

\$5 Vol.3 No.4
Rungb

A South Asian Quarterly of Culture, Comment & Criticism

South Asian Publications

Browsing the Racks...

Taking a look at the South Asian periodical scene



Duty, Desire & Dilemma
Deepa Mehta's *Fire* reviewed

Alternative Bhangra
An interview with *Cornershop*

...and more!



Contemporary Art in Asia **Traditions/Tensions**

a literary reading

June 19
Thursday, 7pm

The **Vancouver Art Gallery** and
the **Rungh Cultural Society**
co-present an evening of readings
by local South Asian authors,
followed by a brief discussion with
the authors and a tour of the
exhibition **Traditions/Tensions**.
This event will be an opportunity
to hear 'local' viewpoints and
finds connections in these
authors' work and some issues
raised in the exhibition.

Participants will include:

Anita Rau Badami

Tamarind Men

1996, a work-in-progress

Sadhu Bhinning

new work

a work-in-progress

Phinder Dulai

Ragas from the Periphery

1995

Shani Mootoo

Cereus Blooms at Night

1996



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Browsing the Racks

Rungh takes a look at the South Asian periodical scene by Zool Suleman and Sherazad Jamal

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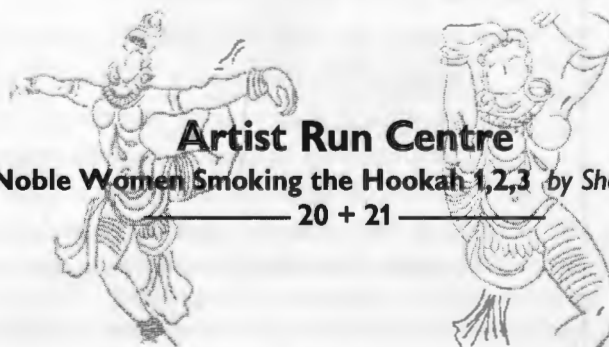
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Rungh

Volume 3, Number 4

RUNGH is an interdisciplinary magazine committed to the exploration of traditional and contemporary South Asian cultural production and its contexts. It is a project of the Rungh Cultural Society, an incorporated, non-profit society.

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editorial

Five years and three volumes later, it is time to write our final editorial. I write "our" because over the course of the last five years I have been the "masthead editor" of Rungh while in reality Rungh has, from its inception, been edited by my partner, Sherazad Jamal and myself. Our partnership in producing Rungh has given us an opportunity to give to and learn from our "communities", however defined. We thank you for the opportunity.

Rungh started as an idea. In the first editorial we stated that Rungh was about documenting and creating 'documents'; it was about dialogues, activism and creating a forum for discussion; finally, Rungh was about defining and challenging definitions. East-Indian. Paki. Indo-Canadian. Curryeater. These were the terms used to describe us South Asians.

Rungh began in the throes of the identity politics which gripped Canada in the late '80s; a politic which simultaneously created and destroyed definitions. As we broach the end of the '90s the seeds of conservative politics have become well rooted and identity politics are increasingly regarded as having marginal value. When Rungh began there was a window of opportunity to discuss what it meant to be 'Canadian' or 'western' while still having roots someplace else in the diaspora. We fear that the window is beginning to close. The rhetoric of globalism, technology, deficit reduction, and corporatism continue to create further distance between the 'haves' and the 'have nots.' All too often the communities which contribute to and support Rungh find themselves on the losing end.

Is there any room for optimism as we are about to enter the much heralded new millennium? We think there is. We are at heart dreamers and optimists. We believe in the strength of communities and the power of creative labour to resist oppression. Such resistance, however, increasingly requires equal doses of open-eyed pragmatism, faith in one's beliefs and the support of a greater community. We believe that there is much work to be done and that Rungh has a continuing role in doing it. Rest assured that the spirit of Rungh will not disappear.

Sherazad Jamal is a Vancouver based mother, writer, designer, artist and cultural activist. After completing a Masters' degree in Architecture at the Technical University of Nova Scotia, she worked as an arts administrator for a variety of arts organizations. She has been published in magazines such as *Harbour*, *Front*, *Bazaar* and the anthology, *Aurat Darbar*. She co-authored a chapbook with Shani Mootoo entitled *Did You Know Snow Would be so Cold*. In 1993 she co-curated a section of *Artropolis* and her work has been included in several group shows. Currently, her primary focus is raising her children.

Zool Suleman lives in Vancouver and practices immigration law and entertainment law. He has had articles published in *Fuse*, *Ankur*, and *Parallelogramme*. He has served as an arts consultant to municipal, provincial and national arts bodies on racial equity, program evaluation and artists' rights issues.

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Browsing the Racks

**Rungh takes a look at what's happening
on the South Asian periodical scene...**

itors of *Rungh*, we browse the racks at neighbourhood magazine store, Magpie, opportunity we get. There is something al, almost hypnotic about picking up, sining and flipping the pages of the latest of hundreds and hundreds of magazines. re magazine lovers at heart and it is our of magazines that led us to start *Rungh* in st place. In this, the final issue of *Rungh* we have conceived and edited, we have ed to go back to our love of magazines xamine what other South Asian periodi- re doing...what's happening on the scene vere.

r review of the South Asian periodical is not comprehensive and is entirely nal. It is based on those magazines that ew off and had heard about. We have o limit our selves to magazines in Canada he United States (with the exception zaar). We have focused on printed zines only (except for *Caju Press* and book publishers) and not reviewed online ations of which there are several (and ing). The twelve magazines we have ed show the enormous range of writing es on within the scene.

From the magazines we have profiled, it is not surprising to note that the non-profit, alternative magazines (*Rungh* included) are finding it very difficult to survive and produce issues on a regular basis. The very nature of their enterprise, to challenge mainstream ideas and/or the very limited audience they have, makes it difficult for them to survive on an earned revenue basis. With public funding for alternative magazines on the decline, this spectrum of the scene is under severe threat. If the alternative magazines do not continue to exist, it will limit the ability of new writers and artists to gain exposure for their work. Increasingly the challenge to publish the work of emerging artists will fall either upon themselves or upon the for profit periodicals.

The for-profit periodicals, like *India Currents* and *Mehfil*, rely on advertising for a substantial portion of their earned revenue. Advertisers count on these publications to deliver to them a defined, affluent and consuming audience. These magazines have little incentive to challenge orthodox notions about what constitutes the South Asian community other than the governing vision of the editor(s) and/or publisher. *India Currents* for example tackles

contentious subject matter and its editorial vision encompasses consistent coverage of the arts. *Mehfil* on the other hand is still evolving from a magazine which caters to the vanities of the rich and powerful (what writer Sadhu Binning refers to as the 'mehfil-ization of the community') to one which recognizes its social responsibility to the rest of the community.

The challenge for magazines, be they South Asian or otherwise, is to continue to stay relevant. With the growth of e-zines and other electronic media, print magazines need to not only offer stimulation but also some form of value. As you browse the racks, we encourage you to order those magazines which appear to be of interest and which you have never heard of before.

Browsing the Racks

from *Watano Dur* to *Ankur*

It has been a long and winding road from *Watano Dur* (far from the motherland) to *Watan* (motherland) and then to *Ankur* (a new beginning). It reflects and records the Punjabi community's journey from a small group in the sixties to a fully established part of Canadian society by the end of the eighties.

The community saw a dramatic population increase in the early years of the seventies. Racism from the host community and nostalgia for the homeland created a general feeling among us that we were not *at home*, but rather temporarily *away from home*. Home was back there, in Punjab/India, and we longed for it. These were strong feelings and needed expression. As a result, a host of new cultural and literary activities began to take place in Vancouver, still the main Canadian center for the community. The Punjabi Cultural Association was formed in 1972 and Punjabi Literary Association in 1973.

Watano Dur saw its first issue out in July 1973 as well. These were the first efforts that can be described as trying to address the identity issue being faced by Canada's growing Punjabi community at the time. *Watano Dur* became the main link that connected old and new writers, not only to their readers in Canada but Punjabi readers around the world, including Punjab and India. The magazine regularly published poetry, fiction, non-fiction, reports about cultural and literary activities, and a number of special issues organized around specific themes.

Watano Dur was renamed *Watan* in 1989. The name change corresponded with the change in the attitudes toward Canada, the adopted country. Nostalgia for the motherland was replaced with the need to define our relationship to the new land. *Watan* became selective in its content and mainly published writings that reflected the change and the process itself. This change in the magazine was greeted with enthusiasm by readers both in Canada and abroad. A number of special theme issues of *Watan*, such as the Komagata Maru issue (August, 1989) and the Canadian Punjabi Theatre issue (August, 1991) attracted wide attention from Punjabi readers and critics around the world.

While *Watan* reflected the change in attitude, something was still missing. The community had moved from being predominantly first generation Punjabis to a mixture of second generation who mainly spoke and read English. Also important was the urgent need to connect with the rest of the South Asian communities and with the larger community as well. This was not possible for *Watan*, a Punjabi language publication. The answer to this new reality was *Ankur*.

Ankur was initiated by the Vancouver Sath Literary and Cultural Society, which published *Watan* and had been involved in community theatre since 1983. *Ankur* immediately became a meeting place for writers and activists from the entire South Asian community. It was celebrated as the link that brought together different generations and communities. It was warmly received by the South Asian community and by the larger community as well.

All this activity was undertaken on a volunteer basis without any financial aid, except for a small grant to start *Ankur*. Those of us from the first generation were feeling the fatigue from this long journey, and the well of new volunteers was drying up. Consequently, the momentum behind these activities has suffered a setback in the last couple of years. Hopefully, movement will continue, once the dream of glamour and the 'mehfil-ization' of the community slows down, and realities bring writers and activists back to the path of true expression.

The journey has not finished yet...we will keep walking.

—Sadhu Binning

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Photo: Gurnail Bhat, Ankur

The journey has not finished...



Photo: Gurnail Bhat, Ankur

...we will keep walking

Browsing the Racks

Caju Press

Publishers of South Asian folk literature

Anyone who wants to read South Asian literature in English normally turns to one of two places: contemporary novelists like Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai, or to translations of classical writings like the Ramayana and the Urdu poets. But it is hard to find the kind of stories and songs we heard at our grandparents' knees.

It's not that these collections don't exist, but that they are very difficult to find outside South Asia, and are usually written for academic or tourist markets. The few collections published in the West tend to merge different South

Asian traditions, and thus lack a sense of local context. As my brother and I hunted through university collections, we did manage to find some books related to Goa, our small corner of the subcontinent, and they answered many questions and filled many gaps. It was then we realized there was a need for a press to publish South Asian folk literature for an English language audience.

Folk literature is a vital yet easily ignored part of a culture. In the oral traditions of South Asia, proverbs, tales, fables and myths are commonly told and don't need to be written because they are known to everyone. Yet they form the backbone of the culture, often revealing, unabashedly, how it is that a society is stitched together. Folk literature is the primary cultural inheritance.

But being raised in new lands often means that this inheritance is only partial, often decreasing with successive generations. Without these stories, songs, and sayings, it is difficult to understand either the culture as a whole or what makes one village or state so subtly distinct from the next. Our books will help preserve, promote and develop these traditions in the South Asian diaspora.

As the rice of home cooks in the water of many countries, our goal is to make folk literature more readily available outside South Asia, in accessible, finely crafted editions. Our hope is that South Asians, wherever they may be, will bring their literary heritage to new countries, and build on them from there.

Our first book, *A Handful of Grams: Goan Proverbs*, has just been published. Printed on high quality papers, this collection contains hundreds of proverbs that have been carefully rendered into playful contemporary English. It conveys the fine balance of East and West that marks Goan culture.

—Damian Lopes



Caju Press, run as a community service by Damian and Dominic Lopes, is a not-for-profit enterprise that depends on your support and welcomes your collaboration. Visit our website at <http://www.io.org/~dalopes>

To get involved or for more information, write to:

Caju Press Box 657 Station P
Toronto, Canada M5S 2Y4
e-mail dalopes@io.org

Browsing the Racks

diva

A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women

Diva is a Toronto-based journal committed to focusing upon the cultural, artistic and political concerns of women of South Asian descent. Published by a collective, the magazine is funded through a combination of public grants, community-based fundraising, private donations and the volunteer labour of its committed collective members. The journal has tended to oscillate between general and theme-specific issues. Some of *Diva's* past publications have focused on art and literature, humour, children, women's resources, and sexual abuse and incest.

A sample of the editorial perspective to be found in *Diva* appears in Volume 3, Issue 2, a special issue on Sexual Assault, Rape and Incest:

"This issue of *Diva* carries testimonies of women's experiences which represent the diversity of our experiences in content and in form. We wish we could print more voices of South Asian women. It has taken us so much time to even say what we as women, have said so far, and the more we hear each other, the more we can say.

The violation of body and trust that occurs in an act of sexual violence against children is experienced by females and males. Therefore, we locate the sexual abuse of male children in the broader context of patriarchal violence against girls, boys, adolescents or women. Perpetrated by men, it is damaging to individuals and communities. As South Asian women, we want to be instrumental in organizing around the issues of sexual violence in a way that links with all aspects of the complexity that survivors experience."

By contrast the editorial to Volume 3, Issue 4, the humour issue notes:

"We have compiled some (laughables) in this issue, and in doing so, we are also trying to break away from the stereotype of 'militant women of Colour'. Always thinking/talking/fighting back against grave issues, gravely. This stereotype is imposed on us by the power structures we want to change, and is perpetuated by the dynamics of conflict in our personal and political lives.

We don't want to become our stereotypes.

These stereotypes are offered to us as 'choices' by the system. But these are no choices at all. These are distorted images of us and we don't feel obliged to live according to these."

Diva has served as an inspiration to many, and been a forum for varied voices, established and emerging. With its hard-hitting political content, its multidisciplinary approach and its commitment to developing solidarity between women of colour and their communities, *Diva* has provided a periodical model for feminists across the country.

—Rungh



Browsing the Racks

hum

Based in San Francisco, California, *Hum* magazine referred to itself as a periodical committed to "South Asian American Issues and Lifestyles". The brain-child of Shalini Malhotra, *Hum* had a vibrancy and street feel which was refreshing. For example Volume 1, No. 2 of *Hum* carried a feature on South Asian gang members entitled "Desis With Guns". The article explored the potent mix of bhangra parties, religion, adolescence and violence. *Hum* also tackled the issues of feminism, sexual identity, relationships and careers—all from the youth perspective.

Hum had the beginnings of a periodical with a strong voice and well-identified audience. Unfortunately, Shalini Malhotra was involved in a very serious accident which no longer makes it possible for her to produce the magazine. Her commitment and spirit will be missed within the South Asian cultural community. To the best of our knowledge, *Hum* has ceased publication.

—Rungh

For Back Issues:

Hum

150-4th Street

Suite 650

San Francisco, CA

94103



India Currents The Complete Indian American Magazine

India Currents was inspired in part by the Festival of India which lit up many US cities for 18 months during 1985–86, and in part by the many free entertainment weeklies that populate the San Francisco Bay Area. *India Currents* was an effort to 'continue' the Festival of India by focussing on the work of local Indian-American community and making it accessible to the widest possible audience.

The Indian fine arts community enthusiastically embraced *India Currents* and its calendar of events. The Indian business community was drawn to it because of its wide distribution and circulation.

Today, *India Currents* sports two editions (Northern California, Nationwide), and is the largest Indian-American monthly on the West Coast. It has enlarged its editorial focus to cover all aspects of Indian-American life through features, opinion editorials, a monthly news digest, fiction, reviews of new music, film, and books, and recipes.

India Currents receives no funding from institutional or government sources. It is privately owned and depends solely on advertising and subscriptions for its funding. It has a full-time staff of four.

India Currents sees its role as serving the Indian-American community, particularly in areas that are ignored by other publications. 'What's Current', its Events Calendar, is the nation's best, most comprehensive calendar of

Indian events, unmatched in breadth and scope by any other publication; it is compiled each month as a service to the community.

India Currents sponsors a Fiction Contest to encourage creative writers. The magazine received the FIA Cultural Awareness Through Journalism Award, and was nominated for the Santa Clara Arts Council Ongoing Business Support for the Arts Award.

India Currents provides a forum for public debate and discussion. Some see the magazine as being progressive, even radical; others see it as too conservative. To some, it appears too Hindu; to others it is not Hindu enough. Each issue of *India Currents* shows, in hundreds of little ways, that affirming and celebrating one's Indian roots in a Western society can itself be a political act.

—Arvind Kumar, Editor

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Browsing the Racks

MEHFIL

Vancouver based *Mehfil Magazine* is a mass market, full colour, glossy periodical which refers to itself as "The Magazine for Today's Indo-Canadian." Through its sub-title, *Mehfil* positions itself as dealing with the present realities of Canadians of Indian origin. As a private business venture, *Mehfil* relies heavily on advertising for its existence. Since its launch in April 1993, it has been a controlled circulation publication which relies on delivering a specific and tangible audience to its advertisers.

In the Publisher's Note at the beginning of their April/May 1996 issue, brothers Minto and Rana Vig write:

"We believe that a magazine without a mandate is little more than a pretty package. That philosophy has been upper most in our minds ever since we first envisioned *Mehfil Magazine* three years ago. The mandate of this magazine is to celebrate the achievements of Indo-Canadians while also addressing the social and cultural issues that have an impact on the community."

True to its mandate, *Mehfil Magazine* has celebrated achievement; from the accomplishments of fashion designer Fayzal Virani, to the business success of Paul Dusanj (owner of a chain of athletic footwear stores). The magazine has consistently highlighted achievement in the business arena and carries regular columns on Personal Finance and Business Development. The magazine also attempts to cover the arts and social issues such as inter-family relationships and the Royal Canadian Legion turban controversy.

In the first three years, the magazine regularly featured an essay in each issue written by a younger member of the community entitled "Proud to be Indian..." Recently this space, at the end of each issue, has been devoted to "Reflections", consisting of a sepia-toned portrait of an older member of the community reflecting on early immigrant and settlement experiences. As *Mehfil* continues to gain a larger audience, it appears to be evolving its editorial mandate to better reflect the diversity with the Indo-Canadian community.

—Rungh



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Browsing the Racks

Sami Yoni

In the summer of 1992, a young South Asian lesbian came to me at the Toronto women's bookstore and asked, "Neesha, are there any books, anthologies, anything written by lesbians of South Asian descent?"

Together we scoured the lesbian section, the anthologies, the Asian women's section, magazines, journals. We couldn't find anything. I was exasperated. I tried to think of a forum, any forum in Toronto, for lesbians of South Asian descent to voice how we feel, think, speak, look, hear... I was surprised that nothing was coming to mind. So I set about trying to create one version of that space. I called all the South Asian lesbians that I know here, in

Toronto, got together names and numbers of others in Canada, and started bugging their asses for submissions.

On the whole, the response was wonderfully supportive, if even just warm words of encouragement. Women went to great lengths to get material to me.

My hope for this journal is that it will be a forum for us as South Asian dykes to communicate to each other, to get to know each other, and to begin or continue to break down barriers and isolation amongst ourselves around issues which are very specific and unique to us as lesbians—as brown lesbians, whether we were born and/or grew up in South Asia, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, the Caribbean and South America.

The issues in this journal may range from coming out to battering or abuse in our relationships, to racism, to classism, sexual abuse, caste, identity issues, our joys, and loves. I would love to see work by South Asian lesbians on erotica—what turns us on? What turns YOU on?

I have been approached by a few women around the inclusion of bisexual women. At this point in time, I feel, for me, it is very important that this journal remain focused in

lesbians and our specific needs, goals, desires, empowerment. At some point in the future it may be decided that an issue or issues will include, particularly, bisexual women.

In order to keep this much needed space continuous and consistent, we need to support it, back it up in whatever ways we can. We need to keep it alive so that we as a community can continue to grow, expand and heal, to work together for and with one another. This issue is a small step to create more, solid space for lesbians of South Asian descent.

The submissions that I received were incredibly power/full and em/power/ing—many times bringing tears to my eyes, and always propelling me to continue. We are beauty/full, brown, talented dykes with enormous strength and spirit. Come...let us take up and claim our space.

—Neesha Dosanjh, Editor

Excerpted from Editorial, *Sami Yoni*, Volume 1, Number 1



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Browsing
the
Racks



SAMAR

SOUTH ASIAN MAGAZINE FOR ACTION & REFLECTION

SAMAR (South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection) was launched in 1992 as a magazine of political and cultural debate with a South Asian focus. It is published twice a year by an editorial collective based in New York.

We choose the term 'South Asian' because we feel it is important to draw attention to the fact that South Asians are a group of people with a shared history, and that this history provides a common basis for understanding our place in the contemporary world. While many other South Asian publications are based on differences of region, religion and nationality within South Asia, we have chosen to base ours on a South Asian collectivity that is now spread out across the globe.

SAMAR was founded by a group of community organizers, writers, teachers and scholars. It began with a letter that was sent out to a few hundred South Asians across the United States, which voiced the need for an alternative publication in an overall climate that was politically conservative and in a community that was politically unorganized compared to other immigrant communities. The letter also asked for donations that would help bring out the first issue. The support that we received in the form of donations, letters and phone calls convinced us that the time for SAMAR had indeed arrived. Although wealthy, conservative, and primarily male voices have dominated as spokespersons for our communities in North America, it was clear from this response that there was room for an accessible, intelligent and hard-hitting magazine focusing on left and progressive perspectives. The legacy of community backing is important to us, and we are strongly committed to the goal of developing SAMAR as a genuinely community-based publication.

SAMAR aims to foster debate and discussion within the community. The emphasis is on clear and analytic writing: SAMAR prefers to avoid the superficial news-byte and entertainment focus of many magazines, or at the other extreme, the inaccessible language of most academic journals. Although we greatly admire several

South Asian publications that are centered around a particular concern—for example, magazines dealing with gay and lesbian issues, or sustainable development, or the issues faced by taxi drivers in New York City—SAMAR has a multi-issue agenda and an interest in exploring the linkages between various political struggles. SAMAR was conceived as an activist magazine, and has been deeply responsive to individual activists and community organizations which have challenged injustice stemming from prejudices about race, religion, class, caste, gender and sexual orientation. As an ethnic publication in the United States, SAMAR backs its commitment to the building of solidarities amongst people of color by providing coverage to such alliances—the forum section of the Summer 1995 issue is a case in point.

At the same time as it provides space for quick-witted and critical writing on South Asian American issues, SAMAR also maintains a distinct Third World focus. The magazine links traditions of struggle in South Asia with those in South Asian communities here. SAMAR is vigilant and creative about locating important movements and organizing strategies in South Asia and North America, and facilitating communication between the two.

A significant proportion of South Asian Americans were born in the West or have lived here most of their lives. It is a source of some frustration to some in this group that most South Asian cultural activities in North America are dominated by the religious right in the immigrant community. SAMAR is addressed to this generation as we attempt together to carve out an alternative space for South Asian arts and culture. SAMAR is committed to providing a forum for the sensibility and the particular forms of creativity associated with South Asian populations, as also for the variety of hybrid cultural forms that have exploded throughout the South Asian diaspora. Rooted in a world region known for its history of partition and conflict, we recognize a particular mission to facilitate creative communication

through the publication of translated work from various South Asian languages, and through the recovery and display of the pluralism that often underlies both our artistic traditions and the work of present-day South Asian writers, artists and performers.

Each issue of SAMAR carries a core set of articles on a particular theme (the 'forum'), as well as feature articles, short fiction, poetry, art, profiles, reviews and interviews. Past forum titles include: *Culture away from 'Home'*, *Communalism at 'Home' and 'Abroad'*, *The Packaging of South Asia: the Politics behind Contemporary Global Perceptions of South Asia*, *Class Encounters of the South Asian Kind*, *Black or White or What?*, and *South Asians and the Politics of Science and Technology*. The Winter 1996 issue will carry a forum called *Sex, Lives and South Asians*. For SAMAR's fifth birthday in 1997, we are planning a paired set of forum topics: the Summer issue will focus on activism and organizing by South Asians in North America, while the Winter issue will carry articles on conservative South Asian movements in North America. The former will build on a panel organized by SAMAR at *Desh Pardesh* in June this year, called *Activism by Any Means Necessary*. We expect that both these issues will make for interesting reading for politically concerned South Asians in the United States and Canada.

—SAMAR, Editorial Collective

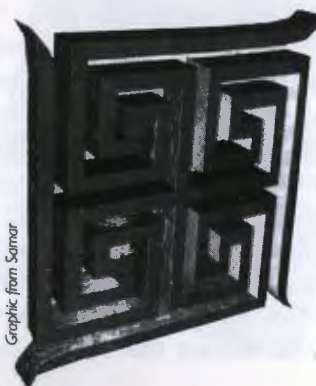


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New York NY USA 10023

Subscription Information:

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Graphic from Samar

Browsing the Racks

Serai

Since its inception nearly ten years ago, *Montréal Serai* manages to fight the good fight against oppressions in all their guises. Under the "leadership" of Rana Bose and Dolores Chew and with the guidance and commitment of an editorial board (at various times consisting of Nilambri Ghai, Himmat Shinhat, Subir Das, Mahzar Wureshi, Samantha-Lee Quinn, Raymond Bechard), *Montréal Serai* continues to stand angry, determined and defiant in a cultural milieu which marginalizes "other" cultures.

The magazine describes itself in the following manner:

"*Montréal Serai* is an interdisciplinary magazine about arts, cultures, social movements and political issues that affect the immigrant community in Canada, with special reference to the South Asian community in Québec. *Montréal Serai*, along with the theatre group of the same name, is committed to the development of dynamic and contemporary concepts of multiculturalism."

Inclusive, non-essentialist, deeply political and always opinionated, *Montréal Serai* has tried to draw connections between such seemingly disparate topics as globalization, aboriginal rights, riots in Karachi and poetry. Produced with the long-standing commitment of Publishing Manager Lisa Foster, the magazine continues to try to new design ideas within a constraining financial budget.

Rana Bose's "editorials" never cease to amuse, anger, entertain, inform and, sometimes, puzzle the reader. In Volume 7, Number 4, he writes, in part:

"In the coming new year, let there be a solemn pledge taken by all organisations working in the South Asian community, as well as all others who can relate to the phenomenon described below: that all organizations must stop having public programs, until...

- They develop a sense of time. Period.
- They respect the presence of the audience.
- That we disassociate ourselves from those garish "variety nites" that perpetuate Bollywood sexism casteism, racism and drunkenness

amongst new communities in the name of entertainment."

In yet another opinion piece entitled "Up Your Angst" in Volume 9, Number 3, Bose writes:

"What's the beef? Let me tell you.

A new version of radical out-closetness has emerged as chic in the latent potent South Asian artistic milieu, here in Canada, and elsewhere. Filmmaker, performance artists, musicians, dancers, poets, writers, talkers, commentators and others with a sense of the public eye, are mainstreaming in the pint and performance media, with a "we too" flair that is definitely eye-catching, if nothing else. A whole generation has sprouted up, whether born here, or in England, or via Africa, who have brought with them the baggage of unresolved identity issues. And as each one discovers more of their own kind, the exercise in self-discovery and coming out of the closet has become just that, a widespread exercise alone. The out-of-closetness, cover a range from politically absurd discoveries in a very rarified academic context (post-this and post that) to monotonous exercises in the discovery of race, sexuality, aggression, cultural exclusion, parental backwardness and other similar, long established arenas of battle. The politics of coming out has lost its edge because of the large number of closets that people are now discovering. Coming out has been appropriated and closets are no longer exciting entities or enclosures of sufferance."

Montréal Serai is a magazine which speaks to both its specific South Asian Quebec reality and a larger North American audience.

—Rungh

Montréal Serai

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514-485-9192

Subscriptions

Canada \$20 USA \$20 US Overseas \$25



trikone MAGAZINE

Trikone occupies its own unique little niche among South Asian publications being the oldest magazine around that deals with South Asian queer issues. It was founded in 1986 by Arvind Kumar in California because he had no idea how to reach out to other gay South Asians. The first issue was six photocopied pages stapled together and mailed to every magazine Kumar could think of. *Trikone* today is an international glossy full-size quarterly sold in bookstores all over North America with subscribers in some twenty countries.

Trikone was established to "...bring men and women of South Asian heritage together in a friendly, supportive and non-judgemental environment, and to promote awareness, visibility and acceptance of alternative sexuality in society. *Trikone* proudly affirms both its South Asian identity as well as its sexuality."

Trikone is both a group and a magazine. The magazine was originally a networking tool to help lesbian and gay South Asians find each other and perhaps form a group. But the magazine soon took on a life of its own. While *Trikone*, the group, is active in the San Francisco Bay Area, the magazine is international in scope and certainly much more than just a newsletter for the group.

Over the years, the magazine has attempted to cover a wide range of issues—from the homosexuality of Hindu texts to the contemporary politics of Urvashi Vaid, from the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali to lesbian suicides in Kerala,



from gender bending in Bombay films to the personal story of an Indian drag queen. It has had its own comic strip and an agony aunt column as well as a resource listing of lesbian and gay groups and contact persons from around the world.

Trikone use to be mailed free to readers in South Asia to help South Asian gay men and lesbians connect with each other. Now the gay groups in India have taken on the task of distributing *Trikone* there which is a sign of how far the movement has come in a few years. There are lesbian and gay groups and newsletters all over South Asia and the West and a new one pops up every month.

Over the years *Trikone Magazine* has changed in appearance and page count but at heart it remains close to what it always used to be — a place where South Asian queers can feel at home. It is still put together by volunteers on a shoestring budget and is built up on ten dollar subscription checks from individuals.

It has not always been a smooth ride over the last ten years. Like many independent 'special interest' publications born with a fire in the belly, *Trikone* has had its ups and downs and periods of torpor. But we never gave up on *Trikone* because we realized that it was not just a whim or a passing fancy. It was a matter of our identities, of who we were. It gave the love that dared not speak its name a voice. We could not afford to let it die.

—Sandip Roy, Editor &
Ashok Jethanandani, Publisher



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Browsing the Racks



After the Empire: The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad Creates a Space for Post-colonial Writing

by Sheyfalli Saujani

Moyez Vassanji leans back in the living room of his Toronto home and recalls a conversation with a government granting officer about the title of the magazine he and his wife, Nurjehan Aziz, have published for the last fifteen years. It's titled the *Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*. The granting officer wanted to know why it had the word 'Toronto' in the title. It made the magazine seem...too regional, not sufficiently national in scope, he complained. Vassanji laughs as he recalls this anecdote. Both he and Aziz were committed to the idea of a Canadian literary magazine, rooted in the city Aziz describes as "...the city (that) epitomizes Canada for us. It's a multicultural city, it has life, it has energy." They see their publication very much in the tradition of journals like the *Chicago Review*, the *New York Review* and others which take location for granted, rather than agonizing in the characteristic Canadian way about regional tensions.

Back in the early eighties when it was *The Toronto South Asian Review*, or *TSAR*—the acronym which became the name of the book publishing company the couple also runs—Aziz and Vassanji were simply looking for a place to get Vassanji's work in print. He had submitted several short stories and poems to other literary magazines, with no luck. They believed that there must be other writers in the

same position whose work was not seen as 'Canadian' or simply not understood by editors and publishers in the 'establishment'.

Aziz says they did not set out with a political agenda. But over time, as issues of identity and culture became more significant, the magazine began to deal with them. It published cultural reviews as well as short stories, poems and book reviews.

Looking back, Aziz says, "I do believe that writers of colour did have difficulties getting published... because of a lack of understanding on the part of the establishment as to what their writing was about. I think that was the central thing. And a lack of willingness to take them seriously. See, if (the establishment) had taken them more seriously, then they would have taken the risk of publishing them. But they didn't. And that's why things escalated and came to a head."

In the early days of the magazine, people reacted in a very lukewarm fashion, waiting to see whether the endeavour would succeed or fail. According to Aziz, "(E)ven the Indians, the South Asians whom we turned to for support were skeptical. They said we would never get it going, it would never survive." But Vassanji and Aziz had invested a lot of time, and their own money in that first issue. They spent long nights frantically checking and double checking for spelling and typographical errors because they wanted so badly to produce something of quality. Their work and diligence paid off. Even the skeptics were impressed.

Aziz and Vassanji immigrated to Canada from East Africa (Tanzania and Kenya, respectively) and both were trained in the sciences. They had always shared a love of literature which found expression in creative writing courses for Vassanji and voluminous reading for Aziz. Eventually they realized they wanted to invest more time in their literary pursuits and to devote themselves full-time to the *Toronto Review* (as the magazine is more commonly called) and *TSAR Books*, which has over forty titles to its credit.

Aziz says she is proudest of books like Zimbabwean writer, Vyonne Vera's *Nehanda*. Vera was a student at York University when *TSAR* discovered her. *Nehanda* was picked up by a publisher in Zimbabwe and went on to make the short list for the Commonwealth Book Prize, Africa Region. *TSAR* has also supported writers and poets like Rienzi Cruz and

Sam Selvon for many years.

For the first issue of the *Toronto South Asian Review*, Aziz and Vassanji had to solicit work from writers. They got names from a multicultural officer at one of the arts councils and cover art through a friend. Now they are flooded with submissions from around the world. The magazine has a healthy subscription base, which includes most of the university libraries in Canada and many in the United States and Britain. And they receive steady and enthusiastic support from the Canada Council for the Arts and other granting agencies.

Eventually the *Toronto South Asian Review* outgrew its early definition. Writers of African and Arab heritage were turning up in its pages. So, Aziz and Vassanji changed the name to reflect their new mandate. But the new name—*The Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad*—was confusing for some contributors. Aziz says, "What we were aiming for (was) international writing. People from anywhere can submit to us. *Abroad* meaning *at large*,

anywhere in the world. And *Contemporary Writing* refers to writing that is happening now. But (the name) has caused problems because people think (the magazine) is not Canadian anymore...So we are thinking of dropping the word *Abroad*."

That's debate an established publisher can luxuriate in. But Aziz is far from smug about TSAR's magazine and book publishing achievements. It is true that writers of colour and writers from developing countries now have a much higher profile in the publishing establishment's consciousness than they did back when TSAR was just getting started. And TSAR has played an important role in legitimating 'of colour' writing to the mainstream. But success breeds a different kind of problem.

For example, the Writer's Reserve is a funding program run by the Ontario Arts Council, which distributes funds to writers through book and magazine publishers. Writers who need money can approach publishers for up to \$5,000 to support their work. "What's happen-

ing (now)," says Aziz, "is if a writer who we have published or who we would normally publish, applied to a mainstream publisher (for funding)...they get (told to) apply to TSAR, that (TSAR) will give the money. 'Mainstream' publishers are not willing to fund (new writers) because they think we are around, and we are sort of competing (at the same level). So, you know, (our success is) working negatively for those writers."

It's still a struggle to get the bookstores to stock TSAR's books. And what Aziz would really like now is more time to promote the magazine, publish more books and market them more effectively.

—Sheyfali Saujani

For more information, please contact

TSAR

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Browsing the Racks

Bazaar

South Asian Arts Magazine

When *Rungh Magazine* was seeking a model and an inspiration, *Bazaar* clearly fit the bill. Hip, urban, arty, inquisitive, impertinent, and self-assured, the magazine covered the full range of Britain's "Black" arts scene. Through the 1970s and 1980s as the South Asian Arts community in Britain began to differentiate itself as a specific group within the Black arts scene, *Bazaar* played a crucial role in creating the stars and defining the issues.

Through interviews and short articles, the magazine encouraged new writers. Its large format layout allowed photographers, artists and graphic designers to experiment and explore. Under the editorship of Shaila Parthasarathi and an Editorial Panel, which now reads as a who's who of the British South Asian arts scene (Sunil Gupta, Sutapa Biswas,

Allan de Souza, Sonali Fernando, etc.), *Bazaar* covered topics as diverse as architecture, post-colonial art practice, literature, dance, music, film, video and multi-disciplinary art production.

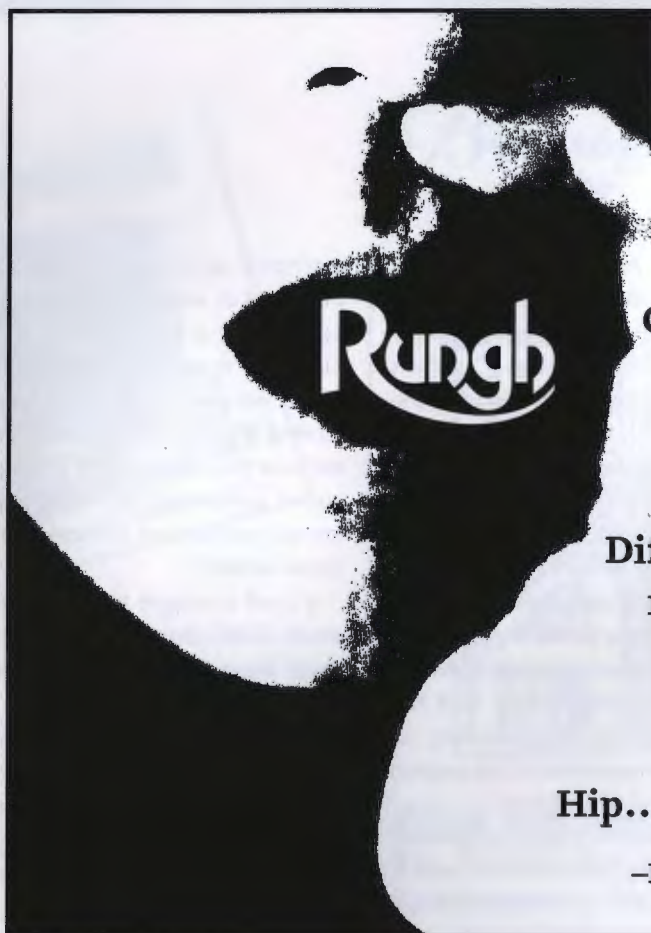
Bazaar also served as a community bulletin board. It announced openings and events, reported controversies, informed artists about funding and employment opportunities and in general served to connect a community of cultural creators who were finding their footing within the larger British arts scene. While early issues of the magazine were thin on political analysis and commentary, later issues championed such activist causes as AIDS within the community, racism, homophobia, identity politics, feminism, and class.

Heavily funded by Britain's public art sector,



Bazaar felt the full brunt of Margaret Thatcher's economic reforms until its funding was finally eliminated. A valiant attempt to resurrect the magazine at the end of 1992 (early 1993) met with failure. As with most such ventures, it was bemoaned only after its demise as an integral part of the South Asian arts community.

—Rungh



Thoughtful...Lively...Essential

—Morris Wolfe, Globe and Mail

Careful thought and fine writing

—Bill Katz, Library Journal

**Different from the usual
multicultural journal**

—Chris Dafoe, Globe and Mail

Hip...Collaborative effort

—Lloyd Wong, Fuse Magazine

Passing the Torch

Celebrating 5 years of

Rungh



**A night
of readings
hellos, goodbyes
thanks, food and chai**

**Sadhu Binning
Chris Creighton Kelly
Phindar Dulai
Yasmin Jiwani
and Guests**

**7:30pm
Wednesday, November 13, 1996
Vancouver East Cultural Centre
1895 Venables Street**



B is for Bissoondath:

Stardate 6071 point 46. Lancaster Colony. Taurus 5.

The self-serve in Central Pod 3 was huge and garishly lit. It was monumental, unimaginative, a venue for ingesting rather than relishing food. The noise of utensils clumsily appendaged rang forth amid the busy-bee-ness of drones gnashing their mandibles between shifts. Over by the turbolift, lifeforms too simple to have developed taste buds punched credits into stimulant dispensers.

I was new to the solar system, the planet, and the colony, still staggering under the disorienting gravity of my new locale.

The self-serve seemed an unhostile environment, welcoming in an off-hand way. Insinuating oneself here, into the eye of the sociable hurricane, shouldn't be hard. I thought. As my optic receptors adjusted, though, certain complications manifested themselves, and it ultimately became obvious that the seeming disorder was in fact artfully arrayed.

A chart could be digitized of the self-serve, with grids labelled to identify discrete zones. To pick out, for example, the trough at which flickered eternally silent telepatic dialogues. Or the troughs by the floral display from which floated the artless passion of Cassiopeian speech. Or the trough more artfully enclosed by skullcaps and compuscrolls ornamented with the Stellar Mosaic. And there was more.

To approach any of these zones was to interlope on a tribal selectivity. It was to question the unsanctioned yet nominal domain of troughs dealt out so that each species, whether hematologically or theologically classified, could revel in its tiny garrison sheltered by unarticulated rights.

Separate troughs, ideas of identification, inducements to social gatherings that would offer fleeting glimpses of *homeworld*. Alone on a new planet, I confronted my own unavoidable questions. Questions about my then-ness and my now-ness. About the planet rejected and the planet newly embraced. About the essential characteristics of this environment and my station here. At childhood's end, about to metamorphose, I sensed these were heavy thoughts.

For many at their feedings, however, these were questions of inconsequence. Their utterings were nigh on bullish in rejecting any unease that they might have felt by ostentatiously displaying the singular administrative plan that appeared to create no ill will: Taurus 5 as an immutable planet. Authoritatively. Judicially. Here, they vowed, one did not have to assimilate. Here one could—zounds, it was one's duty to—stay the same. Fie on this Andromedan absurdity of the crucible, none of this metamorphosing to adapt to one's new environment: one did not have to adapt to the environment; the environment was required to adapt itself to one.

A seductive offering, oh yes, a plan which pardoned much and asked next to no exertion. Here was a vista of interplanetary travel of ultimate ease.

Why then did I find myself not altogether swayed?

The dilemma was that I had arrived in search of a new existence and a new method of perceiving the universe. I had no wish merely to transplant existence as I had known it: this

A Question of Acceptance—Immutability or Assimilation?

Ven Begamudré explores another galaxy in search of an answer

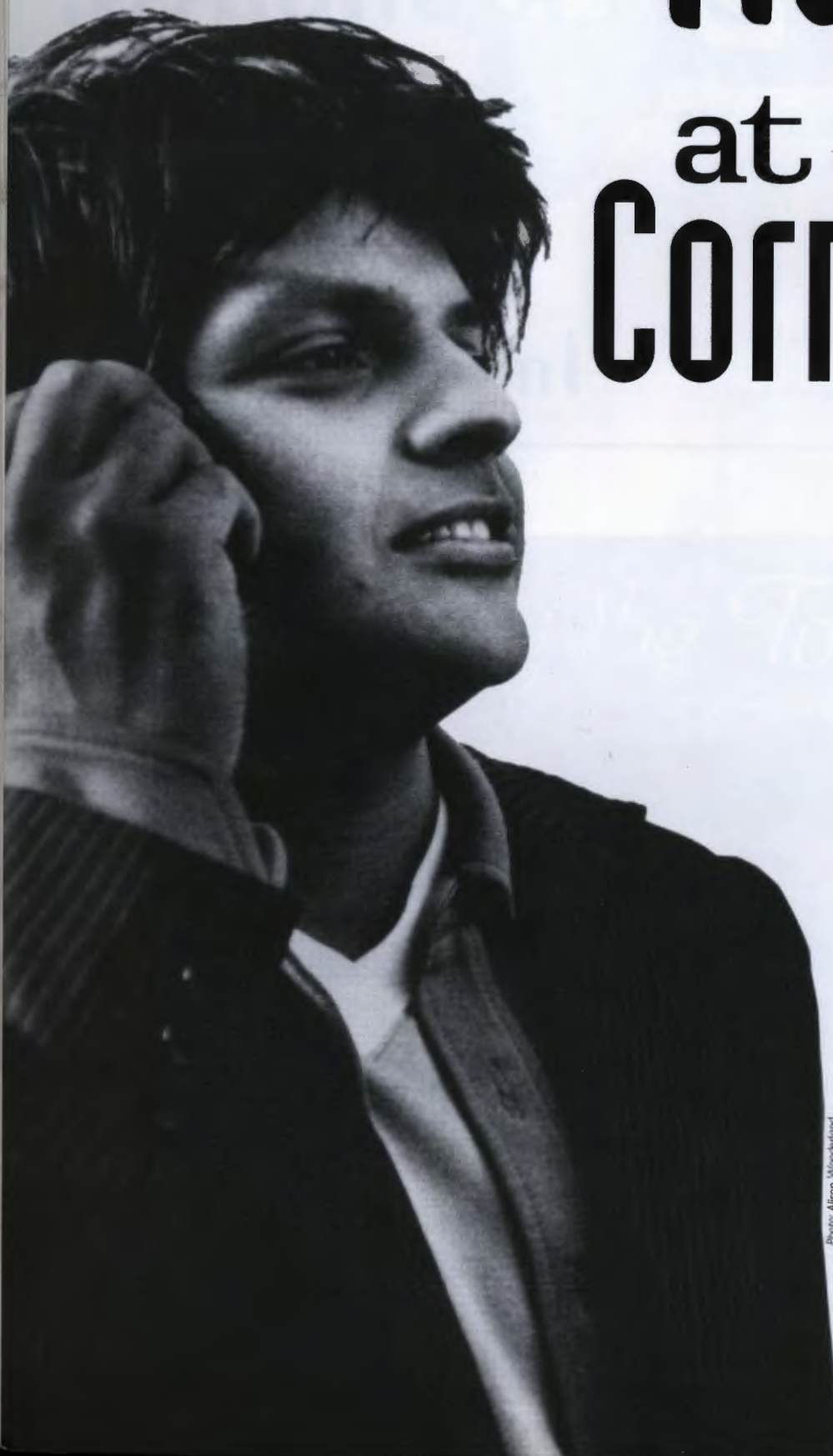
appeared to me gravitationally exaggerated sacking in which to clothe my frame. Moreover, the very fact of interplanetary travel had already metamorphosed me. I was no longer the being I had been when I'd slipped into cybersleep light years away. I had brought to my transport not the beliefs of the recreational traveller but the beliefs of a being setting forth on a journey that would forever alter his existence. This by itself was a form of psychic upheaval.

Immutability, as envisaged by those species at which it was most obviously targeted, left me with more than a modicum of unease. For here was I, a stranger in a strange land which refused to welcome me with open appendages. There was nothing for it but to charge my molecular disintegrator and begin blasting away.

Fie upon these wailing sirens. They will never take me alive. Give me assimilation or give me death!



Ven Begamudré is a praries writer. This story is part of an "A to Z" story project.



Hangin' at the Cornershop

Jerry Gill

**talks with the
British Asian
Alternative
Bhangra band
about their music,
breaking stereotypes
and moving beyond
'the Hanif Kureishi scene'**

Cornershop♥

The words punk rock, alternative, or space age are rarely used in the context of Indian music, but a musical outfit based in London, England, known as Cornershop, have set out to change people's perceptions of South Asians and the music they make.

They began life in 1988 under the name *The General Havoc* when Tjinder Singh and Ben Ayers met in university in Preston. "We both went to the same college and from the second year we shared the same flats in the same buildings," says Ayers. "We just got on really well. I had my mum's classical acoustic guitar, which I didn't even realize was a classical guitar, with nylon strings and it sounded really 'plinky-plunky'. Tjinder picked up a bass and he had an old acoustic guitar as well. We just made up songs because there was no interesting music around. We'd get drunk every night and just wanted to have some fun. It evolved from there."

Oddly enough, one of the band's early fixations had to do with vacuum cleaners. Why vacuum cleaners? "Because that was what we had at hand. We used anything we had at hand...pots, pans, vacuum cleaners." Ayers sings a bit of an early *General Havoc* song, "Vacuum cleaner/You suck me up/You spit me out/ And I'm on the floor/All you wanna do is Vacuum." He explains, "There's a clever analogy in there about being sucked up by the system and sucked into a vacuum cleaner..."

Those may not have been stellar beginning for Singh and Ayers, but fortunately the best was yet to come. In 1992 the band changed its name to *Cornershop* in an attempt to make a statement about Asian stereotypes in England. "I got a lot of racist shit [in University] and we just wanted to go against that sort of stuff and be a bit more focused," Singh says.

The earliest *Cornershop* recordings featured loud, distorted guitars superimposed against a sitar, dholki and flute, played with the amateurish aesthetic of early punk rock music. Singh's political and satirical lyrics, sung in both Punjabi and English, added yet another dimension to the strange brew that *Cornershop* were concocting.

Singh explains the early *Cornershop* sound as follows: "What we were trying to portray was the way Asians are seen. The Asian instruments represented the view that Asians are

Hey, hold on, here's a chap who supposed to be promoting Asian-ness. But I don't think [Hanif Kureishi] is. I think he's actually stealing Asianness and using that as a means to get on with his life.

seen as passive and not adding anything to society and the guitars were how we really felt in the waste and how fucked up we were about it. It was an artistic [statement] that was made and unfortunately it went over a lot of peoples' heads. Again, the groundswell of people got it, and so we kept it, developed it and used what we had on the first EP as a back drop for what we're doing now (the use of samples, different languages, the use of political and non-political songs). Its good now that with [the current *Cornershop* album], *Woman's Gotta Have It* [people have] delved back into those [old songs] and got it now. They've seen the development and can see...more of the story. And that's good, it gives us a lot of depth I think"

Many of the people who didn't "get it" initially happened to be music critics in England who were left scrambling trying to describe exactly what *Cornershop* was. "We've always been stigmatized [by the press] and people [have been] trying to put us into fads," says Singh. "Whether its the 'rebirth of Asian cool' or 'riot grrrls' or whatever, we always go away

from that." Ayers adds, "It really works that way in England as well. The whole press thing exists on the little scenes it creates."

A related problem *Cornershop* continue to face is people prefixing everything they do with the word Asian. "I don't think its really fair to do that," Singh says. "I think we're an amalgamation of different ideas, whether its African or Asian or whatever. There are a lot of Asian elements in there but I don't think that's all it is. Our use of different technologies, too, now days is moving more away from that tag and I don't think it applies." Ayers suggests, "Also, if we were touring India, we'd be called an English band. We'd have English as the prefix every time!"

An interesting twist to people's notions about *Cornershop* is the reaction of Asians to their music. Singh talked a little bit about the band's status among Asians in England: "[We are] pretty well cemented, really, because of what the last album's done and what [the single] *Jullandar Shere*'s done in the clubs. Its there. There's a groundswell of Asians who are into it. We don't expect there to be anymore. [In] the case of a lot of Asians, they don't like *Cornershop* because what they want to listen to is music that will take them off their x-plane, whether its folk music, social or spiritual music or religious music. We don't do that. We pose a lot more questions, even if we don't have a lot of lyrics. We don't expect a lot of Asians to get that. If I were an Asian who wanted an easy life, it would be the last damn thing I'd be listening to."

I asked Singh why he thinks there are so few Asians making the type of music *Cornershop* make. "Because I'm about the only Asian mad enough to go out there and do it. You have to sacrifice an income, you have to sacrifice a lot of tension with your family. Other Asians aren't willing to sacrifice that, unless its got money behind it."

So how does Singh reconcile his career choice with his traditional Indian upbringing?

"There's no reconciliation," he replies, shaking his head. "My family wants me to do my degree and get on with my life." Singh sighs deeply. "I don't really want to do a 9 to 5 job so I've always pursued [music]. We've had a lot of encouragement over the years; that's why we've carried on."

Sidebar 1

Tjinder Singh is not shy about making his feeling known about other musicians. He had this to say about the bhangra scene in England:

"All they're looking for is commerciality. There's only a few people who run the bhangra scene. Before they wouldn't touch reggae music. When I was listening to Lee Perry and Scientist they wouldn't even listen to it and laughed at me. Now days they're trying to incorporate it into their music. Its only done for commercial reasons. You can tell the commerciality and you can tell the lack of integrity and it all sucks! My finger goes up to them."

So, I ask, I guess you're not into the bhangra scene at all...

"Not the bhangra scene at all, but Punjabi folk music, the older stuff, I love all that. I actually thinks that's the precursor of hip hop. The way that they've got rolls, the way that they've got little sections, the ways that they've got different vocal shouting's and what have you."

I ask him is he's heard *Night Song*, Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn's latest collaboration with Michael Brooke? Not missing an opinionated beat Singh replies:

"No. I wouldn't want to hear it. Fuck it! Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is really cool but when he has remixes done he does himself an injustice. Who's that famous bloke from fucking Birmingham, who's a pile of shit?"

Bally Sagoo, I gently remind him.

"Yeah, that remix was fucking tragic! Tragic! God, I could have walked into the studio and sorted it out. Like the doctor, I like to meet and greet my patients. What the fucking hell went wrong there?"

Now we're on an interesting track. I wonder what other celebrity's careers Singh would like to help out? What about Morrissey, the former singer of British band *The Smiths*, whose posters *Cornershop* once burned in protest of the singer's flirtation with neo-facist right wing imagery?

Singh retorts emphatically, "He ain't gonna get it from us. We'll leave *Echobelly* for that... motherfuckers."

Many of the people who didn't 'get it' initially happened to be music critics in England who were left scrambling trying to describe exactly what *Cornershop* was.

An early *Cornershop* song called *Hanif Kureishi Scene* contains the line, *Your life is so pristine, mine's like the Hanif Kureishi scene*. Is Singh's life really like 'the Hanif Kureishi scene'?

"Its fucked up," says Singh. "I've got a lot of bad shit in my life, like money, my situation, my health's not too good. But other than that I'm having a fucking great life. I'm visiting a lot of people; we're going around America a good few times, visiting people again and again and their doors are open. It's really cool and that's about one of the best things about doing it. But, you know, I don't really dig Hanif Kureishi anymore."

I ask him if he has read the *Black Album* and what he thinks about Kureishi's treatment of the Asian punk rock band in his book?

"I read about 30 pages [of the book] and got bored. I don't think Kureishi knows that much about music. He did a list of his desert island discs [recordings he would take with him if stranded on a deserted island] and he mentioned all these different groups, which someone else must have told him about because I doubt he knew about them. At the end of the ten records, [there is] not one Asian track. You think, 'Hey, hold on, here's a chap who supposed to be promoting Asianness'. But I don't think he is. I think he's actually stealing Asianness and using that as a means to get on with his life. Now that's a very serious allegation but I strongly feel it." Interestingly enough, in a rather Kureishi vein, Singh is working on a novel about his days growing up in Wolverhampton. He says its going really slowly but really well...

Cornershop's most recent effort, *Woman's*



Tjinder Singh at the Knitting Factory, NYC

Gotta Have It, has seen the band evolve dramatically since its early singles and first album, *Hold on It Hurts*.

"People have changed within the band and its always been because of natural reasons," Singh explains. "We've just plowed ahead with the same sort of attitude. I think its an approach to music more than anything else. With this last album I did the production for it and it was about knowing a studio and being at a level where I could now produce it. There's a lot of bad production on our last album as well...not on my part though!" Singh laughs.

6am Jullandar Shere is the lead off single from *Woman's Gotta Have It*, and it's the one track that's earned *Cornershop* more acclaim than any other. The song's music influences range from the *Velvet Underground* and German krautrockers like *Neu* to the other worldly drug music of *Spacemen 3* and Indian folk. Its a melting pot of east and west, with its shimmering sitars, outer space analogue synth sounds, simple drum beat, and slightly distorted Punjabi vocal with lyrics espousing the virtues of people following a spiritual path and learning to live among those who are different from them.

Singh says, "When I wrote *Jullandar Shere* I didn't even know what was going to come out. Within three minutes it was written. And then we went back to it and it was like, this is so fucking simple! When it was done it was done with the vocal effect as well and I just knew within those three minutes that it was a good song."

In the tradition of Indian folk music, spiritual themes seem to be something *Cornershop* are inclined to explore in their Punjabi songs. "I've always liked religious music whatever faith it's



Cornershop live at the Knitting Factory, New York City

from," says Singh. "I'm not really that religious but I believe that there's a God. I'm weak-willed and I need something there."

The success of *Jullandar Shere* and the subsequent release of *Woman's Gotta Have It* in America on the Luaka Bop/Warner label, has lead *Cornershop* to tour America, on their own and with the traveling alternative rock festival, *Lollapalooza*. When I spoke with them in New York, it was just two days after they had finished their *Lollapalooza* stint.

"[*Lollapalooza*] was a good laugh, we met some great people," Singh says. "[The audience response was] cool every day. Changed people's lives. There's always a few people who come up to us and say they've been waiting for this for twenty years and its come...We certainly became a sort of band's bands as well. A lot of the other groups were into us and the crew people as well."

Even though *Cornershop* already have their next album completely written and have a double album of previously unreleased tracks coming out, Singh says the future of *Cornershop* is uncertain. "We're not tired of it, its just that we've accomplished a lot of the things that we set out to do. As people we had an agenda against the press [music critics], and against a lot of the music that was going on at the time."

In the mean time, Singh and Ayers plan on pursuing their dub project, *Clinton*. They have an album coming out soon. I mention to Singh

that I was quite impressed with Clinton's *Super Loose*.

"Its not exactly what we wanted to get, but we had reviews on that saying it was better than the recent Mo'Wax [a very hip break beat/hip hop label based in the UK] stuff."

When asked what the next *Cornershop* album would be like, Singh's answer was typical of *Cornershop's* eclectic philosophy. "We're working with Allen Ginsberg...there's a tribute to Asha Bhosle (sic), there's a tribute to the Herb...there's a Lee Hazelwood/Nancy Sinatra style duet..."

Tjinder Singh and Ben Ayers seem to be on a wave that certainly has not crested. Regardless of people's opinions of *Cornershop's* bold, innovative, in-your-face attitude, one thing they will continue to do is explore, create, shock and not sell out.



Discography

EPs/singles

In the days of Ford Cortina 7" (Wiiija)

Lock stock & double-barrel 10" CD (Wiiija)

Elvis sex-change (In the days of Ford Cortina + Lock stock & double-barrel) CD (Wiiija)

Reader's Wives 7", CD (Wiiija)

Born Disco; Died Heavy Metal 7", CD (Wiiija)

Change (live), split 7" with *Jacob's Mouse*, *Bivouac*, and *Truman's Water* (Free with *Ablaze!* Issue 10)

Born Disco; Died Heavy Metal (+ Tandoori Chicken) 7" (Merge)

Seetar Man split 7" with *Blood Sausage* (Clawfist)

6am Jullandar Shere 7" (Wiiija)

My Dancing Days Are Done (Mes Jours de Bal Perdue), split 7" with *Prohibition* (Bruit Distrodu)

WOG remix 12", CD (Luaka Bop/Warner)

Jullandar Shere remix 12", CD (Wiiija)

Cornershop Albums

Hold On it Hurts LP, CD, Cassette (Wiiija)

Hold On it Hurts (+ Lock stock & double-barrel EP) CD (Merge)

Women's Gotta Have It LP, CD (Wiiija)

Women's Gotta Have It (different cover art) CD (Luaka Bop/Warner)

Clinton Singles (dub project featuring Tjinder Singh and Ben Ayres from *Cornershop*):

Jamjar 12" (Wiiija)

Super Loose 12" (Wiiija)

Sidebar 2

Cornershop at The Knitting Factory, New York City, July 19, 1996.

The *Cornershop* live experience is not, as anyone who's seen them can attest to, your typical rock 'n' roll show. The electric guitars and fuzz boxes have been eliminated; instead, they've chosen to recreate their songs using rhythm oriented instruments, including a sitar, tamboura, acoustic guitar, dholki, drums and a wide assortment of percussion devices. Singer Tjinder Singh explains, "The thing is we could do what we're doing now, which is the 'different' set, or we could do a more guitar based one...[T]he logistics of doing both of them are too much, so we just [decided to] hone it down to what this is."

The legendary Knitting Factory was packed on this night with an enthusiastic and diverse group of people, ranging from New York's usual indie rock crowd to record company people and curious on-lookers. The show itself began and ended with extra long versions of the hypnotic *Jullandar Shere*, which guaranteed every single person left the club that night humming *Jullandar Shere* to themselves (about 20 minutes of the 50 minute show was made up of *Jullandar Shere*). In between they played a selection of songs from *Woman's Gotta Have It*, including *Wog*, *Hong Kong Book Of Kung-Fu*, *Camp Orange* and *My Dancing Days are Done* (strangely enough, Singh began this song with vocals but seemed to grow weary of them, so they ended up playing most of the song as an instrumental). The set was rounded out by a raucous version of a B-side track called *Rehoused*, an Indian folk song style tune called *Counteraction* and two new songs, tentatively titled *Butt in the Soul* and *Mar-shal*. At the end of the show a 5 minute piece of Allen Ginsberg reading his poetry was broadcast over the PA.

As a result of the instruments the band was using, most of the songs took on the trance quality of *Jullandar Shere* and tended to seamlessly melt into one another. For those unfamiliar with *Cornershop's* material, this may have resulted in some aural fatigue, but for others it provided a unique interpretation of *Cornershop's* songs and it was certainly a welcome relief from the barrage of loud guitars and pounding drums most bands inflict on their listeners.



Shelly Bahl

Within my art practice I have been exploring the history of Indian art, and playing with and mixing up elements from a variety of historical styles and periods. I have been collecting images of women from Hindu temple sculptures and Mughul miniature paintings, and I am interested in bringing together representations of women from different worlds and creating new hybrid realities.

From temple sculptures of female dancers, I make playful and kitch appropriations of the figures in a very linear and colourful manner. I have drawn and printed these images on a variety of surfaces, and have created environments of repetitious and decorative patterning with the forms of the dancers.





In my current body of work, I make neo-Pop Art versions of Mughul miniatures, with dark outlines and bold flat colours. I appropriate images of royal women pursuing leisure activities in the Mughul courts, and juxtapose and intertwine them with images of the temple sculptures, and depictions of contemporary women and popular culture. At first glance, the images look like traditional Indian miniatures, but close observation reveals surreal worlds where things are not so easily defined.

I often use images and materials out of context to question notions of authenticity and exoticification, as well as to give the original works new meanings through technical manipulations.



Shelly Bahl is a visual artist currently living and working in Toronto. She has exhibited her mixed-media works in Canada and the United States. Her upcoming exhibitions include "Mirroring 2000", a group show at The Gallery, University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus; and a solo show at the Women's Art Resource Centre.

She is a founding member of ZEN-MIX 2000, Pan-Asian Visual Art Network, and is actively working in the collective in coordinating a series of visual art happenings in May/June 1997.



Graphic Toronto Tabla Ensemble

Phat Funky Fusion

**Andrew Sun and Ritesh Das talk
Tabla, Tradition & Canadian Music**

Ritesh Das has a strange idea for summer vacation. "I'll probably go to California and get my ass kicked," says the Toronto tabla player.

No, he is not referring to some resort for the recreational masochist. He is talking about recharging his tabla skills with a visit to his mentor, Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri, who resides near San Francisco. Even though Das has been teaching for almost a decade now, a little bootcamp refresher from his master every now and then is his favourite way to stay sharp and prevent any chance of a head swell.

Staying in touch with his roots is also an important part of the Calcutta born Das' character, a fixture on the Toronto music scene. Yet, it is his pursuit of new possibilities for his percussion instrument that has propelled him to public attention. Sticking to a disciplined foundation while transcending it is the basis of Das' Toronto Tabla Ensemble's success.

From the modest support of the local Toronto community to national touring gigs (they've been invited to the Vancouver Folk Music Festival twice in three years), the unit has now put their unique sound to disc. A self-financed, self-titled CD of original compositions, no less. What do they think they are, a rock band?

It's a balmy July afternoon. Das and the Ensemble has just returned after touring Western Canada. His puny bachelor apartment is still in down mode. "Sorry, I can't offer you anything," Das apologizes. "There's nothing in the fridge." The apartment is efficiently sparse and functional with no furniture per se, just a few throw rugs and large cushions on the floor. A broken down laser-printer is now the TV stand. The only hint of Das' significant responsibilities is a phone that doesn't stop ringing.

"You know, tabla is an instrument that you always can mature on," he starts. "I guess it's this way with every instrument. The longer you do it the better you get. I don't think you can get to a point when you can say, 'OK, I'm a professional now.'"

Das came to Canada in 1987 with Kathak dancer Joanna Das. (The two were married but since have had an amicable separation.) They soon opened a small studio to teach Indian music and dance. A small group of young, ethnically diverse tabla enthusiasts was nurtured and they form the foundation of the tabla ensemble.

In the traditional Indian performance no more than two tablas are employed at the same time. Das' group use up to five, and it gets even more progressive. Das has taken the concept to the cross-cultural. He has collaborated with Carib-



"A Tabla Ensemble doesn't mean it's only classical or it's modern bhangra music. It could be any kind of music. It's totally Canadian music, with a mix of here and there."

bean/African drummers, Chinese flautists, Toronto-based ex-Kodo drummer, Gary Nagata, and currently plays with jazz musicians on Jane Siberry's newest CD. According to Das, "The primary goal of the group was to build a better understanding between cultures. That's the whole idea and it's never changed. We live in Canada and we share our lives with so many people of different cultures. What a perfect opportunity to share it."

As for exploring his tradition with non-Indians, Das says, "To have someone from a different place be interested in my culture is a real honour, I think."



Looking at Ritesh Das' musical lineage, however, you never would have guessed it would yield such a progressive thinker. Almost all his mentors and role models have been purists and traditionalists. Das' parents were the first people to open a music and dance school in Calcutta after the British left India. Taking up the tabla at 14, a very late age by Indian standards, Das started an apprenticeship with tabla maestro, Shankar Ghosh.

"It was a bit like the film, *The Karate Kid*," Das recalls. "I would hang around his house and he would send me to do this, do that, but constantly there was a tabla class going on. One day he said to me, 'Play!' and I just picked up this heavy composition which was for senior students without him showing me the strokes. I didn't even realize I was picking up all this knowledge."

Next, it was off to Southern California, specifically the Ali Akbar Khan College of Music. Located just outside the Bay area, the

school made San Francisco a hotbed for South Asian culture. First, he trained under Zakir Hussain, the young tabla sensation whose star began rising after his work with jazz guitarist, John MacLaughlin's *Mahavishnu Orchestra* and *Grateful Dead* drummer, Mickey Hart. The erratic schedule of lessons made Das turn to another teacher. That person was Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri.

Where Hussain was flashy and energetic, Chaudhuri was stoic and rigorous. A true maestro of the North Indian Lucknow tabla tradition, Chaudhuri instilled in Das a resolute philosophy based on solid groundwork and artistic purity. As witnessed by Das' vacation plans, to this day, Chaudhuri remains an important influence.



After landing in Toronto and seeing the void of traditional Indian music on the scene, Das started to teach tabla. Besides the Indian parents eager for their kids to appreciate their heritage, Das also found musicians including Alan Davis, Programmer of Toronto's Music Gallery and Donald Quan, producer and collaborator with Loreena McKennit.

Soon a dedicated group of young player emerged—both Indian and non-Indian—and the Tabla Ensemble became a reality. But in Das' vision, it would not just be a copy from something in Calcutta, New Delhi or San Francisco.

"Tabla in India and here is different," Das says. "In India you hear tabla all the time and you have musicians whom you can play with. There's always a sitar player to play with your tabla. It's like jazz and rock n' roll here, you have mentors. But...(tabla here) is different. The masters come once or twice a year. It's not part of the main culture, so if you play tabla, you have think about what you're going to play."



Photo: Michelle Bernand

"I come from India but my way of thinking has changed too. I have to say, 'Hey, I'm here so (I) gotta be more open.' I talk to the guys in the Ensemble all the time because I hope they set an example for the younger students. The new kids are looking up at them. So if they do something, then the kids will think, 'Oh, it's OK to do that, too.'"

Most notably, they challenge is to incorporate the diverse artistic opportunities around him without sacrificing his Indian-based milieu. So far, the Ensemble has created a successful and innovative blend. The mix of some Indian rhythmic systems and other influences is captured on the CD. Some of the world beat experiments on display include the infections raga-based composition *Funky 10* which inherits the phat energy of a James Brown 4/4 jam and a reworking of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* as an Indian melody in seven beats. In addition, there is an African/Indian summit with steel drums

and a powerful rumble between tablas and a Japanese taiko drum. But significantly, nothing is done for the sake of novelty. Instrumental and musical discipline remains the priority.

"It's like a bowl of rice," Das compares his music to the flexible food staple. "It's up to you whether you want to add butter or salt or anything else to explore the flavour. And eventually it might become fried rice. Eventually I want to take it to another level, but what that is I'm not sure yet.

"A Tabla Ensemble doesn't mean it's only classical or it's modern bhangra music. It could be any kind of music. It's totally Canadian music, with a mixture of here and there."

On tap this fall, Das will be assisting Joanna Das on her collaborative dance project with a flamenco dancer. Plus the Ensemble will also perform concerts with bagpiper Craig Downey ("I've always wanted to do it. Seriously, there's a lot of connection between the Celts and the

Indians.") and then with jazz scat singer, Julie Michels.

Yeah, things are going very well for Ritesh Das. He hasn't had to sacrifice integrity for success and he's making an impression on audiences with a very distinctive sound. And being part of the centuries old apprentice/master tradition keeps his well-checked humility intact. "Things are very good. But sometimes when things are good, you also get scared. It doesn't matter how good you are. If your attitude sucks, you're gone."

As long as he makes plans to get his ass kicked, Das has nothing to worry about.



Andrew Sun is a Toronto-based freelance art journalist who is also familiar with getting his ass kicked. His work has appeared in NOW Magazine, the Chart and the Canadian Theatre Review.

Toronto Tabla Ensemble



Photo: Toronto Tabla Ensemble



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Home 1

I do want to believe
our relationship
is eternal

I create you with
fatherly affection
you respond
with motherly
warmth and security

In an instant
under the spill of
some white magic
we are no more
its a building
and a builder
a business deal
no emotions
no meeting
no departing

I hide my face
allow a lonely tear
at the death
of another relationship

Home 2

seductive furniture
shiny walls
glossy pictures

yet poverty
reigns all over you

home
look at your pathetic
lonely self
alienated
despicable

cleanliness
orderliness
your fanatic attitude
forced the comfort out
peace and serenity left
under fire from tv

no smiling faces
no jokes, no laughter
no new words come
no ideas enter

home
have you forgotten
home without friends
attracts enemies?

Home 3

(for Resham)

dear home
thank you for
being so quiet
understanding
sharing in my anguish

you must know
you are the only one
who can know
not only
my father's and grandfather's home
the entire village where I grew
I called mine

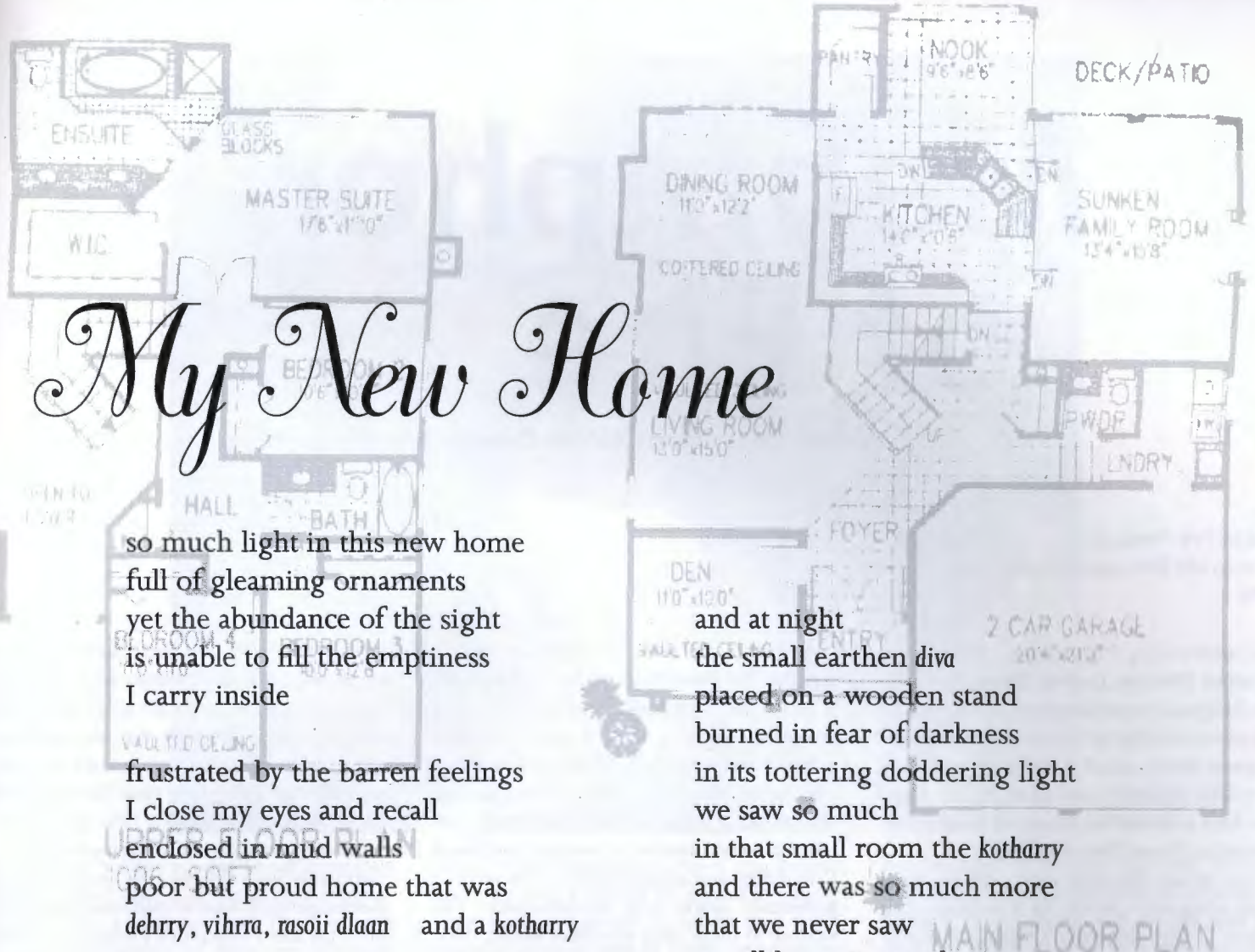
today I heard
my son tell a friend
"yes I live here
this is my parents' home"

home
do you feel the pain?

Sadhu

UPPER FLOOR PLAN
1006 SQ. FT.

MAIN FLOOR PLAN
1320 SQ. FT.



My New Home

so much light in this new home
full of gleaming ornaments
yet the abundance of the sight
is unable to fill the emptiness
I carry inside
frustrated by the barren feelings
I close my eyes and recall
enclosed in mud walls
poor but proud home that was
dehrry, vihrra, rasoi dlaan and a kotharry

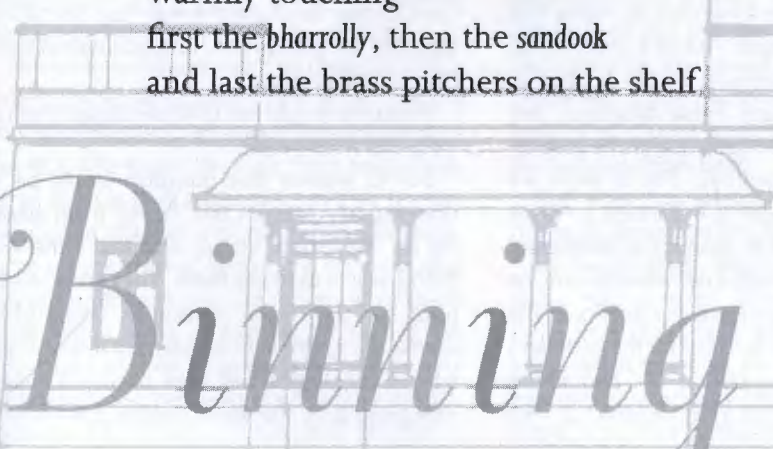
dlaan, the larger room
was always dark
once during the day
a few kindly sunlit rays
dropped from the mog
sauntered through the room
warmly touching
first the bharrolly, then the sandook
and last the brass pitchers on the shelf

and at night
the small earthen diva
placed on a wooden stand
burned in fear of darkness
in its tottering doddering light
we saw so much
in that small room the kotharry
and there was so much more
that we never saw
we all knew it was there
since the time of our grandfathers
and great-great grandfathers
they were in there too
at least that was what
we children believed

now in this new home
there is so much light
to see so many shiny things
yet there is nothing beyond the dazzle
no memories

this is a home
that was a home
how this journey
has changed me and my home

Binning



Sadhu Binning is a Vancouver-based poet. His latest book of poetry is *No More Watno Dur* (TSAR, 1994)

Mehtaphor of Fire

Ameen Merchant takes Deepa Mehta to task

Fire

Trial by Fire Productions

Written and Directed by Deepa Mehta

1996

Try addressing Mythology, Patriarchy, Arranged Marriage, Lesbian Desire, Nationalism, Religious Fundamentalism, Sufi Mysticism, and some real abstract personal memory-stuff in green fields—all of it within an hour and forty-four minutes—and what do you have? You have a somewhat brave and a more than somewhat flawed film called *Fire*.

Not to say that one can't address these issues adequately on film, for it has been done before (Shyam Benegal's *Kalyug*, and Kumar Sahani's *Tarang* are two films which addressed similar issues, except homosexual love), but for these links to work in an intellectually persuasive manner, all the narrative trajectories have to be given a fair amount of time to develop and convince; for textual complexity has less to do with the formal technique of layering, and more to do with the thoroughness of insights explored within each layer.

Recent diasporic South Asian films—of which *Fire* is the latest—that have attempted to address some of these discourses have revealed a basic formula at work behind their plots. And it is a formula which takes the 'metaphor of fragmentation' a little too literally. The work predictably sizzles in that now too recognisable 'universal' way, but almost always leaves one with a bad case of post-modern indigestion. I am thinking here of films like Srinivas Krishna's *Masala*, Amarjit Rattan's *The Burning Season*, and Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala*. Nair summed up the recipe rather succinctly in the theme line for her film: "Tradition. Passion. Mix it up!"

And that's all it takes, it would seem, to put together this market-driven Aloo-Globey mix, in which the ingredients, besides competent technical packaging are: an exotic location (sometimes the diasporic South Asian community stands in for this,) loads of Ramayan and Krishnayan, a few apparently transgressive racial and sexual liaisons, a nostalgia for Geeta Dutt ditties, and a family at the centre which is genetically warm and melodramatic. The women in these films are often young, dark, and seductive and find themselves lost between two worlds; and the men, typically loud or silent patriarchs, or better still, ludicrous buffoons. Sometimes there's parody, sometimes there's tragedy, but there's always a hundred per cent chance of a feel good humanist ending.

Deepa Mehta's *Fire* cooks all of the above.

Fire focuses on an 'Indian' family. Radha (Shabana Azmi) and Ashok (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) have been married for more than 15 years. They live with Ashok's mother, Biji (that old woman figure who in now *de rigueur* in the films of the South Asian diaspora), her other son, Jatin (Jaaved Jaferi), and a houseboy, Mundu (Ranjit Chowdhry). This is what we know about them (clues of 'indianness'): Ashok is on a spiritual quest to abandon all desire and spends a lot of time with a nameless swami; he even sets aside a sum from the profits of the family's food take-out business for the godman's hydrociles operation; he has not had sexual relations with his wife in years. Radha has "No

eggs in the ovary, Madam," meaning she is sterile, and can't have children; when she is not kneading flour for 'to-go' parathas, she is busy sponging and powdering the old ma-in-law with glum-faced dutifulness; yes, she has been miserable for a very long time. Biji rings a bell when she needs something (she can be quite demanding); she likes watching the *Ramayan*—particularly Sita's 'Trial by Fire' incident, which she has seen only-Ram-knows how many times. Jatin operates a video library from a part of the take-out space; he is a fan of kung-fu movies, and thinks Jackie Chan is God; he has a Chinese girlfriend who loves nailpolish and feeds him sweet and sour prawns from daintily held chopsticks. Mundu is definitely from the lower castes (the way he speaks english should tell you that); he masturbates watching pornography—right in the presence of the grand-dame; he is secretly in love with Radha but knows the class divide between them is too wide to bridge (we have to infer this from the way flaps his rubber slippers); he urinates on historical monuments (this is unambiguous).

What we would like to know about them is: *Who are these people?*

But to answer that question would be to cinematically prevent this 'family' from attaining an 'allegorical' status, and that's the way Mehta wants us to see them. They are a "metaphor for the major transitions taking place across the entire subcontinent of India today," so it is only logical that they occupy a milieu-free geography and speak english. If the frame-

**If this is what giving voice to lesbian desire is all about,
then silence begins to seem like a sensible option!**



Shabana Azmi (Radha)
and Nandita Das (Sita)
in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*.
Photo: Dilip Mehta

work of the parable is indeed a self-conscious choice, then Mehta is oblivious to the limitations of such a narrative form. *Fire* flirts with some very serious social discourses of power and oppression that the structure of the parable cannot adequately contain. And some of these issues are historically too complex and urgent to be reduced to the realm of metaphors. Mehta's decision to work revolution from within this decidedly romantic and conservative framework (with just a veneer of social realism) also poses some dangerous consequences for a cause that is obviously very close to her: giving name, form and voice to lesbian desire in a South Asian context.

Here's how it plays out: Sita (Nandita Das), enters the family as Jatin's new bride. She is a young, spirited and rebellious Indian woman of the 90's. We know this right from the outset, for as soon as they are back from their honeymoon, she changes into her husband's jeans, turns up the stereo, lights up a cigarette and swings to western pop. Of course, all of this is done with a sense of parody, for such is the stereotype of 'free' women in India (they may look Indian, but they *really* are from the West!). Neglected by their husbands (one tending to his guru, and the other cavorting with his Chinese girlfriend) and stifled by boredom and loneliness, Sita and Radha begin a reluctant

sexual relationship which grows into love. It also becomes a source of escape for them, smothered as they are by middle class (I am guessing big time here as Mehta provides no class clues whatsoever), Hindu orthodoxy and oppression. They exchange bangles, tie *manath* threads at Sufi *dargahs*, and empower each other. Disclosures and dilemmas follow and very soon they arrive at a point from where there are only two destinations in sight: back to heterosexuality, or a trial by fire—and if one survives this—into the arms of the lesbian lover. Radha courageously opts for the latter and nearly gets burned. But finally everything works itself out and the lovers, drenched by heavenly rain, are united under the sheltering archways of the Nizamuddin Auliya mausoleum. End credits as A.R. Rahman fades in a portentous drum beat.

But what has actually happened, you will notice on closer scrutiny, is that the two women have merely been displaced from one fabled space into another. *Where did these women come from and where will they go?* That's an impertinent question, for the parable is free of contextual specificity and politics, (although there is a lot of posturing here,) and is only committed to transcendental apolitical didacticism. But if one extends the logic of the 'metaphor', does this not also suggest that lesbians

are creatures of fantasy, and their lives and realities not rooted in any material or historical contexts of negotiation and struggle with oppression? How could this be a representation of *any* lesbian 'reality', when the site of its location is a fabled and abstract space, that just happens to look like New Delhi? If this is what giving voice to lesbian desire is all about, then silence begins to seem like a sensible option!

Yet that's not all: never do we know if Radha has ever had to suppress lesbian desires in the past; or if she has only just discovered its existence; or is it lesbian desire by default—given that she's incapable of having children and that her husband (who is more of a brother now) doesn't have sex with her anymore. All we know in the end is that she loves Sita for her "compassion, warmth, and her body, and she is doing this for herself, and not for anyone else!" What one is never quite sure about is whether this is a decision based on sexuality or circumstance.

And if all this makes Sita look like one big incidental convenience, it's because the poor thing has no context of lesbian identity either. Was Sita born lesbian? Has she had previous lesbian relationships, even though there is no word to describe same-sex bonds in Indian languages (she knows *that*). What if her husband weren't such a one emotion freak (it's

**Mehta subscribes to the theory that lesbians are a purely circumstantial phenomena.
And it is their understanding of patriarchy...and its oppressive history
that makes them, not just feminists, but lesbians."**

called 'karate') and loved her as much as he loved the arranged marriage convention? Would lesbian desire still exist? Considering the miserable condition of these women in *Fire*, their lesbian relationship seems not only inevitable, it also feels significantly overdetermined.

Now consider this scenario too: Radha, a happily married, sexually satisfied mother of three discovers she has lesbian feelings for her sister-in-law, and finds herself caught in a dilemma of choosing...Ah, now we're talking a different kind of lesbian and political film—which, unfortunately, *Fire* is not.

And the problem lies with Mehta's understanding of lesbian-feminism(s). In Mehta's understanding (as presented in the film) lesbian-feminism is the ultimate weapon of the international feminist movement. Woman loving woman is not only a more equal and more rebellious scenario of patriarchal rejection, it is also a 'pure' condition, uncontaminated by other socio-historic influences and discourses. If such an understanding of lesbian subjectivity and desire (anywhere and of any sort) reveals anything at all, it reveals the abstract and fetishistic overworking of a heterosexual-feminist imagination. And what's more it sends out an alarmist message to heterosexual South Asian men, which says, "Buddhu, pay attention or else she will leave you for a woman." All of it hauntingly ironic considering Mehta's eagerness to 'realise' the existence of the autonomous lesbian subject amidst us!

By now it should be clear that Mehta subscribes to the theory that lesbians are a purely circumstantial phenomena. And it is their understanding of patriarchy (also a very 'universal' and non-descript version here) and its oppressive history that makes them, not just feminists, but lesbians. Simply put, patriarchy is a pre-condition for lesbian subjectivity. While it is a fact that there is a chapter within the world lesbian community that subscribes to a communal, women-only agenda and ideology, it is a gross misrepresentation to insist that all lesbian desire is constructed in opposition to and, in recognition of, patriarchal oppression. I personally believe this theory co-opts all other lesbian and feminist subjectivities.

But it is this monolithic understanding that

Mehta subscribes to most passionately—at times even sensationally. Proof? The endless allusions to the Ramayan, the many 'Trial by Fire' dramatisations, the *Karva Chauth* fast and farce, and the pathetic and lame caricatures that pass for Indian men in the film. I mean, if one can only make a case for lesbian desire by depicting all the men as insensitive morons, then I say, "Why bother with it at all in the first place?" But patriarchy (without which 'lesbianism' can never be) should hang around it seems. And even a benign 'sufi' variety will do. For how else can we explain the curiosity that both Radha and Sita, victims of Hindu chauvinism and orthodoxy find joy, peace and sanctuary in the Sufi tradition of Islam? I admit that selectivity is an important component of the creative process.

However, does it not also possess the power to produce its own meanings? To pay homage to the secular, composite cultures of India in these troubled times is indeed a noble sentiment, but to play off Islamic Heterodoxy (which is just as patriarchal) against Hindu Revisionism is to manipulate, distort and misrepresent these religions outside their historicity. Never mind the architectural splendour or the transcendental spirit of Qu'waalis.

If anything works at all in this overwrought, impressionistic mumbo-jumbo, it is the scenes of romance between the two women. The intimate moments between Radha and Sita are beautifully picturised—particularly the terrace exchanges where Mehta's script celebrates the love and spirit of sisterhood. And it is in these scenes, washed as they are in the rich hues of saffron and red, that the metaphor of *Fire* becomes erotically and scorchingly palpable. The same does not apply to the rest of the script or for that matter even the perform-

ances. Shabana Azmi certainly brings activist respectability and credibility to the idea of a lesbian role, which may go a long way in making 'lesbianism' even remotely acceptable to heterosexual and homophobic South Asians. Her association with the project is thus both laudable and reassuring.

As far as her performance in the film is concerned, however, she seems to have simply borrowed a few pages from her character in Mrinal Sen's *Khandar* (her best to date,) and wrapped her up in some new sarees (one even has a *tiranga* border!). Kulbhushan Kharbanda delivers what might just be his most constipated performance to date; chewing on every syllable of the english language as though it were an excellent source of dietary fibre. And Ranjit Chowdhry astonishes with his ability to play the same 'Indian' stereotype, in the same way, again and again. Show me one Indian man who speaks or behaves like him, and I will accept I have never really lived there for 26 years of my life! It is Nandita Das who carries the film on her bold and mischievous shoulders. So fresh, endearing and devoid of affectation is her portrayal of Sita, it makes you happy that at least somebody is having fun in this allegory gone *maha* awry.

I will not deny that *Fire* is an important film—if only because it is the first film to attempt a dramatic legitimization of homosexual love and desire, in a mainstream South Asian context. And there's no doubt in my mind that it will generate a lot of discussion and debate which is always a good thing. But to celebrate it as a revolutionary film or to pedestalise it for its apparent courage (especially if you are a gay or lesbian South Asian,) is also to participate in what can only be termed as self-exoticising from within. For bear this in mind: Deepa Mehta's *Fire* is a parable. And our lives all too specific and real to be simply imagined as metaphors.



Ameen Merchant is a writer, director and critic based in Vancouver. He acknowledges the intellectual input of Janice Fiamengo, Fatima Jaffer and Yasmin Jiwani who helped with issues of Lesbianism and Feminism for the purposes of this review.



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Rights Across Borders:

Immigration and the Decline of Citizenship

David Jacobson

Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 184 pages: \$46 – \$90

Long before commerce, technology and the fall of the Berlin Wall gave us today's globalization, there was the universe of human rights. The American and French revolutions reached beyond the confines of the state to proclaim the liberty and fraternity of persons as well as citizens. Even nationalism, the late eighteenth century told us, was an inclusive ideal.

It took the outrages of the Second World War and the unravelling of colonial empires to usher in truly universal claims of individual liberty—and to make them *de rigueur* in constitutions on every continent. It further required the civil rights and women's movements to render the 'human' aspect worth its name. And lest we confuse rhetoric with reality, there are the Rwandans, Bosnians, Palestinians, Kurds and Aboriginal peoples to remind us of the road untraveller.

Indeed, David Jacobson contends in *Rights Across Borders* that it is the ultimate 'others' in our midst—migrant communities—who have most lent substance to the universality of rights. Their appeals to equality and fair treatment in national and international forums tend to be about personhood.

Established bonds of culture, politics and history that gird battles for the rights of the disabled or veterans or children seldom hold for the alien. So strong is the appeal to universal rights that victims of inhuman treatment in former homelands may sue their tormentors in Canadian or American courts; refugees cannot be deported to where they face persecution and, at least in Canada, they enjoy virtually the same protection from discrimination as citizens.

But Jacobson sees a downside to such cross-border rights. Citizenship, based on the distinction between 'members' and 'non-members' of a defined territory, is said to be eroded when residency alone can confer entitlements against the state.

In North America and Western Europe, he argues, rates of naturalization have been appallingly low since the incentive to acquire the rights and burdens of a citizen has dissipated. If courts and

legislatures were less liberal about the distinction, 'membership' would have some meaning.

A recent Angus Reid poll showed that 57 per cent of Canadians—61% in British Columbia—opposed granting automatic citizenship to anyone born on Canadian soil. Some 52% of Canadians opposed citizenship that the global marketplace calls the shots on so many aspects of national life.

What does the less than 50% turnout in the 1996 US elections say about citizenship? Ironically, the figure would be still lower if not for the highest-ever turnout among new migrants fearful of proposals to severely curtail their rights.

Third, the global economy also mocks sovereignty. The IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization are more influential than ever in shaping the course of national life on every continent. Nor is this on account of human rights agendas. Skeptics are welcome to check with any finance minister, from Ottawa to Nairobi to Islamabad.

Certainly, the idea of rights vested in persons is more compelling than sovereignty vested in an abstraction called the state. But states are needed to implement those rights, and hardly as passive bureaucracies. On the contrary, the paradox of globalization is to invite fresh attention to the local: we yearn for the familiar while grappling with the novel.

Migrant attachments to old and new homelands are a variant of that reality—like the embrace by most Canadians of multiple cultural, social and even political (federal/provincial) identities. It is 'a fine balance,' to borrow from Rohinton Mistry, often tipped one way or another in the swirl of civil society.

Welcome to postmodern citizenship, warts and all.



Amy B. Sajoo is a law and public affairs consultant based in Vancouver, and author of *Pluralism in Old Societies and New States: Emerging ASEAN Contexts* (1994).

Entering Closed Entrances

Engaging Oppositional Aesthetics

Arnold Harrichand Itwaru and Natash Ksonzek
Closed Entrances:
Canadian Culture and Imperialism
Toronto: TSAR, 1994: \$14.95

Arun Mukherjee
Oppositional Aesthetics:
Readings from a Hyphenated Space
Toronto: TSAR, 1994: \$19.95



Natasha Ksonzek

Although the subject of race in Canadian literature has made for some splashy headlines over the past couple of years, relatively little critical work of substance has been produced in Canada. This is not to discount the commendable efforts of writers such as Himani Bannerji, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Roy Miki and Jeannette Armstrong, Dionne Brand and, of course, two of the writers being reviewed here, Arnold Harrischand Itwaru and Arun Mukherjee, but their critical voices are few among many. True, today, even the many find themselves compelled, perhaps a little too readily, to enter the discourses of race theory and analysis, but rarely are such mainstream voices, located as they usually are within white academic circles, able to convey the socio-political urgency of theorizing race systematically. And all too often, the popular voices speaking to the issues of race and racism (such as Warren Kinsella's *Web of Hate: Inside Canada's Far Right Network* and Margaret Cannon's *The Invisible Empire: Racism in Canada*) become all-consumed with right-wing extremism, which serves to exonerate the white supremacist system that tis the rule, rather than the exception, to Canadian culture. Add to this the work of cultural and social critics from the United States and Britain, folks like Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, Gayatri Spivak,

bell hooks, Patricia Williams and scores of others, whose critical sensibility is strong but, naturally enough, lacking in terms of Canadian specificity, and the truly critical work around race theory—by, about, and for people living in Canada—is dismally lacking in volume and range.

For these reasons, works like *Closed Entrances: Canadian Culture and Imperialism*, by Arnold Itwaru and Natasha Ksonzek, a series of loosely grouped selections of criticism and reflection, is a welcome shift from the normal course of academic publications which pay only superficial attention to issues of race. Going from the specific to the general—from individual expression and experience to they systemic—*Closed Entrances* performs as a critical foil to the racial injustices brought about by discourses of multiculturalism and diversity. Most of the book is written by Itwaru—Ksonzek, in addition to designing the book's imposing cover, contributes by way of a joint introduction and an insightful personal essay-journey, 'Echos of Empire,' which echoes Marlene Nourbese Philip and others in its indictment of the now infamous *Into the Heart of Africa* Royal Ontario Museum exhibit.

Itwaru's prose is flowing and flowery, metaphor-laden in its attempt to spell out the functions, methodologies, and effects of Canadian imperialism. Inside this prose are indicents of racism experienced by the writer, on the street, in academic institutions and through the public spaces of the CBC (a case study of three white critics discussing Moyez Vassanji's *No New Land*) and of the ROM, a reiteration of Ksonzek's earlier piece.

Occasionally, however, Itwaru's systemic critiques seem too limited in their complexity. For instance, while I believe his perception is correct that in literature, conventional narratives are informed by linear plot-lines and that many publishers, reviewers and readers "...are downright hostile to works which they disparage as being 'plotless'..." (48), I am not so convinced that plot driven narratives are necessarily pro-imperialist and an "...essential strategy of domination..." (49) any more so than that works of literature which avoid the conventions of plot are necessarily liberatory and/or progressive.

If this were the simple case, then many writers who 'use' plot, no matter how progressive their professed or implied politics may be, would be considered pawns of the system, and many writers who resist such conventions, and this included much of the Canadian post-modernist and language-based set, would be, by virtue of their methodology, radical subversives. However, I recognize the validity of Itwaru's claims in terms of systemic analysis, particularly regarding his solid anti-imperialist insistence that permeates this text.

Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space, by Arun Mukherjee, is much more academically-inclined than *Closed Entrances*, it only because this anthology of essays tends to focus on particular pieces of literature within certain genre-bound conventions. However, like the Itwaru/Ksonzek text, *Oppositional Aesthetics* attempts a systemic critique of institutions and literatures. This book is really two books in one, including as it does the now out-of-print *Aesthetic of Opposition* (Stratford: Williams-Wallace, 1988) in its entirety. Mukherjee covers a range of topics in her seventeen essays, many dealing with issues of specific concerns to readers of South Asian literature, but all addressing, in some manner, the insidious systemic nature of oppressive forces in our institutions of literature and 'higher learning.'

Some of Mukherjee's specific subjects include the works of Riezi Cruz, who she lauds as a poet not afraid to "assert his difference" from mainstream norms; Michael Ondaatje, who she castigates as one who buys into, rather than resists, an official Canadian society; and Ven Begamudré, who she describes as a scavenger of 'official' Indian sources rather than a translator of personal experience. But the true nature of *Oppositional Aesthetics* is more readily apparent when Mukherjee is critiquing the racism implicit in white feminism, or attacking the universalist criteria often used to judge (and dismiss) writers of colour, or outlining the discursive strategies, most specifically irony, employed by what she calls "hyphenated Canadians." Interesting, too, is Mukherjee's professed alliance with "a diverse set of constituencies such as writers and critics in the Third World...feminists, racial-minority, gay and post-structuralist critics and theorists in the West" whose challenges she feels empowered by even as she disagrees with what she says might be a tendency to universalize this allied resistance. Nonetheless, the concept of 'oppositional aesthetics' is an attractive one for those looking for strategies of resisting dominant norms while continuing to perform strategically as academics, writers and readers of literature.

Both *Oppositional Aesthetics* and *Closed Entrances* offer strong Canadian alternatives to both radical imported and liberal homegrown texts around race theory and literature. The personal narratives told by Mukherjee, Itwaru and Ksonzek allow for the development of a substantial systemic critique—and often a strong indictment—of Canadian race relations. And while Mukherjee's text might be more useful to the student of literature and Itwaru/Ksonzek's text might be more appropriate to those interested in a larger cultural critique, both *Oppositional Aesthetics* and *Closed Entrances* provide new insights into an as yet largely uninvestigated critical terrain.

Ashok Mathur is a poet, academic and cultural organizer based in Calgary and Vancouver.



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Different from the
Usual Multicultural Journal

Dogs Barking in the Cool Damp Distance, Iron Nails Rusting in the Tree.

**Julien Samuel
Passage to Lahore**

Like all books that grab me, I got a little divine shiver after coming to the last page of Julien Samuel's *Passage to Lahore*. I kissed the portrait of him on the inside of the bookjacket. This was my way of thanking him for a good read. The photograph on the backcover depicts a serious intellectual type—an Asian radical with incendiary raised eyebrows and a balding bean. Looking into the dark compassionate eyes of this talented writer, one might be tempted to take the novel as a grand plea for love—a long open letter to the exile community in search of his Lahori or Arabian bride...

Under an abrasive façade which skewers as many pet peeves as can fit on a page, the author reveals a tenderness reserved for a hypocritical, ignorant and confused humanity. Samuel has no patience for those not aware of the consequences of capitalism's hegemony and imperialistic muscle. He is a political animal, crusader, thinker and shit disturber. Not afraid of playing these roles, he aims his belligerent arsenal at a convenient target while letting us inside the minds of Arabs, Bengalis, Palestinians and Pakistanis. These points of view, rarely noted in the West, are welcome, refreshing, comical and vibrantly full of defiance and humour.

Samuel's autobiographical sketches are woven together into a pleasant journey of sorts. It is the voyage of a mind over a decade—a decade spent smelling the greasy smoke of restaurant exhaust near Montréal's anglophone and immigrant intellectual hub; a decade of observing the conservative Reagan-Thatcher era from behind the cozy economic walls of fortress North America. The odious side of complacency among his fellow citizens is a constant bone of contention. Utilizing a combination of damning criticism and tenderness Samuel slowly allows us a foothold inside his exiled head.

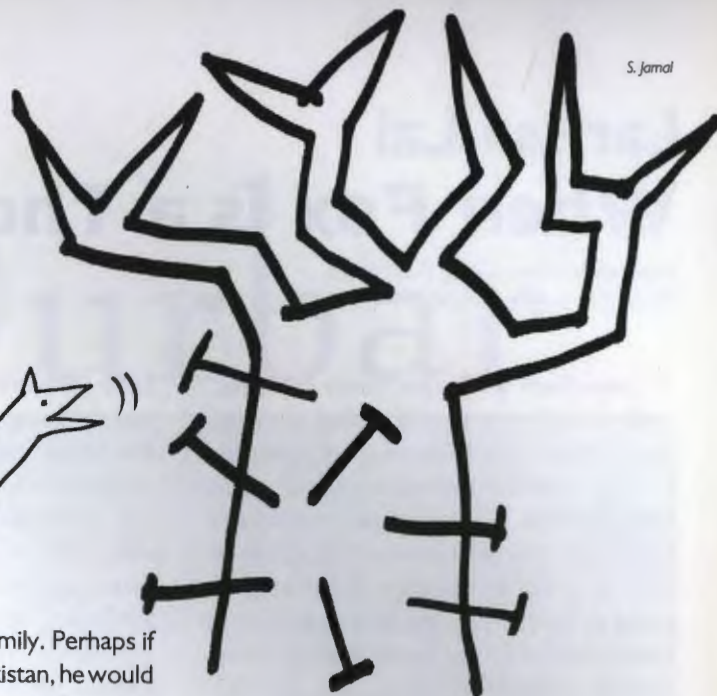
A profile emerges of a cross pollinated cultural hybrid. From the early years in Lahore, Pakistan, we see the author among his secular

Christian upper middle class family. Perhaps if he would have stuck it out in Pakistan, he would have ended up a comfortable army officer with a bevy of servants at his command. This complaint about the loss of privilege might explain the testiness and tension in the prose. Accepting the status of a 19th century petty bourgeois in the home country would be too humiliating for an avowed Marxist. But at the same time there is a whiff of glamour and nostalgia for the home land and an unrequited desire to bed the women of the seductive Pakistani aristocratic class.

An adolescence spent in England woke the author to the bane of racism. From a privileged boy in the home country he had fallen in status to 'dark skinned wog', harassed by brutish boys with plumbers for fathers and mothers who straightened table cloths for tea time. Samuel seems to believe that if he had remained in the racist England of the 1960's, he might have turned into a bitter intellectual hooligan.

But Canada was his final destination. His years spent in Toronto suburbs further transformed his personality with a substructure of underlying niceties. As it stands, I admire the hybrid—just enough over the top irreverence to skewer complacent collaborators, blended with enough of a Canadian type of self-deprecating humbleness that is kind of infuriating but human.

Part of me is calling Julien Samuel a son of a bitch because my work sometimes looks so pale beside his. But I have to remind myself that I'm trying to portray a pale anæmic kid, victim of the Canuck 'muddle' class, while Samuel has the luxury of being the 'man of colour' anti-hero. Samuel seems to inhabit a lot of the intellectual headspace I've wandered through, and articulated it in animated, incisive prose. He is a great lampooner of academia, queer



S. Jamal

politics, race relations, feminists, and himself. and it's great to see it out there on the printed page.

I remember seeing Julian Samuel's film on the Algerian conflict and feeling it was much too angry, too overblown. A kind of indignation that one scorns in other people was present in that work. It was not polite; it was charged. I haven't seen Samuel's subsequent work in film, but the book recapitulates all his jealousies, rants, faults and strengths in a wickedly funny way. It is interesting to be treated to the foul language of the Urdu and Arab world. These colourful languages cannot be outdone for smut and degrading metaphor.

I know Julien Samuel has lots of enemies. Every time I try to enthusiastically promote his book among expatriate Montréalers, I get raised eyebrows. Has his provocative manner managed to offend would-be admirers? Are his charges against those in academia found in the book preventing him from gaining a cherished position at a post-secondary institution? I had the feeling that Abouali's story of going through the motions at a politically correct job interview was very thinly disguised autobiography.

It is good to see academia has not swallowed Julien Samuel. If he did indeed obtain some fat cat posting, he might get soft. That post-colonial grunge goatee of his would definitely be an æsthetic hazard as he negotiated his way between tenured fossils and the arrogant avant garbage intellectuals who pose as our illustrious cultural ambassadors. What more can I do but suggest, no, urge you to read this comically abrasive pundit of Boulevard St. Laurent?

Gregory Shea is a writer and critic.



Larissa Lai

When Fox is a Thousand

Vancouver, Press Gang Publishers
1995, 236 pages: \$16.95

"I come from an honest family of foxes," begins the title character of Larissa Lai's debut novel, *When Fox is a Thousand*, and right away one can sense the mischievous grin behind the voice, the wink, the nudge that promises a tall tale or two. And tall tales are what Lai delivers, offering up not one, not two but three alternating stories that become progressively more interwoven until they converge at the book's startling conclusion.

The first tale is narrated by the fox spirit of the title, an enchanted trickster who inhabits the bodies and minds of women and leaves a trail of chaos and delight in her wake as she sojourns across centuries and continents. Now nine hundred and ninety nine years of age, the Fox prepares for her thousandth birthday, when she will achieve immortality. The second tale recounts the history of the ninth century poetess, Yu Hsuan-Chi. Both nun and courtesan in her time, her free spirit, 'lascivious' sexuality and talent for verse scandalized China until she was sentenced to death for allegedly murdering her maidservant. The final tale, located in twentieth century Vancouver, follows the progress of Artemis Wong, a young Chinese Canadian woman struggling to find her identity among her friends and her community.

The first two stories set mostly in ancient China are beautifully told in lush semi-poetic style appropriate to the setting, and it is these two narratives that provide much of the initial appeal of the novel. It is, however, the third story, that of modern day Artemis Wong, that holds the key to unlocking the structure of the book.

Unlike the other two stories, both first person narratives, Artemis' tale is told from a third person omniscient viewpoint, thus ensuring that we never get inside her head. From the outside, Artemis is almost a complete cipher. Named for the Greek goddess of the hunt, she seems forever in pursuit of some single defining moment, while not knowing what she is really after. Instead, her life drifts through a series of unseemingly random encounters with friends, lovers and acquaintances who embrace a spectrum of experiences and whose names—Diana, Mercy, Eden,

Saint—drawn from classical Western and Christian mythology stick out like sign posts against the prosaic twentieth century landscape. An adopted (i.e. rootless) child, Artemis' personality seems to transform itself depending on which of these people she is around, transformations which mirror those of Fox. But unlike the latter's deliberate machinations, Artemis' actions seem neither voluntary nor purposeful. Instead, trapped at the convergence point of several worlds—Canadian and Chinese, heterosexual and homosexual, mainstream and marginalized—and uncertain of her role in any of them, Artemis resembles nothing more than a character in a child's choose-your-own-adventure book, uncertain of which plot line to follow.

And therein lies a clue as to why Lai has structured the book the way she has.

Like Artemis, the reader is presented with a series of stories and challenged to find the 'true' one. The three stories initially appear to exist in three separate and clearly demarcated territories that initially seem to have very little to do with each other: mythology, history and reality. However, before long elements of each start to bleed into the other. The 'mythical' fox moves to Vancouver; the 'historical' poetess encounters a house inhabited by fox spirits; and Artemis, while seemingly 'real', encounters a mysterious woman with magical abilities. The more the stories mesh, the clearer it becomes the Lai, like Fox, has woven some mischief of her own: 'mythology', 'history' and 'reality' crunch together and are revealed as merely framing devices through which the world is perceived. The three stories are, in fact, one. All of them are true, yet none is true. And it is this inquiry into the nature of what is deemed to be true which provides the foundation of the novel. As Fox wends her mischievous way through time and space, she uncovers the silent history of women and their desires. The poetess, too, tells a version of her life far different from historical record. And as Artemis struggles to find herself, we as readers are forced to confront our perceptions of what is known about the world and whose point of view it is known from.



Photos: Chick Rice

Such an elaborately contrived structure could easily fall to pieces in the hands of a lesser writer. Fortunately, Lai is more than equal to the task of populating the wonderful worlds that she has created. Fox in particular is a triumphant creation. An unrepentant mischief-maker, she allows Lai's poetic sensibility and subversive sense of humour to shine through the narrative. An example is an early episode which recalls Fox's intervention in the affairs of a married couple in the ninth century, China. The husband demands a concubine and the wife, eager to escape her 'wifely duty', complies; but the wife soon discovers that she has lost her household authority as a result of her husband's absorption with the concubine. Enter Fox, who counsels the wife in how to win her husband back. This episode could almost be a traditional folk tale, except that Lai ends it with a gender-bending twist that is both amusing and incisive. At the same time, she fills the page with sumptuous descriptions—flesh that glows "like translucent jade", gowns that ripple and flow with the colours of "moving water" and "the sky before a storm"—ensuring that the subtext never overwhelms the storytelling.

In a world where new novels are as numerous (and often as insightful) as B-movies, *When Fox is a Thousand* is that rarest of treats: an intelligent and absorbing literary vision that seems to have sprung fully formed like Athena from the brow of Zeus...or whatever myth you may happen to believe.

Kuan Foo is a writer and cultural activist living in Vancouver.

Aurat Durbar

Writings by women of South Asian origin

Edited by Fauzia Rafiq

Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995

Reading a collection or anthology is like eating tapas—or better yet, like eating on Eid day: you visit everyone you know, sampling the food at each stop, trying to strike a balance between how much namkeen and how much meetha you take in, but you still manage to save room for the biryani made by your favourite aunt. It's easy to overdo it in face of so much choice, so much good stuff. Same goes here: there are thirty one writers in *Aurat Durbar*, and sixty-five pieces of writing.

What binds them all in this book? The obvious answer is that they are all South Asian women writers. The not-so-obvious answer is that they have 'overcome.' Overcome what? Racism, sexism, homophobia—whatever form of oppression it is that makes you stop dead in your tracks, unable to respond, react, resist, rebel. The strength of these writers is that they *have* responded, reacted, resisted, rebelled—the have found voice.

Individual voices are strong in *Aurat Durbar*—notably, those of Maya Khankhoje, Mina Kumar, Uma Parameswaran, Fauzia Rafiq, and Vinita Srivastava—but the collective voice is hard to pin down. This is not to say that it isn't present, or that it isn't strong, but perhaps that it is subtle...and somewhat new. New, not because it is focused on South Asian women—there are other such collections—but new because it has crossed the diasporic line. That is, editor Fauzia Rafiq has (knowingly and specifically) included South Asian women living in the West and South Asian women living in South Asia. As she says in the preface: "... none may be judged according to here. Or there ... [T]he content and terms of reference are diverse and so might not fit any politically correct format evolved in one cultural/geographical reference/location." (p. 12).



Mughal women in the garden, Indian Miniature collection, Berlin State Museum

However, with this promise of geographic inclusiveness, I would expect better representation from around the world. As it is, most of the thirty-one writers (about twenty-five) are Canadian, and most of those (about seventeen) are Torontonians.

Beefs about Toronto-centrism aside, I welcome the diversity and the good writing in *Aurat Durbar*. If culture is supposed to hold up a mirror to ourselves, then I want to hear more from those who speak from the same space I'm in, who speak to me. *Oy ah jo*, brown sister.

Shazia Qureshi has written for *Vox* and has been involved with cultural collectives in Calgary and Toronto.

back issues



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Interviews with actor/activist Shabana Azmi; documentary-makers Ali Kazimi & Anand Patwardhan; and visual artist Vivan Sundaram • Reviews of Narmada: A Valley Rises by Ali Kazimi (film); Bandit Queen by Shekhar Kapur (film); Beyond Destinations (film and video) curated by Ian Iqbal Rashid; two videos by Julian Samuel; and an Asian film programme curated by L. Somi Roy • Sheyfali Saujani visits with her Meena Foyba • Review of Her Mother's Ashes edited by Nurjehan Aziz (anthology of writings by Canadian South Asian women)



The Queer Issue

Volume 3, Number 3 \$8

Guest Editor: Ian Iqbal Rashid
Feature photographer Lianne Harris' small duotoned portraits of Pratibha Parmar, Johann Insanally, Cathay Che and Tanya Sayed • Gayatri Gopinath on a Queer South Asian Planet • Queer Screen with Pratibha Parmar & Zahid Dar • Alistair Raphael's haunting Interrupt • Barbie Goes South Asian in colour with Adrienne Vasanti Salgado and Ian Iqbal Rashid—plus Anita Kaushik's Oriental Mistress, Plastic Passions full-colour digital collage • Shyam Selvadurai's Funny Boy • Shani Mootoo's Her Sweetness Lingers

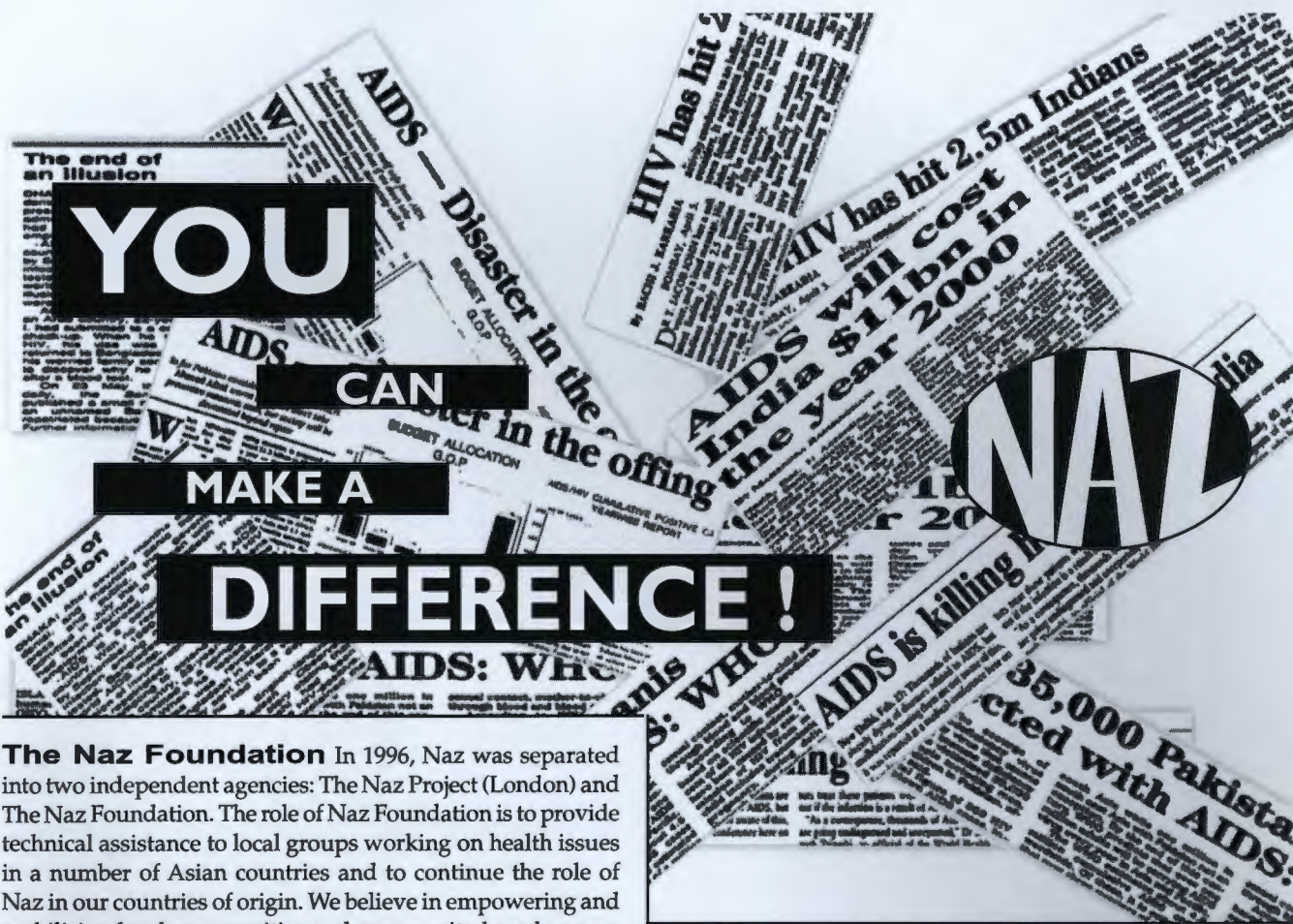
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YOU

CAN

MAKE A

DIFFERENCE!

The Naz Foundation In 1996, Naz was separated into two independent agencies: The Naz Project (London) and The Naz Foundation. The role of Naz Foundation is to provide technical assistance to local groups working on health issues in a number of Asian countries and to continue the role of Naz in our countries of origin. We believe in empowering and mobilising local communities and community based groups to develop their own responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic now growing rapidly in South Asia.

The Naz Project was established in 1991, to provide HIV/AIDS and sexual health services for the South Asian, Turkish, Arab and Irani communities in London developing programs for education, prevention and support. Naz have pioneered culturally appropriate services, working in ten different languages and addressing the needs of our people from within our communities.

International Support Since 1993, The Naz Project has also been working with agencies and groups in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS by providing training, improving skills, access to multilingual education resources and through enabling community based organizations to provide education and prevention services to their local communities, as well as support services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Naz Foundation of Canada (under incorporation) is the continued work of South Asians in the diaspora living with and affected by HIV/AIDS in our communities and in our countries of origin, such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other Middle Eastern countries.

In July 1996, the XIth International Conference on AIDS in Vancouver provided critical need for South Asians living in the First Nation countries to respond to the AIDS pandemic in our countries of origin. While the conference provided a glimmer of hope in two AIDS ravaged countries; in Uganda and Thailand through public education there has been a dramatic reduction in new infections. Recently, the New York Times reported that United Nations AIDS now estimates that India has emerged as the country with the largest number of people infected with HIV. With over 3 million people infected

with the virus, India is now the epicentre of HIV/AIDS. The India Health Organisation warns that the number of infections double every 18 months and that in four years there will be over 20 to 50 million HIV positive men, women and children. "What does this mean to us here in Canada? How do we respond to this growing epidemic and crisis in our countries of origin? Do we as Non Resident Indians (NRI), and people from Pakistan or Sri Lanka have any moral or ethical responsibilities for our brothers and sisters in our countries of origin? As South Asians from East Africa or the Fiji Islands, even though our ancestors left the old country over 150 years ago, do we have any responsibility to act? Clearly the answer lies in our hearts and in our actions as we witness the devastation AIDS has caused on the African continent."

December 1st was World AIDS Day which acknowledges the international pandemic of AIDS. The purpose of Naz Foundation of Canada is to raise funds to provide HIV/AIDS education, prevention education and support services for South Asian and Middle Eastern communities. The second purpose is to provide funds to the Naz Foundation (UK) in order to support their programs on HIV/AIDS. The third purpose is to liaise with the Naz Foundation (UK) and to receive their resources for our communities in Canada, particularly in prevention education.



Foundation of Canada

The Naz Foundation of Canada needs your help and support. If you are interested in working on establishing Naz Foundation of Canada contact:

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