to do.**

**To be the best we can be.**

**To be proud to be us.**

**We could name it after Saroj Lal.**



## Saroj

'Saroj' is a Hindi name, derived from Sanskrit, which means 'lotus' – a beautiful aquatic flower, like a water lily, which inspired our lotus emblem.



# SAROJ LAL: A LOCAL MORNINGSIDE STORY AN EDINBURGH ICON A SCOTTISH ROLE MODEL

Saroj Lal was a remarkable woman. One of a kind. She was a leading figure in Edinburgh and Scotland during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, fighting against racism, injustice and discrimination.



She defended the rights of black, Asian and elderly people, and fought for equality for women and refugees. She helped communities to learn English, and minority children to learn their mother tongue, traditional music and dance.

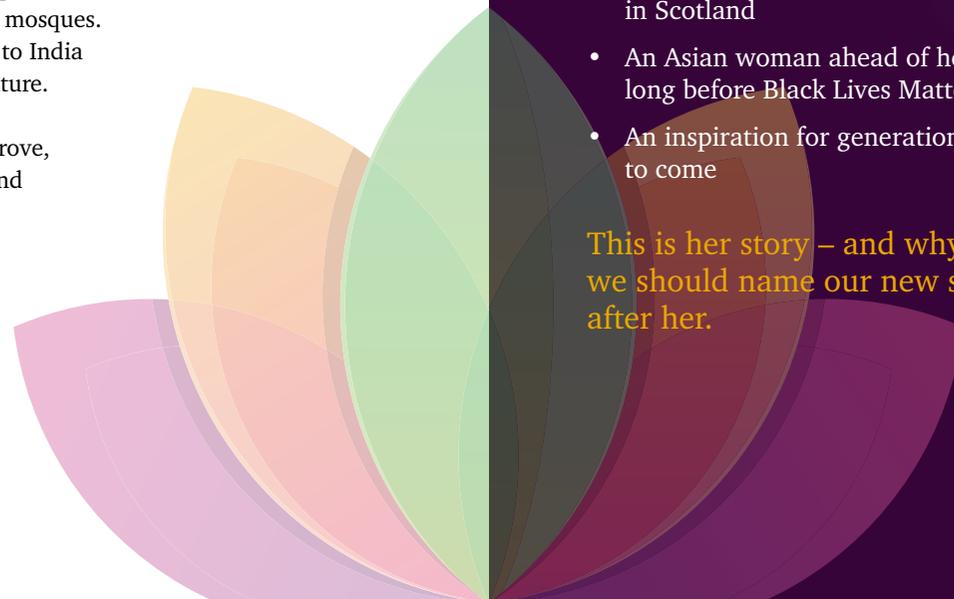
She worked with many people to help her do this – the government, the immigration department, the local council, the police, schools, libraries, hospitals, prisons, social workers, charities, churches, temples and mosques. She even took a lonely patient all the way back to India to reunite him with his parents. It was in her nature.

Saroj battled hard for things to change and improve, and she made life better for so many children and their families. Right here, in our city.

Here are just some of the words people have used to describe her:

- A pioneering Asian teacher
- A champion for children and education
- An activist for anti-racist education, diversity and inclusion
- A campaigner for equality, justice and Edinburgh's minority communities
- A feminist who cared about women and women's rights
- A trailblazer for race relations in Scotland
- An Asian woman ahead of her time, long before Black Lives Matter
- An inspiration for generations to come

This is her story – and why we should name our new school after her.



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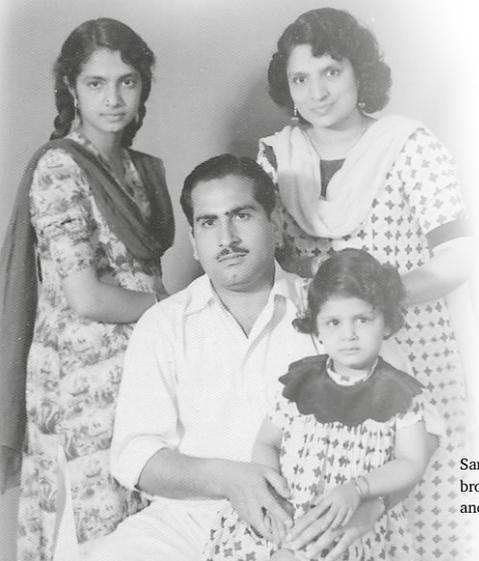
# SAROJ: AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY FROM INDIA TO SCOTLAND

Saroj was born in British India on 23 April 1937, the youngest of eight brothers and sisters. Her father was a well-known politician who was involved in the struggle for Indian independence. He firmly believed that all women had the right to a good education, and his ideas would influence Saroj throughout the rest of her life.

When she was only ten, the British left India and it was divided into two separate countries: a new, independent India, and Pakistan. This was a terrible period in India's history, called Partition, when families had to move across the new border and thousands were killed in horrific bloodshed and violence.



Saroj, Amrit and their son Vineet in Singapore



Saroj (left) with her sister Shakti, brother-in-law Mohindra Madan and niece Romi

She studied economics at university, and in 1962, the year she finished her degree, she married Amrit Lal. He had studied engineering in Glasgow in the 1950s. They moved to Chennai, in south India, and then to Singapore where Saroj gave birth to their son. Saroj loved Singapore because it was home to so many different races and cultures, all living together in peace.

From Singapore the family moved to Britain, firstly to Birmingham in England. That was when Saroj first realised that society could be racist. Finally, they settled in Edinburgh in the late 1960s and the couple had another child, a girl this time.

Life in Edinburgh was very difficult in those days for an immigrant family from Asia. They could only afford to live in a tiny one-room flat in Leith, and people were not always welcoming.

Saroj was determined to combine being a mother with making a real difference to other people's lives. She went back to her studies – but this time, she was going to be a teacher.



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# SAROJ & SOUTH MORNINGSIDE PRIMARY

More than 50 years ago, in August 1970, a new teacher arrived at South Morningside Primary School. A new teacher called Saroj Lal, who had come to Edinburgh all the way from Singapore.

She had been born and brought up in India, and studied to be a teacher at Moray House College of Education. There were only a handful of Asian families in Edinburgh at that time. Saroj was a pioneer, one of very few black or Asian primary school teachers in the city. Her husband was a college lecturer, and the family had moved to Edinburgh because of his job. They had two little children – a boy, who was five, and a baby girl who was only one year old.

Pupils in her class adored being taught by her. They said what a lovely and kind teacher she was. She was proud of her culture and heritage, and always wore beautiful saris, gold bangles and bright red lipstick.

Saroj was fond of reading stories to her class, doing all sorts of projects, and arts and crafts. She suddenly had to learn about British life, and about the books and TV programmes her class enjoyed at home. The Narnia books and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* were some of her favourites.

Saroj's P3/P4 class, 1971-73



She loved watching *Blue Peter* and was inspired by its dynamic young presenter, Valerie Singleton, who was almost exactly the same age as her. Saroj introduced her class to other cultures and life in other countries, so her pupils would see that the world is a rich and diverse place.

She noticed that, when she was out and about in Edinburgh, very often she wasn't treated equally because she was a woman, and because she was originally from India. Some people were racist, simply because of the colour of her skin.

Saroj knew that the children at school were not racist. Her class didn't mind what her gender and colour were, so she realised that racism and prejudice are not things you are born with. She saw that there was a need to change how people think and behave, and the way they treat others, and would spend the rest of her life doing just that.

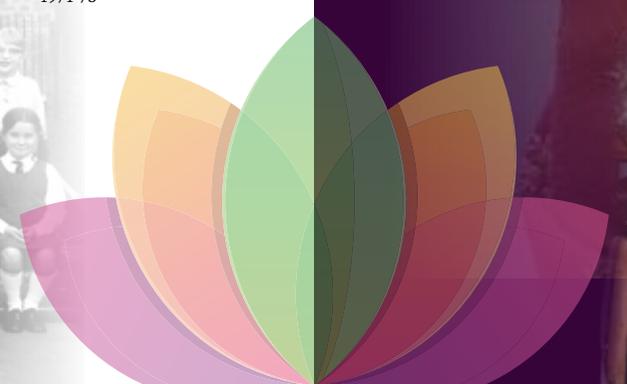
Fighting for equality.



Valerie Singleton  
Former *Blue Peter* presenter  
Photo© Les Wilson



Saroj's P3 class, 1970-71





Saroj (left) with YWCA colleagues Shamim Shaukat (centre) and Ezar Monahan

## SAROJ, LOCAL COMMUNITIES & WOMEN'S RIGHTS

After teaching at South Morningside for three years, Saroj went to work with a well-known charity called the YWCA.

She had decided to spend more time working with local communities, particularly with women who were originally from other countries – mostly from India, like Saroj – but who had made their home in Edinburgh. She wanted to make life fairer for everyone, no matter what their gender, race or religion.

It was hardly surprising that she chose this path, as she was continuing in her father's footsteps. He had been a politician who had spent his life fighting for India's independence from British rule, and for democracy and equality for the Indian people.

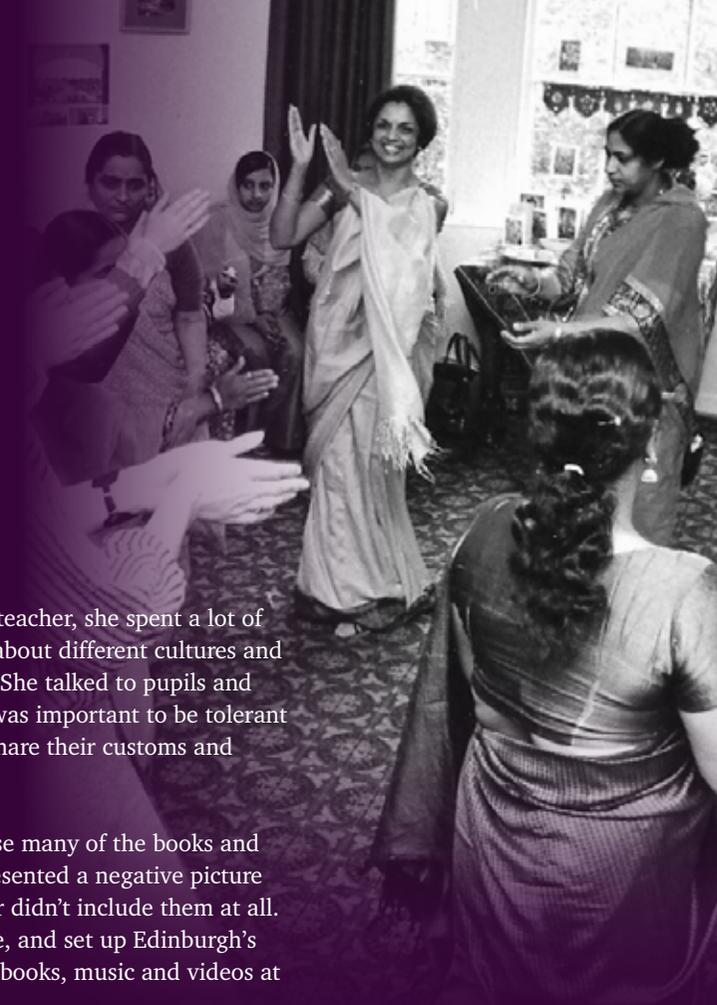


Because of her training as a teacher, she spent a lot of time visiting schools to talk about different cultures and living together with respect. She talked to pupils and their teachers about how it was important to be tolerant and understanding, and to share their customs and beliefs in the classroom.

This was challenging, because many of the books and resources used in schools presented a negative picture of black and Asian people, or didn't include them at all. Saroj campaigned for change, and set up Edinburgh's first-ever ethnic library with books, music and videos at McDonald Road.

To help those who couldn't speak English, she created an interpreting and translating service, and encouraged minority children to learn their own languages too. She wanted Asian girls to have jobs and careers, so she developed a special course at Telford College which allowed young women to continue their studies and become independent. She also took a group of young Asian people to Munich for an educational visit.

Everything she did was based on equality, diversity and justice.



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# SAROJ, EQUALITY & RACE RELATIONS

Eventually, Saroj's work with local communities led her to become Director of Lothian Racial Equality Council. In many ways, this was her most important role, as she was able to bring together all of her experience from being a teacher, from working with women and from fighting for a fair society.

She set to work, and she wasn't afraid to ask difficult questions, or challenge people in power – including politicians and government ministers. She had a job to do.

She was especially proud of her work with the police. She ensured that, when someone was attacked because of the colour of their skin, this was treated seriously and that the incident was recorded.

She encouraged the police to tackle racist bullying in schools, trained new recruits so they knew about Scotland's different communities, and encouraged more black and Asian people to become police officers. Most of those in the police force were men, and sometimes they weren't willing to listen, but she never gave up. She was determined to make sure that everyone was treated equally.

Saroj worked closely with hospitals, hospices and prisons too, to improve things for people who had special needs – often because of their religion, or because they had recently arrived in Scotland and couldn't communicate very well.

She knew that elderly people in the Asian community needed support, so she set up an organisation just for them, called Milan. One of her greatest achievements was to establish a temple for Edinburgh's Hindu community and find it a beautiful home in a former church in Leith.

In 1986 she became the first Asian woman in Scotland to be appointed as a Justice of the Peace. When she retired in 1996, the police presented her with a special award to thank her for all her tireless work over the years. Saroj sadly passed away on 12 March 2020, aged 82.

Scotland today is a much better and much fairer place for everyone because of Saroj.

**Her legacy lives on.**



# SAROJ: A MORNINGSIDE LEGACY

Thursday 20 August 2020 marked exactly 50 years since Saroj arrived at South Morningside Primary to start teaching.

To commemorate this special occasion, pupils and teachers at South Morningside arranged an event in her memory. P4-7 pupils prepared a special assembly attended by Saroj's family, along with two of her former colleagues. The assembly included a wonderful presentation on Saroj's life and work and some challenging questions around race and equality. The family were delighted to receive a special garland from the pupils with the motto *There is only one race. The great human race.*



From left: Saroj's son Vineet, granddaughter Isha, daughter Kavita and husband Amrit

This year, 2021, three new awards mark Saroj's legacy as a pioneer in education.

The **GTCS Saroj Lal Award for a Pioneering Spirit in Equality and Diversity** will be presented to a teacher who has gone above and beyond in fighting for equality and diversity.

The **Moray House Saroj Lal Scholarship** is designed to encourage more diversity among those training to become a teacher, just like Saroj.

And in August, the **City of Edinburgh Council Saroj Lal Award** will inspire today's young people to celebrate equality and diversity through art and creativity.

Saroj is no longer with us.

So let's continue her journey. Together.





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‘Mrs Lal was always extremely animated and full of enthusiasm for learning and love for her class. I am now a head teacher at a primary school in Edinburgh. I think this is something that Mrs Lal embodied in her teaching, and I thank her for being part of my life!’

**Kathryn Wright**

Saroj’s former pupil, now Head Teacher at Oxgangs Primary School

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‘Mrs Lal was a beautiful and graceful woman. I remember her distinctly, because I needed kindness and reassurance. I had just arrived in Edinburgh from Chicago and was looking at a strange new world. I was horribly shy and self-conscious. I credit Mrs Lal among the handful of people who gave me the confidence I needed when I returned to the States alone in spring 1984.’

**Nicholas Jenkins**

Saroj’s former pupil, now a lawyer in the USA

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‘Saroj was a woman who cared for and about other women. She took on the establishment, talked back, made it possible for us to tell our own stories. She did not sacrifice dignity for acceptability. Saroj was a trailblazer, and it was on her shoulders that many of us stood in the fight against racism in Scotland. We listened to Saroj and we learnt.’

**Kaliani Lyle**

Former CEO, Citizens Advice Scotland and Scottish Refugee Council

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# SAROJ LAL

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‘It is so rewarding to know that my time on *Blue Peter* was such an inspiration to Saroj Lal who passed on the values of the programme to her pupils at South Morningside Primary School. Clearly these values were very close to her own. She especially found our film *Blue Peter Royal Safari*, shot in Kenya, a great inspiration and it led to her later work in race relations.

Saroj was a very special and exceptional teacher, and without doubt she has created a future generation of adults who will be hugely concerned for the welfare of less fortunate children in the world.’

**Valerie Singleton**  
Former *Blue Peter* presenter

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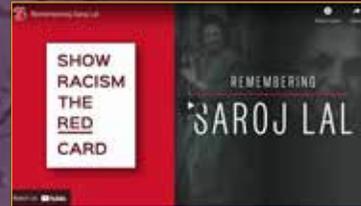
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BE PROUD TO BE US



## FIND OUT MORE



### WATCH

[Show Racism the Red Card: Remembering Saroj Lal](#)



### LISTEN

[BBC Radio 4 - Last Word, Lord Robert May of Oxford, Dr Judith Darmady OBE, Mark Barkan, Saroj Lal, Saroj Lal, the Indian-born teacher who played a leading role in campaigning for racial equality in Scotland.](#)

## SAROJ, SOUTH MORNINGSIDE & EDUCATION

TES Scotland

[One small step for Mum...One giant leap for equality | Tes News](#)

Teachwire

[Mum, you were one of the first BAME primary teachers in Edinburgh and blazed a trail for those that followed \(teachwire.net\)](#)

[Scottish Educational Journal 50th anniversary of a trailblazing teacher – Scottish Educational Journal \(sej.org.uk\)](#)

[Edinburgh Evening News South Morningside Primary in 50th anniversary tribute to school's first Asian teacher | Edinburgh News \(scotsman.com\)](#)

[The University of Edinburgh 50 years on: a trailblazing teacher and race relations pioneer | The University of Edinburgh](#)

[General Teaching Council Scotland Saroj Lal Award for a Pioneering Spirit in Equality and Diversity | General Teaching Council for Scotland \(gtcs.org.uk\)](#)

## SAROJ'S LIFE & LEGACY

BBC Scotland

[Saroj Lal: Legacy of teacher who was race relations trailblazer - BBC News](#)

The Guardian

[Saroj Lal obituary | Society | The Guardian](#)

The Times

[Saroj Lal obituary | Scotland | The Times](#)

The Scotsman

[Obituary: Saroj Lal, race relations trailblazer, feminist and equality campaigner | The Scotsman](#)

The Herald

[Obituary: Saroj Lal, inspirational figure in the long fight for fairness for all | HeraldScotland](#)

World YWCA

[A Tribute to Saroj Lal: A Race Relations Pioneer, Feminist and Equality Campaigner who Fought for Fairness for Women and Minority Communities - World YWCA | She Speaks. \(shespeaksworldywca.org\)](#)



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