

Samia Malik - Life and Music

Samia Malik has lived an extraordinary life. She was born in Saudi Arabia to Pakistani parents and soon after her birth, the family returned to the family home in Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Born into a culture that reveres the first son, Samia's birth is explored in **I Was the Third Daughter (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**,

I was the third daughter
In a culture that worships the first son
So I tried to reason...
So I shouted, and beat my fists...
So I tried to be quiet and good...

Despite all the negative cultural messages about being a girl, Samia's father, Abdul Latif Malik, wanted to bring his three daughters to grow up and study in England, as he was a deeply devout Muslim who believed passionately in the Islamic ideal of equality for women. When she was six, her family moved again, this time to live in Britain and settled eventually in Bradford. This early displacement, and an ensuing search for identity and roots, while growing up in an inner city immigrant community, is later explored in **Mothertongue - Mah Ki Zabaan (The Colour of the Heart 1998)**:

*Aas paas khurrai hae ye ghurwaale loag
Mer ghar kaha hae, bus ye putta nahi...
Kia thi me, kisa bun gayi mujhse na pooch
Aisi budul gayi hoon ke koi nishan nahi...
(All around me are people who belong
But where is my home...
What was I, what have I become...)*

In **Ik Sheher A City (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**, she writes

*Ik sheher phookarta hae
Kaise waha me jaoon...
Sudian beet gayi hae
Bichhur gayi sarae saathi
Be-jurr hoon, me soorat upni...
Roz roz nahi bunaoon
Ik sheher phookarta hae...
Do jahan me reheti hoon
In ko kaiseh munaoon?
Kaha dhoondoo upnai khooda?
Kis zubaan me me gaon?
Ik sheher phookarta hae...
(A city calls me*

How can I go there?
Centuries have passed
All I knew are lost
Rootless, I invent
A new face every day...
How can I reconcile
These two worlds?
Where shall I seek my gods?
In which language shall I sing?)

In Bradford, the family struggled against the twin evils of poverty and racism. It was the 1970's, when the National Front marches actually began on the waste ground next to Samia's house. In **Land of Hope (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**, she writes of this time:

At times, their mother calls them urgently
They huddle together in the cellar
Giggling
As men with small heads and big boots gather
And march down their street
Throwing bricks, and worse...
New symbols appear on their walls overnight...
These streets were never paved with gold...
They are hot with burning cars
Who will ever connect
An end with its cause?

In the hot summer of 1976, the family was devastated by the sudden and unexpected death of Samia's father. As an adult she wrote **Khailti Hoon Playing (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**, in tribute to this remarkable man:

*Khaliti hoon puraane raho me
Upni tukdeer ki bunyaadon me
Terai khaito pe khizan chhaee nahee
Phool khiltae hae terai baghon me...*
(I am playing in alleyways of memories
In the roots of destinies
Autumn has not come to your fields
Flowers bloom in your gardens...)

The loss of her father, and a relationship with her mother that had always been troubled, meant the next few years were a difficult time in Samia's life. At 17 she decided to get married, but later said she had 'jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.' Her new marriage was into a much more deeply orthodox family than her own, and Samia spent the next few years virtually locked in a house. She was told repeatedly that she could not leave, that all the problems in her

marriage were her fault, that as a woman, she should try harder. Since she had no adult male in her family to protect her, she became the victim of domestic violence. These deeply traumatic events were only alleviated by the birth of her son in 1991. Much of her earliest writing was directly as a way of dealing with these experiences: ***Kooch Loag Some People (The Colour of the Heart 1998)***:

*Kooch loag kurtae hae ajeeb si mohubbat
Zanjeerai pehenatae hae phir kurtae hae ibadat...
Meri humjinz kaise zulmo me bus rahi hae...
Honsla rukho beheno anchal me chupao khunjur...
(Some people love in a strange way
First they tie you in chains then worship you...
My sisters live in terror...
Hide a dagger in your veil...)*

After her son's birth, still aged only 20, Samia ran away from her husband and from Bradford, carrying just her baby son and a suitcase of his clothes. She was terrified for her life, feeling sure if her husband found her, she may be killed to save the family izzat (honour). These honour killings have only recently become better known, but this was in 1980. She was also scared her son would be taken from her. For the next few years, she moved often and kept her addresses secret. She ended up in Norwich, deciding to study for a degree in Mathematics in order to become a teacher. Being a single parent and doing a degree simply for the security it would give her were difficult, but all the time, Samia was aware that she was free, in a way that had always been denied to her until now.

While she was doing her PGCE she went through counseling and decided, after all, that she didn't want to teach secondary maths full time. She had always enjoyed singing as a child, enjoying Bollywood classics, Ghazals (Urdu couplets set to music) and classical music. She was on a bus from a demonstration against Cruise missiles at Greenham Common when she heard about a local group, **The Norwich Women's Soul Choir**, whom she joined and performed with regularly.

After some years Samia realized she wanted to learn more about Indian music. She set about looking for a teacher, and at the end of 1989 found **Baluji Shrivastav**, a world famous sitarist based in London, who agreed to take her on as a student of North Indian Classical vocal music. She began training, while also supporting herself and her son by teaching, traveling regularly the 200-mile round trip to London from Norwich for her lessons. She began doing small solo performances, and workshops in schools. She formed her first band **Awara** and did a number of gigs in Norwich followed by two summer's tours with the Bungey-based **Company of Imagination**. In 1990 she was doing a performance for the London based **Asian Women Writers Collective** where she met the writer/ translator **Rukhsana Ahmad**, who asked her to compose the music for **We Sinful Women**, a bilingual anthology of contemporary feminist writing by

women in Pakistan, which she was translating and editing. Samia was thrilled to be working with such powerful material, composing music for poems like **Kishwar Naheed's Ye Hum Gunagaar Aurtae Hae We Sinful Women (The Colour of the Heart 1998)**:

*Ye hum gunagaar aurtae hae
Jo ehle juba ki tumkunut se ne roab khae
Na jaan baiche
Na sir jhookae
Na haath jhorae...*
(It is we sinful women
Who are not awed by false splendour
We don't sell our lives
We don't bow our heads
We don't fold our hands together...)

However, Samia felt those poems did not go far enough into her own experiences as a woman growing up in England and in the early 1990's she began writing her own songs, using, to her surprise, the *Ghazal* form from Pakistan, in Urdu and English. Her first song was **Mothertongue - Mah Ki Zabaan (The Colour of the Heart 1998)** explored her relationship with her first language, and her fears of losing it. However, she says 'When I had finished working on this song, and found what it came out in was the traditional Urdu form of Ghazal, I realized I had rescued my Urdu. You can't write poetry unless you know a language.' **Junun ke Dookh – The Pain Of Life (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**,

*Junun ke dookh me kioon purri ho?
Moht ki khooshi me gaya kurro
Tor do bundhan kioon durti ho?
Chhor do rishte kioon rookti ho?
In dustooron se kia ghubrana?
Upnai sutch ko maan lo
Upnai huq ko thaam lo
Keh do keh do upna fasana...*
(Why be lost in the pain of life?
Sing at death's ecstasy
Leave these relationships, why hesitate?
Break these bonds, why be afraid?
Tell your own story
Believe your own truth
Fight for your rights
Why be scared of convention?
Why be lost in the pain of life?
Sing at death's ecstasy)

In 1991 she also had a second child, a daughter. She formed a new band **Sargam** which toured new material around Norfolk, though solo performances at the same time were going as far as The Black Writers Festival in Glasgow and St David's Hall, Wales. There followed two UK tours with **Man Mela** Theatre Company and **Slant** - a cross-cultural celebration of poetry and music. In 1996 Samia was commissioned to write the soundtrack to **Safar**, a new play for **Made in Wales** Theatre Company and in the same year she formed the band **Garam Masala**, with **Sianed Jones, Cris Cheek and Sukhdeep Singh**. With Garam Masala, Samia toured the UK regularly for the next 5 years, and released her debut CD ***The Colour of the Heart*** in 1998.

It's not the colour of her heart
It's the colour of her face
It's not the whisper of her dreams
It's the roar of her race
So hard to give so hard to take
These words of love these words of hate
Words can free her
Words can keep her in her place...
What must be wrong cannot be right
No shades of grey just black and white
Words may heal you
She may die in their embrace...
These scars cut deeper than the skin
One world without one world within
Only see them
They may fade without a trace...

She was still working as a teacher, mainly doing supply, but also doing increasing numbers of workshops on Indian music in schools. She also began doing more explicitly anti-racist work, including co-authoring ***All Different All Equal***, a set of antiracist teaching materials for use in middle and secondary schools. Performances included the **Music World Festival** in Tuscany, Italy, and a study of Ghazal form in Pakistan. She completed the Diploma in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia and had poetry and poems published in ***Tales of Eastern Promise***, an anthology of new writing and in the Redbeck ***Anthology of British South Asian Poetry***. She wrote **Land of Hope** for the **Sidmouth Folk Festival**.

Samia most recent international work has been at the **Darpana Academy of Music and Dance**, Ahmedabad, **India**, to work with **Mallika Sarabhai**, celebrated dancer, activist and actress. The tour was called ***Colours of the Heart*** and based on the Samia's songs and music, and choreographed by Mallika. The all-women cast included **Ambra Bergamasco** of Italy, and

Jeannine Osayande of the USA. The major tour of 12 cities in India in the summer of 2004 included Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Bangalore, Hyderabad, plus two controversial performances in Kashmir that made the news from Australia to the UK, and caused questions to be asked in the Pakistani government. Performing for audiences that understood not just the languages in which she writes, but also the context, was affirming. Samia's overriding memory of the India tour is when the audiences regularly joined in with her heartfelt words in **Jaago Wake Up: (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**,

*Jaago han jaago mut soh laina
Jaago han jaago oojala hoai ga
Rung chehrai ka na dekh humarai
Dil ahon rung eik humarai
Kaisa ajeeb sa khail chulayai
Na upon ka saath na sung puraye...
Aiseh ruwajo she kioon durroon me?
Aiseh sumaj se roz luroon me
Upna des hai, upna watan hai
To kioon yaha purdesi bunoon me?
(Wake up, wake up
Don't stay asleep
Wake up, wake up
The dawn is coming
Don't look at the colour of my face
Our hearts and dreams are of the same colour
What a strange game is this
Neither my kin nor strangers are with me...
Why should I be afraid of these traditions?
I will fight this system every day
This is my country, my land
Why should I be an outsider?)*

Samia is not afraid of difficult themes: in the next excerpt, on both her CDs, she talks about child abuse and our responsibility to protect the vulnerable **Raat Meh In the Night (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**:

*Raat me akailai meh
Lurkian kioon roti hae?
Buchpan ki masoom khwaabe
Lurkian kioon khoti hae?
Khaae jo dil pe choat
Dagh kaise mitten ge?
Rugur rugur naazuk budun ko
Lurkian kioon dhoti hae?
Bhool ki gehri kaali nudi meh
Yaade kioon diboti hae?*

*Ghairo ki busti meh na dekho
Upne ghar me hohti hae
(In the night all alone
Why do girls cry?
Why do they lose
Their innocent dreams?
When the heart itself is scarred
Why do they rub
Their fragile skin so hard?
Why do they bury memories
In the deep black ocean of denial?
Don't point at other's houses
Look in our own homes)*

Revolution has always been a central theme. Samia's vision can be summed up in **Haseen Khwaab Beautiful Dream (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**:

*Jaage jaage kaisai huseen khwaab aya
Is watan meh akhir inqalab aya...
Haath me haath ik saath hum chul ruhai the
Behe ye mehel bundon ka salaab aya...
Be-insaaf kanoon ko julla ke dekha
Ke badul hut gayai aaftaab aya...
Jaage jaage kaisai huseen khwaab aya
(I was awake, how did I dream such a beautiful dream?
A beautiful dream of revolution?
When we walked, all hand in hand
To sweep away palaces of privilege...
When unjust laws were burnt we saw
The clouds part, and the sun came out
What a beautiful dream of revolution)*

But Samia's life has taught her that true revolution comes from within: **The Third Daughter (Jaago Wake Up 2005)**:

Now
I am a daughter
Of my rage
I am a daughter
Of my love
I am a daughter
Of my self
And have as much right as anyone
To the bounty of the world
Now
I hold my own hands

From the inside

Now

The flowering of acceptance

The fire of the challenge

The vision of freedom

Samia returned to the UK to take up her place on the BA in Fine Art at **Norwich School of Art and Design**, where she is studying painting. She also continues working in schools, more recently teaching protest songwriting skills, and continuing Race Awareness work. She says of her degree course 'After more than 15 years of performing live music, I am keen to explore the same issues using the more universal language of vision, and am simply enjoying being creative just by myself.'

However, she was also busy recording her new CD ***Jaago – Wake Up*** released locally as part of **Norwich Black History Month** in October 2004, and is planning a national release on May 28th 2005. She is also planning a national and international tour of ***Jaago – Wake Up***, working with dancers and video installation, for 2005/6.

In short, Samia has created a volume of work from her own experiences that speaks to audiences everywhere. She is unique in being a woman from a culture where women are routinely silenced, as she was, who is choosing to speak out against repression of all kinds. But more than that, her glorious synthesis of musical styles and languages with her hard-hitting lyrics is truly unique, inspirational and ultimately beautiful.