



# One Stop Doc Shop

## Episode 4. Jayisha Patel



Hello and welcome to One Stop Doc Shop, a podcast that celebrates and encourages diversity in non-fiction filmmaking. In each episode, a guest filmmaker will share their secrets on how to make award-winning documentaries.

I'm your host Angela Clarke and this series was made possible with the support of Screen Alliance Wales, Ffilm Cymru Wales and BFI Network funding from the National Lottery.

My guest today is Jayisha Patel, an award winning filmmaker who works at the intersection of cinematic film and VR. In 2020, Jayisha was hailed by Screen Daily as one of the Stars of Tomorrow and her films have premiered at Sundance, the New York Film Festival and the Toronto International Film festival.

Her first short film, *A Paradise*, was nominated for 37 international awards. Her film *Circle* was nominated for a student BAFTA, and her first VR experience *Notes to My Father*, won the UN Women's Global Voice Award for Best 360 film.

Jayisha seeks to give a platform in particular to women of colour who are fighting stereotypes, in bold and unconventional ways.

We discuss the importance of working with local crews, what it takes to embed as a filmmaker within a different cultural community, and how to make sensitive and thoughtful films in challenging circumstances.

We also discuss power dynamics, and how to work out if you are qualified to tell a particular story or not.

I hope you enjoy listening...



Notes to My Father



A Paradise



Circle



Power Girls



Khusbu – India's Wushu Warriors

**Angela Clarke** - Hi Jayisha, welcome to the One Stop Doc Shop, thank you so much for coming in to have a chat with us...

**Jayisha Patel** - Hi Angela - lovely to be here.

**Angela Clarke** - I'm super pleased, it's lovely to meet you and I'm really excited to speak to you about your films, because you've made a lot of powerful films over the last couple of years and you've also dabbled with VR as well, so there is lots of ground to cover in the podcast. But I suppose before we get started on that, what I'm interested to find out I guess is, how did you find your path into the industry? How did you know that film was your thing?

**Jayisha Patel** - I feel like the answer to that changes for me like every year! I don't think I can pin point exactly but I guess I came from a house where there were lots of stories within it, you know not consciously like storytellers as such, but you know coming from an Indian/East African background, I lived in a big extended family with lots of people coming in and out.

And every time someone came in from far away, they would always have lots of stories so I think I just grew up with that kind of aspect. But it wasn't something to take seriously as a profession; it was more to kind of just hold on to my heritage I guess in a certain way. So I think I'm grateful to have had that and I think consciously if there was one moment - you know I studied economics and so I came from a very kind of academic background, but I was terrible at economics. And I remember a friend of mine was like, back in the day you know when Ryanair used to do those 99p return flights and I was student and so me and my friends used to love it, (*laughs*) getting drunk one night and then booking a flight to Latvia and then realising in the morning that we might be going to Riga!

So I went to Berlin with some friends and there was this thing called the Berlin Film Festival on and a friend of mine who was actually more into films than I was said 'Let's just go check out this film festival' and I was like, 'Okay, but if we go check out a film festival then I wanna see this type of film', and it was a slightly wacky film called **Gandu** by a film maker called 'Q' (Quashiq Mukherjee) and I just remember watching it and I didn't realise that films could be so bold or experimental.

I didn't come from a kind of film culture per se and I just turned to my friend and you know at the time it was a flip between me doing jewellery design or film and I asked her like, 'Alex do you think I can be a filmmaker?' and she said, 'Well you definitely don't have the patience to be a jewellery designer Jay and so maybe film is your thing', (*laughs*) and so I just became very determined. I was like how do I do this because I didn't really have a path like a lot of people listening to this might be in that same boat. And so I finished my degree in economics and there was a recession and I couldn't really afford to be a runner for free so I was thinking - what do I have?

And this is the thing I keep coming back to in a time of difficulty like now, what do I actually have and where can I work from a place of abundance? And what I did have was the ability to speak languages, so I was like okay, how can I use my languages to somehow get into film? And the things that I looked up online were in international sales of films and distribution and I was like I don't even know what this is but I'm just going to apply for a distribution assistant or a kind of sales assistant position, any of those type of things!

And I ended up getting a job in Paris and so that was my first job. It was very low paid you know but I survived and it was cheaper to live in Paris than it was in London. I was working with these two incredible women who kind of just took me under their wing and it was really beautiful so that was kind of the start of my journey. And then I applied to the Cuban Film School again because it was cheap compared to going to a film school here (*referencing London*) but like it was an incredible film school, and I heard it was really hard to get into and so I was like well I must get in then (*laughs*).... I must do whatever I can, and so that was kind of my journey.

**Angela Clarke** - So you spent three years in Cuba studying film – and then it was in 2014 when you made your first proper film, in terms of fully on your own?

**Jayisha Patel** – Mmmm.

**Angela Clarke** - And that was called *A Paradise* and you were nominated for lots of awards and shortlisted for lots of film festivals and stuff. So do you want to tell us a little bit about that story and what was it that attracted you to making that particular short film?

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh it was actually just a second year film assignment in the Cuban Film School and basically the documentary director students were taken to the east of the island and dropped in a very rural village and the teachers were like come back in a month with a film! And this was a place where everybody, year after year went to the same space and I remember just as soon as I got off that bus feeling this sense of time in a way that I had never felt before anywhere else. It was almost like time had stopped and I thought - what are the consequences of having so much time that stops in this way?

And obviously it's Cuba and it's the east of the island so it's very pro-revolutionary, very censored, you cannot say anything against the government. So I started to find out there was an alcohol problem because people have so much time on their hands. And then I realised there were consequences to that in terms of adult suicides, and that there were also consequences of that in terms of children. So I found this huge child suicide phenomenon and no one would believe me that this thing existed.

And so filming happened over a very short period of time. I mean we had a week to find a story, a week to research and shoot it, and we were only allowed to film

for 6 hours, that was it. And so what that did was it really forced me to pinpoint what was at the heart of the story. And when you don't have much, you have to really hone in on what you do have and what you can do with that. And I found this incredible couple called Alberto and Damaris and they really changed my life. And I know that they met up with my sound recordist afterwards and said that we really changed their life too!

And it was just four months after their son had taken his own life, he was 11 (*when he died*) and they just invited me into their home and we made this story to commemorate him. It was a gentle film and I think I felt a huge amount of responsibility. You know we were only allowed a certain amount of time to edit it and so I had to do everything and I remember all the students at the Cuban Film School went home in the summer and I was like well this is not it! Like this story is bigger than me because these people have lost their child and I just stayed two weeks more, when everyone had gone home, and like the cleaners were like, 'Oh my god my child what are we going to do with you?' (*laughing*)

**Angela Clarke** – Just dusting around you! (*laughing*)

**Jayisha Patel** 'Are you eating?', and I was like, 'Don't worry about it', (*laughing*) and I made this film and it's a very kind of small film if you think about it but like a lot of heart went into it.

**Angela Clarke** – Yeh.

**Jayisha Patel** - And I just felt like going back to my first experience at the Berlin Film Festival, and there was something about the film that reminded me of being in that festival. There was no internet in Cuba so you can't even apply to a film festival and I remember this foreign teacher came in and I was like, 'Look in 2 days time there is this deadline for the Berlin Film Festival can you please ask someone in your office back home to upload it for me?' And she was like, 'Don't worry about it, I will handle it', and bizarrely it got in you know out of thousands of films!

I wasn't anybody, but I made a film that really meant something to me, and to the people that were in it. I think that was a really valuable lesson, and it did very well but I was in a film school where there was no internet, I didn't know Obama had got elected, I didn't know anything about the Syrian war and then suddenly I'm in this premier at the Berlin Film Festival, with people who have had access to the outside world and it was a very big shock. And I remember thinking about that journey a year afterwards and I was like actually the most meaningful thing about this was not going to the film festival, although that was amazing or winning these awards. It was that relationship I had with Damaris and Alberto – that was why I was making the film and I think that spirit is something I'm internally trying to get back to - Yeh..

**Angela Clarke** – Mmmm. And again, I think you start to see the approach you take with your contributors, you kind of feel like you're sat on the edge with

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them, in their space, taking in their world at their pace which I think I think is a really undervalued technique. Because when you watch it, and it's done really well, it can look really simple and almost like it's just happened naturally and I think that in itself is a huge skill especially to do it in such a short space of time, with such an enormously sensitive subject. Plus it's only been a couple of months since their child has passed away...

**Jayisha Patel** – Mmm.

**Angela Clarke** - ..and they are still processing grief and stuff aren't they? What was the biggest lesson you learnt from making that film? What did you take away from it that you hadn't maybe even thought about at the beginning of that process?

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**Jayisha Patel** - I think the biggest thing was just following my instinct and learning to listen to my instinct....

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - Because it's very easy to say that sometimes our heart and our head make us think that it's our instinct when it's not. I think just being in a very vulnerable space with two people I mean it would be impossible not to be affected by seeing two people like that. And you know at times we would have government officials come knocking on the door and Damaris would say, 'Look this is my home and whoever is in my home I invited them in', and that was a remarkable thing for her to say in a place where there could be serious repercussions but she was like I'm doing this because I want to....

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**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - It was an act of defiance and as I was going to their house, there had been a funeral and so you could hear music echo's, and there is a part at the end of the film that is that same song playing, just echoing in the background in these open fields, and I felt like I'm going to the right destination and when I saw her and she saw me it was something very powerful and preverbal. She invited me into her home and that's how it started.

**Angela Clarke** – And because that first film was so successful and gathered lots of attention and stuff, did you ever feel pressurised to carry on in the same vein and make something of a similar ilk, but as a feature documentary? Because sometimes you know, when you enter this world that's kind of the expectation isn't it – did you feel any pressure?

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**Jayisha Patel** – Yeh absolutely because it was almost such a perfect way to start, if that makes sense, and that there was clearly a way you could make a formula out of that. But that kind of made me feel very restricted because had I made it in a formulaic way the film wouldn't have been what it was. So I think there was pressure to make it into a feature film and I think there is a time and

13 place for every story in terms of emotion, and that had gone, that chapter had closed for me. But again its like listening to your intuition as opposed to what other people tell you about how your career should be going because the next step would have been to make a feature out of it.

But I think for me there was a feeling at the time of responding to things that were happening in the news in terms of the sexual violence in India and the way it was being perceived in western media and it was almost like, you know I felt like that was where I wanted to go. And so I started this journey of doing a few films on sexual violence in India, but again you know how much am I qualified to tell these stories?

14 I am Indian, of Indian heritage, but I'm not actually Indian in that way. You know there are themes certainly that I can relate to, but to answer your question, of course I felt pressure. I think it's kind of knowing the fine line between that pressure, what you want, and also there have definitely been moments in my trajectory where I've felt like I haven't deserved that success you know. It's almost like you self sabotage as well and I've definitely felt like I've done that before, and that is something I'm learning from. Like if someone gives you a big opportunity and you're like no I don't deserve that ....

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** -.so it's a mixture of lots of things I think just because we are human (*laughs*) and we make lots of mistakes too. To get to a certain sensibility or to understand things takes life experience and it also takes time...

15 **Angela Clarke** – You're right it does take time and it takes I guess a sense of giving yourself the space to breath as well between films... So, in response to the sexual violence that was happening in India that was very well publicised in 2013/2014 thereabouts...?

**Jayisha Patel** Yeh.

**Angela Clarke** – So then you start to make, you do two other films that both focus on different sets of young Indian women challenging the patriarchy in their own way. So can you tell us a little bit in case people haven't seen them, can you tell us a bit about *India's Wushu Warriors* and *Power Girls* because there is some commonality between the themes isn't there?

16 **Jayisha Patel** –Yeh. It's interesting because those were commissioned pieces so you very much have to work within a kind of structure and it's not like film school or an independent project, but still there were lots of things I learnt from that, and so I had to learn more about what the audience wants rather than what I would like the audience to view...

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** – ..and so the process was different, and the sensitivity required was a bit different. But it was interesting because I remember a good friend of mine came to shoot on *India's Wushu Warriors* – and it's really important for me to work with local creatives, in order to get that complexity. He was a good friend of mine, but he got really frustrated with me because I'd just received notes from the commissioner, and it was very Western notes on what this story should be and so I had just internalised that too of course because I come from England. And he was like, 'Just stop Jay and I'm going to walk with you in this corridor, and I'm going to tell you everything that I see', and what he was trying to do was say that we can walk through the same corridor but you're not going to see what I see...

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** – ..and he noticed details that I just completely, because of my western gaze had not, I had failed to see and it was so powerful. It was such a good lesson in humility. Like whatever your processes is, at the end of the day, these are young teenage girls and you have a limitation as a western filmmaker, even if you're of Indian origin, and so what are you going to do about limitation? And I think, that yeh it really made me stop and think about what I was doing, and what I could see and what I couldn't see and how I could embody something that was a bit bigger in terms of a vision.

**Angela Clarke** – So we will discuss the first one then, so with *India's Wushu Warriors*, so that featured was it Ferria? (*Questioning the name pronunciation*)

**Jayisha Patel** - Ferria yeh...

**Angela Clarke** – So this is a young girl who basically starts learning a Chinese martial art isn't it, in order to counter the growing violence against young India women. And her family are Muslim and her mother doesn't want her to enter the competition that is coming up and her father is supportive of her how did you navigate filming with her?

**Jayisha Patel** – It was interesting because it was Al Jazerra's *Witness* strand, and so their remit at the time was stories that have not been reported on at all. So I was in England at the time and so to find a story that was to do with martial arts and women, it was hard, but I just remember this very local story or image I had seen of a different girl from that school and I contacted the school and said, 'Hey can I come and film', and it got commissioned on the basis of that really.

And I remember on the first day of filming, she (*Ferria*) was there and she was doing her Wushu practice and she just flung her glasses to the end of the playground (*gesturing the action*) and she didn't even care that they smashed on the concrete, (*laughing*) and I was like, 'Wow, who is this girl?' She was great; she had so much energy about her and such a vision so that I was very drawn to her!

**Angela Clarke** - Yeh she had a steely determination didn't she?

**Jayisha Patel** – Yes.

**Angela Clarke** - Quietly confident, like I'll find a way of navigating through...(laughs)

**Jayisha Patel** - Exactly, and I obviously knew that her mother was very conservative – but I had beforehand kind of anticipated that (A) we were going into a Muslim southern space, and I was of a Hindi background – and what I didn't want to do was have a team that was just purely Hindu coming in...

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** – Into that space, that couldn't respect, (pauses) not respect but kind of understand certain ways of working. So I had a team that was a mix of men and women that were of both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, and I think it was just almost like this dance of all of us. You know, as you have to do in order to allow them, (participants) to feel respected as people. Like they may not (pauses) the mother didn't agree with what Ferria was doing, but it was important for her to not feel like I was antagonising her or judging her for who she was.

**Angela Clarke** – Yeh.

**Jayisha Patel** – And so it was that, it was kind of, and I think a lot of these things are pre verbal you know, it's just intuitive, just intuition right?

**Angela Clarke** – Absolutely.

**Angela Clarke** - So once you've done that, at what point then did you start to film *Power Girls*? Again there are kind of similar parallels there aren't there? *Power Girls* was all about the Red Brigade so it's a child sex survivors organisations isn't it?

**Jayisha Patel** –Yeh.

**Angela Clarke** - So it's about teenage girls who have been sexually abused that have formed a unit as it were, to help other young sexual abuse survivors. So how did you find their story?

**Jayisha Patel** – Well I filmed *Power Girls* before I filmed *India's Wushu Warriors* and it was actually just a pitch at Camden Film Festival, and I had just come out of the Cuban Film School – and I was like how am I going to kind of navigate this real world? (laughs)

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - Because I can't just have the joy of making these films in my own way (*laughs*) and so I got selected and I won. So then they commissioned that and it was my first commissioned piece, but because it was a low budget production I was like well I probably have to move to India and make this and live there! (*laughs*) And so that was a really interesting process because, it was an activist organisation, and sometimes when you're in an activist organisation they would go to the political and for me the emotional angle will always be very important. And so actually I was dealing with incredibly strong women but also a lot of strong willed egos too, and so it was navigating that space from a place of respect. And also in UP (*Uttar Pradesh*), which is very, very hard, I had a mainly female film crew and you know we got threatened at times, so yes it was very intense experience.

**Angela Clarke** - I was going to ask did you encounter any issues along the way...

**Jayisha Patel** - Yes, I think I've experienced it kind of erm, probably not just in India but everywhere to be honest. You know sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes very overt, and I think there, in UP (*Uttar Pradesh*) it was a very different type of culture to Bombay. You know one time we were filming a night scene, and I was like please can you just move out of the way, you know we are not filming a Bollywood film! And you know one of the men shouted we're going to trash your camera and every woman on this set, if you ever tell me to do something again....

**Angela Clarke** - Mmmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - So yes it was difficult. But I think you know making films in Cuba where there was lots of censorship actually almost served me well because if that was how I started, I just presumed you know that things were naturally hard...(*laughs*)

**Angela Clarke** - That was the norm? (*laughs*)

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh!

**Angela Clarke** - If you have a new filmmaker starting out, and they are looking to approach a very sensitive subject you know like sexual abuse, how do you have those initial conversations with potential contributors, they are always really difficult, how do you put people at ease? How do *you* have those dialogues?

**Jayisha Patel** - I think it's such a, (*pauses*) it's pre-verbal. And I know that may sound...(*pauses*), you know I think, you need to know why *you* are doing something, whether *you* actually are *qualified* and to have really hard conversations, because sometimes you can think *you* are qualified but you're not.

**Angela Clarke** - Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - And that is not a bad thing. That's just actually really, you know it's just like proprioceptivity; being very aware of who you are in relation to somebody else and power dynamics. So if there is a difference in power, then you know take your voice away or make sure that they speak more and have a space in regards to you. And I think naturally western culture, because of its colonial space, it almost tends to go in and impose its way into every space.

And this is completely the opposite of doing that. I've always been qualified to be in those spaces and done things to make that space open, and I think a lot of that is non-verbal. So it's like when you give somebody a hug, or when you look at them, and acknowledge them, when you smile at them, and it changes for each space. And I think when *you're really meant to be in that space*, you will know it because this happens naturally. It's not forced, you don't have to think how can I kind of perform so they trust me, so I think it's just being very honest with yourself you know.

**Angela Clarke** - Mmm yeh.

**Jayisha Patel** - Whether you are there for the right reason, and being open again to your intuition.

**Angela Clarke** - And why were those stories (*pauses*)... why do you feel so strongly about making those particular of films, and I guess shifting that perception and that balance of how women in that particular country are seen by the world?

**Jayisha Patel** - I think it's just because to be a woman is such an expansive thing and there is no one-way of doing it. And unfortunately because of power dynamics, there seems to be, certain kind of mediums are being dominated by one perception of being a woman and so that for me was a very visceral reaction because it was hugely invalidating to who I was as a woman, and therefore other women largely black and brown and indigenous women right?

And I think with a country like India, there is no such thing as an 'Indian woman', in same way there is no such thing as a 'British woman', and I wanted to explore that, and I think, I wanted to do that also in order to expand *my* notion of what it means to be a woman which is kind of why I went on that journey! (*laughs*)

**Angela Clarke** - And then so from the group of women that formed the Red Brigade, you then meet your next contributor. So do you want to explain a little in case people haven't seen that or aren't familiar with it what **Circle** involved and what that film was about?

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh, I mean I wasn't even looking for a story you know but we were filming this protest scene and all of these girls were very feisty and confident women and just at the back was Kushbu. She was very, very quiet and she reminded me in a way of parts of myself, from when I'd been through

traumas. So I asked one of the girls - who is that young woman because she just kind of stood out in a very quiet way and they were said oh she doesn't speak. So I actually just went up to her and smiled and it felt like she was disassociated slightly, and so I just said, 'How are you', or "Kaise ho?" - I can't even remember we didn't even many exchange words! Again, it was mostly non-verbal.

But through that 'exchange', Khusbu invited me to have biscuits the next day at her house. And so we went along and then I had found out from somebody within the group that she had been gang raped, and that her grandmother had orchestrated the rape. *(pauses)* And so obviously, when you find something like that, (A) it takes a lot to process. Like how does that happen? So erh, it was such a complex house, and there were all of these dynamics and when I said to the mother you know, this is what we would be filming with Khusbu, because she was younger, she was only 14, would that be okay given what she has gone through? And her mum said in a very kind of blasé way, 'It happens to the best of us'. And so she had this very stern grandmother, but if I was out in the sun for too long she would shout, 'You will catch the sun darling come in', and so it was very like... *(pauses to reflect)*

**Angela Clarke** - Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - It was a complex family dynamic. And yeh, I guess the process started there. We were filming *Power Girls* and I was like well I have to do something with this, just to see if there is a story or we can do something with Khusbu. And so you know we would film on our days off with Khusbu, and I didn't really think anything more of it until two weeks after that, when I was editing *Power Girls* and Khusbu rang me up and said, 'There is a wedding', and I said, 'Whose wedding?' and she said, 'My wedding'. And it was because one of the men who was in jail *(for her rape)*, had been released and so they would go straight to her house and her family needed to find a way of marrying her off very quickly.

**Angela Clarke** - Oh right...okay.

**Jayisha Patel** - To leave straight away. So with that I was like, 'Oh my god, okay', and I applied for some funding. I had two incredible producers, who had stayed with me until 4 am. I had built a team where there were largely sexual abuse survivors within our team, all women, and so there were sensitivity there and it was important for everybody in that team to be qualified to be in that space.

**Angela Clarke** - Yup.

**Jayisha Patel** - And we got some funding from Hot Docs to go back and film and then the nature of things, she *(Khusbu)* got married and I never saw her again. *(pauses)* So it was this very bizarre, intense filming, it was almost like this sisterly bond in some way and then she left...*(pauses)* and so I mean I can't go

and follow her, and so I left it (*the film*) because I didn't know what to do with it, and it was better to leave it than to force something with it.

**Angela Clarke** – So obviously the film itself, it says so much with so few words without ever feeling like it's passing judgement and maybe just to explain a little bit more in case people who are listening haven't seen it, **Circle** is addressing that notion of engendered violence within a community where there is an acceptance amongst women, there is a kind of cycle of abuse where I guess women have accepted there are going to be certain expectations of them or certain things that are going to be allowed to be done to them, and it's about how we as women process that isn't it?

I think the film is really powerful in the sense that it doesn't... you sit in her world, and you watch Khusbu and her mum inside the interior of the house, and you hear the voice of the grandma constantly scolding, almost like the all seeing eye! She sees everything and is ruling the house with an iron rod. And then you see these lovely little moments with just a mum and a daughter together, at the market picking fabric. And on the face of it, as a sequence, it's an unremarkable act. It's them going shopping, but you know the non verbal joy you see them share in a moment of almost like quiet; like they're not being watched, they're not being dictated too, they're just enjoying 5 mins of enjoying the textures and feels and colours of the fabrics, whilst having a laugh and a giggle.

And then you see them going back into the house and so it begins again and it's that 'groundhog day' vibe of going home and the same things happening every day. I think one of the other bits that is the moment at the end where the gran sits with...(*gesturing to Jayisha as if she's unsure who the young person was*)

**Jayisha Patel** - Her other granddaughter yeh...

**Angela Clarke** – Reading her some sort of like a poem or story?

**Jayisha Patel** - A nursery rhyme....

**Angela Clarke** – Yeh about sexual abuse in that kind of same way (*pauses*) that was just read like those other kind of standard nursery rhymes and I think its those moments that take you time to just sit and wait to capture. So what did you do when you returned to the area? Did you have all your rushes in the can and didn't edit it till later, how did you do tackle it?

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh I mean we had a very limited amount of time with Khusbu because I didn't know what would happen to her and when I first filmed that I would never see her again properly, and so actually I had very limited footage with her, so I had to be very concise with what I did. And that nursery rhyme, it was very interesting, it was like the scene in Cuba (*in A Paradise*) where they were picking the rice and sorting through it, and were like, 'You know uncle committed suicide that day', and I was thinking, 'What the hell, what?'

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It (*trauma*) is so normalised and yet every detail of your life actually reveals bigger things, and I think that is a big thing I learnt in Cuba as well. Being in a space when (*pauses*) if it's largely a Western context, we are quite overt. Unless something is very evident it doesn't have value and so I think that way of seeing is something that I have carried on but when you find the right story everything within that is symbolic of their life. And so when I came back to that story (*Circle*)... obviously Khusbu had left but because I had done this VR film in the interim, it made me very creative and it enabled me to align more creative techniques, and to be able to revisit that and finish it in a way without Khusbu's presence.

**Angela Clarke** - So is that when you shot all your lovely big GV's and all the big quiet, still shots, did you do all that at the end?

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**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh and also the shot of the women in the field, it was almost like their message was – in India when somebody says you know, if it's like a death or when somebody has died young, or a woman has gone to another space it's almost like the spirit of that person is trapped in that space. So for me I wanted to evoke that. What are the essences of the non-real world, that affects our reality? Kind of magical realism I guess, but something that is actually very real and not magic.

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So I filmed that scene to give context of why women would perhaps, why the grandmother would do something like that because I also wanted to know. And when we were filming with those women, even when the sound recordist was putting on all their mics and stuff, I was like, 'Auntie why do you think she did that? Why did the other grandma do that?' and she was like, 'Well women deserve to be hated', and so it was going in deeper, to this internalised misogyny that I think I needed in order to wrap up that film.

**Angela Clarke** –Yeh.

**Jayisha Patel** - And gain some understanding of what had happened to her.

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**Angela Clarke** – And I suppose one of the things that people might ask is how difficult is it as a filmmaker when you're filming a story like that, and you form a bond with Khusbu, and you know that something heinous has happened to her and you are filming with that person that has effectively incited that act. How do you park the act that person has done, and you don't bring that bias yourself where *you* make a judgement of that person? Because it's also a difficult emotion, especially if you form a bond with the person that has been the victim, how do you reconcile that in your head when you're engaging with participants?

**Jayisha Patel** –Mmm (*reflects*) I think it's probably akin to the process that happens maybe with therapy sessions, where the therapists obviously has empathy, but almost removes themselves from the situation so they should be able not to judge. I mean obviously I'm not a therapist, but I kind of see it as a

similar process – I think it’s about ego and trying to remove that, so you are open...

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - But of course I’m human (*pauses*) and there are times you know where it’s also like being sensitive to the culture. So like in a space like Cuba, me showing emotion in an overt way was okay behind the camera. But in a space, like in a rural space in India where you are told to shut down your emotions, and it comes from being in a deeply colonised space where if you show your emotions you could literally die, so it’s a different type of logic. So you find your spaces to express that emotion and show love without being....(*pauses*), or feeling like empathy means I have to kind of ‘tear up’ listening to you, because that can feel weird. So I don’t feel like there is a template for that. I think it’s just learning the nuances of a culture and respecting that culture and I think that judgement then is determined by how much you respect that culture or not actually.

**Angela Clarke** – Absolutely. And then so as you say in that gap from when you started to film *Circle* to when you came to complete it, you then tackled another film which was your first foray into VR and that was called *Notes to my Father*. So it was quite different in terms of technique and style, not just from the VR point of view, but also in terms of the storytelling. So how you start to create that story and take it apart and tell it in a different form? Do you want to explain a little bit about what the film was about as well and maybe we can delve into why you undertook the particular processes you did to tell that story?

**Jayisha Patel** – Yeh, it was such a beautiful but intense process actually making *Notes to my Father*. At the time, after I was filming all of these films, I was in India and I came back actually to try and get some money to finish *Circle*. And I remember coming back to Sheffield Docfest and this very English way of making films, and all of these commissioning editors were like, ‘Well if it doesn’t have a western angle then well its irrelevant essentially’, and I thought wow what a sad way to look at life, where you have to kind of centre yourself in order to have empathy.

And I met Gabo Arora who was the creative director at the United Nations at the time at a party in Sheffield and he literally just put a head set on me. It was a film that he had made in a refugee camp in Lebanon and I was like wow because you are literally transported into that world and I was thinking that’s how you know you get that western style of empathy without like..,

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** - You don’t have to centre it on a western character because you can literally be transported into that world. You don’t have to use your imagination. I was like this is a really powerful tool, I don’t know what I would

do with it, and I don't have the means to do anything with it, because no one was making any VR films at that time.

But I think a year later actually there was a call out inspired by the same man that Facebook were doing and luckily I saw it because we had become Facebook friends. And you know Facebook had been inspired by his work you and they were choosing 10 filmmakers from around the world, and so I was like I have to do this. And so he was actually in London at the time and so I bugged him and he was like this important man who was probably thinking who the hell is this! *(laughs)* So I sent him two emails and he didn't respond and I think for listeners just be persistent, just be audacious. *(laughs)*

And the third time he said, 'alright you can come and hang out with my friends because I'm leaving tomorrow don't worry I won't ignore you', and I was thinking okay! So I went along to meet them, and they gave me amazing tips on how to stand out in an application. And I remember we finished dinner at midnight and the application was in at 8am the next day, and I literally just drunk lots of coffee and I just poured my heart out into this application. I was like this is why I need to be making a VR film, and this is what I've done.

I think there were over 1200 applications and 10 people got chosen and I was one of them. And so yeh it was amazing and they said here is some equipment that none of you have used, get it ready by Sundance! And there was no kind of rule about how you make films in VR and so that is a very scary but also expansive thing for you as a creator. And so it almost felt because there were *no limits*, it was really expansive, and it was really hard actually because you can't direct from behind the camera otherwise you'd be seen so its almost like you have to kind of... *(laughs)*

**Angela Clarke** Hide!

**Jayisha Patel** - Give the audience yeh *(laughs)* it's extreme manipulation actually because you have to give the audience the sense that they have a lot of power but actually you are there in the background pulling all of these strings that probably feels horrible. *(laughs)*

**Angela Clarke** - You must be good at hide and seek after doing VR I reckon...

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh *(laughs)*

**Angela Clarke** - So, tell us a bit about the story. Who your central character is in that and how did you take apart and put together their story again?

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh it was interesting for me because it was 10 film makers and 10 NGO's who had a cause that you had to make a film about, an authored film, so because I had made films about sexual violence, I was paired with an with an NGO preventing sex trafficking. And at the time I was quite emotionally tired of making that type of work actually, and so when I first heard that I was going to

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make *another* film about sexual violence it actually it took a lot. You know I was thinking okay this is an amazing opportunity, but I'm like there is a limit to my emotional bandwidth at the moment to deal with something like that again.

But you know I decided okay, this is a new way to tell stories, and you know it is a different region in India and so I accepted. The story, or the NGO we were working with they had found that fathers were often complicit in their daughters trafficking, not because they were bad men, but because traffickers would trick them. So it was really important for me to find a relationship between a father and a daughter that was you know perhaps loving, but this had happened.

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And so through the NGO we found lots of contributors and I remember again because we had a limited amount of time, and because VR is expensive, we just had a 10-day shoot. And so we took a 6-hour drive to the village where Ramadevi lives and we interviewed lots of people because I hadn't had time to cast my contributor, because I wasn't in India at the time. And then I chose her and her father because I could sense the love between them, but there was also this massive elephant in the room, this un-spokenness that they had clearly not talked about what she had gone through. And I felt that un-spoken vibe was something I could viscerally capture with VR where you embody that tension between two people in a way you can't really do just on a flat screen.

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

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**Jayisha Patel** - And so almost the central character became that tension between them and so it was a film about their relationship and I guess because she didn't know me and I was just this random alien that had just landed and was very jet lagged, I was like - why would she trust me? And so her best friend was also a survivor of trafficking and I was said you can come with us and be on the shoot at all times and we had this official translator but I could see she (*Ramadevi*) would just clench up. And I would just be like, 'Okay everybody, sit on the floor', and I got the cook to translate instead, and through those conversations the cook revealed her stories from her trauma, I did the same and Ramadevi did the same. And so it was just like these four women expressing themselves when everyone else had gone to bed, and joking about Bollywood films, and it was just this beautiful seed of solidarity that was very much at the heart of the film.

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I think there were lots of different techniques we used that I had never used before. I work with this really great sound recordist called Jo Patterson and at the time she was like, 'What is it about - how can I get into it?' And I was like Jo you know this is just a story about a woman and her father and the unspoken words between them, so what I want you to do is have a difficult conversation with your father, about all the times you felt betrayed and loved, and you don't have to tell me anything.

Just go and have that conversation, and when you put the phone down just play the piano. Just express yourself and so the music for that came from her relationship and conversations with her father actually. And in the same way,

13 the voice over for the film was crafted from conversations that we'd had, but I took my voice out. However, Ramadevi spoke Telugu and I spoke English, and we needed a voice over in English and so Facebook suggested we get this particular Bollywood actress to do it and it will be great and I'm like, 'It will completely ruin it'.

14 And you know obviously when you're working with lots of big people you have almost be like okay we'll try it your way and then we will also try it my way, and I did. I did all of these interviews with these actor and I was like, 'Oh god', and then I remembered seeing this play at the South Bank Theatre, and just hearing the voice of this acid attack survivor, and I thought I need to find this woman.

14 So I rung her up, I found her on Facebook and I rang her and she said, 'Mam I don't speak good English', and I said, 'I don't care about how good you speak English, I care about the emotion in your voice, and also what you have been through', and she was like, 'You're right, give me a week because I want to say this stuff to my papa too.' And so Ramadevi had written a letter to her father about all the things she wanted to tell him but she couldn't say to his face and that was what forms the voice over of the film.

**Angela Clarke** – Mmm.

**Jayisha Patel** – So it was all of these women working in a very kind of honest way and confronting themselves about our own vulnerability that enabled Ramadevi I guess to also feel safe in hers. Because it's not just about her; if you don't make yourself vulnerable, why should somebody else, especially if you come to their space?

15 **Angela Clarke** – Absolutely, and I think that the thing that is hugely powerful about that film, that voice over is incredible in it. You *feel* the emotion in her voice and I don't think you would have got that from an actor, however good an actor would have been because I think that is probably a trauma you have to live in order to really truly understand that pain, and how deep that pain cuts. And when I heard it, she gave me... like the hairs on the back of my neck stood up when you hear that voice because you know there is an absolute authenticity and pain and openness to it.

16 There was something hugely powerful about it and then add to that your big wide shots where you see that tension in the room. A lot of your stuff is non-verbal, a lot of the sequences that are really powerful often don't even have music, and it's just atmosphere sound. It's just being aware of what is going on and drinking up very single sound and movement, however tiny it may be. And so what was it about that process that then influenced you to finish *Circle* in the way that you did? What did you take from that? What was the biggest thing you learnt from doing *Notes to my Father*?

**Jayisha Patel** - It was interesting, I think mainly in terms of sound, you know there is a moment in Khusbu's wedding where the sound just dips completely

and it makes you see the visuals in a different way. And so just being more understanding or being able to play so much in VR enabled me to kind of then use that in a different way in **Circle** and working with or directing non actors in a documentary space, even if its just the voice over, meant that I could do that with the women in the field who were talking. They were essentially my non-actors, but you get to a process where they are talking from a space of truth, that is not performativity, and so it was almost like being able to understand more fictional elements and being able to take them into **Circle**.

And just being bolder I think with that because if you can maintain or sustain or move people in a 360 space where you've got all of this other detail to have to use and be aware of, then it becomes easier when you've just got a flat screen to work with. *(laughs)* And it's really interesting because I think that VR principle of having to be aware of the 360 perspective when you're just working with a flat screen is incredibly useful and powerful actually in terms of detail. Because I think subtly and simplicity is actually about understanding complexity and being able to distil it, so the more complex things you are aware of, the more you have the capacity to distil into something that looks very simple but is probably not...

**Angela Clarke** - And especially that is true when you're making short films - you know like both **Circle** and **Notes to My Father**, you're packing a lot...

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh..

**Angela Clarke** - ..into a short period of time. And it's not just packing a lot in, but also giving the viewer time to breathe, because they are big impactful, upsetting stories and I think sometimes as well by stripping everything back to its bare bones, your films have allowed people to get engaged straight away then because you've cut straight to the jugular.

And I think again those things are subtle and are easy to overlook when you watch a film but I think that is a component all of your films have. Each time you've made a film, it feels like you've pulled off another layer of something and taken it back again. Is that something that has just grown organically or was it something that you thought that is something I purposely want to do? Or did that just come as part of that process of filtering things away?

**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh that is a really good question *(pauses)* I don't think I've been asked that so thank you for asking it. I think it's probably both conscious and unconscious. I think the conscious thing going back to **A Paradise**, it's not necessarily awards or that kind of thing that had given me meaning, it was that relationship, so it's almost finding that honesty within myself and then filmmaking becomes this beautiful journey of being able to understand yourself on a deeper and deeper level. And I think that's where I'm at currently *(pauses)*.

Now I'm writing the most personal thing I've ever done, like everything has been personal up to now, and so I'm in a process of *(pauses)* as long as I can try and discover parts of who I am, and have more of a self awareness of who I am, I trust

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that if it can transform me, then hopefully it can transform somebody in the audience too. And it requires patience and it requires you to surrender and it's difficult but that's kind of where I'm at now. I think that is how I find meaning and as long as I can make films where I learn more about myself in the process, then that is enough for me.

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**Angela Clarke** -Yeh - and I suppose one of the things I wanted to ask - quite a few of the filmmakers taking part in this series have all done very personal stories in different ways. It's difficult when you start out, in a territory where you start to do subjects where you find yourself going down a path when a story is quite dark. How do you keep *yourself* in check as a filmmaker in terms of your own mental health? What do you do to clear your mind and start afresh and cope with the information you've been given?

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**Jayisha Patel** - Mmmm that is a really good question. You know just very simple things, (*pauses*) even at the start of lockdown I found things like cutting vegetables and like making salads and feeding yourself kind of nourishes you in lots of ways, so things like that. Cooking well, learning to cook, being creative but also trying to be as healthy as possible. And I've just started learning flamenco, I'm learning flamenco at the moment and I feel like its this beautiful...,I mean I don't know because I'm two lessons in (*laughs*) but it's a very beautiful process. It's a dance that has come from collective trauma and collective healing and its something the Roma community descended, it came from India, like north west India, like me of Indian descent but obviously part Spanish and it's their journey - it's the will to survive, and it's space of collective trauma and collective healing so I feel that is a space where I can express myself and take things out because its movement.

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**Angela Clarke** - And one of the last things I wanted to ask, with the latter two films, there was a bit of impact producing - the film had a life beyond the cinema screens as it were and it's been used for educational purposes and raising awareness of issues. Could you just maybe explain a little about what you did with the film post festival?

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**Jayisha Patel** - Yeh sometimes it's come like very consciously and other times like for example, with *India's Wushu Warriors* I never thought, but Ferria she is now, she has been invited to do an advert for Nike because somebody saw the film and saw these powerful kick ass women! And so she is this force and you know we still message and she is like, 'Thank you so much', and I was like, 'No it was you, you are a total star'. (*laughs*)

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Others like the VR film, there was obviously, you know this was for impact, but it's like an authored film for impact but I think the nature of VR at that moment was also used by groups like the United Nations and stuff like that, so that kind of came from that process.

**Angela Clarke** - And so you've got a couple of projects on the go at the moment I know you want to keep it on the down low, but you are doing like your first feature now. Are you enjoying that process? Is that a different beast again?

**Jayisha Patel** – Yeh (*pauses*) I think in some ways the hardest thing is being in England and my film not being in England and again now having to find different ways of like virtually doing work-shop stuff because I work a lot with non actors so it's forced me to like really think about the stories I'm telling and whether I can tell them and what is my meaning right now as a film maker.

**Angela Clarke** – Well look it's been so lovely to speak to you and thank, you've been really honest. And if anybody hasn't seen your films, I think almost all of them are on your website – so if anyone wants to go and view them they are on [Jayishapatel.com](http://Jayishapatel.com) and you can see most of the films there. If you haven't seen them, I urge you to watch them because they are beautifully crafted. Thank you so much for sharing your process, and good luck with all your future projects...

**Jayisha Patel** – Oh thank you – it's been a lovely chat thank you for your time and the space.

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