



## TRANSCRIPCIÓN ORIGINAL DE STUDIO OCHENTA

### MIJA ON THE MIKE - SAADIA KHAN

00:00 LORY

Bienvenido and Welcome to Mija on the Mike, where Mija interviews daughters of immigrants and immigrants who are making moves in their industries around the world.

00:15 LORY

Today, I'm so excited to invite podcast host, activist and entrepreneur Saadia Khan. She's the host and executive producer of Immigrantly Podcasts, an independent W.O.C. led weekly show that aims to deconstruct stereotypical narratives of immigrants, their second generation kids, people of color and change makers with cross-cultural nuanced conversations.

00:33 LORY

Thank you so much for joining me, Saadia.

00:36 SAADIA

I am so excited to be here, Lory.

00:39 LORY

So it's exciting to chat with you because I was already a fan of your podcast and I didn't realize I was talking to "the Saadia Khan". I'm from Queens and it's one of those wonderful shows that reminds me of home, the diversity of it and the immigrant community there. So it's always really cool to hear your stories. I love your show. So this is really fun. Thank you.

01:00 SAADIA

Oh, I'm so glad that you listen to Immigrantly. It's the kind of validation that I'm always looking for, especially from second-gen kids. And believe it or not, a lot of second-gen kids listen to my podcast more than immigrants, which is crazy.

01:15 LORY

Yeah, I think it's a, we want to find content that speaks to the issues around our experience. So I completely understand that makes a lot of sense. Like my mom is not necessarily asking herself these questions so actively because she's not in it anymore. She's been in the US 35 plus years. She's American. So whereas me, I'm always like, what am I? Who am I? Great. Let's get started.

01:42 LORY

So Mija is a show where we share immigrant stories through fiction and highlight the nuances that affect all members and a family, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, grandparents, people who stayed behind, wherever they are in their journey. So I want to start our conversation with your immigration story. Tell me everything about that last day before you left.

02:01 SAADIA

You know, I don't even remember the last day before I left because I was so anxious and excited at the same time. So I took the flight from Islamabad, which is Metropolitan City in Pakistan. And my husband and I both said goodbye to our parents.

02:23 SAADIA

I remember one thing though, I was bawling before I left Lahore for Islamabad, another city in Pakistan where my parents were living at the time and I am extremely close to my mother. So that was the most difficult thing to do. Although I was excited about what lay ahead, we were going to be here on campus in college. So a lot of exciting things to look forward to, but at the same time, the mere fact that I was leaving my mother, my father behind, my friends, my family was daunting at the time. So yeah, I mean, the only thing that I can recall is bawling and weeping because I was going to leave my mom behind.

03:06 LORY

I love hearing that emotional kind of reaction because we have a character in the podcast who plays Mija's mother, Tatika, who also went on her very own adventure to immigrate to the US. Though the father in the story had a different experience where he had to leave, the mother is very much someone who comes from more privileged background in the sense that she could really decide to go. And so her first, her last day was very much this anxious and then crying in the airplane and then you arrive. So I would like to hear what you felt those first couple of weeks in the US and how you felt kind of that connection to this new home in that first period.

03:46 SAADIA

So at the time, I didn't even consider it my new home. It was just a place that I was visiting because my husband had gotten into this amazing program at MIT and we were going to go on our adventure for a couple of years and then move back to Pakistan. So the whole experience was supposed to be transient. It was just like I was going to come to the US experience and go back. And the first two weeks were just now they are a blurb. But if I look back and I really think hard, I was missing my home like crazy. I was missing my parents. Everything seemed so strange. I was in a strange land knew the language. Of course, I grew up speaking English and yet I couldn't connect with anything in the US. Everything seemed squeaky clean, right? So I was coming from Pakistan where the soundscape is so different there. You hear noises, you hear human stalking, you hear crowds, hustle and bustle.

04:53 SAADIA

And then you come to the US and everything is clean and the roads are wider and bigger and people are just going about there. And nobody really talks to other person and everybody is busy doing something. But there is no sense of connection or community. And just remember this was on campus. So I was still lucky to be in a place which was different

from obviously if I came here to suburbs or anything, right? So it was still different. There were a lot of students from all over the world.

05:25 SADIA

There were students who had come from East Asia, Africa, South Asia, Europe. And that was something that I enjoyed. But at the same time, it was just not by Pakistan. And I didn't connect the first two weeks.

05:40 SAADIA

And then what happened after those two weeks that made you, was there like a moment where you felt, okay, I could get used to this. I could understand this.

05:48 SAADIA

I don't think it was an aha moment or an epiphany where I was like, oh, you know, I can connect. It's been an evolution for me. Right? So initially, as I said, I came here on an adventure. I thought I would go back to Pakistan. And then I had my kids here and I moved to suburbs and I started living the American life and going to grocery stores and running a household. And I think that changed a lot of things for me.

06:19 SAADIA

So it took me good about six, seven years to start looking at US as a potential home. And initially, when I came, I was on F2 visa. My husband was on F1. Then he was on H1B. I was on H4. And then once we applied for Green Guard and we got our Green Guard, I think that also somehow solidified my sense of we are really going to stay here now and we are going to call US home. And then I went back to grad school initially in Denver, but that didn't pan out because we moved to New York. And I wanted to do masters in human rights. So once I went back to grad school in New York, that's when things started to turn around. And I remember that particular moment when somebody said something about, oh, so do you still plan to go back to Pakistan? And I had to pause and think and I was like, I don't think so.

07:18 SAADIA

So that was the moment when I knew America is home now. But it took some time, at least for me. And I'm sure every immigrant's story is different. Every immigrant journey is different. We are not a monolith. Unlike what people may think. So I'm sure there are immigrants who connect with America the minute they land. But for me, it was a learning experience.

07:42 LORY

That's so interesting to hear. I would love to hear your thoughts in particular related to building a family because I come from a family of immigrants and many of the people in my family have gone to other countries too. It's not just the US. Because in Colombia, there was a huge diaspora because of the drug wars and everything. So there was a lot of people in my family that are everywhere. And one of the advices I got when I myself immigrated was you won't feel like this place is your home until you have a family of your own and you create your own family in this new place. Because they're going to be connected to this place forever. And you have to kind of deal with that.

08:20 LORY

And there will be more of that country than you are. And there's going to be that connection with it. But I would love to hear your thoughts on that because I know you're a mother. And so I do want to discuss that. But I just even hearing that. What does that make you think?

08:34 SAADIA

You're absolutely right. Now I had kids early on. I was pregnant when we were still on campus at MIT. So when I came and I'm sure my husband thought she cries all the time and she misses her parents, let's have kids. Let's distract her. And he was like, oh, do you want to have kids? And I was like, yeah, sure, let's do it. So I was like, you know, not a lot of thought put into it. And I don't advise that. Although I'm really happy that I have two kids and their teenagers. So that's something that happened early on in my life. But as my kids started going to kindergarten and I could see them being part of the community and being American more than me. Right.

09:15 LORY

So when they started to talk and when I could see those interactions and I could see, I guess I could see some reflection of American society in the way my kids spoke or how my kids interacted with me. And that was also a watershed moment when I realized, okay, my kids are going to be different than me. Their upbringing is going to be different. They may not speak the language that I grew up speaking. They may not have the same cultural conditioning that I had growing up. They may not have the same relationship with me that I have with my parents. So it was an interesting experience.

09:58 SAADIA

Sometimes humbling to be honest. But yeah, you're right. I when I look at my kids now, I see so much of Americanness in them. Although they don't see it that way, they are still navigating cultures and they are trying to see where they fit in. But I see a lot more Americanness in them than I would ever see in myself. And you're right, when your kids are invested in a place and when they belong to a place, that place becomes your place. America is my home, not just because I have accepted it as my home and I have adopted it as such, but it's my kids home more than it could ever be mine. And that's why it is so precious to me.

10:45 LORY

That's beautiful. I would like to hear about how you inculcate your culture to your family. How do you do that? Is it through the language, through food, through movies, music, a little bit of everything?

10:59 SAADIA

Oh, like if you ask my kids, they'll be like, you know, I drive them crazy trying to do that. So they're pretty annoyed. So it's like culture school that they're forced to go to. Yeah, they're not denied. I think they enjoyed. So I speak the language. In fact, we speak three languages at home. So we speak English, which is my kids' first language. We speak Pashto, which is my mother tongue. And then we speak Urdu, which is another language spoken in Pakistan. So there is this, you know, interesting combination of all three languages that we speak. I cook Pakistani food. Unfortunately, I am not a great cook. My mother was not a cook. She had help. So she never tried to be a good cook. And that's why I guess I never put in effort in cooking, although I've been cooking for the last 20 years in the US.

11:52 SAADIA

But the only thing that I can cook well is Pakistani food. And other than that, we visit Pakistan often. We talk to our kids about Pakistani politics. We talk to our kids about intersectionality of different cultural identities, whether it's their Pakistani heritage or their American identity. And we have those tough conversations a lot of times, even conversations around respect, disrespect. What it means to be a part of an individualistic society and what that individualization looks like, where says having grown up in collectivist society, where you always prioritize the well-being of collective over the well-being of self. do have a

12:35 SAADIA

So yeah, I think we lot of conversations and my kids and I have found that happy medium. They have accepted Pakistani heritage and both my girls are proud of that. I'm also trying to navigate a space where I can be proud of my American identity. And I've said this in the past that there are days when I feel more American and then there are days when I feel more Pakistani depending on my mood and circumstances. So that's how we navigate those different identities within the household and outside.

13:12 LORY

I would love to hear what that translates to. So what kind of discussions do you have that make the collectivist versus individualist thing come up or the arguments that arise and bring that conversation. Because again, coming also from a collectivist community culture, Latin culture is very community-based and then going to the US is very much all about you and your own dream and don't care about other people. I mean, to put it very directly and bluntly, it is that, you know, and there are benefits to that too, of course, but I definitely have had experiences where that comes up. So I would love to hear if you had like an anecdote or something in particular that made that conversation come up and that you were able to put words to it and you said, this is because you are from an individualistic society.

13:59 SAADIA

You know, I'm so glad you brought this up. The one that comes to mind is this constant tension between my kids and I when it comes to how they communicate with parents and the idea of respect. Which is very different in collectivist societies versus individualistic societies, parents coming from collectivist societies approach or view their kids versus parents from individualistic societies. And I can vouch for that. When I look at my kids, I see them as an extension of me. I feel as if it's like myself out in the world and because of that, I feel this sense of responsibility towards them. And in a way, ownership and I don't want people to misconstrued the word ownership, but what I'm trying to say is that I'm really, really invested in their well-being, right? So how they behave, how they communicate, how successful they are, how comfortable they are, how much they take care of their mental health, their physical health.

15:03 SAADIA

And because of that, obviously, as a parent, and I'm sure there are a lot of parents listening who could relate to this, I give them advice and I give them advice on a regular basis because my mother does that to me even today. The thing is, when I give them advice, their response to me is more like, oh, we know. Or if I will say something that they don't understand, they're calling me a hypocrite or why would you say this and this doesn't make

any sense. And that tone doesn't sit well with me because I, to this day, talk to my parents in a certain tone, and I'm sure people listening, especially from East Asian cultures, Latin cultures, know what that tone is.

15:47 SAADIA

So I feel like we have this constant tension and I have said things like don't act like American kids and let me tell you this. When I tell my kids don't act like American kids and I've said it a number of times, I'm adoring them by assuming that American is equal to white Americans only, right? Because there are a lot of American kids who come from families that have been part of collectivist societies. So for me, calling them that is problematic. So I've stopped doing that. But I think that's where most of the tension lies for us and they don't understand the threshold of respect, disrespect that I have. So sometimes they're like, oh, we are not disrespecting you.

16:37 SAADIA

We are just telling you what we think. And I'm like, okay, you can tell me what you think, but I don't like the way you tell me or the tone that you use. Again, we've found a happy medium where sometimes they'll say something that I could never ever imagine saying to my patients and I'll be like, you know what, it's fine. You know, it's okay.

17:01 LORY

You come to this place of acceptance.

17:03 SAADIA

I have. I have and I'm glad I have. Because of that, I think my kids and I have a lot more conversations and we are more open with each other than we were probably, I don't know, four, five years ago.

17:17 LORY

I want to talk about immigrantly. But before we get to that, I have one more question about this kind of cross-culture experience that you're dealing with with your kids. Because again, I'm a daughter of immigrants. So I'm here. It's like I'm hearing my mother speak. It's very cool to hear your perspective on it. I would love to hear thoughts on the fact that more and more young Americans consider themselves multicultural and identify as multicultural. And so one of the conversations that I've been starting to have with other kids of immigrants, daughters of immigrants who are having now their own kids is, you know, asking, well, they'd be still asking these questions to themselves. One generation away. Will they still be asking themselves if they identify as Pakistani American or will they just kind of forget that identity? Well, you know, there's kind of a loss generation after generation of that identity. But they'll still say, I'm multicultural because I'm from all of these places, right? I would love to hear what you think about that, you know, how these lessening of the culture, it's being watered down from generation to generation because you're more and more distant from it. So what do you think about that? For your own kids is when they have kids, for example.

18:20 SAADIA

You know, as a mom and somebody who would like to preserve part of my culture through our future generations, ideally I would love for my kids to pass on parts of their identity, at least Pakistani heritage to their kids. But you're right, it will be some concoction of more

watered down iteration or vision of what they're experiencing. But at the same time, what I've realized and what I've seen with Gen Z and my kids are part of that generation is that they are more unapologetic about their identity in whatever form or shape it comes, whether it's their ethnic racial identity, whether it's their sexual identity, whether it's their sexual orientation.

19:12 SAADIA

I think they are more comfortable in who they are and I'm so glad. And we are also seeing a paradigm shift within American pop culture media, with media like podcasting, we see that a lot of people from diverse backgrounds are having these conversations and it's okay and acceptable and celebrated. And that's why I think prior generations were probably not passing on those values. And again, I don't want to speak for somebody else, but my assumption is that it was more difficult for them to own themselves wholly and fully. But this new generation is doing it unapologetically and therefore my hope is that they will retain parts of their different identities, trans cultural identities that they have nurtured and that are nurtured at home and they continue to nurture that outside the house as well.

20:09 SAADIA

I see that with my kids, which is interesting because when they go to Pakistan, obviously people don't consider them Pakistani, they consider them Americans, when they are in the US, people see them as trans cultural, but my kids are unapologetic about it, right? So they are not trying to hide that part of their identity. In fact, they are celebrating it.

20:33 LORY

Yeah, completely. So I do want to talk about your podcast. Please tell the audience what is Immigrantly Podcast and how did you start it? What inspired you?

20:46 SAADIA

Oh, I mean, Immigrantly is a passion project, small but hugely impactful platform that celebrates the extra ordnance of immigrant experience, whatever shape and form it comes in. It started around 2018 and of 2018, beginning of 2019 as a result of the 2016 elections and this may sound cliché, but that was the trigger for genesis of Immigrantly. However, when I go back and I look at my 20-year journey in America, I feel like I was other and there were microaggressions against me and my family and I always felt I didn't fit in and I was trying to make America home. In an effort to make America home, I felt I had to reconcile with so many different parts of American identity and create a safe space for me and my kids and people like me.

21:45 SAADIA

So that's how Immigrantly was born. It's been four years we've had incredible conversations with 220 people and I've learned so much and I have changed so much and I have been able to own parts of myself that I was embarrassed off through Immigrantly because I saw so many incredible badass people owning those parts of their identity and I was like, why can't I not do that? It's been an incredible journey and we have also launched another podcast called: "Invisible Hate". Which started in January of 2023 this year which is very specific true crime, ethical true crime podcast that features or highlights injustices against minority groups. So what we do is we take a case every week we dissect it, any hate crime perpetrated against minority communities and then we deliberate it. I have a co-host, this is

a collaboration with Refillion Media and then at the end of the podcast we decide whether it is a hate crime or not the way we see it. So that's where we are in my immigrantly journey and I hope to create more podcasts.

23:03 SAADIA

We are already working on a third bitch. So yeah, it's been an incredible journey and I'm glad that we were able to create this space and above all I think Immigrantly is a safe space for POCs before anything else to have those unadulterated, honest, messy, introspective conversations and to be themselves because I felt I couldn't be myself for a long time in America. I had to pretend to be somebody else or at least hide parts of my identity that I felt I would be judged on.

23:39 LORY

Tell me more about that, about an experience in which you felt other.

23:45 SAADIA

Oh my gosh, so I came to the US around 9-11 and as a Muslim woman of color from Pakistan, I was othered in an instant because America at the time was so paranoid, resentful, angry at Muslims. It still is to be honest and I came to US at that time so I did not experience US prior to 9-11. I don't know how immigrants fit in to that narrative prior to 9-11 but I have only seen America as guarded, angry and resentful towards people who are not white or European.

24:28 SAADIA

And for me that was a constant struggle and once we decided to stay in the US and call it home and raise a family here, I knew that the stakes were high. They were really high and I could not sit on the sidelines anymore. I remember my daughter was in sixth grade and I've said this in so many interviews but I think it's an important detail that I always shared. She was in sixth grade and a kid in her class called her Queen of Taliban. Now imagine a kid born and raised in the US probably at the time she had visited Pakistan only once or twice and being called something so vicious and so obnoxious and I don't blame the kid. I'm sure the kid must have heard it in their family but that made me think of how I want my kids to live in this country, how I want other people's kids to be comfortable in American society and to work towards practically realizing the American dream.

25:34 SAADIA

I guess theoretically it exists but practically it does not exist for a lot of people and that's why immigrant Lee came about as a rights activist. I thought the best way for me to make a difference was through audio activism and that's that's what I did.

25:51 LORY

You talk a lot about the American dream. What is it for you?

25:57 SAADIA

For me it's a myth. It doesn't exist. Yes, there is a normative framework around it but for a lot of people it's still a myth. It's unattainable and it's discriminatory and until we create an American dream or realize an American dream that is accessible and attainable for every single person setting foot in this country. We have a lot of work to do.



26:27 LORY

You sound hopeful though.

26:28 SAADIA

I am hopeful. Oh my gosh, I am so hopeful. In despite all the critique that I may have, I am so grateful for where I am being part of this American experiment and having experienced it and continued to experience it every single day. I guess my hope leads the way to have these conversations and to enact change and to criticize and critique because that do is patriotism right? Hoping for a country to realize its full potential and helping it to get there. That's what I am hoping to do.

27:15 LORY

That's beautiful. I want to ask you a question that is a little bit more related to Mija and her experience but I'd love to hear your thoughts on this quote. So we have the saying that Mija says at the beginning of every story that she tells about her immigrant and her family and how they went on their journey and it's this is the story of those alive, those long gone and those still dreaming. What do you think about that phrase?

27:39 SAADIA

That's a beautiful phrase and that is so true because this story is universal. It transcends geographic boundaries. It transcends ethnic, regional identities, languages and it's a story that somebody is hoping to experience in future or now in present. So that's a beautiful quote.

28:03 LORY

Amazing. Thank you. So I want to come to a conclusion now and ask you just in general, what are you the most proud of in all of these years as you were an immigrant now you're American? What are the most proud of in that journey?

28:21 SAADIA

Wow. That's that's a difficult question. I would say I am most proud of being able to accept and celebrate different parts of my identity alongside my American identity and I didn't have to sacrifice parts to gain others and that's been an evolution for me but I am so comfortable in being American right now versus I was 10, 15 years ago. Because I've been able to bring along all the other dimensions of who I am unapologetically and it took me so long to do that to accept those parts because if we are unable to do that there's always some void and I feel like I feel complete now because I can just talk about all those different parts proudly without feeling embarrassed or without hiding them.

29:24 LORY

That's beautiful. We're going to come to an end here with a speed round question. So, what language do you swear in when you accidentally touch a hot plate?

29:35 SAADIA

Pashto.

29:36 LORY

What is your favorite food?

29:37 SAADIA

Biryani.

29:38 LORY

What is a song that you've had in your head this week?

29:40 SAADIA

It's a Punjabi song, nobody would know.

29:43 LORY

Oh tell us the name of it, tell us the name of it.

29:45 SAADIA

It's called Sonic, it's it's an interesting Punjabi song.

29:49 LORY

Okay. What's your last Google search that you feel comfortable sharing?

29:53 SAADIA

How not to kill an art kid?

29:58 LORY

What is your most embarrassing dream?

30:00 SAADIA

I can't think of it, Lory. I think I don't remember my dreams normally.

30:06 LORY

Okay. And then the next question is actually also still related to dreams but in the sense of what is what is something that you always dreamed that you'd be? What you wished you'd accomplish in your life? What was that big dream for you when you were growing up?

30:21 SAADIA

Wish for others what I wish for myself and I'm still working on it.

30:26 LORY

That's it. Thank you so much for your time, Saadia. Tell us where we can find you and where we can listen to your stories.

30:31 SAADIA

So you can find Immigrantly on all streaming platforms. You can find, find "Invisible Hate" on all different platforms. My Twitter is @swkkhem. Immigrantly use Twitter is @Immigrantlypod. Immigrantly on Instagram is at @Immigrantlypod and if you want to watch some cringy videos of me on TikTok, you can even go to our Immigrantly podcast because I

do create those videos and my kids don't want to watch them. And I think they've blocked me on TikTok but I don't know who knows.

31:06 LORY

All right. One last thought for our Mija listeners out there. What's your advice to daughters of immigrants who are scared to take the leap and start telling their story?

31:16 SAADIA

Believe in yourself, address the most embarrassing parts of your identity that you think are most embarrassing first and believe it or not, there is no end to it then.

31:29 LORY

Amazing. Thank you so much.

31:31 SAADIA

Thank you, Lory. This was so good. Thank you for having me. I had a blast.

31:35 LORY

Thanks for listening. This is Mija on the Mike, a season of reflection on our shared experiences as daughters of immigrants. Over the next couple of weeks, I'll be sharing stories like these and inviting guests to share theirs.

31:53 LORY

Follow us on Instagram at @mijapodcast. That's M-I-J-A podcast and leave us a note if you like this storyTune in every Wednesday for a new episode.

32:02 LORY

This is a production of Studio Ocenta, a Latina-owned multi-lingual podcast studio dedicated to raising voices across cultures.

For more from Studio Ocenta, follow us at @ochentapodcasts on Instagram. That's O-C-H-E-N-T-A podcast with an S on Instagram.

32:18 LORY

P.S. Don't forget this season is also about you. If you have a story you'd like to share or if you'd like to be a guest on the show, I invite you to reach out on Instagram at @mijapodcast and leave us a message with a short story or memory of yours that warms your heart. We'll read it out loud on the show.

32:34 LORY

Hasta pronto, ciao!