

## Archer's Actor - Jamila Massey

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The actor **Jamila Massey** is famous for her role as Auntie Satya in Radio 4 's daily agricultural sopa opera the Archers. She has lived in Llanidloes for nearly twenty years. Read on to find out more about her life and work.



### How did you get into acting?

I came to the UK with my parents in 1946. After the war, my father didn't want to be in the army anymore and he applied to the BBC and got a producer's job at 200 Oxford Street. The studios were later moved to Bush House. He was that rare commodity - a born broadcaster - and, I suspect, some of that rubbed off on to me.

At that time, there were few Asians in this country and certainly very few Asian children. The BBC used to have a children's programme on the radio and the person who did the children's programme wanted to see me. He thought I could do radio and so used me whenever a part came up. I would have trained as an actress if my father had lived but when I was doing my finals at university he died. My mother didn't approve of acting at all - she didn't think it was a respectable enough profession so she wouldn't allow me to go to drama school. Hence I had to get into acting by subterfuge!

A friend of mine knew someone who cast for extras in films and she said to me, "Well look, my mother doesn't like me to go to film studios either, so if we both go to our mothers and say the other one's mother is allowing her to do it, it might work. Then we could both do it together, and we'll get away with it". So that is what we did and it worked.

My very first film acting job was in *Sink the Bismarck*. The studio rang up the BBC and asked for someone who could translate the news into Urdu and read it as well. The Urdu section recommended me and I went off and did it. I announced to the world, on camera, the sinking of the British battleship HMS Hood. The debut was great, they sent a limousine for me and I came back and thought: "My film career is launched. The telephone will start ringing!" But it didn't.

I carried on doing radio in English, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi as well as some work for the German service of the BBC. Years later I did *Tribunal*, a ZDF television serial in German, with leading European actors. Doing bits and pieces as an extra in films and television, I gradually worked my way up. In those days there wasn't much work in television anyway. The few roles that came up were for waiters, waitresses or maids; someone called for a scotch on the rocks and you said "Yes, Sahib!" or words to that effect. But I carried on regardless.

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I'm a persistent old beast. Lots of people got tired of doing these small 'cough and spit' parts, carrying trays and serving in corner shops, and dropped out. But I didn't because on the sets it was an education to see the professionals at work. One learnt all the time. Finally I joined the Afro-Asian Committee of Equity and decided that we had to do something about the dismal situation. We used to go and meet writers, directors and casting directors and so on and say, "Look we are here and we haven't got horns or two heads or anything like that. We are normal people."

We used to get all sorts of excuses. "No, no, it will unbalance the play!" or "Oh no, we know nothing about Asian culture so we can't write Asian characters." To which we responded, "You've done murders, mayhem and hold-ups convincingly. All you have to do is to write a part for a human being for goodness sake and leave the cultural bit to the actor". Now, at last, it's a lot better.

### **How did you get into the Archers?**

I've been an Archers addict for donkeys' years, probably since it began. I seem to recall it came after Dick Barton which we used to listen to. I used to think, "I'd love to be in The Archers"; but I had absolutely no hope whatsoever. Because, I thought, why would they have an Asian woman in Ambridge? I couldn't see it happening. Then, lo and behold, there in the village arrived the Asian solicitor Usha Gupta.

Out of the blue my agent rang up one day. I was in Manchester for the last night of a play and he said they would like me to go to Birmingham to play Usha's interfering aunt in The Archers. I thought, "Wow, ambition fulfilled; wonderful, yes, yes, yes! I'll go down to Birmingham from Manchester but I'll have to get back for the half to Manchester. He said "I'll ring them up and ask them"; but they said: "Oh no, we're not recording until 4.15pm. She won't be able to get back to Manchester in time." I was bitterly disappointed, I thought that was my one chance gone forever and I was really sorry.

Anyway, a year later my agent rang again and said that they were recasting the part and they would like me to do it. I was thrilled and I've been there ever since. It's a joy to work in The Archers. They even held the part for me while I was in Eastenders for 18 months. I don't appear that often because my character, Auntie Satya, doesn't live in Ambridge. She lives in Wolverhampton but makes forays to Ambridge to see her niece about whom she is very concerned, mainly on account of the fact that Usha hasn't 'settled down' with a respectable husband.

### **How did you come to live in Mid Wales?**

We are, I think, now living in a civilized place where people are not demented. They don't go round looking tense, pushing and shoving, looking overwhelmed by the worries of the world, crushed. Thank goodness we came to Wales, what bliss. We came because we visited some friends, well my agents actually, who lived in Artist's Valley near Machynlleth. We just fell in love with Wales and I've been in love with Wales ever since. It must be about 20 years ago that we found this place. After we'd been here about 4 years, a friend of mine at church said to me, "You've been here ever such a long time, haven't you? You're a Welsh woman now".

### **Any advice for any budding actors?**

If you're mad, go into it. If you're prepared to put up with a lot of total nonsense go in for it. Only go in for it if you believe that it's the one thing you want to do; otherwise don't become an actor. If you want to become a star you might or you might not and, if you don't, you'll get very frustrated. Don't go in for it if you want to make vast amounts of money or are dying to be famous and recognized in shops and streets, because you may not achieve either. Only do it if you really can't help it, because actors are mad. But they're lovely.

- **Read an interview with Jamila's husband Reginald Massey on the Bookshelf...**

#### your comments

**monica,bangalore,india**

i love jamila in myl she is outstanding i wish i had the dvd of myl

Fri Apr 4 11:34:29 2008

**Donald Wilks, London**

Your very dapper husband taught me at keyworth school in the 70,s, he used to call me wee willy winky, great man.

Wed Mar 26 13:16:53 2008

**Arif Hlani, Baroda**

I really liked the acting of all the stars in MYL. I would like to know from where would I could get the DVDS all the volumes of myl.

Tue Jan 15 09:02:33 2008

**Bhawna from jabalpur,india**

I totally agree with nisha,i love jamila and everyone else in the show,n barry evans death is very heartbreaking,to be a good artist or u need to be a good person first and this is amply reflectd by everyone in mind ur language,they r absolutely brilliant.I love them all.

Tue Dec 4 10:31:03 2007

**Nisha Top-Teagarden**

I love You in Mind your language and Barry Evans and all of you. You are all great.Please help me to start a Barry Evans fan club and please mail me about any thing that you rememeber about Barry. His death is a tragic loss and he was a brilliant actor. Please send me your address so i can write to you as i am half Welsh and so glad to hear you love Wales. I love it too i have been there several times. I live in India and am half Indian. My father was a Welshman he was a very famous journalist and photographer here in Madras now known as Chennai. His name was Harry Miller. My mother's name was Revati Parthasarathy she was from Madras of a very famous family of freedom fighters and great lawyers and judges here in Madras. She was the sweetest person on earth. I am a medical transcriptionist. I would love to come to see you if i ever get a chance again to come to England though at the moment it seems unlikely. Please do mail me about Barry and any other cast of MYL you know about.

Mon Oct 22 08:01:46 2007

**Deepak from India, State of Kerala**

Its a funny, wounderful and informative programe. I would like to buy a cd to watch and where can I get and how

much will it cost?

Mon May 14 16:54:52 2007

**Parimal Kumar, Darbhanga, Bihar, India**

I have done my PG Diploma in Hindi Journalism from IIMC, New Delhi. I hv 3 years experience of journalism. Presently i m associated with Rashtriya Sahara, a hindi national newspaper, Noida, Delhi & would like to associate with your service. Please give me guidelines.

Sun Apr 15 12:17:08 2007

**Margaret Shelleng**

Jamila in "Mind your language" was great. She was a natural. I cant think of any comedy as hilarious. My husband gave me 5 volumes of the comedy for my birthday and we both have a good laugh each time we watch it. I wonder if she also has a good laugh when she watches it. Its lovely to discover Jamila is alive and well. Is she in touch with any of her co-stars?

Thu Mar 8 09:41:06 2007

**Anura**

She was excellent in her role as Jamillah in Mind Your Language! So many of the cast members have passed away or faded into oblivion, I'm glad she's still acting!

Tue Jan 30 10:52:48 2007

**Maryann Scamp, Worcester**

I am I hate to say now 49, and have always wanted to act. I also get involved in role plays on training days at work and get asked if I have ever considered acting. I would so love the chance to try. To meet an agent and if they think i am rubbish I amy accept it or may move on to the next. I just want the chance to try. I would have loved to go to drama school just for the experience and knowledge but I dont know how to start now. I have a motrgage and residence of my 6 year old grandson. I still beleive that one day, yes one day but please tell me how. I worked in Mental%2! 0Health for 9 years but am now unemployed apart from CAB work for now. I really want to try out my dream even if it means selling up. I just need some sound advice and some support.

Fri Jan 5 09:45:45 2007

**Vikash Kumar Singh, India, Jamshedpur**

i want to be a actor .I want to act in serial,ad film,music album.please give me one chance for act.

Mon Oct 9 17:21:47 2006

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