So I made a counter-proposal: that Zubaan find another editor, whom I would informally assist in putting the anthology together. Over the next two years, we discussed the idea several times, but made no headway. And eventually, I realised that unless I got down to brass tacks and took on the task, this book would not be appearing in print anytime soon!

With some reluctance, I began identifying, shortlisting and editing stories for the collection. In the end, it took nearly two years and an arduous journey to reach the actual publication of *Lifelines*. If I'm honest, I have to admit that some of those memories still have the power to make me break out in a cold sweat. For each obstacle overcome, another one would emerge without warning. For each challenge I had anticipated, there would be several more that could not have been predicted.



The launch of 'Lifelines' at the Hay Festival Dhaka 2012 (R to L): Mahmud Rahman, Farah Ghuznavi, Firdous Azim and Selina Hossain.

And the deadlines were a category unto themselves. I coined the term 'zombie deadlines' during this period. Because no matter how hard I tried to lay one deadline to rest by delivering on time, a new one – or a revised/extended version of the earlier one - would pop up to replace it. It was like running a very, very long marathon without sufficient training or provisions (and no finishing line in sight) - and I am no athlete!

But what a learning experience it was. Working with fourteen other writers, each contributor and I went through several rounds of revision for each of the stories. And I have lost count of how many times I revised my own story, 'Getting There', before I settled for the version that appears in *Lifelines*. My role as editor was fairly hands-on, but I did my best to be as gentle as possible. Because each of us puts a piece of our soul on the page when we write, and it's hard to have that edited or altered, even if it is done from the best possible motives. For that reason, I am happy to say that while no stories were killed in the process of bringing out this anthology, several were successfully and significantly modified.

In the end, I had to balance my responsibility as an editor, which was to make each story read as well as possible, with my respect for the work of each of the writers. It was *their* voices that needed to come through in the stories, not mine, however good my intentions. It was a mammoth task, but I was encouraged by the generosity that most of the contributors demonstrated whilst working through the edits. And I found, to my relief, that they were all still talking to me by the time we reached the end of that process!

In terms of content, I chose a mixture of what might be called literary fiction, and more 'approachable' writing for the collection (I have more recently undertaken a similar selection process for my own short story collection, tentatively titled *Fragments of Riversong*, which should be appearing in print later this year), with the aim of ensuring that any reader would find something to enjoy. I also chose to include some 'uncomfortable' topics – for example, difficult childhoods, or domestic violence – which continue to be a recognisable part of life, no matter where you are from. And whenever I chose a story featuring a more traditional topic, such as the tensions between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, I tried to make sure that there was a twist of some kind