

## Review by Amrit Wilson: [Samia Malik's Azaadi: Freedom \(2017 Ashwood Music\)](#)

I first heard Samia Malik's music back in 1998 when her debut album *The Colour of the Heart* had just been released. The haunting melody of her voice with its deep sense of longing, the originality and sensitivity of her lyrics - which resemble the Urdu Ghazal in form but extend and subvert its content and the strong feminist and anti-racist message of that first album spoke directly to me. It made me think of the young Pakistani women living in Bradford and Oldham whom I had met when I was researching my book *Finding a Voice, Asian Women in Britain*, and how uplifted they would have felt to hear this music and these words which expressed emotions and experiences so close to their own.

On a very different level I remember thinking that here, at last, was a British Asian musician who was able, not only to write songs and sing in Urdu and English, but to combine a powerful performance in English with an uncompromisingly South Asian sensibility. I felt that Samia's work implicitly challenged the stereotypes which so often shape the way South Asians are represented in Britain - sometimes even by South Asian performers and artists themselves.

In 2017, nearly twenty years later I got to see Samia perform again at the launch of her brilliant third album *Azaadi: Freedom*. Her voice still haunting and melodious now has a new strength and conviction, its music qualities honed and perfected by intense training in Indian classical music and complimented now by a wonderful group of musicians including the so-called 'sitarist to the stars' Baluji Shrivastav. Her presence on stage together with projections of her own visual art is tremendously powerful and inspiring. (*Azaadi*, as she tells us, reflects her own personal journey through art 'which was an instrument of... healing and empowerment').

Her feminist message has become a strong uplifting current. It embraces our pain, sorrow, and anger and speaks out about Asian women's oppression, epitomised in being 'the third daughter in a culture which worships the first son', and finally gathers us up, as it were, calling on us to

*'let go of fear,*

*nothing can contain you*

*Believe in your own truth,*

*Claim what was always yours'*

At the core of *Azaadi* are songs and poems which speak specifically about the South Asian (sometimes Muslim) women's experience, as in *Shubaab: Longing*

*'What crimes have been committed in that longing*

*For that which is not tangible*

*For that which is not hidden in books*

*Some search in the Mosque*

*Some search in the Quran*

*Some search in their hearts,*

*Some search in wine'*

or more specifically about the South Asian woman's experience in Britain as in the unforgettable *Colour of her Heart*:

*'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'*

Samia frames these songs, however, in a broader perception of struggle, by including, for example, a riveting spoken-word performance of Kishwar Naheed's poem 'Anticlockwise' (translated by Rukhsana Ahmad) written during the Zia era in Pakistan, and at the end of the show by singing finally of revolution

*'I was awake*

*How did I dream such a beautiful dream*

*A beautiful dream of revolution?*

*When we walk hand in hand*

*Together we will sweep away palaces of privilege'.*

At a time when women the world over are facing an onslaught of intensified patriarchal violence and oppression, these iconic songs are needed to heal and empower us too.



**Amrit Wilson**

Amrit Wilson is a writer and activist on issues of race and gender in Britain and South Asian politics. She is a founder member of South Asia Solidarity Group and the Freedom Without Fear Platform, and was Chair of Imkaan, a Black, South Asian and minority ethnic women's organisation dedicated to combating violence against women in Britain, from its inception in 1999 to 2014. She was a founder member of Awaz and an active member of OWAAD.

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