

Links: [Soundcloud playlist - Rubbena Interview 4 Sep 2025](#)

41:51 – 53:07 (Interview conducted by Imam Jalees Khan)

I had the absolute pleasure of conducting an interview with Sister Rubbena Aurangzeb-Tariq. Absolutely stand-up woman honestly, a really really polite, really really nice. She had a translator as well. I would like to thank the translator as well for helping us with the interview.

Sister Rubbena Aurangzeb-Tariq is a British Pakistani artist and psychodynamic and psychotherapist with over 25 years of experience working with deaf adults, young people, and adolescents in mental health and education. Profoundly Deaf and fluent in both BSL and English, she is also a chair of the Deaf Ethnic Women's Association, co-chair of Deaf Aspirations, and a trustee for the British Society for Mental Health and Deaf People. Alongside her therapeutic work, Sister Rubbena is an internationally exhibiting painter and installation artist, whose work has been exhibited in New York, London, Paris, Korea, England, and Wales. Sister Rubbena's work explores themes of identity and culture.

Again, a real pleasure talking to her few days ago.

Thank you so much, Sister Rubbena, for joining us today for this interview, with an interpreter. We really appreciate it. Let's get straight into this.

How would you describe the impact that sign language has had on your everyday life?

Yeah, without sign language, for me, it's a huge barrier. Although I speak, you can hear my voice, it seems quite clear, but I'm profoundly deaf, so I hear nothing without my hearing aid on. So I depend on sign language to have access.

So I gained an education, with degree level, because I have access to BSL, sign language interpreters. Every day, I could go to work because I have interpreters. Every day, I could make a phone call.

Every day, I could have access to communication. I can go to the theatre, I can go to the art gallery, have access to BSL. Because sometimes speech is difficult to follow.

We have lots of accents now, we live in a very diverse society. So, for me, I have a choice and I have a control how to have my access to my life, to communicate every day. So it's really important.

It has a lot of impact. Without it, I wouldn't have a job, even.

Thank you so much for that.

How do you feel how society interacts with and understands those who are deaf? And what adjustments need to be made to ensure society is more inclusive and accessible?

Talking about society, they fully understand deaf people's needs? No. Or even disabled people? No. Because, especially in an ethnic community, it becomes like a taboo, a stigma, shame.

They're blaming themselves, they're grieving. For a long time, years and years, trying to think, what have I done wrong? But they forget the child is growing, and they forget the child needs to learn. So society has made it accessible? No.

Because I think, you know, public, if they're more aware of sign language, visible, they can see that we need access. I mean, slowly we are improving, but we need the attitude to change. Education has not improved at all, in my view.

Because, if you look back at my time, 30 years in education may be longer than that. I'm quite a bit older than that. But access to education, most deaf children leaving at 16 years old, with a reading age of 8, 9. And that doesn't help us to go and carry on to degrees.

For me, I have to be repeating a journey to get to my degree level. So it's very difficult to understand speech if it's not clear, you know. Or the word in speech, the sentence, we missed that.

What did she mean by that sentence? English language is really difficult. I mean, by the time we're 18, if we haven't got the basic foundation, our career pathway is limited from society. We can't do anything.

The visual communication is needed everywhere. If it's visual, we are starting there. We understand, we know what's going on.

If a train has a problem, something visually, beep, beep, tell us to look, the train stops. That helps us to move in society. I've been quite a few times the last person on the train when everybody got off.

Because I don't hear the announcement. I've got used to it. But we need to stop following the medical model where people are saying, fix it, fix it.

Wearing hearing aids, cochlear implants. Because that just stops us learning. We need to listen to the child and think what's best for the child, really.

And make that change, and society can change a lot.

Again, thank you so much for that. In some cultures, disability is viewed negatively. What role can organisations such as the Deaf Ethnic Women's Association play in awareness, or raising awareness, and promoting understanding of sign language, as well as other forms of support that could enhance the lives of deaf individuals?

Deaf Ethnic Women's Association is a national organisation to try to embrace change. We want people to start thinking about disabled child. It's a taboo no more.

We need to change it. We need people to think, stop blaming themselves. And there's a child here who needs to have access to education.

Families often got led up to end up controlling a deaf person's life. A deaf person's impact on that becomes their mental health. It's declined.

It doesn't work you know. Families decide to arrange their marriages you know because they happen to have a hearing person, and want to help them for life.

That's not a solution. That can become trauma. So, it doesn't help deaf people at all.

It makes them very vulnerable. We will make our family happy. We will say, yes, yes, whatever family wants.

But are they happy themselves? It's not worth that, you know. It's not fair for a deaf person. So Deaf Ethnic Women aim to try to make people understand that putting them into a marriage situation makes you talk to that deaf person.

You know, raise awareness to the families that deaf women can do a lot of things, you know. I'm a deaf woman myself. My mum has made me think I'm not disabled, although I'm profoundly deaf.

And I have to grow up with that, live with that, so that I can have access to education. And that's really good. I think that's a good model for my mum, who couldn't speak English when I was a baby.

And she went and learned English because she realised if two languages in the house. I'm not developing. I wasn't developing.

By eight, I had no speech. So she decided to learn English in a home. Everybody speak English.

That changes perception. So every deaf woman, for me, I want to give the same projection out there to change.

Thank you so much for that. Just finally, art has been a powerful way for you to express yourself and tell your story. What advice would you give to other deaf individuals about pursuing their ambitions and recognising that support is available to help them in everyday life?

Hmm. I'm lucky my parents allowed me to become an artist.

So I'm practising as an artist, installations everywhere, internationally exhibited. So I'm lucky. But I'm also trained as an art psychotherapist, where I support women, children through their trauma and hope they have a better life.

So for me, all of that layers, intersexuality, my identity being deaf, being Asian, being a woman, being a mother, being a wife, all of those layers, for me, that art is put into my work. So I project that out. Very abstract.

So people don't understand it. So that's a challenge I have to live with. So when I do that, it makes me think very creatively, right, we have to have a workshop next for deaf ethnic women because they don't understand everyday incidents and learning.

So they've missed out all that education. So the workshop educates them. Then they start to realise themselves, oh, I've been through that experience.

So we support them then from one-to-one to make their choices themselves, what they want to do with their life, changes. Some of the mothers have trouble with their children who could be deaf, who could be hearing, and nobody tells them. There's no access, there's no, BSL interpreters are available.

We, the school, we provide for a parent to have access to have a meeting suddenly. There's no BSL interpreter to provide for a legal request if a woman wants to have a divorce from her parents or trying to have access to her children because there's no BSL interpreter. Who's going to pay for that? There's huge barriers.

So Deaf Ethnic Women's Association really want to change that because I think it's not fair that women should suffer in silence. They shouldn't have to. So that's my mission, is just to change perception, thinking, that not only the medical model or educational model, look at yourself and we have to change for them as well.

I think that's really important.

Amazing stuff, Sister Rubina. We really appreciate you taking your time and we can hear your emotion and how much this means to you.

And I pray everything goes well for yourself as well and I pray for your association. And I hope, and I'm pretty sure as well, that these interviews, including yourself as well, will inspire a lot of women as well as other Deaf people as well, inshallah. God willing.

Thank you, because I think families forget that there is a child, there's a human, who's going to live in society and they're not going to be there forever. So they are independent. I really appreciate your advice, because for me it's a huge thing that the Deaf Ethnic Women's Association, I've seen a lot of things, a lot of traumatic life experience I've witnessed and it's horrible.

It's not nice because the families choose not to listen. If the families listen and look, change will be amazing. Thank you for asking me.

No, it's a real pleasure having you on the show. Thank you so much for your time. May the peace of God Almighty be on you.

Thank you. Bye-bye.

That was our interview or my interview with Sister Rubbena Aurangzeb. I see amazing stuff and as I've mentioned she is very very inspiring empowerment woman who is leading the way of or paving the path for other women like her, and she had some interesting experiences in her life. She mentions specifically about her culture as well and acceptance in her culture.