

Tell me about your current work.

I'm an author, and I've just completed my second novel called the 'Indian Ayah', which I am currently seeking a publisher for. My first historical novel Lascar was published in 2012; I am also a blogger for the Huffington Post.

What inspired you to go into writing and publishing as a career?

I didn't plan to become an author and a writer; I was a homemaker and wanted something to do at home, whilst looking after my 4 children.

I decided to write about a subject very close to my heart. It is the story of my son who grew up with a learning disorder. Ibrahim had a severe speech disorder; Semantic Pragmatic Language Disorder (SPLD). Children with semantic difficulties have a very hard time understanding the meaning of words and sentences. He had difficulty understanding social situations and did not know what was expected of him; I kept records of all of his reports. I wrote down Ibrahim's difficulties and decided to turn it into a book.

I couldn't compare Ibrahim to any other child in the Bangladeshi community. I was going through a difficult time with him, felt very isolated and that no one was listening to me. I wanted to be heard, and I wanted to tell his story for other mothers who may be in a similar situation. Ibrahim has thankfully overcome his difficulties.

I tried many different publishers but soon discovered that it wouldn't be published by a conventional publisher. But I wanted it published no matter what. After much thought and consideration I decided to self-publish; self-publishing means when the author pays the publisher to publish the book. So I launched my own publishing company, Perfect Publishers in 2005 with my brother Kal and published my book, 'Ibrahim – Where in the Spectrum Does He Belong?' We publish books for authors who wish to self-publish.

I run my business from home, working around my children.

What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?

I decided to write a historical novel, which I completed in 2006 called Lascar. My mother once told me that my paternal ancestor was a Lascar. The word Lascar means 'sailor from East India,' (now present day Bangladesh.) This inspired me to write the novel.

After 5 years of rejections and tears, I finally received a 'yes' from Indigo Dreams Publishing in 2011. Lascar was published in June 2012. I had been waiting years for this. It takes just one 'yes' answer and everything changes. This journey taught me to be patient and to be honest, I am happy that it took so long! I needed time to learn all about the publishing industry.

I got so many rejections. It hurt but I kept focused. I moved on and kept trying. For me it was about seeing it through and not giving up, a real rollercoaster ride.

I became a confident public speaker. Getting my book published led to other work. I have written about South Asian history and issues affecting South Asian women today.

What are the 3 most important things you've learnt throughout your career?

That I needed lots of patience, persistence and perseverance. Getting a book published requires a lot of hard work. It doesn't happen overnight. I had to find and build my audience, it didn't come to me.

Who has been your biggest inspiration/role model to date?

For me, it was author and councillor Rabina Khan. I first got in touch with her when her first book was published. She taught me so much about writing and has encouraged and helped me in many ways. She's an inspiration to all women, a strong speaker and strong campaigner.

What advice would you give to anyone wanting to go into writing and publishing?

Be prepared for lots of rejections, criticisms and tear. Any writer will tell you the same story. Writing is difficult. However, the rewards of seeing the words you have written on the page make this difficult journey worthwhile. You need lots of patience, persistence and perseverance. It can take years to get published. If you truly believe in your book, then someone else will. If you don't feel enthusiastic enough about your work, then don't expect someone else to. This will show in your writing. Read, read and read! It will help your writing. Find the right agent or publisher for your work and never give up. If you get a rejection, don't despair. It hurts but do keep focused. Move on and keep trying. Hopefully someone will love the story as much as you do, and your book will be published, God willing.

Finally, you are an active campaigner and have spoken publicly about many important issues and topics such as racism. What are your key messages for young people in these challenging times?

I feel very strongly about issues such as these. I want my voice to be heard. I would advise, make your voice heard. Don't sit back and watch someone else do it. We need everyone to be part of fighting against Islamophobia, racism and other injustices. Let's fight, but let's fight without violence - with words and ideas and symbolism.

As Albert Einstein said: "The world is a dangerous place to live in not because of the people who are evil but because of the people who don't do anything about it."