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# Krishnan Guru-Murthy

## Presenter, Channel 4 News

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**Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Krishnan Guru-Murthy, presenter of Channel 4 News and Unreported World. After 10 years at the BBC, Krishnan joined Channel 4 in 1998 and is now their second longest-serving news presenter. Krishnan and has fronted everything from the bombing in 9/11 to special war coverage and the Mumbai attacks. He has covered seven British general elections and regularly presents political shows on the side, such as the Ask the Chancellors Debate. Krishnan is arguably most recognised for his big name interviews, and has also been in several films including Shaun of the Dead and Dead Set.**

**Krishnan, thank you for joining me.**

It's very nice to be here.

**We were talking before the recording started, and you said that the art of political interview itself has changed markedly since you have become active in the mainstream media. How so?**

Well, I think it's changed in all sorts of ways but principally in the way politicians themselves, or their spin doctors, approach it. When I was growing up in journalism, if you like, it was a routine part of being a politician and of being one of the programmes that holds them to account – whether that's Newsnight, Channel 4 News or the Today programme – to do tough interviews with politicians, and it was it was regarded as a democratic duty, if you like, to both do it and to appear on them. And they did, in their droves. Politicians, cabinet ministers, shadow cabinet ministers. It was part of the deal. And that's really changed, I think, in modern days because they all want to avoid it wherever possible and they want to do cosy interviews, easy interviews, daytime TV, sofas, you know, the gentler stuff, but they don't want to do the rigorous, tough interview. And part of the narrative for it has been that while we don't get, you know, they're unfair, they give us a hard time, and they they're sort of very hard on us, and you kind think, "Well, yes!" Because that's the job. That is our job, is to give you a proper going over in terms of your decision making. But increasingly, I find people just don't want to do it because they find it easier not to – and they can get away with it, because there are so many outlets now that you can appear on, or you can go and do a pooled clip, where you get all the broadcasters to

agree that you will just come out on the doorstep and you'll do a 30 second answer, giving your account of what has happened today, and then you'll walk on. And it means that politicians these days just don't get the same kind of rigorous questioning that they did years ago when I was growing up in journalism.

**Because if you listen to the politicians, they would characterise it as a gladiatorial style combat, that a minister comes on Channel 4 News and you or Jon Snow, or John Humphrys on the Today programme or whoever it is, is going to kind of knock seven bells out of them and neither party comes out of it very well.**

Well, I think that's the sort of… that's the narrative that has developed and that they've developed it to say nothing comes out of it very well, and I just don't think that's true. I think there is a role for tough, interrogative interviewing that holds politicians to account, that goes over things in detail, but does it sometimes in a forensic way, and that seizes the moment. You know, when there is a real sense of public anger about things, the public wants to see the people in charge held to account and questioned, and sometimes questioned robustly. And I think that's all we are trying to do; it's not gladiatorial. 'Gladiatorial', I think, cheapens it in that it suggests that we just doing it for a spectator sport, that this doesn't matter, it's just television entertainment – it's not. It's a vital part of the democratic process.

**And actually it's the least entertaining in a sense, because that forensic going over exactly what their policy position is isn't going to result in a 30-second clip that's going to be shared unless you can get them to start to admit something's wrong or that something's been covered up.**

Well, I mean, when I was younger I was used to watching people like Brian Weldon, Matthew Paris, Anthony Jay, David Dimbleby, and then Jeremy Paxman, Robin Day, going further back, really standing up to politicians and saying, "You work for us, I'm going to ask the questions that people at home want answers to." And they would do it robustly. And it wasn't theatre; this is not a musical we're engaged in, it is genuinely trying to get answers that we know people at home want answers to because they stop you in the street all the time and say, "Will you ask them this the next time you get him on or get her on?" "Make sure you say this to them or find out about that." And so I feel quite confident that there is still a demand for this. It's not that we are suddenly a bunch of old dinosaurs who are pursuing something that used to be television entertainment in years gone by and that there isn't a demand for. There is a demand for it, and I think increasingly, the public feel that those in power are trying to pull the wool over their eyes by not coming on the big programmes, if you like, with the big interviewers, and I know this because people talk to you all the time in cafés and bars and in the street. When they're talking about the news – not just Channel 4 News, but the news in general – they want their politicians to be held to account properly.

**Well, nothing frustrates me more as a viewer on Channel 4 News for example, when a very balanced package comes on criticising the government, and then you look into the camera and say, "We asked someone from the government to appear on this show, but they weren't prepared to supply anyone." I mean,**

**that demeans the government, not you, or indeed us the viewer. It's very frustrating for everyone.**

We do seem to say it a lot more. And I agree, it's a very frustrating thing to have to say out loud. And I think it is frustrating for viewers, because you set up a problem, you set up an issue, and they want some answers – and all too often they don't get them. And increasingly, I think people in power, not just politicians, regard engaging the media as an irritation that gets in the way of what they're trying to do. And I have had many conversations with spin doctors, or former spin doctors, where they would admit they would say, "What's in it for us?" You know, we have to prep our minister to go on the programme, and then the chances are that they might end up coming out of it looking stupid.

**Do you have the tiniest bit of sympathy for a minister though, that if they, for example, do think aloud when they're being interviewed with you or admit to making a mistake? That not necessarily you, but the media will use that interview the next day, the press will be all over them and call it a gaffe or a faux pas, or say it was a car crash interview. You know, in one sense, even though I want them to appear, because that's their duty in a democracy, I also don't blame them because they've got more to lose than to win, surely?**

It's only ever a car crash if it's a genuine car crash. I mean, if you really don't know your stuff, if you're incompetent and don't know the answer to things, you know, things that you should know the answer to, then yes, okay, that's embarrassing. Or it's a car crash if you refuse to answer the question and Jeremy Paxman has to ask you the same question a dozen times, or if you look like you're deliberately obfuscating, or if you lose your temper when asked a relatively reasonable question. Those are the car crashes; they're all avoidable. I think basically we've got to get back to a sense of public service and that it is important to face questions, and to answer them, and to give the public as much information as you possibly can. No one's asking for state secrets or things that are going to compromise national security. You know, to basically answer the question, and to come on and regularly answer questions about what's going on, whether it's in the health service or the Home Office or the education system or whatever it is, I think it's perfectly reasonable, and all too often it doesn't happen.

**How does it work in terms of your emotional state during an interview? Because clearly you're not setting out to humiliate anyone that appears on your programme, but on the other hand if you get a senior ranking minister who is clearly making mistakes, that's good journalism on your part. But it is part of you excited in the moment, that you feel like you've almost got them on the ropes, if I hadn't put it like that?**

I mean, personally I try and keep as calm and unemotional as possible. And I think when things are really going crazy in live television, whether that's because lots of things are happening around me and I'm in the middle of a breaking story, it's the Arab spring and I'm in Egypt and the crowd are going crazy around you, or the president is arrested on air as has happened to me with Channel 4 News, or if you're in the middle of an interview and it's pretty high stakes and you know things are getting heated or that you're on to something. I think in a way I try and slow things

down a bit in my own head, and try and calm myself down, and you've got to really remember that this is not an emotional encounter, it's not you personally; you're there representing the viewers, as many viewers as you possibly can, trying to ask the questions that they want answered. And so quite often it's just a question of pursuing a thread, pursuing a logic, and not getting over excited about it, and not losing your head. Because if you do – and we all do, you know, we all have from time to time got too excited, too emotional, too angry – you know immediately that it was the wrong thing to do.

**Would you describe it as a good time at the moment in terms of your profession? Because in one sense you've got Trump, you've got Brexit, you've got terrorism, there's unrelenting global uncertainty. In one sense I can see it's exciting to be involved in broadcast journalism, but then you've also got the fact that there's fewer people in newsrooms, you are getting personally attacked on Twitter and your integrity is impugned by both sides just because you're asking a question… I mean, it sounds to me like it's a bit of a curate's egg.**

I don't really see it like that. I mean, yes, it's an incredibly exciting time in world politics, and I don't mean exciting and in gleeful. I mean there's just lots going on to get your head around. It's pretty relentless. This year has been extraordinary for any journalist in any national and international newsroom. Just so many things going on, whether it's Trump, or North Korea, or Brexit, or the general election, or terrorist attacks, or the war in Syria – its literally non-stop. And we have gone from one thing to the other. And especially a place like Channel 4 News, which is a relatively small place, you know, we're not a giant like the BBC or other news organisations, we're a relatively small team of people who all move from one story to the next. And so, yes, it's not it's not like any other time I can remember, that there's such a variety of very high stakes, critical stories where terrible things could happen, potentially, that you really have to be on top of your game a lot of the time. And so that professionally, of course, that's satisfying and it's exciting and it gives you a load to get your teeth into. But you're also you're also a human being in the world, and so you are aware of what these things are away from your profession as well. So people often say to me, "Oh, terrible times, aren't they, but it must be great for you!" And I always think that's a sort of slightly strange thing to say because it's busy, but it doesn't mean because something terrible has happened that we're all jumping up and down saying, "It's a great time to be a journalist."

**Covering the apocalypse is a story but you don't want there to be an apocalypse, presumably.**

Exactly. And as far as the downside goes, I mean, it's certainly true that's there's a febrile atmosphere out there, and with social media it's very easy for people to tell you exactly what they think and for people we don't like you to rally a crowd around you and try and gang up on you. But I think that's just the way things are now, and we've got to adapt to it and we've got to understand that this is the way media works these days, and you've got to keep things in perspective. You've got to not believe that the world is really like Twitter, or even like Facebook, and say these are really valuable means of feedback and it's really important to look at what people are

saying. But you mustn't be driven by it and you mustn't think that's what everybody thinks. Because it is an engaged minority of people, and they are very loud and often pretty organised, and so you can't be brought down by that. I think you just have to say, "Okay, well this is a new world we're in and it's different to how it was 10 years ago, it's certainly different to how it was 20 years ago." It's really interesting, and you've just got to roll with it and try and see it for what it is, which is also an opportunity. It's an opportunity to engage with people, it's an opportunity to bring in new audiences, the kinds of people who weren't necessarily watching the programmes I was making before, and try and reach them in a different way.

**But there was literally a mob of people advancing on BBC Scotland to protest against Nick Robinson a couple of years ago. Laura Kuenssberg needed a bodyguard at the Labour party conference. This is new territory, is it not?**

I was talking about this the other night actually, in a speech at the BBC. When I first came into television in the 80s and 90s, the idea that the BBC political editor would need a bodyguard or that there would be a demonstration against Nick Robinson or anything like that was completely absurd. That trust in the news and news readers on television, and news journalists on television, was incredibly high – and it actually still is high if you look at survey evidence. But there is no doubt a breaking off at the edges of certain groups of people who just don't feel served. I think to some extent that's just a product of our times politically, that you do have some bits on the edges. They're not all fringe, you know, but they are people who tend to sort of be part of particular constituencies.

**And they're very vocal.**

And they're very vocal. But there must also be something else going on there, and I think there probably is, about the way the establishment hands down information. And I think it's a challenge to us actually, in positions of privilege, to think about are we doing something wrong. So I think we must be, if we are losing people. Whether they are on the far right, or the far left, or nationalists, or whatever they may be, if there are reasonably large groups of people who are saying, "We don't like what you're doing, we don't trust that, we don't trust the BBC, we don't trust mainstream media," – which is a phrase I hate – then I think that is a challenge to us actually as well to say, "Well, we must be doing something wrong, actually. We've got to try and reach those people and get their trust." There's no point just turning around and saying, "Oh well, they're all crazies." They're not all crazies. And I think it is our responsibility to ask ourselves, "Are we getting it right all the time?" Because I'm sure we're not. Because this is not sort of a precise science. People are always saying, "Why didn't you do this?" and "Why didn't you do that?" and I will often say, "Well, we could have done, and that wouldn't necessarily have been wrong, but we took a certain set of decisions on that particular night for these very good reasons and I hope you'll just respect that."

**It's interesting, because about Brexit, a lot of my friends and family voted Brexit and none of the coverage of the campaigns on either side made any difference to them. It wasn't about the actual issues and the individual mechanics of X and Y and everything else, it was more about the fact that they**

**felt ignored by the establishment and it was never in doubt that they were going to vote Brexit to kind of stick one on the establishment. It's interesting how, for me, the debate didn't change anyone's mind. Everyone who I knew was going to remain at the beginning and everyone who was going to vote Brexit the beginning, never changed their mind.**

Yes. And I think there is something about the establishment. I'm not sure what this means now, but there is a thing that we all think of as the establishment and most of us think it's something else that we're not part of.

**And yet the ultimate establishment, the royal family, is beloved by all!**

Well, certainly by most people. There is a certain breakdown I think of trust in the establishment, because all of us are being more confident in a way about who we are, you know, as minorities as well, whether you're talking about ethnic minorities, or not minorities but women, or disabled people, or… different constituencies of people, I think, are increasingly saying, "What I hear coming from the middle doesn't always speak to me and doesn't always speak to my concerns." And I think there is a bit of a diversity crisis in a way. And again, diversity isn't a very good word because it means different things to different people. But I think there is a bit of a crisis of people not all thinking that the media is speaking their language and is speaking to their concerns. And I think it's a real challenge for all of us in places where we do have big audiences to try to reach out to people who are peeling off.

**But it seems that every constituency of people seem to feel that now. So the more that women are featured, the more that minorities are featured, in the media, the more that the traditional stereotypical Brexit voter, the white working class person in the north of England, feels that they're being ignored now, even though they're not. Clearly, just on sheer maths they're still the dominant group and yet you speak to some of those people and they say, "Oh, the media doesn't reflect what I'm about and that's all the more reason I'm going to vote Brexit." So you almost can't win.**

Well, I think you've got to really try hard. Because I think what's happened with trying to represent different strands of opinion and different groups of people – whether it's gender, race, sexual orientation, political persuasion – is that you still have a sort of a media establishment to some degree which sets the tone of the majority of the media. And there is a bit of a pack mentality when it comes to news journalism, and dominant ideologies do form. And so I think there is a challenge for us all to say, all the time, you know, are we really being… not 'as fair', but are we really thinking about everybody? And I think the way to do that is actually to make your work forces reflect the country. That's part of the problem, you know, part of the big problem is our workforces in journalism don't reflect the country at large. And until they do then we will really encounter this problem.

**Channel 4 News for me is the first reflective news programming of a week night at seven o'clock. Do you find that it's more difficult to produce a show with that depth at 7pm rather than say, Newsnight, at 10.30pm because they've**

**literally got another three or so hours to think on it more and see how the story is going to develop.**

There are actually quite different programmes. You know, Newsnight basically deals with maybe three or four stories. Channel 4 News is a news programme and it does tend to cover a higher story count. But we do go in-depth, I suppose, on three or four stories during the course of that programme. I don't feel that… you know, I think that seven o'clock is actually a great time to do it, and you've had all day to see where the story is going. And I think it's a good time of day actually for people to come home from work or stop what they're doing and say, "What happened today, what's really important and what is this team presenting to me as its pick of what I need to know today?" I've worked on both programmes and they have a very different rhythm. I think what we try and do on Channel 4 News is slightly different to what to what Newsnight is doing, and is slightly more newsy and on the story and trying to push the journalism, rather than that sort of late night feel of, "Let's just step back and think about what happened today before going to bed." So I think they are actually trying to do slightly different things. We're trying to do analysis, you know, in-depth interviews that will move the story on, and keep everything sort of… while the story is still sort of moving, you know, everything hasn't stopped at seven o'clock these days. I think that's different to late night, reflective programme. And it's interesting that other people are doing it now. ITV are doing it now with After the News, where they want to sort of chew over the day and think about what happened. I think what goes on late night on television is quite different to what we're doing.

**Some would characterise Channel 4 News as being more liberal than the other mainstream news programmes. Do you accept that that's a fair characterisation?**

No. I mean, I really resist any attempts to paint us out politically in one way or another. It's not true of the people who work on the programme, it's not true of our approach to the news. My personal view of journalism and the way you attack different stories has always been sort of keep people guessing about where you're coming from.

**Including the interviewee.**

Yes, definitely the interviewee! And if you occupy a position and decide to be, you know, left wing news, or right wing news, or whatever it is news, then I can't think of a thing I would less like to watch. It's just utterly predictable. If I know where they're coming from, then what's the point? You know, how do I trust what it is I'm seeing? It's why I am quite resistant towards this idea that we should all move into an era of taking sides and of, you know, doing journalism with a conclusion all the time that tells people what to think. I don't think that's what people want at the moment. I think people have this huge amount of information, huge amounts of opinion coming out them from all sorts of different angles at the moment, and what they want are facts and truth, and they want people who will stand up for the truth, no matter how inconvenient it is for left or right. And you say what our reputation is; I think that's just because of who's in government. When Labour were in government we were no more popular with them, believe me! And we used to be tough, and we used to have

very robust conversations. And it's inevitable that whoever is in government is going to feel that we're giving them a hard time. Because that's our job!

**Absolutely. What is an ideal programme from your personal point of view in terms of presenting? Would you rather be out in the field abroad or would you rather be on College Green talking to MPs, at Gray's Inn Road in the studio talking to people? What do you think delivers the best punch for viewers?**

Doing both. I've had been incredibly lucky actually, in that I've always managed to combine both things, from my days on Newsround at the BBC, where I'd spend a week in in the studio and then a week on the road. I managed to pull off something very similar when I went to Channel 4 News. And even now, I do get out quite a lot. Channel 4 news I suppose is unique in sending presenters out to big stories, not just to present but to report. So I was out in Syria this year, I also do this programme called Unreported World, which is a foreign affairs documentary series. So I do maybe three big trips a year, which is pure reporting. So that that combination of being out on the road in this country and abroad and being in the studio is a real joy. I mean, it's a real privilege, because it keeps you in touch with journalism and with people and opinions, and it also enables you to talk to people at home from the polish, if you like, of the studio, you know, looking down the camera in that calm setting and to do those big sort of studio interviews. Actually what I manage to do at the moment is a great combination. I can't think of anything worse than being a full time presenter and never getting out of the studio, and to be honest being a full-time correspondent going to a war zones in difficult places all the time is pretty tough. It's hard on your family, it's hard on your life, and it's exhausting. And it's dangerous. And doing that all the time I think is very tough.

**Do you think editors have it more difficult now in terms of the sheer risk of sending you to Syria? For example, if this was a Hollywood movie and you were the lead actor they'd have the stunt man jump off the cliff, whereas you can't do that if you are going to report from Syria. It has to be you, and therefore you might not come back – and that's a very serious situation. For me, it's characterised almost in the fact that there seems to be a huge amount of use of freelancers these days where people go to Syria off their own back, file a report and then sell it to someone – because you would be a very expensive person to lose, financially and morally I would imagine.**

Well, actually I think that the big broadcasters have really changed their approach to that. You know, we don't tend to work like that at all. We do use some freelancers or independent producers, or independent companies, to cover different stories but we don't on the whole just live in a world where freelancers go off and take all the risks then bring that stuff back and we look at it and go, "Yeah, okay, we'll take that." Because that's really irresponsible.

**Do you feel sorry for your editor when he sends you to Syria? Because what happens if you don't come back?**

Well, I mean (laughs) do I feel sorry for my editor? No, I don't feel sorry for my editor, because I'm the one going. No, but look, it's a very regimented regime. We have a

lot of risk assessment, we are constantly in touch. We don't just sort of disappear off and for two weeks and come back with a story, they know exactly what were doing all the time. And there's no excuse for that not to happen now because modern communications are so easy.

**Satellite phones.**

Yes. I mean, we don't take risks lightly. We've got experts usually out in the field and back in the office who help us assess what were doing pretty much all the time. Obviously when it comes down to the day and you're out in the field and you're doing something, you're the one who has got to look at it with your colleagues and decide together whether you're going to do something and whether you think it's safe. But we will talk to the office and say, "This is what we're thinking of doing and this is why we think it's safe," and they'll say, "Okay, go ahead."

**But the rules of the battlefield seem to have changed in terms of the way, particularly in the Middle East, that journalists are treated. So for example, 20 years ago you might have been able to go to somewhere like Syria or wherever and cover it honestly, and no one would kidnap you and parade you as a hostage.**

Yes. The situation has changed massively in that there are many more places where it's just no longer safe for journalists, and journalists to become targets, and they do become kidnapping targets in particular. And the training that you go through these days can be quite hairy and quite scary, and it's difficult for families as well, knowing that their loved ones are going into some of these situations. So yes, I think that's true. I mean, obviously I'm sure if you talk to people down the generations they would say, "Look, there were always places like this where journalists became targets and where it was dangerous to operate." But it does feel that there are an increasing number of countries where it's really hard for us to get to, and that's very frustrating because it means it's very hard to tell the story, and very hard to tell it accurately, and knowing that you're getting it right – because you can always get to those places yourself and you're relying on other people's information. And it's that much harder to check because you're not there yourself. So yes, I think things have changed. The first war, I suppose, I went to was when I was at the BBC and it was the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. And I remember people then, very experienced correspondents – I was 21 or something – but talking to very experienced guys coming back saying something has changed there and that it's very unpredictable, you're never quite sure who's fighting who. If you think about that scenario, to go into places like Syria now or Iraq, you know, the picture is very different. And it's a whole lot hairier.

**Tell us about Unreported World. Because as you mentioned earlier, clearly if there's no journalists reporting from these locations then that's a serious deficit for all concerned.**

The point of Unreported World is in the title. You know, we go to those places that's the mainstream news agenda doesn't touch enough. I think it's one of the best reasons for Channel 4 to exist, and it's existed as a show long before I got there –

I've been doing it for about five years. And it's one of the great joys I think of my career, because I get to go to the most amazing places to do stories and talk to the kinds of people that I just wouldn't get to otherwise. And it's meant that we have also been able to be on the cusp of things just before they made it very big into the news agenda. So I was able to go to Yemen last year to cover the emerging starvation crisis that was being caused by the war and that is still going on now and it's very hard to cover because it's very hard to get to. But I was able to get in with an Unreported World team who were able to dedicate the time and resources to getting into that story that most newsrooms really struggle with. So I think its raison d'être has never been greater, because there are places that are really hard to operate, very hard to get into, require a lot of careful thought and planning, and that's one of the reasons why they fall off the news agenda – because it becomes difficult and expensive, and there are five or six other stories to look at that are easier to get to. It's a huge privilege. Various people at the BBC have said to me that Unreported World is their favourite programme on Channel 4. I remember Alan Yentob saying that it's the one programme he would love to have poached for the BBC.

**That's quite a compliment.**

Yes. And it was one of his favourite shows, and I think it really is something to be proud of. And it's an amazing team as well, because it's one of the most diverse teams in television if you look at the talent that they are using, and the reporting talent, much of which is largely freelance and comes in do a couple of Unreported World films, but if you look at the ethnic mix, the gender mix, we've got disabled reporters, we've had a transgender reporter. And so I think again, in terms of where Channel 4 should be and the kinds of people making it, it's absolutely there.

**Do you feel personally at your kind of most journalistic, if could put it that way, in terms of doing Unreported World, because it's quite long form, you know, you are breaking stories and setting the agenda well before it hits the mainstream agenda. It's insightful and it's almost a pleasure to watch, even in some uncomfortable situations that you've covered, because it feels to me like proper long form journalism on the telly rather then you just doing four minute package in terms of 'this has happened here'.**

It's certainly really gritty, and it's a great luxury when you're used to filing every day or being on the telly every day to go away somewhere, film for two weeks or maybe three weeks, and not have to produce a package, not have to produce a piece of television, but just go away and do it properly and come back with a story. Think about it, edit it over a period of time and put it put out the best possible product. So that's a great luxury. I wouldn't say it's where I feel the most journalistic…

**I'm not even sure that's a word, but anyway…**

… because I think you can you can do journalism live on air, and if you're any good at it, when you're doing your interviews that's what you are doing, you are trying to find new things out, or reveal things about public policy, or an individual, or a public figure, or a politician. And so that is journalism as it happens on air. So I think that's why I'm really lucky actually, to have this combination of getting out and about and

being in the studio. I think the mistake other people make is thinking that just sending your presenter away to present, to stand in front of the camera live, you know, in some way is as good. That that gives the audience best sense that the presenters really at the story – but audiences are cleverer than that; they show they know that if you're just standing in front of a camera in a foreign country, you're just presenting from a better set. So I've always really liked to Channel 4's approach, which they've always done to be fair, which is to make the presenters do the work and get out and do the journalism as well.

**You recently retweeted an article that said British TV is rife with sexual bullying. Are there any Harvey Weinsteins in current affairs journalism?**

I think there is sexual bullying everywhere. I mean, I don't say that because I've got colleagues who I know have been abused, I just mean as a human being you can't grow up with… you know, knowing women, without hearing of pretty terrible things happening. And I don't necessarily mean criminal or sexual assault, but inappropriate comments, inappropriate sexual politics, innuendo. I think that that is everywhere, and then there are other stories that you hear. So I think this is a really key time in in society actually, it feels as though everything is changing and that it isn't even just about sexual assault. I think from now on – I hope as well – that this is going to change the whole way people in power operate. Whether it's to do with bullying, you know, power dynamics, sexual assault, racism, you know, any sort of discrimination. I think it's going to be much harder for people to get away with it, because I think that the mood that everyone seems to be in at the moment is to stand up and shout about it. And I kind of think that's a good thing. Because even though I've heard over the years – and we've reported on Channel 4 News, I mean, Channel 4 News reported three years ago on allegations around Westminster, and put together quite a convincing case that this was a really big problem – so even though I've heard about it in lots of different industries, I still feel shocked when I see the numbers. So I think a lot of people do. And a bit angry about it. So I think and I hope everything's going to be different from now on. So when you say are there Harvey Weinsteins in current affairs, I don't know. I mean, I'm sure there are sexist men and people who abuse their positions in pretty much every industry in the country. And I've certainly heard of people throwing their weight around and their power, and of bullies. I'm certainly not aware of the kinds of things that are being said about Harvey Weinstein specifically, but it wouldn't surprise me if that was the case, because it seems to be pretty rife.

**Well, indeed. I mean, I was about to say Donald Trump was aspiring to be president the United States and during his campaign it was revealed that he was quite, you know, this so-called 'locker room talk' where he was talking about sexually assaulting women. And yet for me, when I watched that, I thought, "I'm so glad he said that because now he's got no chance whatsoever." And then, of course, days later he was elected president.**

Well, I mean, it's very hard I think to draw any conclusions from Trump about anything! Because I think he really is an outlier in so many different ways. So I hesitate to go there on that particular one. But I think the fact is that since the Weinstein scandal broke it's made us see past scandals in a different light, whether

that's around Trump or Savile or anything else. It's also made us think more widely about how women are treated, how minorities are treated, what is the relationship between people in power and people who work for them, and at what point you stand up. You know, at what point can you stand up and say, "No, this is wrong." And will more and more people now get together and join you in that? I think that's been the issue of this all along. There have always been people who occasionally stood up and said, "No, I'm not taking this any more." But because everybody else who this had happened to didn't join them and say, "Yes, it's happened to me too," it didn't really go anywhere. That's this whole #MeToo feeling that is out there at the moment is very powerful, and I really hope it changes things because I do… you know, you do see that sort of… when it's what's become called 'everyday sexism', you realise it's got to change. I mean, I've got I've got a 12-year-old daughter and I don't want her to be facing this kind of rubbish when she's going into the world of work.

**Do you think she will? How hopeful are you?**

Well, as I say, I think things are changing. I think the whole Weinstein, pay gap, gender pay gap thing, I think there's a bit of a critical mass going on – it's all come at the same time. And I think it's making us think quite deeply about how things have got to change. And so I am hopeful that by the time my daughter is in the world of work things will be different. I wouldn't be as bold to say it'll all be gone and we're all live in a utopian world where everybody is kind and thoughtful to each other and there is no discrimination, because I think discrimination is part of human nature. But I hope it will be better than it is. And I think in all sorts of ways, when these sorts of things happen, partly because of the way the media is structured and partly because of social media, we tend to think everything must be terrible and must be worse now than it was before. I generally think things get better, and there are relatively few things in which they don't. Diversity is one where things can get better and worse through the years, but I'm sort of fairly optimistic on this one that things are going to get better.

**There still seems to be a deficit there in terms of BME faces on screen. Would you agree?**

Oh, yes. I mean, I think Lenny Henry was absolutely right when he stood up a couple of years ago and said things had gone backwards since the late 80s, when I was coming into television. There is a real feeling that things had gone…

**Why is that?**

Well, I think it's quite complex. I think it's partly because, you know, 30 years ago there was a real sense amongst those in power that this was a problem they had to tackle, and so they were taking certain measures, but then those in power sort of felt they'd done that. You know, they almost thought by recognising it…

**Box ticked.**

I don't want to say it was a box-ticking because I don't want to doubt their motives. But I think there was an element of that.

**They seem to have falsely concluded that the job has been done.**

Yes. And I think because the media is largely populated by small l liberal people who are not racist on the whole, the idea that this could be a racist industry was just really horrific. You know, people thought that was ridiculous. “Of course we’re not racist!” You know, there must be another reason why there aren’t any black channel controllers or heads of department or, you know, why there is only a few on-screen people, and it must be because there aren’t enough of them, is what people concluded. So I think we went backwards a bit for a while, and the last couple of years have been useful in that it’s made people think about it again and it’s made the industry set up targets and strategies, but we’re still in the, “Well, can you just get on with it?” stage. It hasn’t been delivered yet. And there still needs to be the same kind of focus on ethnic minority representation that I do now detect with gender. And I think gender was tackled in the media – well, not tackled, but people really started taking big steps in institutions like the BBC – quite a long time ago when they recognised that there was a real lack of women at the top of the industry. And so there was quickly created a whole generation of people at the top of the industry because they just promoted them. They decided we are going to create new generations of women leaders, we’re going to put them on training courses, we’re going to promote them, we are going to encourage them. And they created them. Whole generations of brilliant women leaders.

**And yet recently the BBC was compelled to publish news presenter’s salaries and the gender pay gap is still there. Do you feel a little bit sorry for the BBC?**

What, in being forced to publish?

**Yes.**

I think it’s been really difficult because I think the gender pay gap is a massive issue across society, and across media. I think it’s been slightly distorted in a way by talking about presenters, because the presenter pay issue is a really weird one; there are all sorts of issues there as to why people get paid what they get paid. And it’s not just about gender, it’s about what their agent was able to get away with, did they have another job offer, what kind of contract were they on.

**Time served, experience.**

Time served, so all those sorts of things. And what they could get away with, what they could persuade a boss. There’s a lot personal favouritism involved as well, you know, this is an industry in which bosses lunch talent and work out between themselves what they’re going to do and how much they’re going to pay them. I think it’s a bit of a shame that the gender pay gap is being seen through this prism of what highly paid presenters get paid, because I think we actually need to look at it more seriously in ordinary people’s jobs. That’s where the real scandal is. And of course you need to tackle that. There are definite disparities, and there are definite issues, and they need to be tackled and hammered out. But I do think it’s quite a complicated one because you do also need as a boss to be able to decide what

talent is and what talent is worth and what people want to watch and all the rest of it. It's not an ordinary job, being a presenter, and so I don't know whether news presenters should be treated in a different way to entertainment presenters, or whether we need to move to a world where if you've got a job you've got a job and you should all be paid the same thing. Then we need to ask ourselves bigger questions like, "Well, why do presenters get paid so much more than producers?"

**There was a slightly odd situation, I mean I'm a big fan of Jeremy Vine, I've known him for many years and he's been a sat in that seat and been on the podcast, and he's very helpful. He's a good guy. But on the other hand, there was that slightly odd situation on his show recently where he had James Purnell on and he asked him and said, "Why am I worth, you know, well over £1m?" Even though he was the presenter. I mean, it was a slightly odd situation. And then part of me thought, even though I like Jeremy, I thought, "Well, why are you worth more than £1m of licence fee payers' money?" With the greatest of respect to him.**

I'm a big fan of Jeremy.

**Me too.**

For a long time. So I wouldn't want to personalise it. But I mean, I do often think that the issue really is about these extraordinary paid numbers.

**Is it just because the BBC has bigger coffers?**

No, because it's not just the BBC, it's all around the media. But it's nothing compared to America. I remember going to America and talking to one of the big network bosses about a particular presenter who they thought was going to leave. And I was just there for a week of sort of fancy work experience really, I was just sort of soaking up the way the Americans do TV news. And I had a great week talking to everybody, from the head of NBC to the head of CNN and the head of Fox and people like that. I remember talking to this one person who was talking to me about this presenter saying, "It's a real challenge, we don't know what to do, we think he's had enough, we think he's going to leave." And I said, "Well, what he's only about 42 or 43, what's he going to do with himself for the rest of his life?" And they said, "Well, I don't know, but he's been on $18m for the last few years," or whatever it was.

**Doesn't need the money any more.**

And I just sort of thought, "Well, don't you think you're paying him too much?" If that's the sort of situation you're in, then it's absurd. So I do think there is a wider question, which goes way beyond the media, about why people are paid what they're paid. And there are some stars, there's no doubt about it, who are worth a lot of money because they can always go off somewhere else. But there are a lot who probably couldn't.

**I'm not putting words in your mouth, but I imagine when you started out your career presenting youth programmes for the BBC aged 18, fame and fortune wasn't your primary motivation. You didn't think, "Wow, this is my way to get rich."**

No.

**What was your motivation?**

My motivation was, I just thought it was amazingly exciting as a thing to do. I was actually going to be a doctor when I was 18 years old. I had a place at medical school and I was just in television initially in my year off as something fun to do for a year before going off to be serious and learn about medicine. But I enjoyed it so much…

**It's been quite a long year off.**

Yes! It's been a long year off. And basically I decided after my first day in the studio, in which I interviewed for two different programmes, Jimmy Savile and then John Prescott, when John Prescott was standing for the Labour deputy leadership in 1988, that this was brilliant fun. It was a brilliant, privileged thing to do, to get to talk to people in power and ask them tough questions. And I really enjoyed it. And that's the point at which I thought this is what I want to do. No, I mean, I don't think money really came into it at all, and probably a good job.

**Do you still have that same thrill doing the same job now?**

Yes, I do. I mean, I genuinely regularly think I've got the best job in the world because I have a huge amount of fun doing it. And it's hugely stimulating because you are right at the centre of things. You do still, despite many of them saying no, often get to ask people in power the tough questions, and to hold them to account. You certainly get to chase them around, even if they're trying to avoid you, and you get to report on ordinary people's lives – and that's the biggest privilege. People often ask me, "Who's your favourite interview?" My favourite interview is invariably the amazing woman I met last week in a particular situation, because they're the ones who are really inspiring, you know, ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, or adverse conditions, or in wars or disasters. And to get to go into people's lives like that with a camera and just ask them, you know, what would in normal conversation be incredibly intrusive questions, is one of the best things about our job. I mean, you get a window on other people's lives you just wouldn't get any other way.

**And I know that you've talked about it in a lot of other outlets, I want to dwell on it too much, but a lot of people said you got a badge of honour when Robert Downey Jr famously walked out on your interview. Do you think that actually that you were asking the proper journalistic questions and refusing to do the kind of junket thing, and arguably the other journalists should have been asking those questions as well and he should have been working out on them as well? Because it seemed to be that his walk out on you, because it was so**

**visual, that that attracted all that attention. Whereas in reality you were just doing your job.**

I was just doing my job. I mean, I don't want to make too much of the journalism there because at the end of the day it was just an interview with an actor, and he's under no obligation to answer any particular question. That was mostly a misunderstanding, because after what had happened with Quentin Tarantino a year before, in which I had asked him totally legitimate questions about violence in film and he got quite annoyed, he hadn't walked out but he got quite annoyed…

**He was visibly irate. I don't think it did him any credit, actually.**

After that, the studios, I guess, were a little wary and I did actually say to them in advance, you know, when they said, "What are you interested in about this?" I said, "Well, we would talk about the movie and Iron Man and the franchise, and then we would also talk about Robert Downey Jr and his amazing journey from being a man who was in trouble with drugs and the law to being the most bankable film star in the world." Incredible story, very inspiring, most people want to hear more about it, he's talked about it before in the past, and he's talked about his history with drugs and his problems within his family and his father and all of those sorts of things before. So I honestly didn't think I was asking anything that was going to upset him. So I didn't go in there to cause a stir; I went in there thinking he would have been told, because they've asked and I've told them, that this is what the interview was about. And it obviously came as a surprise to him. So the whole thing was a bit ghastly in that respect.

**It was overblown.**

And it was overblown. It was overblown because it was Robert Downey Jr and he's a huge star, and because it went viral in that way. And so it was interesting. I don't think it was half as interesting as everybody thought it was. I don't even think it was half as interesting, for example, as the Tarantino interview, which was about something real and serious.

**I think that's where the medium of television really worked in that Tarantino interview. Because you can tell on the Today programme when you get someone on the ropes, but he visibly looked irked, and that said to me more than the way that he answered his questions in terms of the tone. I mean, you could tell that he was really concerned at the questions that were being asked in quite a defensive… quite a passive aggressive way, I would say.**

Well, I mean, again, as a movie director he is not, I suppose, under any obligation to answer questions, but if you put yourself up for interview and you want publicity, then I think you have to be prepared to face reasonable questions. And I think that was a reasonable question, and what was very revealing was that his attitude was 'this is a commercial for my movie', which is what most junket interviews are. They are just promotional, I suppose. But he saw it as that, and that's not the basis on which our interview was booked, and that's certainly not how we ever see these things. And so there was again, there was an element of misunderstanding there I suppose, but it was quite revealing. Obviously everyone would really like now to do a big interview

with Tarantino again about Weinstein in light of what he said to the New York Times, but I suspect we won't be first on the list.

**No, I can imagine. We've just got a couple more minutes left really, so if you don't mind me asking, I always ask this as the penultimate question, is what's next for you? You've been doing Channel 4 News for quite some time now. Are you going to be there sort of 30 years from now?**

I've been at Channel 4 News for 19 years, next year is 20 years. It's a long time. But I mean, everything changes. You know, my job now is so different to how it was five years ago, let alone 10 years ago or 20 years ago. So I don't ever feel like I'm doing the same thing. I'm working in the same world of politics and foreign affairs and covering disasters and terrorism and all those sorts of things. But it's so different. It's such a different environment, as we've talked about already. It doesn't feel repetitive, it doesn't feel at all boring. And so as long as it's still exciting, then I can't think of anything else I'd rather do. You know, when I say to you I genuinely often feel I've got the best job in the world, that's a brilliant privilege, and you'd be mad to run away from it. So I wouldn't be running away from it in any kind of hurry.

**I mean, you're very recognisable. Do people approach you in the street and talk to you or criticise your journalism or compliment you, or do they just largely leave you to it?**

People talk to you all the time. I mean, yes. And I think the thing about being a news journalist rather than an entertainment presenter is that people know that you're not a movie star and so they don't talk to you in that way.

**You're not a tap dancer, are you?**

No. You're not a *celebrity*. You're the guy on the news. And so you have pretty normal conversations with them.

**So there's an element of respect there straight away.**

Well, there's an element of respect usually, but I mean, more than that I just mean people want to have a chat. They want to talk to you about something that they're interested in or what they've seen you do, or they'll say, "Oh, I saw that interview you did, I thought it was great," or, "I saw that film you did," you know? Somebody the other day was talking to me about an Unreported World I'd done two years ago that had stuck in their minds. And that's brilliant. I mean, it's a really privileged thing, you know? People sometimes say, "Is it irritating?" and it's not half as irritating as nobody recognising you.

**What's the one story that has stuck in your mind after all these years?**

I think it's often the last one you did, to be perfectly honest.

**It's a conveyor belt, isn't it?**

I find it impossible to say what's the most important thing you did. I mean, I think stories such as the one I mentioned in Yemen, when we went to Yemen and we went places that people hadn't been before, and we saw horrific things of children starving to death because of this war that's going on there that is very little reported, and it's very little reported because you can't get into the country. So those sorts of things feel really important because you think, "We're the only people here. We're the only people that get this information out." And that's really big. And that makes you feel, "This is why I do what I do." But the things that stick in your mind, as a say, are often the things you last did. I've just come back from Mexico and the Unreported World I've done there is going out this Friday. That's about extortion and murder and how Mexican tourism is massively at threat. So it's again, it was a really surprising story because I went to Cancun and found that Cancun isn't just this great beach resort that people book their holidays for – there's a lot going on there that's really quite scary. You know, and a man was shot dead on the beach outside the five star hotels when we were there, you know, and we were also in Acapulco for that and a man was shot dead outside our hotel.

**Wow.**

He was a taxi driver; he was being extorted. And that kind of thing is very shocking when you're there, and when you put it all together into a story that says there's something going on here that is not just a murder, that is not just one of those freak scenes that you often see in these sorts of countries, you know, in Mexico or the cartel land type things where it's very common to see murder scenes and dead bodies and all that kind of thing in any kind of documentary or news coverage of it, but when you put that together into a bigger story about what's happening to this country and why tourism is massively at risk there, that's really interesting. And again, you feel very privileged to get to be able to tell those stories. That's great fun. So people always say what's the one that sticks in your mind? It's usually the one you've just done.

**Last question, then. You've done 19 years, let's say you do 30 or 40 years, whatever it is, but at some point you'll retire. What would your advice be to your replacement? Someone who's just leaving university now and wants to be the next you. What you tell him?**

Well, on the retirement thing, let me take that one first. Because I come from a culture of not retiring at all. My dad is 83 and is still working every day. So I think I've been brought up never to think about the idea of retiring. Whenever I talk to my friends – in fact, I was talking to a friend of mine the other day who was talking about getting to 55 and thinking about stopping when he's 55. I can't think of anything worse!

**You come from a family of grafters, like me.**

I'd be bored out of my mind! So I don't know what I'd do. I think I'd drop dead. I just atrophy and quit. So – rather like Jon Snow, I suspect – I'll go on forever. As long as I can, as long as people are interested in what I've got to say. But in terms of advice, I think no matter how this industry changes – and there's no doubt this industry is

changing massively, the way journalism is done, the way it's delivered, who's reading it, how they're getting it – these are all really exciting times, and things are unrecognisable in many ways, it all boils down to the same stuff, which is great stories, exposing injustice, holding people to account. And if that's what you're doing, it doesn't matter what's going on in the world of journalism, you'll still find an audience.

**Krishnan, that's been a hugely enjoyable interview. Thank you ever so much for your time.**

Thank you for having me.