

From CIA to CEO: Rupal Patel

Paramita Purakayastha

Rupal Patel is the founder and CEO of *Entrepenora*, through which she advises executives, MDs, and other high-level corporate leaders in developing their interpersonal, communication, leadership, and strategic execution skills.

But before all of this, she was an Intelligence Analyst at the CIA. Described as 'a power woman' by Harper's Bazaar, we don't meet someone like her every day in the South Asian community. Speaking of how the CIA came along, Patel, the Ivy League daughter of doctor parents who immigrated to the USA, told Asian Voice, "It happened when I was studying for my MA. I was initially planning on working for the State Department because when I was an undergraduate studying political science, I had spent a summer working at the US Embassy in Muscat, Oman. And I loved the experience. When I was studying for my MA, the CIA was recruiting, and they effectively asked me if I wanted to apply. I never really thought about it because, to be honest, I didn't know anything about what people did at the CIA. I just assumed it was all spies and James Bond-like characters. But I was intrigued, of course, anyone would be, and so I submitted my resume.

"I did a couple of interviews with one of the men who ended up being my boss after I started and then just went through the background investigation process. And as I learnt more and more about what I would be doing as an analyst at the CIA, I just thought it would be the perfect career for me because it would enable me to learn and get very smart on whatever topics or issues I would be covering.

"My paternal grandfather was an English teacher in Gujarat, and he, for his entire career, fought very hard for girls to be able to be educated in small rural villages. And even as he got older, he built libraries and sponsored students. So, teaching and education were huge elements in my family's values. Though in my role at the CIA there was not a teaching element per se, it was the idea of becoming an

expert on something and then using that knowledge and that expertise to help other people like policymakers, the president, ambassadors and four-star generals, and all of the US and foreign government officials that really resonated with me."

Last year, her book *From CIA to CEO: Unconventional Life Lessons for Thinking Bigger, Leading Better and Being Bolder*, was published and quickly became a best-seller around the world. When asked whether she found the war zone or the corporate boardrooms more interesting, she said, "The fundamentals of performance, strategy and execution,



are more or less universal. And what appeals to me about both what I did at the CIA and now the work that I do with companies and organisations is just trying to make a positive impact using my skills, my expertise, and by making people better at their jobs and at executing their core goals and their core mission."

She also has another book lined up for the next year on "life skills, values and self-improvement from a very unique angle and helping people look at their own skills, own success and their own careers in a way that they've never looked at before."

What is her unique take on life? "My philosophy is that people can



never question competence. So, if you are good at what you do, if you become an expert, if you know your subject matter inside and out, then whether you're 20 or 50, or a woman or a person of colour, none of those things matter because you have done the work and you are the expert. Poking holes in your judgement, anticipating weaknesses and questions and finding ways to explain them, being transparent about blind spots and accommodating open and uncomfortable questions and information are not only great career skills, but also life skills."

She had a few words for other ambitious, intelligent, hardworking women as well, especially the younger ones. "You get to decide when you stop. The world still hasn't progressed as far as it could have and should have at this point as far as gender equality is concerned. So, don't let other people stop you from pursuing your goals, your ambitions, your dreams. But to do that, to be unstoppable in the face of what are often huge challenges and huge pressures from family, society, culture, religion, and different areas of life, make sure that the people you have around you are the right people so they're pushing you forward and are giving you moral and practical support. Ensure that they're not trying to sabotage you, they're not telling you that you're crazy for having a big dream or a big goal and that they're not going to be jealous of your success when you finally become successful. I think, fundamentally, anything is possible, but you have to make sure that you're not being held back by the people you have in your life because it can make or break a huge amount of what happens in your life, for women in particular."

Mayor joins forces with survivors and campaigners in community-led action to end FGM



A new series of self-authored short films by Londoners affected by female genital mutilation (FGM) are to be promoted by the Mayor as part of his grassroots 'FGM Stops Here' community outreach campaign to end this illegal and barbaric practice.

The new 'FGM Stops Here' videos by FGM survivors, family members, medical professionals and campaigners from across the capital's diverse communities, highlights the determination of Londoners to end the practice and demonstrate the devastating impact FGM has on the lives and wellbeing of survivors and their families. The Mayor is amplifying their voices to help change attitudes towards the harmful and illegal practice.

The films premiered online ahead of International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM on Monday 6 February. FGM violates the rights of women and girls and can have lasting consequences for their physical and mental health. Research shows that while there has only ever been one prosecution for FGM in London, it is an issue that affects women and girls across the capital with more than 2,000 patients being treated after undergoing the practice between April 2021 and March 2022.

The Mayor's work to support the 'FGM Stops Here' movement has been led by the Mayor's advisory board of FGM experts including survivors, frontline professionals and activists. They have worked together to share the personal stories of Londoners on why they are looking to stop the practice, through films, posters and leaflets. These materials are being distributed to over 50 community centres, places of worship, colleges, clinics and hospitals in communities across the 11 London boroughs where FGM is most prevalent. In her video, Soraya Ali, who is a trustee and co-founder of The Avengers charity, said, "I was actually the first woman in my family not to undergo FGM and now I campaign to support other survivors because I believe other survivors shouldn't be alone in having to stop FGM. It should be all of our responsibilities to protect women's health and wellbeing."

Ameen Ali's wife is a survivor of FGM, but it has meant she isn't able to have children. He said, "Having been married to a woman for 17 years who has undergone FGM and further surgeries to then be told that we cannot have children, cannot be told in 20 seconds. Men, let's end FGM."

Joyland: About being human and having dignity

Joyland, Pakistan's first feature film to be shortlisted at the 95th Oscars will be released in UK cinemas on February 24 in the UK.

Director Saim Sadiq talks to us about the intricacies of the film.

Shefali Saxena

Saim Sadiq's Oscar-shortlisted film 'Joyland' holds a mirror in your face, and is most likely to resonate with South Asians because the characters and story are set in Pakistan. In the heart of the metropolitan yet conservative city of Lahore lives the Rana family, a lower middle-class joint family comprising of the old patriarch, the elder son and pregnant wife with three daughters, and the youngest son Haider and his wife Mumtaz. As the Rana's eagerly anticipate the birth of a baby boy to continue their family line, Haider secretly takes up a job as a background dancer at an erotic theatre where he is drawn to an ambitious trans starlet, Biba. Slowly yet suddenly, Haider and Biba are engulfed in a secret summer romance which surreptitiously takes over his home, unravelling the dichotomy between desire and morality for the entire Rana family.

Speaking exclusively to Asian Voice, writer-director Saim Sadiq elaborated on how he wrote the film and said, "It was a process. I took five years to write and rewrite the script over and over again. I really changed a lot of things during the course of writing, but the core of the film remains the same. I don't know, interesting or elegant ways of going about it, but I was trying to find the truth of

all characters, I had the time to even flesh out smaller characters, which didn't remain so small anymore. It was like giving them all an opportunity and being human and having dignity."

The beauty of Joyland is in the intricacy of how its character arcs are never incomplete. The film delves into sexuality, love, infidelity, justice and pain all at once, where Saim and his co-writer Maggie Briggs bring alive a very contemporary south Asian household from a lower middle-class family that has its hidden secrets and vices. Saim added, "There's a lot there to love. There is love there, which is why the toxicity hurts even more. You know, it's not without love." Saim also explained how as a first-time filmmaker, he didn't really have anything, but he was sure to start the shoot in September 2021. "We had zero money. Back in 2020, we decided we're going to the start in September 2021 and at the time, me and my producer, had one actor on board, Alina (Biba). On some level, that kind of sheer cockiness of



Writer-director Saim Sadiq

being young and naive, that we're gonna create our own movie because you just come with that kind of attitude that we're not going to give up. I knew from the beginning where it came from, I knew that it was dramatically exciting enough, you know, this, this idea of this family?" Saim told the newsworthy. However, the director admitted that at some point while he was developing the script, the writing wasn't so relevant. He said, "It became more relevant in the second or third draft." The upsurge in advocacy of trans rights was beginning to increase on the web back then.

Saim further added, "From the beginning, the first idea of the film was this very exciting romance between this guy and a trans girl that kind of takes you along - this summer romance, and it's exciting. And the characters in the film sort of forget about this girl, who's always been there and perhaps has more scars than anybody else in the film. And I wanted to structure the film in a certain way, where we, as audiences were as comfortable in her invisibility, we also almost forget about her, we also are to join the idea



and the sort of sexual tension of these two people having this romantic way too much to forget that way, it's coming out of somebody, and are we okay with that? Even just generally speaking, on a political level, when people speak about in movies, especially about sexuality, and coming of age and finding your identity, they almost speak about it as if, you know, freedom is the only and ultimate goal. But it's really not, especially living in a society like this, you can't say individual freedom trumps everything else. It should be equally important to people who are going to continue to live in a society that's like a collective, so you get the freedom in the end that you want, but at what cost is the term and are you okay with it? There's a big heaviness that comes with losing your innocence and coming of age."