How To Write For Journalism

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

writing, stories, imposter syndrome, fiction, khan, journalism, journalist, book, read, world, rejection, crime, piece, women, wanted, brilliant, feel, representation, day, paper

**SPEAKERS**

Saima Mir, Nelima Begum

**Nelima Begum**

Good morning, Saima, and welcome to the Being A Writer podcast, how are you?

**Saima Mir**

I'm a little bit tired because it's a school holidays but I'm very well thank you, how are you?

**Nelima Begum**

I'm very well, thanks, lovely, bright - is it Tuesday or Wednesday? It's Tuesday morning, that's how tired I am! I'm thrilled to have you on here because we're speaking about writing journalism today which is very different to what we've had so far on this podcast series so I'm excited to jump straight into it if you are.

**Saima Mir**

Yes, absolutely. Let's go.

**Nelima Begum**

Wonderful. So I've read that your background is actually in science, in the sense that you did, biomedical science if I'm not mistaken. How did you get into journalism, and when did you realize racing is what you really wanted to do?

**Saima Mir**

So I yes so I have a degree in BSc in biomedical sciences, and then I actually weirdly have a Masters in engineering, computer integrated manufacturing, it's management of all things. But what happened to me is that I, as I've written about before I was married quite young, and I got divorced by the time I was 25 and I was a little bit lost. I'd done odd things like I done photography and I'd worked in accounts, but I didn't really know what I wanted to do and I suppose I loved journalism, my grandfather was a journalist, but he was a journalist in Iran, in the 60s, so I didn't really know how to navigate that world so after I finished my Masters in engineering, I knew I wanted to be a journalist but I didn't quite know how to get there, and my local paper had a column called The Voice of Youth. I emailed the Features Editor and said I'd like to write for that and I submitted a couple of things. And it got accepted. And then I sort of, I emailed him and said I'd really like to come meet you and get some advice, and he was amazing. He could have invited me to the office, and we had a chat and he sort of said 'yeah, if there's any more opportunities I let you know'. And then he let me know actually when a traineeship came up, I didn't know traineeships existed. And I applied for it, I'd never ever stepped in a newsroom before then. So I did the interview which I completely blagged and then I did two days of work experience at the paper. And that's how I landed my first job at the local paper.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh, that's amazing. So, it was just a series of events that unfolded quite spontaneously then.

**Saima Mir**

Yeah so I think I think you know when you focus on something, you know what you want to get and you're looking around for what opportunities there are. It was that - I was looking I didn't quite know how it was fortuitous it was this, he was just happened to be amazing and I tell him this regularly when I interact with him on Twitter. It was great, it was a traineeship so what happened is they took me on, they paid me my salary, they paid for my NCTJ training. They paid for me to stay in Darlington, which is where the course was, it was just the best six months of my life, because I had found where I belong. And that was in a newsroom and writing news.

**Nelima Begum**

That's fantastic, and it leads us really nicely onto our next question as well on the topic of belonging. So in an interview for the Bradford Literature Festival (and I know Bradford feels a lot like home to you) you said that stepping into a newsroom as you just said, felt a lot like home and gave you a sense of belonging. What do you think it was about journalism that demanded your attention?

**Saima Mir**

For me it's stories about people, I think, I mean I'm, I'm sort of trying to figure it out, figure out what it is that makes your soul sing now and then there's two things for me. Bizarrely, one of them is the newsroom made that happen and the other is kickboxing, which is something I do, and that's only happened to me twice, where I've walked into space and it's like, everything comes together. And there was something about succinct writing, you know the basics of writing who, what, why, when, how, the phone call of gathering information, and the privilege of being able to ask really personal questions to someone as part of your job and then actually getting the answers, and then turning it into copy - 400 words of a story. There's just something magical about it out all the fat, putting down the facts.

**Nelima Begum**

So when you started out, did you have an idea of the kinds of stories you wanted to cover what did you have, you know, did you kind of have expectations that you wanted to write about?

**Saima Mir**

So I was probably like most journalists, I thought I was going to change the world. I was going to tell these stories I was going to check the world and I was going to break through. And now I realised how disrespectful that was because journalists have been doing this for years, you know, and the world, we make a dent in it, it doesn't really evolve so much, so I just wanted to tell stories about people like me, I think, and I wanted to give faces like mine, I'm a British Pakistani Muslim woman, representation. I want to display them in the paper.

**Nelima Begum**

Do you think there are caveats that come with representation because there are times when it's quite difficult, I would assume.

**Saima Mir**

It's like, someone called it the rep sweats- you get the rep sweats the representation sweats and it happens in publishing I think more than in media, because I think as a journalist, I didn't really want to represent myself, I wanted to be the conduit through which other voices could come through so I could interview people and make sure that they were equally represented or when a story was covered make sure that it was fair, because we all approach the world through our own lens right on our own privileges. And so I wanted to, so that's what I wanted to do and I didn't think about my representation then, I mean my mom I remember saying to me, oh you know you're representing X Y, Z and I was like no, no, I'm just representing me. Later on, when I became a published writer of fiction, then that question arose again and then the answer to that was, was slightly different really.

**Nelima Begum**

It's quite difficult to navigate at times I feel, because like you said you don't go into things, thinking that you represent a wider community but then you just do and someone comes up to you and says 'well, don't you feel like you represent someone who is like you?'

**Saima Mir**

Yes. I think the way I deal with it now is that actually we are a community, I don't, when I say we I mean the human race is a community. And anything we do, is dependent on other people. So for example in fiction writing, I write, I write, I've written crime fiction, but crime isn't the only thing I write, I write romance I wrote about family I write, but the only thing that sees the public sees is the thing that I get paid for, and I can't control that and I think with, with time I've learned that I can only do my part and do it to the best of my ability, what happens to it is out of my control really.

**Nelima Begum**

You've got some big publications under your belt; The Telegraph and Argus, The Guardian and the BBC. What was it like coming up in the world of journalism for such big names?

**Saima Mir**

It was, what was it like so it's great to see your byline in those big papers, it is amazing. And so I used to work for, and my grandfather taught me to read the headlines of Telegraph and Argus which was my local paper, so I wanted to work there. The Guardian I used to read when I was doing my A-Levels and the BBC was just the BBC so those are the three things that I really wanted to do. And it's funny because it's incremental when you get to these places. For someone like me it is so incremental but by the time you get there, sometimes you're exhausted because the work that you have to do as a person of colour is greater than somebody who may come from a middle class white background. That's the nature of the situation at the minute. So, I did love seeing my byline and there is a bit of, there was a buzz to it but I think I was so engrossed in it and I was so engrossed in doing the work that I didn't get to enjoy that moment, as much as maybe I could have done

**Nelima Begum**

That was going to be my next question Do you remember how you felt when you saw your first piece or byline?

**Saima Mir**

Oh, it's amazing -my first - so the local paper for me was amazing because it was the place I'd grown up. It was an old school newsroom. It was really experienced journalists who you can learn your skills from and your talent. That was the first place that saw my byline. And I loved it and I never ever got over seeing the splash my name on the front page. What was funny was I remember going out with my mom one time or taking it to a cafe. It was my day off, I had a splash that day. And I was like stumbling and wrote this paper saying 'mum, look my paper, see!' and she said, 'yeah, it happens to you every day now'.

**Nelima Begum**

(Laughs) The novelty had worn off.

**Saima Mir**

You know, I've grafted for this.

**Nelima Begum**

Well, yeah, mums are there to humble us, they keep us grounded. Yeah. When I think of journalism, I feel like it requests, as you put it previously, I think you've phrased it as 'gutsy and honest' and at times, thick skinned. Do you think these are qualities that you've had from the start, or were they things that you've had to learn and develop throughout your career?

**Saima Mir**

They weren't not qualities I had at the start of, when I kind of entered adulthood, at all. And it's because of what happened to me in my life where I ended up young and divorced from this background, where I had got to a point where I literally didn't care anymore. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to swear on this podcast but it's so that no f's given scenario, where I had nothing to lose, really, and I wanted to be a journalist and I wanted to do this job I wanted to be good at it. And I'd seen the, it's almost like the curtain has been pulled back from the world, and so I didn't care anymore. So I was gutsy, because I knew that's what I had to do to get ahead. And and I'd read this book called Why Good Girls Don't Get Ahead But Gutsy Girls do. And it was about, being empowered. So I think at that point I was, I was empowered. I don't think I was - so now I understand rejection, more than I do, then it doesn't hurt the way it did then. I think it's a bit like being pummeled you the first punch always hurts more than the last because you're numb by the end of it. So I had some of the qualities, I was gutsy, I was ready to pick up the phone and call anyone. I would get in the car and go anywhere to interview anyone. I was okay, you know, I was happy to call us whatever questions, but it's, it's got greater with time, I think the resilience and thick skinned-ness, has grown with time.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, so it's definitely something that you've kind of just added to over the years.

**Saima Mir**

Yeah, I think I'm also quite sensitive soul. I feel things really deeply, and so for a long time, I was in the world. It was almost as if I didn't have skin and everybody had lemon juice and everything was painful, so I had to learn to survive, and part of my survival through life has been, I am adult for a while, and I think the gutsiness and the resilience and all that came, it came from that, just having to survive.

**Nelima Begum**

So prior to pursuing that career in writing did you write in your spare time, and if so, what kinds of things were you writing?

**Saima Mir**

Yes, so I used to write, I just used to I used to keep a journal, like most, most people did at that time. And I just used to write about my thoughts, I did write a book which is hidden away somewhere, which is probably a terrible, terrible piece of literature, somewhere I wouldn't even call it literature. So I wrote poetry, which I don't do anymore. And I just wrote prose really nothing too solid.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, I was just about to ask you, are there any hidden gems or unseen pieces you can tell us about from earlier years?

**Saima Mir**

I did. I wrote a book about myself. I think everybody with the first book everybody writes about themselves is that we have to exorcise those demons and it was about myself kind of loosely based on my experiences, and the things I was going through. And I discovered it recently. And what was interesting was I in my head I remember it being awful. It must be awful. Actually I when I read it, it wasn't that bad. It was okay. And the reason I never did anything with it is because I showed it to someone and I got a knock back so this goes back to the resilience thing of, I got a knock back and I just thought, this is terrible, I can't do anything with it and I left it for a long long time before I tried to write a book again.

**Nelima Begum**

What's, I mean, what's that like, dealing with rejection. Do you feel like it gets easier over time?

**Saima Mir**

Yeah, I remember I read this quote recently which I loved, which was like, wanting to be a successful writer, and not wanting to get rejected is like being a boxer in the ring and not wanting to be hit. It's hard part of the course really, it's going to happen to you, you're going to get rejected. And, actually, in the long run, when you do achieve the success of being published or having that thing out in the open, it helps because it really does build character, and it also shows you the worth of what you've done. It shows you the financial worth of it, the emotional worth of it. I just think it really grounds you, if I hadn't have had all the rejection, I think I wouldn't have embraced the success that came in the same way as I have done.

**Nelima Begum**

It's a great way of looking at it. You say that it kind of builds characters but do you think it also changed your writing in any way, like, did you ever go back and change what you were working on, did it influence the outcome of your stories or anything like that?

**Saima Mir**

I think we always hone our skills, every, every day, the more you write, the more you change and the better you get at it. Someone, Val McDermott, gave me this really great advice recently where she said, when you pass your driving test you're road worthy but you're not ready to get on the motorway, but you you know you're allowed to go out that so that's like when you've written your first piece and then, then you do motorway training, but you're still not ready to do Formula One. So you do more training and it's like that where every day we're developing and we're learning. I, what I did, I think, is I, in terms of my fiction, I think my fiction was just more melodramatic. That's because I come from a very melodramatic culture. And as I began to navigate the industry more I realized that the thing that was normal in the background I came from which was oh my god, the world is ending isn't acceptable in any form of writing at the minute, in this country. So I learned to pare back, I learned to pare back all that emotion I used to overwrite and I learned to use. Yeah, to use one sentence to convey so much, maybe a look or something like that.

**Nelima Begum**

When dealing with rejection, did you have like any coping mechanisms or something that you constantly tell yourself, just something that made it slightly easier to handle, or approach?

**Saima Mir**

The 100 rejection approach I think is brilliant, which is I set out to get 100 rejections. It's the idea that you send out so many times that you know, you get 100 rejections, the power, the point that you just keep going. You hunker down and you just keep going, that I love that idea.

**Nelima Begum**

It puts a really positive spin on it, too.

**Saima Mir**

Totally, it's that normalising rejection - everybody is getting rejected. Nobody knows what's ending up on the cutting room floor. For every one article that someone might see in a paper, they may have pitched 99 but no one tells us that but actually that's the fact of it, we are all constantly getting rejected and I think it's the same with editing, we are always being edited even the best writers are being edited and actually it's a privilege to be edited. And so, if someone emails you back to say, thank you very much, this isn't good they might actually in the same in the same breath, do you have anything else. They, but you've actually made a contact with them if they've taken the time to reply to say no thank you that very busy commissioning editor has taken time to say no, they've seen something in your work, maybe, but you know it's that thing of staying, you just got to dig your heels in and stay,

**Nelima Begum**

Be persistent and take a chance on yourself as well I think we're so caught up in seeing the final result and what the end product will be, that we often forget that there was a lot of grind and a lot of graft and a lot of rejection along the way, like you said, that one piece that you see, is not, it doesn't show you all the work that was put in prior and all the rejections and all the times that someone said no.

**Saima Mir**

Yes, I am always astounded by how people think that my success is just light and airy, this piece I mean you just tapped it out and then sent it off. And then, yeah, the piece I did for the Guardian about sibship, which was edited and edited and edited and edited and fabulous. I mean ended up brilliantly and I totally see what they wanted from it, but it's also because the person you're working with, maybe doesn't know exactly where they're going or what you have inside of you that's that nugget of gold that's gonna make it come alive. So, everyone is being constantly rejected, and constantly having imposter syndrome and thinking, I don't know if this is right, and that's the best writers, because that's how you get good, no one is born a Shakespeare in no one's born like that everybody has to learn it and also life experience teaches you that - what you write at 21 and what you write at 41 is going to be, if you've lived an actual life where you've like you know sucked the marrow out of life. It's going to be different, and that's the joy of it.

**Nelima Begum**

I wanted to say, on the topic of imposter syndrome, does that vary across what you're writing? So imposter syndrome within journalism and imposter syndrome within writing fiction, is it the same or do you feel like journalism you've kind of got such a handle of it now that writing fiction you have impostor syndrome less so.

**Saima Mir**

Yes, so I have I have massive imposter syndrome with fiction, still, so I've been at these amazing events recently I was at Harrogate Crime Writers festival that had amazing seasoned writers, and I felt like what am I doing here now in fact I said to them, I feel like a fraud here. And I don't have that with with journalism anymore, because I can do it with my eyes closed I feel, maybe not feature writing but news reporting, I know what it's like driving, I don't have imposter syndrome when I drive a car, because it's my brain is now programmed to kick in. And also because I refuse to have imposter syndrome with some things, I feel, as women, we always undersell ourselves, we're always being humble, aren't we, and we're told that we need to step back. I'm old now. I do not have time to cover myself in humility and wait for someone to give me accolades. I have to give myself the accolades every day, and also I'm sick of the voice in my head, which says, 'well, who do you think you are, what do you think you're doing?', and it's like Saima Mir and I'm doing what I want to do and I'll do it till I die and that's it, I'm not having any more. Stop coming at me imposter syndrome!

**Nelima Begum**

I love that you have this conversation with yourself! You know what? The shower is where we have some of the best ideas and conversations with ourselves happen.

**Saima Mir**

I'm absolutely nuts, I have conversations with myself in the shower and everything! We all do it right, we're all in that shower, those are the five minutes we've got where we're not being accosted by phone calls or, you know, siblings...

**Nelima Begum**

I actually loved that you've looked at it in that way and actually, sometimes it doesn't even have to be an experience, or an age thing - I think as women we do just need to tell ourselves like, look, stop questioning. You've done the work, and that in itself makes you worthy.

**Saima Mir**

Yes, I think there aren't enough people outside of us to tell us that we're not good enough. We have to tell ourselves we aren't good enough, because men tell themselves they're good enough from day dot, they are the, the systems that are in place to tell men that they are the power are not going away anytime soon. So until they do, we have to be our own champions, and each other's champions, and I think I spent a lot of time, saying, when someone would say 'that was great', I'd say 'oh no this was wrong with it that was wrong with it'. And now I don't do that anymore because that person doesn't need to know, I need to know that can go in the privacy of my study and do my work, but that person who said that was great doesn't need to know what's wrong with me.

**Nelima Begum**

We just need to learn to accept the compliments and the accolades, because they are a representation of how well we've done and we shouldn't question it.

**Saima Mir**

I've only read recently that hen someone says something, say 'thank you'. And what's funny is, sometimes people look at me really strangely when I just say thank you, because we're so trained to expect women to say 'thank you but, oh, it wasn't that good. Oh, it was nothing'. And I wanted to say it was everything, because I did it with three children, probably with heels on backwards while I was handing out snacks. So it was everything. And, you know, it might not be the Nobel Prize, but for me that day, it was everything. And I think we need to embrace that more as women.

**Nelima Begum**

Absolutely. So going slightly back to the stories that you covered within journalism, I imagine that when you're covering crime as you do, there are times when certain stories are quite a shock to the system. Do you have ways of dealing with them and looking at them objectively to write a piece, because I know you mentioned before the 400 words and costing out quite a bit can be difficult as well.

**Saima Mir**

I've got to be honest I never learned to to help deal with it well. There are stories that still stay with me. I feel like journalists should have some kind of trauma training or some kind of, we're not given that we're just trained to write and trade to interview, but there are stories that were exceptionally traumatic that are still in my head if I let myself think about them. Some of them, I now use in crime writing, so I don't know what that says about me. But yeah, I'm afraid no, I I don't, if anyone has any tips I would love to hear them.

**Nelima Begum**

We will definitely put that out there. So the crime scene, you've woven into your fiction writing. And so your debut novel, The Khan, (which I love) was published earlier this year and it's been praised for how bold and brilliant is. Talk me through what inspired the story as a reader I personally haven't seen or read many crime thriller stories that feature South Asian families as the central characters, especially against a backdrop of modern day Britain, so it's really great to see something different out there.

**Saima Mir**

So The Khan, as I said I was, I was a reporter at the local papers so I heard lots of excellent amazing, mind blowing crime stories, some of them were true and some of them were urban legends, and they stayed with me. I was the only writer of colour in that newsroom, and for a while I was the only writer of colour at the regional television program that I was at as well so it never failed to amaze me that we were covering stories about crime, but actually, from a completely white privilege perspective, which I thought was really interesting because there were bits that were being missed that I had access to. So I remember covering the shooting of police woman called Sharon Beshenivski and going to this scene - I was a reporter sent out there to get, get the story, and there were helicopters and it was, you know, the media had descended and the police had cordoned everything off it was late at night it was dark, it was raining, it was cold, it was like a really grimy part of town. And I remember I was followed by Daily Mail journalists so journalists when we hang out together we know, we usually have the same patch so we know who's what. So this guy in a mac who was a Daily Mail journalist, and he clocked me and he realised, obviously she's the local paper so she will have some contacts so he followed me. When I saw this cafe was the only thing that was, it was a cafe and I went in, and it was, it was called Cafe Lahore, and it was a young place it's like painted in orange, it had pictures of like Amitabh Bachan on the walls and it was full of young people who were all British Asian, and I had not seen this place before and I saw the guy behind the counter and I realised the Daily Mail journlist was behind me so I switched languages and I said, said to the guy 'do you speak Urdu?' and he said yes and then I asked him for what I wanted. And he gave me phone numbers in detail and contacts. And in that moment it crystallized to me that there was this whole world of us who are British, and we were born here, we grew up here, that nobody is seeing in books and stories, we're living this life and we're being successful; we're being lawyers and doctors and all this kind of stuff. But why are we not represented as women, and also strong women? So there was that, and then the crime stories, I just saw this city that was, that didn't have investment but there were still these flash cars everywhere. And some of that came together and formed The Khan.

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic! So on still on the topic of The Khan, I found out recently that you actually had it with you for a while and it took a few years before it was picked up by an agent, how did you approach the writing process and especially in comparison to the journalism. What was it like pitching a book compared to a story?

**Saima Mir**

So what happpened with The Khan is I had an agent but she couldn't sell it, she couldn't do anything with it. And I think, I'm not sure what happened. I think she pitched it to one place but I didn't know what to do with it so with journalism, there are very clear rules about how a journalistic story works, but with fiction because it's you're writing something completely new and I was writing something, I didn't realise that, then that didn't exist, that genre didn't exist. I didn't know what to do with it so I was quite lost after I'd finished it and after I edited it and edited it, I didn't know what to do with it. But I was really lucky because I said goodbye to my agent when I found out I was pregnant again with my third truck so I thought I'm never gonna have time to do anything with this and it's killing me, because I love, I love that story, and I love that novel and I love those people, they're so real to me. So I, and I knew that I just turned myself into pieces by trying to have a third child and do all this so I said goodbye to my agent. And then I gave up, and then that essay came out that you mentioned that the start from It's Not About The Burqa -

**Nelima Begum**

Brilliant essay, I highly recommend every reads it!

**Saima Mir**

- Thank you! So that essay came out and Nikesh Shukla had set up the Good Literary Agency, and I got a text from him saying, I had sent him, I sent him The Khan saying look, I've got this, I don't really know what to do with it. And they had an brilliant editor called Arzu who gave me some tips and said do this, so I did that work and then I was lost again so I sent it and I said, I don't know what to do. Anyway I got a text from when the essay came out saying don't find with anyone. We want to sign you. That's anyone else so they signed me, and then again, I think they thought, my agent, the lovely Abby Fellows thought that this book would go to auction, because it's been so well received and you can see that afterwards. Now you know the reviews of that kind of, you know, what's going on with it. But they couldn't, the one publishing house point blank who I'm now so grateful for that they're the ones who came through and I'm so glad that nobody else did, because I, they're seasoned editors and a seasoned team and they know what they're doing with it. So they then offered for it, but it didn't, it didn't sell for, like, lots and lots of money, and it still, then there was two years between them buying it and then saying when they will come to the way it works is they set the dates or when they're going to publish, they said two years. And so I spent a few more months editing it. And then, you know, I didn't think of it until April when it came out.

**Nelima Begum**

What was your writing - so did you have a process and did you have time in the day that you'd allocate specifically to writing? Did you do the map of Post-its on the wall? What was that like for you?

**Saima Mir**

I am, I'm, I'm such a bad planner. I love, I love plans but I am impatient so I wrote the first draft as a screenplay, because I loved reading screenplays and I'd read Save The Cat and I loved the story structure and I loved William Goldman's advice about get in late, leave early. I love all that so I wrote it as a screenplay and then I then turned into a novel so the structure of it was there, but it evolved, I mean it evolved so much. There's a scene in the book where Jia Khan goes to meet the dudkha. And that's my favorite scene I think in the book because it sets up, who she is, and how they respond to her and how she listens and you hear her internal dialogue but she doesn't actually say, she doesn't get angry at them, she kind of controls it, and that scene I wrote several times until it clicked with me, so I didn't have Post-it notes, I had a script that was written like the structure. Yeah, I wish, I wish I was a planner, I'm not, I'm a parent.

**Nelima Begum**

It's fine, everyone has their own methods! So between reportage and fiction, do you have a favourite? And I know this could be a tricky one to answer...

**Saima Mir**

I still love reporting but my life is not conducive to it, because I've got small children, and I am a workaholic. And I think news journalism, I love it, it's a drug to me and I know if I go down that I'm a recovering junkie with it, and if I go down that I'll never see my children again, or my husband because I'll just be chasing an ambulance and chasing the story of ever, so I love it, but fiction I love because it's almost like making your own people. I love those people. I can't choose, circumstances mean that I can't report anymore...

**Nelima Begum**

So reporting is home in a lot of ways.

**Saima Mir**

Yeah, but I think also because reporting, you know, I'm, I've been a journalist for 20 years so reporting is, is what I'm skilled at and fiction writing is still something I'm learning so I'm only a debut novelist so I only am very aware that it's my first book and there is more to come, and more to work to do. So, reporting is my comfort zone and fiction is the thing that I'm stretching.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that. So kind of on the topic of both, you've been very open and honest about your experiences of growing up in a South Asian family, marriage, cultural expectations, and everything else. Did racing fiction require a different kind of honesty and did you ever think about how involuntarily your writing might represent a wider community just going back to that question of representation. Was it difficult for you after your book came out?

**Saima Mir**

So it hasn't been difficult, it's been really interesting so I, because I think the audience was ready, I think women like me, British Asian women are ready, we are hungry to get stories about us, you know, we've been here a long time and some of us that are like third generation, you know, we're not - it's not our mum's time and we are of an age now as well, we we've stepped into our power, so we're not 21 trying to navigate, we're like 46 we've arrived or, you know, 30s, across the board. So, women have been waiting for this book - that's what I sort of felt, especially women who were not, we don't need to be rescued. We're not looking to be rescued by men, or anyone else. So, they were looking for Jia Khan, and waiting for this protagonist to arrive so it's been, it's been great. Has it been difficult writing fiction? I think I didn't think of it as I'm representing anyone other than writing a story, I just wanted to write a great story that I wanted to read I love entertainment and I love fiction, and I love being lost in a novel, and I wanted to write the book that I wanted to read that I would want to read that I couldn't find on the bookshelves. And so I didn't really think about representation, until afterwards, after it came out and then I think someone asked me this question, and then my answer to that is the same as I've already mentioned which is, I can write other books that somebody has to pay me for them to be published and reach the shelves, so that's not really my responsibility.

**Nelima Begum**

Brilliant way of looking at it, I actually completely agree with you that books like yours have been a long time coming. So, as I said earlier it was just really nice to see something different and to see a space carved out for these characters.

**Saima Mir**

We all know strong women right? We all know, strong Muslim women, strong brown women, you know, I know a lot of Muslim women who do the rescuing of men. I know more strong Muslim women than I know strong Muslim men, if the honest truth is told -

**Nelima Begum**

I completely agree with you there!

**Saima Mir**

- Yeah, and I think the work that women have done on ourselves. We've been forced to do on ourselves, is far greater than the work that men have done because patriarchy has propped them up in their own cultures in the wider world, whereas we've literally had to with a toothpick climb that mountain. And so I feel like we've we've arrived and we've been waiting for someone to talk about us in that light in that positive light.

**Nelima Begum**

And it's brilliant because our time is now, and I hope it will only get better.

**Saima Mir**

Yeah, I know - amen to that!

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic. So just to round off the podcast and what we're doing this season is we're ending each episode with some really nice quickfire questions. So, kind of just don't think! What do your kids think you do?

**Saima Mir**

They think I'm famous.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that. I love that! Are there perks that come with mum being famous?

**Saima Mir**

When The Khan came out, my agent sent us these amazing Biscuiteer biscuits! They asked me to write more books so we could get more biscuits.

**Nelima Begum**

Keep the biscuits coming. What are you currently reading?

**Saima Mir**

I am reading Dark Pines by Will Dean, which is a crime which is great. It has a female protagonist called Tuva Moodyson who is deaf, andshe's also a journalist - I love it, read it!

**Nelima Begum**

I will make a note of that. Are you writing anything at the moment?

**Saima Mir**

I am supposed to be writing the sequel to The Khan.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh how exciting! Brilliant! That's great news. What's one piece of advice whether it be writing-related, or about life that has stuck with you?

**Saima Mir**

Always work on three projects at one time. Something that is really easy, that you've nailed for a long time, something that is your comfort zone, and the level at which you're working on and something that is completely out of your comfort zone.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh amazing, and it can be anything, anything, across formats as well?

**Saima Mir**

One gives you confidence and makes you feel good, one teaches you the work that you've done and where you've arrived and how you've nailed it and the next one is the bit that you're working towards.

**Nelima Begum**

What advice would you give to budding journalists?

**Saima Mir**

Persistence and resilience. Just keep going, set your heart set your eyes on the goal and just keep going towards it until you get there.

**Nelima Begum**

What about budding novelists?

**Saima Mir**

Same, same also time - I would say to them, the time that you don't spend writing is as important as the time that you spend writing so forgive yourself for not being able to put pen to paper every moment that you want to.

**Nelima Begum**

Brilliantly way to round this off. Thank you so much for joining me Saima, I feel so empowered and inspired by this conversation.

**Saima Mir**

Thank you so much for having me. It's been such a joy! Thank you.

**Nelima Begum**

Thank you so much!