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diva

A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women

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Humour Issue!

diva

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We produced this issue without any funding too.

diva Calendar of Events

- 1. A Collection of Writing and Artwork Manuscripts in English**, translations very welcome Poems, Short Stories, Oral Histories, Testimonies, Journal Entries, Sketches, Photographs, Slides, Paintings...
Dateline to receive contributions: **February 15, 1993** Specifically inviting lesbians, bisexual women, Indo-Caribbean women, and women living in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
Mail to: **DIVA, 427 Bloor St. W., Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1X7.**
We accept nonsexist, nonracist, nonhomophobic contributions.
 - 2. Saturday, January 9, 11a.m. to 1p.m. Launch of the DIVA Humour Issue** at 427 Bloor St. West.
 - 3. Women of Colour Constructing a Collective Position on New Reproductive Technologies.** In cooperation with other feminist groups, DIVA is organizing a series of forums towards a better understanding of our reproductive rights Forum 2: **Feb. 25, 1992, 7p.m. 427 Bloor St. West** For more information contact **Sharmini Peries (416) 921-7004**
 - 4. Wednesday March 19 to Friday March 21, 1993** DIVA is organizing a three-day **South Asian Women's National Conference "Against Sexual Violence."** Objectives: Orientation and training; improving counselling skills, available resources, understanding the issues; barriers, what our choices are, how we can use our skills to create a supportive environment for women, combatting myths, to work on a plan to reach out. For more information contact **DIVA, 427 Bloor St. West, Toronto, 416-921-7004.**
 - 5. Harbourfront Centre** in cooperation with DIVA - Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women and ASAP - Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention present a free community forum **"Addressing Our Fears: AIDS in South Asian Families."** Saturday, March 20, 1993 from 3p.m. to 6p.m. in the Brigantine Room at Harbourfront. Free Childcare and Refreshments available. Presentations by: South Asians living with HIV, Dr. Bhooma Bhayana (physician), Deo Kernahan (school teacher), Farah Schroff (health educator) and Shyamali Pal (service provider).
Forum Supported By: *Coalition of Agencies Serving South Asians, KHUSH, Malton Neighbourhood Services, Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, South Asian Women's Group, South Asian Family Support Services, South Asian Fellowship and Monthly SANVAD.*
 - 6. Information Sheets on Women and AIDS in six South Asian languages:** Hindi, Gurmukhi, Urdu, Tamil, Bengali and Gujarati. Available at the community forum "Addressing Our Fears," Saturday March 20, 1993, 3p.m. to 6p.m. and through DIVA.
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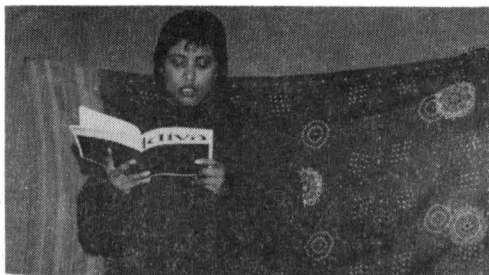
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Caught...



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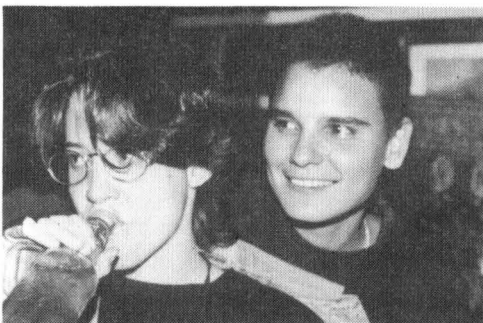
Sharing secrets, Sudarshan Duraiyappan and Danny Shea



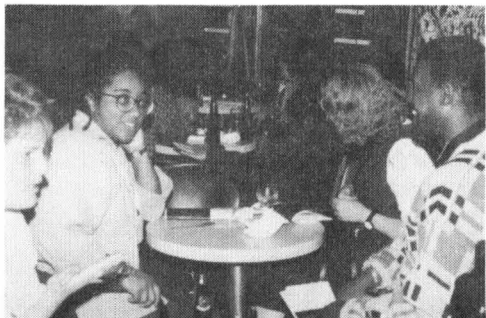
Doing Mehndi



Ooo! Talking... Amina Sherazee and Amita Handa



WFO with Connie Fife



Dionne Falconer, pretending (to be interested)

At Diva Launch on October 1, 1992 at Clinton's Tavern between 7pm and 3am.

No Jokes!

We have been wanting to bring out a 'funny' issue of DIVA for as long as two years. First it was a pun: "let's do a humor issue, no one will fund us for that!" Then it became a wish, "let's do a humor issue, please, with samosa & chutney on top?" After a while it became a declaration of courage, "we will bring out a humor issue," and then most recently it became a commitment, "dateline for contributions: Dec. 15, 1992."

Never before have we felt so collectively unsure about any other issue. We did have a scattered table of contents which looked more like a disheveled wish-list. Apprehensively, we talked to women, discussed ideas and committed ourselves to written contributions and art work. Commitments, it was understood, were 'ostensible' until received. It seemed, we wanted desperately to do stuff for the humor issue but none knew if we will be able to.

It was difficult changing gears. But once it happened, it was a learning experience. First of all, we learned never again to call it a 'humor' issue, call it ANYTHING but this. [next time you hear of DIVA producing an issue on 'Clintonian Revolution & New Waves of Change' you'll know it's time for humor again....]

Another jewel of wisdom we found while in the process of publishing, was the open affirmation of the hunch that 'humor' indeed is the most neglected area of women's lives. From there we get a perspective on the proportion of humorous ingredients in the lives of women of Color, then South Asian women, and after that, South Asian women who are working against the norm.

There are few humorous resources, fewer speak to us, almost none make us laugh. Whatever was available in print did not give us enough understanding to know what we could bring to Diva and how should it look. From this deep ignorance we began and, guess what? We have here a fabulous collection of humorous writings, artwork, editing and publishing by women of Color.

This issue of Diva is the first time we have expressed our concerns, lightly. And it sure is feeling good.

No but seriously, DIVA feels creating this space is crucial to our lives, work and culture. In most communities 'humor' is derived from exaggerating or ridiculing or juxtaposing the life experiences of certain groups of people for the sole benefit of the dominant culture and values. It neatly reflects the preferences of the dominant group\groups and is often used to maintain control over other groups.

For example, most of the jokes going around in South Asian languages including English, reflect the culture and values of two major groups: mainstream South Asian and dominant white. No wonder then that these jokes and humor is so firmly based in sexism, racism, homophobia and on class/caste/religious prejudices.

It is a suicide attempt to try to enjoy them. And from there we realize that this humor is definitely not reflecting the values of most South Asian women and women of Color. So, what do we do? Laugh at nothing, smile at nothing?

But we are smiling and laughing. And of course

it is not true that we don't laugh. We are laughing, but it was not clear about what, at what and about what? We might not be laughing a lot, but whatever it is, is a lot to begin with. All we need is time to compile our laughables.

We have compiled some in this issue and in doing so, we are also trying to break away from the stereotype of 'militant women of Color'. 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.

The Diva collective is aware that all this could have been said much more humorously, but you see, the gravity of the issue of humor.

The grave issues are part of our struggles, our lives, yes. But we can think\talk\fight back against gravity from a lighter perspective too.

We have enjoyed thinking, writing, drawing, editing and desktop publishing this issue of humor. Now this is our space, we have created it as an opportunity to smile and, in certain cases, laugh, even roar.

It was difficult but together we are getting there.

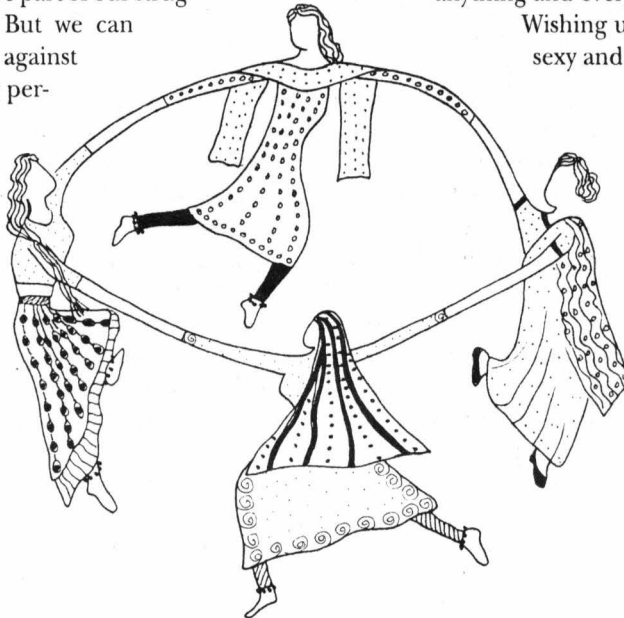
Please feel free to continue sharing smileable/ laughable one-liners, classifieds, prose, fiction, poetry. We want it.

We also want to express here our appreciation for: Sharon Fernandez, member of Diva Editorial Collective for over a year, for her valuable contribution to Diva organizing, outreach and artwork; Nudrat Niazi, a member of Diva Editorial Collective for more than two years; and Lasanda Kurukulasuriya, for her editorial support to Diva for nearly a year.

This issue marks the end of Volume 3 and the beginning of Volume 4 of Diva. Please have a look at our upcoming themes for Volume 4 (under the Diva Calendar); you are welcome to contribute anything and everything.

Wishing us all a joyful, creative, sexy and prosperous 1993.

*Leela Acharya
Fauzia Rafiq*







Here we go again with the worship smurship. I'd like to reach down from this pedestal and smack the bastard in the head.



My darling. Mother of my children, keeper of my home, transmitter of my culture. You know I worship the ground you walk on. Please don't leave. I promise I will never raise my voice or my hands again.



Adventures of Saheban:
Biography of 'The Relentless Warrior'

Saheban* vs. the Crisis of Identity

part 1

by Fauzia Rafiq

[Not a continuous account of her life, the following pages are independent narrations of her major wars waged in the olden times of 2000's. Like millions of other women on earth, this writer also is fascinated by that great woman warrior of her time.]

THE ROOTS

Born in the Milken State of Pacpenistan¹, Saheban's earliest war was waged against the crisis of identity that surrounded her at the time of her birth.

Over the years, there has been an incredible amount of speculation around her 'strange behaviour' as a new born baby. And, indeed, this 'strangeness' has been offered as proof of her ostensible 'urge' to commit violence against men, an allegation perpetually levelled against her by most learned male historians. Yes, you are right, we are talking about the incident where immediately after her birth, Saheban ostensibly attacked the doctor, who happened to be a male.²

* Letter 'n' silent please.

The fact of the matter is what follows:

Saheban's identity was put in crisis by the Keepers Of the Pure Penisoids [hitherto called 'KOPPs'], when she was in the process of becoming a fetus. The KOPPs, with the characteristic cunning of a colourless enemy, had colonized the brain of Jattee, Saheban's mother³. The colonizers took over the central communication support systems sending viruses in her think tank. Resultantly, the inner voice of Jattee, whenever speaking to Saheban in the womb, called her 'my son'. Her mother's inner voice was elated, loving and in awe of Saheban (who her mother assumed was a 'he'). As a direct consequence of this, Saheban also was led to assume that 'she' was a 'he'). This sense of perpetual comfort available to male fetuses or

assumed male fetuses, is very relaxing for the fetus. Saheban was physically strong, developed high self-esteem and felt comfortable with her body in the womb of her mother.

When she came out of the womb, however, the situation changed with some drastic implications and an uncontrollable speed. Saheban came out eager to see her mother's face. She needed to concretize the loving, elating and in-awe-of-her voice.

She found her mother in split second from among many. She willed the woman who was holding her to take her to her mother. Her mother, instead of looking at her face, went for her warm covering cloth.

Okay, may be she wants to see my body first, like I wanted to see her face first. People have the right to be different. Why get alarmed?

Her mother glanced between Saheban's legs.

What is she looking at? Saheban wondered and that's when she heard her mother wail in such

pain that she could not help but jump into a state of shock directly from her peacefully floating state of wonderment.

What is it? She screamed the question at her mother.

You don't have it! Her mother wailed, strangling million tears.

What? What is it that I don't have, Amma? She screamed louder, now almost in panic.

The thing between your legs, you fool. Her mother was getting hysterical.

The thing between my legs? She wriggled and



"Saheban: You Caterpillar", A.K.D. Nice, AGE (Art Gallery of the Earth), 2020s.

Black ball point on white bond.

came right back into the comfortable fetal position. Her head snugly fit between her two knees, she had an excellent and clear view of between-her-legs. She looked intensely. There indeed was something between her legs. Mother did not look closely, Saheban thought with a sigh of relief.

It is here. She said comfortingly to her wailing mother. *It is here, Amma, it is.*

Her mother did not acknowledge.

Amma, it is here, Amma. She shouted as loud as she physically could.

Her mother felt so mad at her that she broke the continuity and rhythm of her wailing and said to her.

That's not IT.

What's not it?

That.

Okay, but it is between the legs.

Yes, I know. I have that too.

Then why do you say that its not it?

Yeah, its not. You have THAT.

I have what?

That.

That?

Yeah, that.

What's that?

Its definitely not IT.

Yeah, well I already got that.

What have you got?

I got something in my legs but its not IT, its THAT.

Yeah, you got that.

Okay, so now, what's that?

Its not —

Yeah, yeah I have that, what I have is not IT but that, so what's THAT?

That's not —

I got that, Amma. Now listen to me carefully, do not get anxious, just listen to me.

Okay.

What is IT?

Its not—

No, Amma. What - Is - IT's - name? What do you call it?

P—Pee-nus-s.

Pee-nuss?

Yeah.

Now, Amma, what - is - THAT's - name? What do you call that?

C— cunt, dammit.

Cunt. Oh. And its not pee-nuss?

No.

And every one is supposed to have it?

Yeah.

So, where is my pee-nus? She demanded to know.

You don't have one.

Why not?

Get away from me. Her mother was now absolutely disgusted with her.

Don't close the inner communication system, Amma!

Jatee turned her face away.

Amma! Don't do that to me.

Jatee was now wailing for every one to hear.

She closed the channels, Saheban thought, *and just for something that I forgot to bring with me?*

Something called pee-nuss which is between the legs.

Oh, my god! It must be important. It can still be in her womb. Where is the midwife? May be she can get it out. I must try to get it, Amma is going nuts.

As chance would have it, just at that moment

when Saheban faced a short term crisis situation at ten minutes of age, the doctor picks her up.

Where is my pee-nuss? She screamed at the doctor.

The doctor had never bonded with her so he didn't get it. He thought she was screaming and crying for no reason at all.

Where is my pee-nuss? She tried to communicate again.

The doctor paid no attention to her whatsoever.

Where is my penis? She felt tremendous sense of oppression and a breach of her rights by this obvious silencing and forced invisibility.

She had to fight it. And in her struggle to gain a voice and to preserve her right to be heard, she chose to do the only thing she could do under her circumstantial limitations. She went and scratched his clean shaven cheeks with her ten tiny, soft nails.

The doctor who had IT between his legs instead of THAT, also had an extremely fragile ego. It is obvious that he could not put Saheban out of his mind, ever, and so instantly came out

with this sob story when Saheban was gaining media attention for her war against the Thick Waters.⁴

After that there were small exploits but a major gain came when she was three and a half. As every one else, Saheban was also required to study Wholy Chooran, the religious book of the state. Her teacher was an elderly bearded priest always wearing white cotton clothes to add emphasis to his purity and holiness. While teaching her, he would pick her up and put her in his lap where she often felt something hard under her. The holy man would rock her on the surface of the hard thing to bring in unison the rhythm, as he reverently recited verses from the Wholy Chooran, often going into a powerful fit of religio-spiritual ecstasy.

Every day Saheban wondered about the hard thing that she was continually being rocked on, she felt intimidated by the fit every now and then. One day, the priest was busy rocking her on the hard thing when something clicked into place within Saheban's cognition and discovery process. It seemed to her, she might have found an answer to her queries. She slid down from his lap without letting the hard thing move away, then before she picked her bum up she reached under her and firmly held the hard thing.

Is this IT? She asked eagerly.

The holy man ogled his eyeballs and screamed.

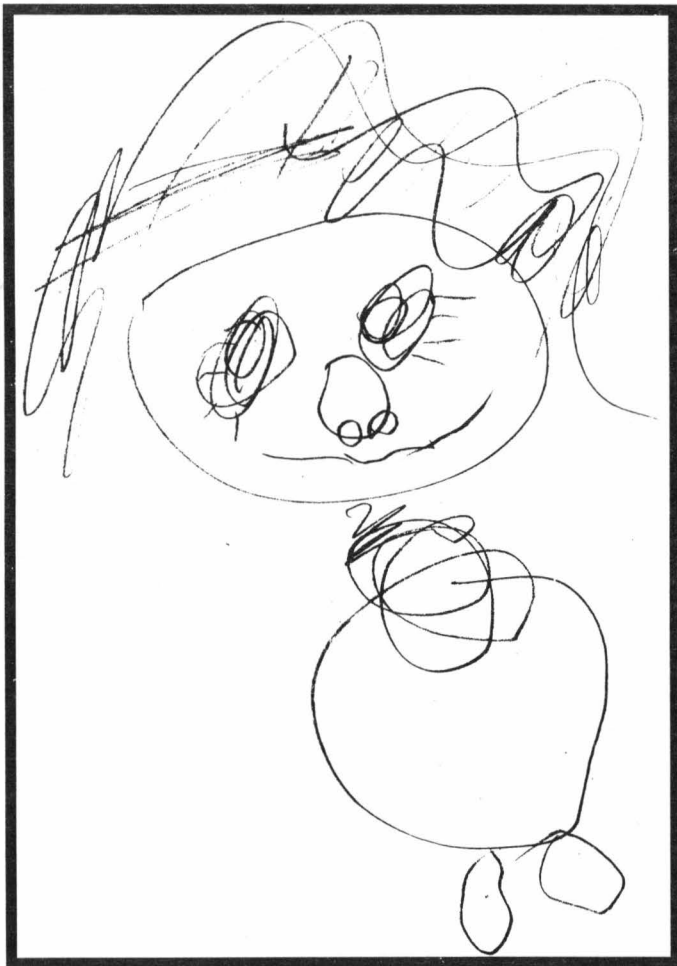
Is this IT? She needed an answer for sure.

The holy man tried to get up.

She refused to let go.

The holy man screamed again and then jerked himself away from her grip, screamed again and then scrambled out of his own room, turned into a school for young children.

Needless to say, Saheban was truly taken aback at this turn of events.



"The Princess of Mice", A.K.D. Nice, AGE, 3025.

Black ball point on recycled.

So she went home and found her mother working in the kitchen.⁵

Amma, I got a hold on IT.

Got a hold on what?

IT.

You did what?

Got a hold on IT.

O'my God! Whose IT, was it?

Maulvi Jee's.

Her mother fainted holding an antique china serving bowl in her hand.

The consequence of it was multifaceted at best. Jattee lost her job becoming a homeless single mother; her father stayed on and was promoted to the position of pimp from the lowly wage of security guard.

Many attribute these developments to the incredible loss of the bowl but in-depth research clearly brings other factors to light.

It is now proven that the following interaction between the Master, Maulvijee and Saheban's father did take place the same day, after the bowl was broken.

Master: *Yes Maulvi? Why are you here wasting my time?*

Maulvijee: *Master, I have important business.*

Master: *Okay, can you wrap it quick?*

Maulvijee: *Its complicated....*

Master: *Wrap it, you son of a dog.*

Maulvijee: *Yes, Master. S-Saheban has the spirit of Satan, incarnate....*

Master: *Oh, interesting. Who is Saheban?*

Maulvijee: *The daughter of your security guard.*

Master: *Oh, very interesting. I did not know he has daughters....*

Maulvijee: *I beg forgiveness for cutting you off, Master. She is only about four.*

Master: *Oh, very disappointing. 'Kaun jeetta hey teri zuluf ke sar ho ney tak'6*

Maulvijee: *Master, don't judge her according to her age. She is evil, Satan incarnate....*

Master: *What did she do?*

[Maulvijee brought his voice really low. Allah Baksh, the oral historians says that this part of the conversation was not heard by the ear-witness present in the room at the time.]

Master: *Incredible. Call her father.*

Saheban's father: *Master....*

Master: *You have two options: you take your female shit out of my house, or....*

Saheban's father: *I will do it Master.*

Master: *Excellent. Good boy. Sit.*

Saheban's father: *Thank you, Master.*

Master: *You are promoted from my security guard to my pimp.*

Saheban's father: *They will leave before sun-down, Master.*

Maulvijee, Saheban's father, ear-witness:

'Long Live The Master.

Down With The Evil.

Down With Female Spirit Of Satan.'

It is clear from this conversation that Saheban and her mother were made homeless by a total misrepresentation of actual facts. Also, the myth about Saheban being 'the female spirit of Satan' comes from this same interaction.

Later it was rumoured that Saheban actually could assume different spirits: of flowers, caterpillars, mice and million other things.

1 Historians give conflicting views about the origin and meaning of 'Pacpenistan'. The literal meaning of the term is 'The Milky State of Pure Penises' and is used to mean, 'The Milky Land of the People with Pure Penises'. The concept of the purity of the penis, historians believe, come from the fact that the majority of penesoids living in this land chose to remove the outer skin of the head of the penis thus making it pure. The word 'Milky' refers to the famous breast-milk farms which brought Pacpenistan into the first four breast-milk exporters to the biggest

pharmaceutical corporation of the universe. It was at that time that the word 'Milky' was proudly added to 'The State Of Pure Penises'. It was also at that time that the symbol of 'hila' [a moon fixated in his childhood, a classic case of 'arrested development'] was expanded to include the image of a woman in a perpetual state of post-natal situation. It is said that this woman on the fly— flag, stuck to the edges of the undergrown moon, is an indication of gender equality in the ruling philosophy of the state..

The progressive school of male historians and linguists differ with the above interpretation. They trace the origin of the name from the word 'pack' believing that the name means 'The Land of Packed Penises', while the League of Women Historians rejects it knowing it to be "a grave and misleading under-statement of the actual state of penises at this time in Pacpenistan." The League argues that the term simply means 'The Land of A Pack of Penises' (as in 'pack of wolves').

- 2 The practice of hiring male midwives was strongly opposed by the World Mid-Wifery Organization, a subsidiary of The United Midwives of the Mother Earth, on account that this practice was a conspiracy to take women's jobs and pregnant women's rights away. This view was militantly opposed by the World Congress Of Totally Unreal Women, Against Women [WCTURW,AW]*.

*[The name was later abbreviated to W,AW. A spokesperson of the W,AW, Major Generally Dolly Civic, in her opening address to the 129th Congress of her organization, said: "We might be known by as many names as our independent and wealthy chapters worldwide, including of course, our coloured, ignorant but filthy-rich sisters in the Twenty-fifth World. But what explains our mandate best in four letters is the word 'W,AW'.

Translate it into your own languages, my

unreals, and have no fear because our brothers around the world approve of it. As a proof of this assertion I present the electronic mail received moments ago right here in our head offices in Saudi Arabia*, a message sent by the World Order of Totally Unreal Men supporting the promotion of 'W,AW' as our motto".]

*[[Just for the record, the establishment of 'W,AW' head offices in Saudi Arabia was symbolic in nature while this international organization was guided by its regional office in the state of Florida in North America.]]

- 3 It might be of interest to our readers to know that Jattee was honoured in early 1980s by the Great Underground Womb Organization [GUWO] with the title 'Womb Defender 10', for her refusal to be surrogate in the birth of a child.
- 4 For her war against the Thick Waters, please refer to page numbers 22,7800 in the unabridged edition of 'Adventures of Saheban: A Biography of "The Relentless Warrior"' at your local women's bookstore. If it is not available, look under the counter.
- 5 It was a huge kitchen of a rich household where her mother worked as a maid, cook and cleaning 'lady' while her father worked as a gardener, security guard and pimp.
- 6 Ghalib, Urdu 'who will live (long enough) for your hair to grow back'.

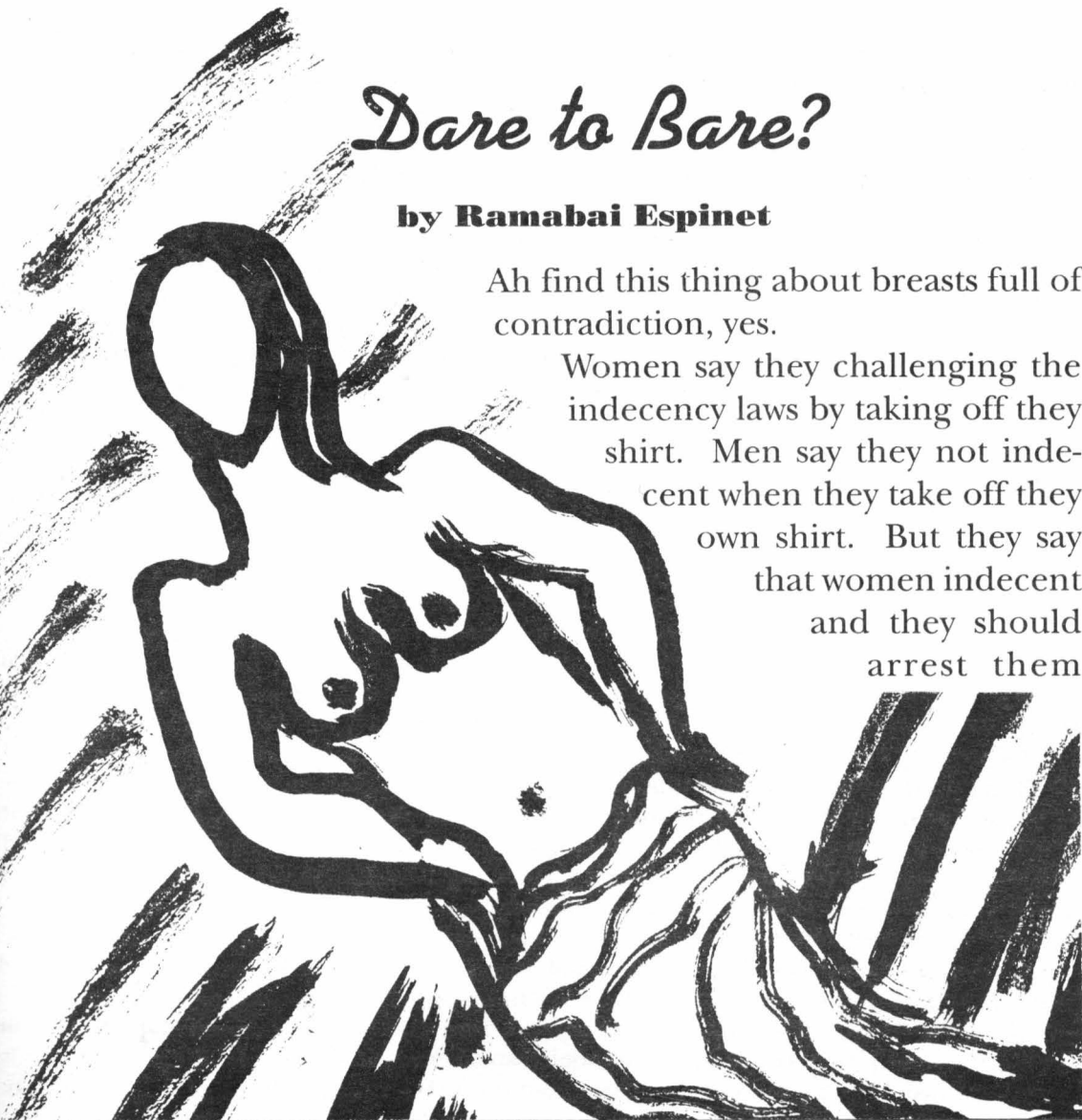


Dare to Bare?

by **Ramabai Espinet**

Ah find this thing about breasts full of contradiction, yes.

Women say they challenging the indecency laws by taking off they shirt. Men say they not indecent when they take off they own shirt. But they say that women indecent and they should arrest them



when they do the same thing, and doh mind that, they go push and shove and run up with camera and camcorder and all kinda thing to see the women and them "in a state of indecency."

Is a funny world for true when on a hot day, or at the beach, any man could yawn and stretch and take off he shirt. Yuh think a woman could do the same? Well think again.

In the demonstration in Waterloo over the weekend, I see a young woman protesting with she breasts taped down solid with black tape and CENSORED scrawl all over it. That is a symbol for repression mother in truth!

So wha' wrong with breasts? A breast is a natural, functional organ. Is the receptacle of mother's milk. Is the best source of sustenance for a newborn infant. Is a moral, wholesome thing. Why all the shame and scandal associated with this particular body part?

Part a the problem is really because de people in charge, de world of consumerism and advertising and dem tings dey, need to mystify, package, sell and control the female body. So woman cleavage now convert into a kinda time-share.

Yuh could use cleavage to sell everything from motor-car to pretzel these days and people go buy. It just go to show how much power and control a woman body could have if she decide to really use it in the skin trade.

So when woman decide that all a de whole power structure doh own she breasts but that is she and she alone who go decide when she dare to bare, or when she choose to cover up, or when and where she go breast-feed she baby, then de whole power structure does start to shiver and shake and get really frighten.

They feel that it go be de end of the world as they know it. And yuh know something? Don't think is only a feeling. Is de God truth, yuh hear me?

Because de day that all kinda woman get up and say listen man, is my body and you can't tell me how to jam it into dis or dat or de other shape, and if mih breasts stand up straight or fall below me waist is mine, and who tell you God put me here just to be a object of beauty for you eh? Man, I just living mih life so leh me pass, yuh hear. De day all kinda woman get up and say that, well, is all fall down.

When that day come, all kinda vice and peep-show go fall flat on they face just so. Who go want to pay to siddown in some dark lil tavern in the middle of the day, drinking beer and watching t.v. while some poor lady, struggling to support two/three fatherless chirren, have to take off she bodice and bring dey beer just to get a few dollars?

All that kinda thing go be dead when people see breast as normal and natural. Buh human beings so perverse. They so like scandal and bacchanal it ain't funny. From the time God pelt we outa de garden of Eden we dey chasing down forbidden fruit. De day breast get normal and natural, ten to one they go dress up a arm or a leg and turn it into some other kinda fetish. It look like we can't help it. That is how we stop.

And yuh know why? Because it have a dream of power and control. Everybody have de dream, that ain't no secret. Is just that de power and control right now in the hands of the man and dem. And they ain't go give up power and control so easy.

Yuh want to know why breasts have to keep lock up? Not because every man in town to tun rapist when he see the occasional pair of boobs sauntering casually by. Not because a that. Is because woman own body is not they own. Man must regulate it, control it, say when to take

off clothes, and how much, where to nurse your baby and so on.

Man have a stake in breast-commerce yuh hear. They done seize woman breast and then go and sell it to other man in strip joint, in advertising, "cheesecake" and ting. Is a kinda exchange they know bout. Man don't like woman to give away she body for free. She must value sheself. That mean she must sell sheself under the trade grounds them set up already.

That is why they really run to see with camcorder and camera and ting. To catch a "piece" of the action. And when they see a set a women marching with they shirt on, and some man without shirt marching with them, they start to bawl, "Bare your breasts!" One righteous fella even say, "Buh allyuh is something else yes. Allyuh ain't even live up to allyuh convictions!"

As far as I could see de only conviction in he head was the conviction to see a "free-show." How much more miles to cross Mudda?

Dare to bare? Yeah! Is a ordinary natural thing. Is a ordinary, NORMAL part a we body. What is indecent about breasts?

(This article is written in the Caribbean Creole english common to Trinidad, with snatches of Jamaican and Guyanese Creoles at intervals.)



Words and Music

by Sheila James

You always thought you could handle your women
you had them pegged as The Weaker Sex
one kiss and you had them wrapped in your linen
and then moved on to someone else.

And every dame was yours for the taking
you'd pick her up and put her in her place
skip the drink head straight for the love making
at least that's what you'd call her to her face.

You always liked to move in high places
with women with large portfolios
lady lawyers would drop their brief cases
the moment you walked in their doors.

But then you thought you'd set your sights higher
in court, the Queen of the Opera Stage
you didn't know you were playing with fire
'til you fell victim to her rage.

*She's a Diva
and she knows the score
she's sung it more
than 1000 times*

*She's a Diva
she's bigger than life
her voice is a knife
that would cut your
heart in two.*

And so you thought you'd win her with dinner
and treat her to Italiano cuisine
but you just sat there watched your ego
grow slimmer
when she stood up and ordered for 3.

You tried to woo her with cheap simple phrases
but she knew Shakespeare like the back
of her hand
while you stumbled through inarticulate
mazes
lady MacBeth was making her own plans

*She's a Diva
she's had leading men
in the palm of her hand
and she'll crush them flat*

*She's a Diva
brings men to their knees
and they aim to please
they're at her command*

*She's a Diva
yeah she knows the score
yeah she sung it more
than 1000 times*

*She's a Diva
she's bigger than life
her voice is a knife
that will cut your voice in two*



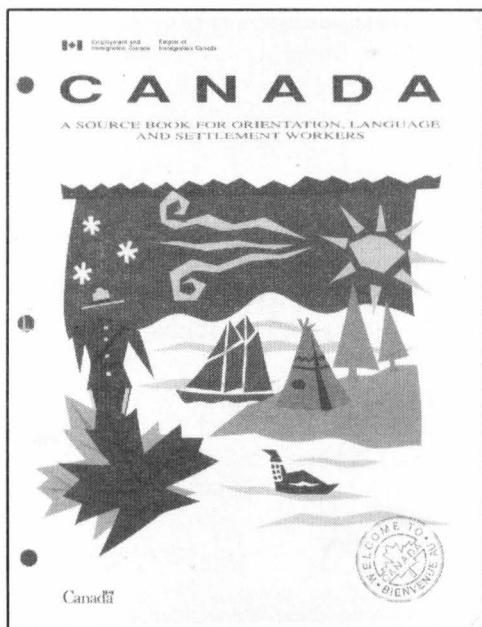
Canada Re-Source-ed

A Complete Guide to Assimilation

a review of Canada, a Source Book For Orientation, Language and Settlement Workers from Employment & Immigration Canada

reviewed by Sharmsar

Recently Employment and Immigration Canada came out with a source book that was meant to make life easier for us immigrants by providing useful insights to settlement workers and service providers about us immigrants, the everyday problems that we face and then how to help us cope and expedite the process of our assimilation into the mainstream. We are going to tell you about this very book here.



First of all let it be stated for the record that we are here to humour you and not to piss you off. If what the book entails pisses you off, makes you nauseated, gives you unexpected migraine, do not blame us. Instead, without wasting any

time check up your cultural inoculation record to make sure that you did get all the shots of “INTEGRATION” and were fully “DEWORMED” of all your third world hang-ups. And if you are sure on that account and are still getting pissed off by the contents of the above book, then it is serious. In that case, rush to the nearest Multicultural Clinic and report the outbreak of this new strain of stomach flu (obviously smuggled in from Hong-Kong, Calcutta, Uganda or any other of those bleak, infested, God-forsaken places) for in this great country of ours (where only three percent of the natives survived the disease called white man’s burden) we all live a totally sanitized life (foreign AIDS notwithstanding).

Anyway, getting back to the book called “Canada, A Source Book for Orientation, Language and Settlement workers”, produced for Employment & Immigration Canada” by Arctus Production Ltd. The book is published in 1991 and is such a great literary achievement that it had to be printed twice in the same year. It can be found proudly displayed at a prominent corner of any social service agency (not that they

are afraid that their funding will be stopped if the book is not displayed) or any federal government office. Because of the amount and importance of the contents, it is understandably a large volume. Something like 361 pages, to be precise, beautifully laid out on glossy white paper, with heavy-duty margins on all four sides for ease of reading. We are of course not implying here that the margins are so wide because it was done on per page basis. We are not at all implying that a more functional layout and a simple kind of paper could have saved measly taxpayer money. And, anyway, we are here to humour you and not to do a cost/benefit analysis on book publishing for you.

The cover is a must for framing and posting for new immigrants on a low art budget. But before you rush to your local photocopier and spend your hard earned pennies, let us give you a review of the art work which is of very high calibre, loaded with real politic symbolism which is in total harmony with the new form of political realism so fashionable nowadays.

Let us, for example, tell you about the pictorial story on the cover page. The background is an immensely blue sky dominated by the shining fabled Sun of the British Empire (famous for not setting ever), the northern wind blowing a ship (Columbus's Mayflower, we presume) menacingly towards a Tee Pee located on a shrinking piece of land. Nearby lurks the outline of an RCMP uniform. Foreground is probably the outcome of the story. You already guessed it? Two leaves of maple and one loony. Hallelujah.

The book is wide in scope and thorough in it's approach. Taking nothing for granted, the authors went into great detail about different aspects of everyday life in corporate Canada. The book succeeds in establishing the virtues of the Canadian living experience, and in the process, totally trouncing the life styles and

meanings of our pasts.

The manual, geared for service providers, is divided in five parts. Part one talks about geography, weather, food, clothing, shelter and avoiding embarrassment. A WASP version of Canadian families, Public behaviour, what Canadians admire, what and when Canadians eat, what Canadians wear (And how can they afford to pay for all that?) Canadian sports and the Canadian quest to produce something called an art form. The one minor teeny weenie bit exemption here is the absence of any Canadian history. But apparently it was deemed strategically/politically incorrect to mention in these pages that

- all current Canadians are immigrants from other lands
- out of gratitude for welcoming everyone, the real native people have all been sent on a long vacation to special vacation properties, code named "RESERVES".

THE GREAT HERITAGE "The ultimate objective of the book is to provide newcomers with a better understanding of Canada."

It informs us in the beginning that "all newcomers enter Canada under the rules of the Canadian Immigration Act, which does not discriminate on the grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion or sex."

Only a white person entering Canada with a Canadian passport could possibly believe this because the rest of us, who this book is geared to anyway, have had completely the opposite experience.

Let us be clear about one thing here. This book is focused on the immigrants; and an immigrant, to them, is a coloured person, a coloured person is you and I. So dear Shehrzads, for their purpose, all we need to understand of their culture is that it is an "undercurrent of social conventions that we (white Canadians)

hold in common, regardless of our ancestors' country of origin, or whether we (white Canadians) speak English or French."

In other word if you live in Canada and do not speak English or French you are no part of no current (under or over) of any social convention whatsoever. Be advised that the Canadian recipe of Multiculturalism is strictly a Franco/Anglophone concoction, protected by the Federal French Language act.

The source book claims to use "a descriptive" methodology rather than a "prescriptive" one. It is, then, puzzling when it says that to be at home in Canada, newcomers must master a new system of interaction with components that range from table manners to the way Canadians shake hands.

Us coloured people are understood to be coming from "nations in which religion and politics are not separated, or from countries that retain a hierarchical system in which power is equated with maleness, age and inherited position".

Not so in Canada, Eh! Well, congratulations! Following this assumption, the Reform party, the Right to Life Coalition, the Mulroney crowd, the John Crosbie, the Heritage Front and all such other entities, may be declared perfectly Canadian.

Jump Starting you to Canadian way of life (a brief list of critical do's and don'ts) The Book sure wants to leave nothing to chance (or discretion). So when comes to imparting critical information it does not mince words and calls a spade, a spade. A few examples of its cultural sensitivity and objectiveness are as follows:

Thou shalt not

- defecate or urinate anywhere other than in a private or public toilet
- eat without a fork and knife
- spit in public

- expose your genitals in public
- go topless (even in January)
- shop anywhere but at A & P, Loblaws, Steinberg and your friends at IGA
- miss a Monday night hockey game on TV

Thou shalt Eat the meals between 7 and 9 P.M. and call this meal dinner At the office wear suits or jackets with ties, minimal jewellery and black or brown shoes. Line up or queue especially when dealing with authorities such as customs, immigration, employment, etc. Say "sorry" if you happen to burp on the dinning table AND CONFORM. "They should be aware that the more and the sooner they adjust to the very broad notions of what is acceptable and ordinary, the easier they shall find the transition to living comfortably in Canada."

The book is meant to be used by settlement workers and ESL teachers and faithfully provides them with a plethora of valuable tips/insights/hints about how to do their jobs more meaningfully. Following are a few tips for the above mentioned about how to generate a discussion with the new immigrants:

A FEW DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS How and where might someone urinate in your country? Do people "line up" or "queue" in your country?

SOME CULTURAL SENSITIVITY "Eating as much as you can is not a sign of appreciation, nor is belching, which is considered impolite in Canada. If you do happen to belch, you should say "excuse me".

A THOUGHTFUL HINT "Many Canadians eat a breakfast consisting of some form of cereal, toasted bread with honey, jam or marmalade, accompanied by beverages such as fruit juice, milk, coffee or tea."

THE SHARED SYMBOL The Royal Cana-

dian Mounted Police (for resistance to the turban, we suppose).

Like we said earlier, we are here to humour you and not to piss you off. (and quite a job of that we are doing). Also, remember that the book is meant to help settlement workers in helping the IMMIGRANTS settle down. And an IMMIGRANT is a coloured person. A coloured person is you and I. This book is about YOU and I.

It shows us all that was regretfully wrong with the cultural baggage that you and I are carrying along i.e. our pagan, uncivilized, unclean, unhygienic ways. And then contrasts it with the totally sanitized human cultural

achievement, the miracle of kindness, the immigrant's dream, the fountain of justice that the Canadian culture is.

The book succeeds remarkably in achieving the above. It reaffirms the splendour and superiority of WASP way of living and doing. In this interpretation of Canada nobody notices any racism or discrimination. All is well. The task in hand is brainwashing and indoctrinating the immigrant, that is a coloured person, and that is you and I.

So now, after having actually humoured you up, we let you go, but not before this piece: our own poetry.

O Canada
you lovely fair land
conquered by racist myths
who are hoggin' it
like it's their father's land

O Canada
our chosen native land
we the labourers
of the third world
the engineers
and doctors
we all dishwash for you
serve and sweep
for you

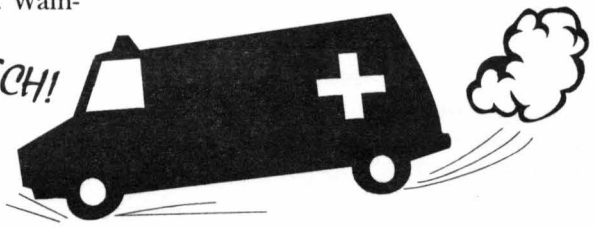


The Emergency

by Honor Ford-Smith

The ambulance comes. It is an old thing that looks like a fat metal lizard. I watch the window as it lumbers slowly to a stop as if it is a living thing that has heart disease. Two men come into the house.

“Oh My” says Mr. Williams, the older of the two men
“Imagine is Doc sick. I never think Dr. Wainwright could sick. From I know Doc, all when she used to work down a public hospital, she never sick. Good day Doc” he says going to the bedside “is a shame to see you so sick when you do so much for so many. Allow me please to say a word of prayer.”



Doc is flattered, for she nods, almost smiles, in spite of the pain. “Let us pray.” The entire company stop in the midst of whatever they are doing. Putting a towel into a bag. Searching for a nightgown. Miss G who has been pouring out a cup of tea, pours it back into the thermos and clasps her hands. The others bow their heads and shut their eyes. He puts one hand on Doc’s head and the other on her hand “O Lord I am begging you to take this child in charge. I am praying O God, that you will be the doctor in this operation! I am asking you to heal her Lord,” I open my eyes. The prayer is going to be one of those long ones, “Bow you head and close yuh eyes,” whispers G loudly pushing my head down on my chest. “At last you going to learn to pray.”

We carry her downstairs on a chair. She wants to walk but we won’t let her try. She refuses to go on a stretcher. Miss G goes with her into the ambulance. I watch them go prepared to follow in the car. I wave good-bye when they seem settled. Mr. Williams slams his door and starts the engine. “Crrups” goes the engine. Nothing happens. “Crrrrups.” Still nothing. A third

more deliberate, "Crrrrrrrrrrups."

Mr. Williams sends the other man to open the bonnet. He opens the huge old shrieking lid, studies the engine and knocks something. Finally he shouts "Alright. Try her now." "Crrrrups" and again nothing.

Miss G comes out of the ambulance. They confer by the left headlamp. "You have any jumper cables?" asks Mr. Williams. G sucks her teeth. "You no supposed to ask us fi dat. Suppose him did have heart attack? Him would a dead already." "You see Miss," says Mr. Williams to me (ignoring G) "It really need a new ambulance. Dis old one hardly have any use. But dem say dem no have no money so we haffi try a ting, an all yuh try dem still a under mine yuh!" Here he pauses and gives G a mild cuteye. "I cyaan keep a pair of cables, I tell yuh. As fast as I buy a pair dem tief it out. Dem tief di las cables from three month a back and all di requisition, dem don't pay me no mind."

I look for jumper cables in the trunk of my mother's car.

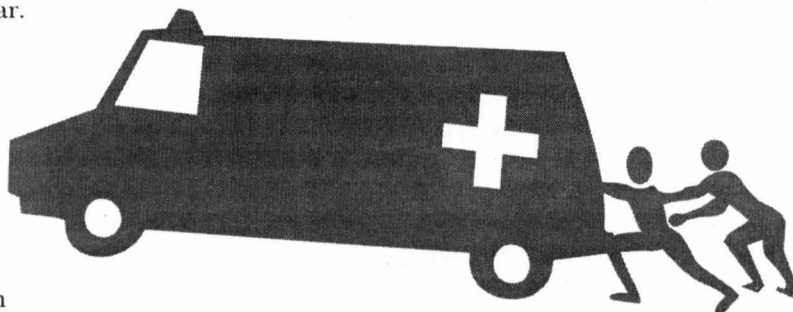
There are none. Mr. Williams looks suddenly weary. He goes to the back of the vehicle. Says something to Doc, and then summons the little group again.

"You will haffi push" he informs us, with no show of fear. G laughs mockingly, kisses her teeth more loudly "But Jesus Christ. Anybody ever see my trial. MAC!" she shouts for the watchman from ARAFAT's GUEST HOUSE next door "COME QUICK! DI GOVERNMENT EMERGENCY AMBULANCE WANT TO PUUUUSH."

Mac Millan, the security guard at Arafat's guest house jumps the fence and comes. They remove Doc from the back (to lighten the load) and put her under the overhang of the roof. That is as much shade as there is in the yard. She says nothing, is breathless, greyish. I squeeze her hands. They are cold. "We goin fix everything Doc," says Mr. Williams. "Don't it?" he adds looking at us one by one. Altogether we nod. Then we line up behind the ambulance and push. The enormous heavy lizard-like vehicle hardly moves at first and then it picks up speed as it hits a brief incline on the drive way.

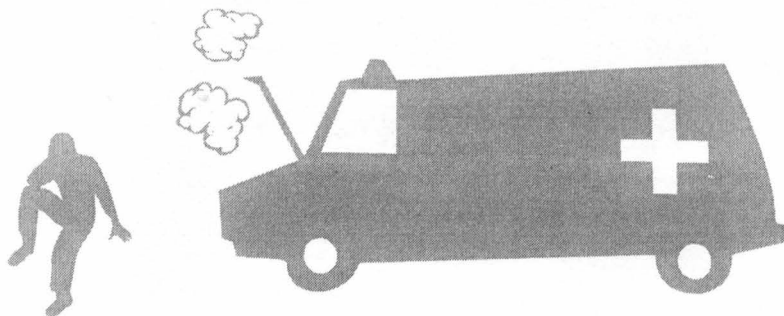
"Clutch it! Clutch it!" shouts Mac. "Wah di hell yuh tink me a do!" shouts back Williams as the ambulance lurches and hiccoughs and finally comes to a full silent stop by the gate where the main road traffic streams by indifferently. We lean on the bonnet of the vehicle beside the dying woman's tongue tree and pant.

"Come we try it one more time" Mac says. We agree. We are determined it will work. I pray silently. "Make it work. Make it work. We will give it all our strength, focus all our concentration on it as if were our own breath creeping away from us. Please make it work." Mr. Williams comes out and gives instructions about how we are to push it, when to pick up speed, who should stand



where etcetera, etcetera. Two boys selling newspapers at the corner join the group and Mr. Williams places them between Miss G and me. A woman selling cigarettes at a make shift table calls encouraging phrases and asks "Who inside?" and "Wah do him." A man who had been waiting at the ruined bus stop across the street also comes. He is put beside Mac at the back. Off we go again down Hope Road. Pushing the empty ambulance past the disconnected traffic lights, past the Governor General's residence, where a policeman standing at the guard box is reading something, where a homeless woman is still asleep on her cardboard bed on the bankside, past the roofless church, past the bent rows of electric wires, finally coming to rest in front of the tumbledown zig zagging fence outside the Office of the Prime Minister. That is where we give up.

When we get back to the house, without the ambulance, Doc has moved herself from the stretcher and has propped herself up in the car. "The state of the health service may be bad, but you don't have to turn it into a poppy show," she says, her lips moving tightly against her teeth. "Get in now." G. piles into the car grumbling. I follow. We drive her to the hospital in silence.



*Honor Ford-Smith is Jamaican and comes from a popular theatre background. She is also a writer and a graduate student at OISE in Toronto. She edited **Lionheart Gal**, published by Sister Vision Press, 1987.*

Again, Caught ...



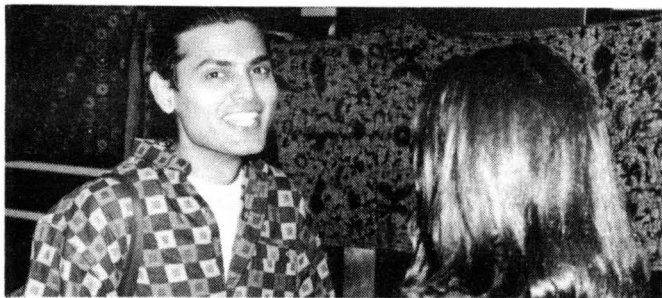
Hot, Connie and Paulina



Laughing, Vasu Patel and Makeda Silvera



Practicing new trends in South Asian Parenting...



Vision-ing, Mark Haslam and WQ

At the Diva Launch on October 1, 1992 at Clinton's Tavern between 7pm and 3am.



From Promiscuity to Celibacy

(A Creative Piece on Sexuality)

by Sheila James

I am a South Asian slut! Raised a dutiful daughter of East Indian medical doctors, I realized early in life that I would fail to meet the professional and personal expectations of my parents. You see, I aspire to nothing more than to have a good...no, a great sex life.

My obsession with sex began when I discovered the "dirty" pictures in the National Geographic magazines (you know the ones.) Anyway, I would covet the magazines, take them to my room and greedily devour them with my sex year old eyes. Often I'd share my photo treasures with other children wondering if they felt those exciting tingles at seeing full breasts and the dark nipples of the African woman. I dreamed that one day my breasts would emerge so dark and full, but that dream has yet to reach fruition. Well, my penchant for National Geographic came to a halt when I was caught redhanded by my shocked and disappointed mother. "Shameful girl" echoed over and over in my head and the magazines were moved to my parent's office. This incident, however, didn't dissuade me one bit. By putting pen to paper, I realized that I could create my own anatomically correct characters. Pictures of naked bodies surfaced all over our house: on the telephone directory, in my sister's scribbles, on desk tops and walls. My art of course was quite naive. You see, I knew little about sex and even less about sexual intercourse. It was not until I discovered the Kamasutra in my parent's bedside table that the world of fucking was opened to me... Was it 36 or 136 positions? I examined each drawing one by one, imagining my perfect, puritanical parents engaging in such activity. Well, well, well... With their unspoken go ahead, my fantasies flourished.

I entered my own fantasies as a super sex star! Naturally, I became well-endowed. Unnaturally, I became a blonde. Why not? All the sex objects on T.V., film and magazines were blonde haired and blue eyed. I figured I could adjust the color in my head to fit the role. Who would ever know? As my fantasies became more detailed, I sought new inspiration. Where else could I find detail but in my parents medical journals. This is where I first glimpsed the female genitalia. As non-traditional casting was not yet in vogue, all the photography models were white skinned. I saw pink vagina, pink lips, and white asshole. "Hmmm...so this is what it looks like." I decided a self-examination was long overdue. You can imagine my surprise when at 9 years old, I squatted over a small hand mirror to discover that my hot pink vagina was modestly covered by purplish lips and leering at me from behind was the wrinkly eye of my little brown

asshole. It was mocking me saying, "ha, ha we fooled you!" Did I really think that my genitals would resemble the ones in the photos? Talk about internalized racism.

The years went by and puberty hit. So did pimples, strange proportions, and embarrassment. I went under...to the world of my fantasies. I had thousands of scenarios featuring different people, different places and different positions. One of my favorites was the fantasy where I became a high class hooker. Of course I knew nothing about the reality of prostitution. I simply associated the profession with lots of sex, which I wanted, and lots of money, which I also wanted. Luckily for my parents, I didn't take my vocational dream too seriously. Problem was, I was bad in business. I ended up sleeping with people for free! Well...not exactly

free. There are always small paybacks. Like flattery for instance. I discovered very quickly that the fewer clothes I wore the more compliments I'd receive. It got so that I'd be on a date, stark naked, saying "Ah, gee you don't mean it. Ah go on..." I guess I should add that I experienced my first date, first kiss, and first lay all in the same night. I was 19 years old, in university and extremely horny. You see, being a South Asian girl, living in a predominantly white, middle class town, and having a curfew at 8:30 p.m. minimized my chances of getting a date, let alone a boyfriend. But don't feel sorry for me. My early 20s proved quite active.

Sex soon became a substitute for everything: food, drugs, exercise, recreation, attention, affection and unfortunately, love. It was a big ego booster and I shared my ego with everyone. Yes, I've been around the block enough times to know the neighborhood and the drivers have



been of both sexes. No, gender was never an issue. I lusted after men and I lusted after women, so please indulge a little generalization. My experience has shown me that men are easier lays than women. Put it this way, I've slept with most of my male friends and tried to sleep with most of my female friends. Ah, but this shouldn't come as a surprize in such an outwardly heterosexual and heterosexist world.

Some friends say I should identify myself as a bisexual, but I'd rather just call myself sexual. Afterall, I do have sex with myself and I must admit that I am the most willing, reliable and faithful partner I've ever had. Fifteen years and the flame still burns. Of course sex toys help: dildos, erotic literature and the old hand mirror. In nights of self-absorbed passion, I'd often hold the mirror above my vulva pretending I was my own lusty lover. What a change from the medical journal days.

Yes, a lot of things have changed. I decided to commit myself to a year of celibacy. During this time, I reflected upon my sexual history and how it was somehow shaped by the images in the environment around me. I had internalized racism and sexism to such a degree that my way of belonging was to be sexually acceptable to almost anyone. My needs propelled me down a reckless road. There was both fun and frustration along the way but most of the time I felt I had lost control of the wheel. The year of celibacy not only helped me to develop amazing self-control, but self-satisfaction as well. After lots of gentle caressing and self-discipline, I've come to love my cunt. Now I see sexuality as a jewel; sometimes undervalued and given away, other times overvalued and locked away, and all too often forced from us against our will. In some hands, the jewel is dull. In other hands it emanates light and beauty. And I can proudly attest that I own my sexuality and as long as it remains in the right hands, mine, it works like a gem.

(Sheila James is a theatre artist, musician and social activist presently working in Toronto. South Asian by origin, she was born in England and immigrated to Canada with her family in 1968. For the past three years, Sheila has worked in popular theatre collectives (Company of Sirens, Mixed Company), writing pieces on social issues like racism, violence against women, child abuse and employment equity. She has also composed music for various productions by the Company of Sirens and Carousel Players. Sheila has just completed her first play Canadian Monsoon, and is currently involved in a collective playwrighting group focusing on child abuse.)



Poems by Shani Mootoo

Bu' A A!

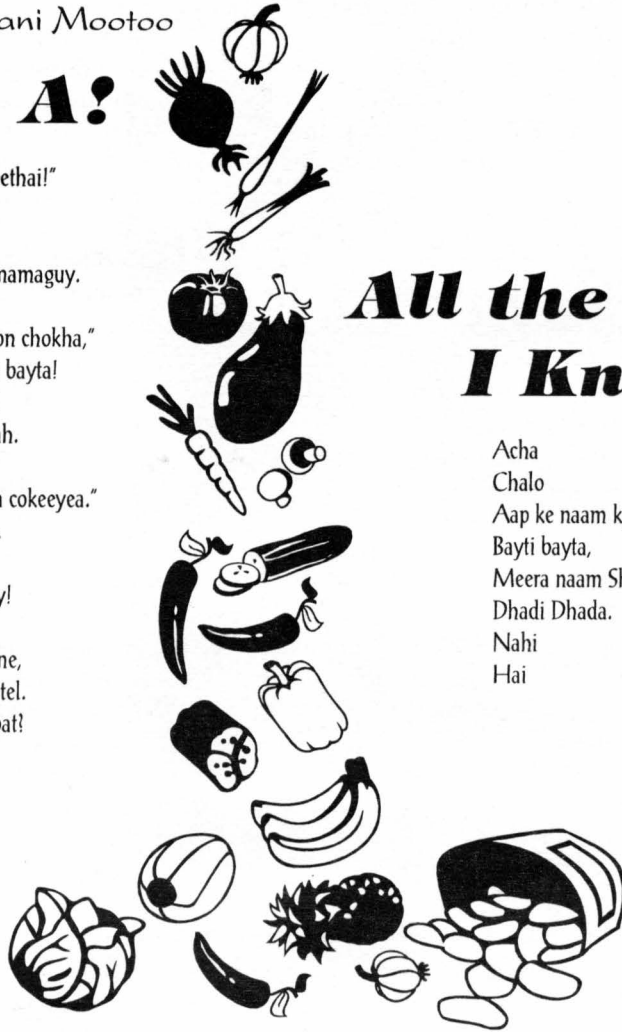
Hardi aloo "Sita Gita Meethai!"
Paymee pone Koorma
Aloo dhal tabanka!
Baigan peewah, junjhut mamaguy.

Jeera jhundi, "Gulab jamon chokha,"
Anchar roti, pelau baigan bayta!
Chundy aloo dal paratha!
Pomerac chataigne peewah.

"Doodoose sapodilla peera cokeeyea."
Pooja, busup-shirt joovay.
Googlie junjhut calaloo,
Pholourie - Pandit Panday!

Mauby:sagaboy pelau pone,
Shadow-benny sorrell pastel.
Cookoo, la jablesse, jagabat!
Careete corailee parang!

Moko jumbie bara,
Agoutie.
Chip-chip ackra!



All the Hindi I Know

Acha
Chalo
Aap ke naam kya hai?
Bayti bayta,
Meera naam Shani hai.
Dhadi Dhada.
Nahi
Hai

Shani writes poetry, is a painter, makes videos and is coming out with a book to be published by Press Gang, Vancouver in 1993

TOGETHER WE CAN STOP RACISM!

THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON US!

TAKE ACTION!



DESTROY RACISM!

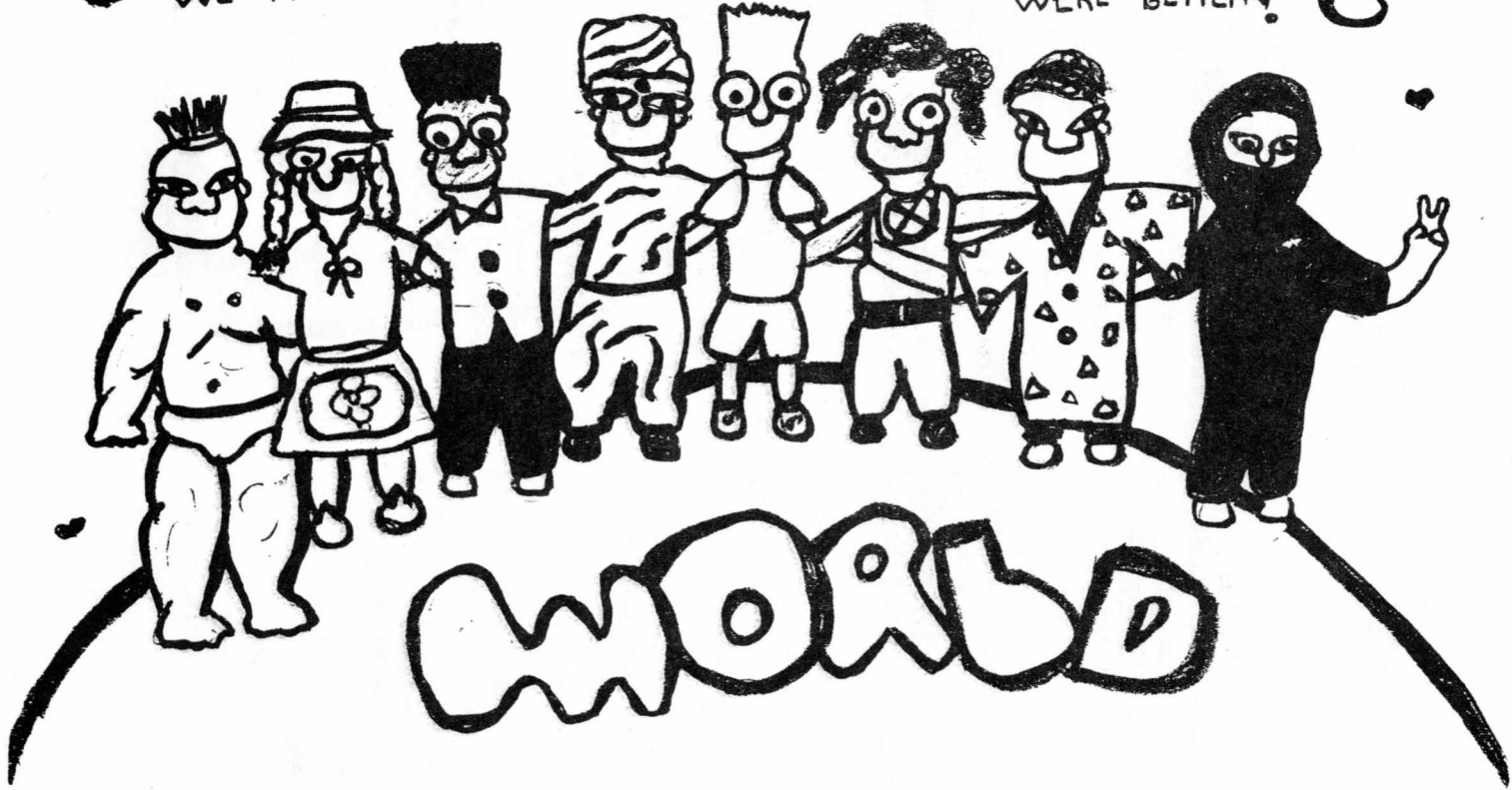
WE CAN CHANGE

WE ARE ALL ONE PEOPLE!



TOGETHER WE'RE BETTER!

THE



WORLD

Classified Ads



Exchange

My working class background so that I could become at least middle class so that I could intellectualize and write about my working class experience. D.C.D 666-2422

Seeking The Ultimate...

Young, light-skinned, able-bodied, BENGALI, lesbian-identified feminist bisexual of Brahmin descent seeks sensitive, non-ageist, non-classist, non-bi-phobic, big-boobed, butchy and femmy female for safe, hot, creamy, drippy and exquisite ecstasy..... understanding of the language an asset, race politics a must, vegetarians will be considered, SMers unfortunately not tolerated, dark-skinned women preferred (for purely aesthetic reasons, not out of internalized guilt....) D.C.D. 419-7256

Needed

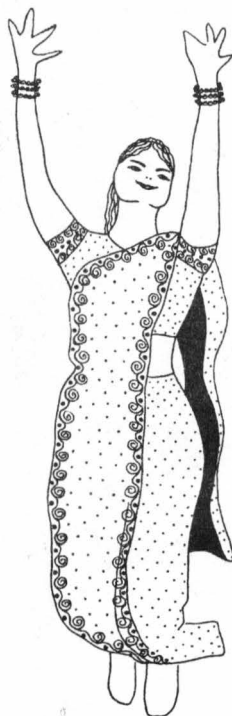
A South Asian man capable of working with South Asian women without being fixed. No experience necessary. Will train. Call 1-800-420-4204

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Half pack of cigarettes. Recently left smoking. Looking for a smoker with integrity. The pack was bought here in Canada, cost me a fortune. D.C.D. 264-7351

Exchange

The painful reality of hiding my country's food: egg plants, green beans, peppers and garlic. For being the monopolist owner



in gaining the monetary privilege of yuppitized food. D.C.D. 599-6776

Needed Desperately

The anthology on Theory of Feminist Collectivism. Updated version preferred. Will not accept without a complete training manual. (Emergency situation, interview scheduled mid of next week). If you have it don't hesitate, call D I S - T R E S S will pickup within Canada.

Exchange

My young white skin for any shade of Brown, Yellow, Solid Black preferred. White privilege comes free with it. Desperate. Need to get a contract position as a multicultural worker. Job is lousy, no benefits, no security. But it is a job. D.C.D. 439-4179

I Wish

I wish, the food that is sent to Cuba from Western countries, reaches the Cuban people instead of feeding the military to continue the oppression. D.C.D. 403-4127



HELP AVAILABLE

ATTENTION! All Ethnocultural institutions, Ethnic Counsellor available. Specialist in Ethnoracial issues with pan canadian cross cultural perspective. Trained to deal with persons in community setting in linguistically appropriate manner. Several years of cultural sensitivity experience. Pluralistic-Cultural personality will appeal to colourful women in particular. Operational knowledge of intergenerational conflict, ethnicity and language barriers in racial communities. Skills include powerful insight, resourcing, accessing and activating delivery systems. Desirous of performing advocacy and issue based work in non-dominant cultures and networking with racial sensitivity. Trained in mainstream models with working knowledge of alternative mode. Can work across cultured, largely abused populations without difficulty on a case to case, flexitime basis. Especially interested in working with Vis. Min. women. Salary: peanuts welcome.... Invisible Minority Organizations need not reply. Contact Smita Vir Tyagi boxed in at 565-5555.

For Sale

My only pair of Cowboy boots. Can't stand on their own when taken off. Black leather, good base, neutral colour. Add any ornaments. Bought in early eighties as K.D. Lang's career development was gathering pace. Connecting to the gender courses side, not on the edge anymore. No more Butch, I know what side I'm on. 403-488-3200

Wanted

A woman that's into SPIRITUAL LOVE to have drinks in the GRAVEYARDS among tombs and spirits... We can make beautiful love in the open fresh air... Please call and let my fantasy come true...D.C.D. 235-8689

Volunteer

Willing to volunteer time and work for nothing. Willing to work under duress and sub-human conditions. Enjoy political conflicts and unrest. Power and domination a must. D.C.D. 539-9023

YOUNG, Light-Skinned

Lesbian-identified feminist bisexual seeks same.

Support Group

Are you having techno-related nightmares and sleepless nights? Worried/depressed/stressed over your invisible answering machine? Maestro? Call waiting? How about your video player/recorder and c.d. machine? Too many remote controls? Is your car talking back? Wordperfect, Windows and PageMaker getting you down? Why not come in for a free consultation and enrol in our support group. Call TECH NERDS for our nearest location. D.C.D. 888-9999

Lesbian Seeks Arranged Marriage

with suitable woman. Race, caste, religion no barrier. All barriers possible to negotiate. Agreement renewed on yearly monthly basis. Can you deal with the

engaging and striking presence of magical eyes, talented hands and an honest and gentle heart? Checkered past and low-income but well on the way to a bright future in a blossoming field. Applicants must enjoy fame and travel. Willing to re-locate (references available on request). No booze, drugs, neurotics, color queens or self-righteous upper middle-class Marxists. Please send this ad with letter, photo and references to Didiji Match-Making Service, courtesy of DIVA.

Looking For

The perfectly selfish lover. Someone who lies back and demands optimum performance; whose hands rest on themselves, who climaxes and rolls over into a d-e-e-p snore. 50:50, 60:40's need not apply.

Shrimatiji!

We held this miserable box for you 'til Dec. 15, 1992.

You were too shy to come out. Please send us \$1.10, cheque payable to Diva, ASAP.

MEMORIAL

RING, Nose, Vinita's (nee Amita's). After a short, but successful life, Nose Ring passed away in a moment of joy. Nose had already lived through the death of her partner, Nose Ring-Back, who tragically fell to her death in the drain of a bathroom sink. For Nose Ring, life after the death of her partner was never quite the same. Nose Ring successfully flew away into her afterlife at 1:55 a.m. while bopping away on the nose of Vinita at a nearby club.

YOUNG, Light-skinned

Lesbian-identified feminist bisexual wants sex!

Wanted

Better jobs for Brown Boys.

If you are thinking of responding to any of the ads above, D.A.B.D.C.D. (Do Anything But Dont Call Diva)! If you want to place an ad, however, go ahead, call Diva. Ads in this section are absolutely free of cost.

The Exit Interview



or, Why do White People Have So Many Hang-ups?

by Anna Melnikoff

Imagine a small antechamber, containing only a chair, a desk and an austere-looking couch. It looks like a typical psychiatrist's office in Anywhere, North America, or maybe Europe. A kindly-looking old man enters the room and sits down. He is white, and has white hair and a long, bushy white beard and eyebrows. He is wearing a wrinkled white lab coat and spectacles, and carries a pen and notebook. (We'll call him Doctor, although he's not particularly fond of titles.)

The door opens, and a younger man enters. He is also white, but he wears a very severe business suit. He looks confused and nervous and a little angry. "Where am I? How did I get here? What is this place? I'm supposed to be in the hospital having surgery!"

"Well I'm afraid there were some complications," replies the old man, consulting his notebook. "This is your official exit interview, where your soul will be evaluated to determine what therapy, if any, is needed. Let's see, hmmm, you must be Mr. Western Culture."

The young man has begun hyperventilating. "This can't be happening!" he wails. "I was supposed to be *immortal!* Everything was under control! We were finally getting - shit, it was only some minor cosmetic surgery, just a little environmental adjustment!" He starts blubbing uncontrollably.

"Oh shut up and stop feeling sorry for yourself. Here, have a seat on the couch. No culture is immortal, wherever did you get that idea? Hrrmph! I'll have to note that...severe delusions...obsession with control..." The old man

is mumbling to himself and scribbling notes furiously. He looks up. "I see by my notes that you have quite a history of psychoses. We'll need to go back at least five hundred years. Why don't you start by telling me about this enlightenment nonsense - you know, Bacon, Descartes and so on?"

"What do you mean, nonsense?" splutters Mr. C. "They were two of our most brilliant scientists and philosophers! Not since Aristotle has the world seen such fine thinkers!"

"What is this fixation you have with western philosophy? Were you not aware of any other explanations of reality? It's a very dangerous concept, this idea of Nature being mechanical and predictable. Leads to all sorts of problems." The Doctor takes more notes. An observer would notice that his facial features have started to subtly alter, his complexion slightly darker now than his disturbed patient.

"But it seemed so logical at the time! We were so afraid of death and pestilence, so insecure! Only the fittest can survive out there you know, and after all we did bring civilization to the world."

"Hah! You call this mess civilization? When your children can't even swim in your lakes and rivers, or play in the sun because you've stripped away all the ozone with your pollution? You live in concrete boxes and no longer know the joy of being alive! You have gouged great scars in your mother's flesh in your search for wealth. You burn your ancient oxygen-generating rainforests to raise cattle for MacDonald's burgers and pet food! You have tried to suppress and eradicate

almost every other culture you have encountered. You have glorified material things at the expense of your fellow humans, and your military and corporate monstrosities have killed millions of innocents! How can you *possibly* think you are secure when your nuclear weapons alone can destroy the whole world several times over?" The Doctor's beard is now nearly gone, and his face and body is taking on a distinctly feminine appearance. The patient is still wringing his hands in anguish, and has not yet noticed this development.

"Well, I don't see what your problem is. We have every right to do what we want with our land."

"Ah, but you are mistaken. The Earth does not belong to you at all. You belong to her; she is your mother, and you must learn to treat her with respect, for you cannot survive without her. You have built your culture with aggression, power, oppression and death. This is *not* a healthy relationship!" The Doctor has now fully transformed into a small and very angry brown woman. She stands up and begins to pace about the room. The patient has finally noticed the change. "Agh! What's happened to you? You're a *woman*! This is no good! How can a *WOMAN* possibly judge me?! You women are never happy anyway! You're not even *white* any more! This isn't fair! This is *insane*!"

The Doctor stops pacing and slowly turns to the patient. Her voice is calm but there is an undercurrent of fury which gives her words extra force. "No, I'm afraid that it is you who are insane. You have little respect for women, or other cultures and races, or your mother the Earth. If you cannot be open-minded, or share and learn from others, then you will perish. I'm not sure that therapy will even help in your case. Your psychosis is very deep-rooted. I think that only a major collapse of your so-called civilization will be enough to wake you up. If you're really lucky, your brothers and sisters whom you have looted

and oppressed for so long may find it in their hearts to show you a new path. It will be very hard for you to open your eyes and learn from them, but if you can't do this, I promise you that even the history books will have no sympathy. Whatever good you may have accomplished will be forgotten as surely as if you never existed. You have been a *very* spoiled child and I'm very disappointed in you."

The patient is sniffing quietly, his head bowed. "I'm sorry, I never meant to screw up so badly. Who are you anyway? What's going to happen now?"

"I am your Mother, the Earth. I will always be here, but unless you can learn to live in peace and harmony within my sphere, you will disappear and take many of your innocent brothers and sisters with you. I have lots of other children you know, maybe not so highly evolved as you humans, but I'm very patient. I can wait a few million years." The Doctor sits down again and rubs her temples. She looks very tired. "You'd better go and start cleaning up your act now. Your sniveling is really starting to bug my ass. Now get lost, and try and behave like a responsible adult for a change."

The patient scurries out of the room looking chastened. The Doctor sits at her desk shaking her head and muttering to herself, "Kids are *such* a pain in the butt sometimes."



An Entity - Never an Identity

by Madhuri Bhatia



PROLOGUE

The perspective here
Is from the auditionee's point-of-fear
Who unwittingly
Is a part of this milieu

The medium delineated here, is celluloid
The characters are barely humanoid
Barring a singular redeeming presence
Of this person - only human in essence

SCENARIO

A play on emotionality
An act of insult
Adapted from reality
Portrayed visually
Projected verbally
Within the confines of a rectangle
A cell of a many slotted-angle
With little or no ambiance
Which is an unfortunate happenstance

The area is referred to - as studio space
For auditions - that lack intellectual grace

Imagine if you will
Icicles of stares from the panelites
Floating in the arena of penetrative lights
Resembling particles that are freeze-dried
Dripping pernicious granules of cyanide

This union of smug symmetry
Is broken for fleeting moments
And that too - only occasionally
With contrived horizontal movements
Of the elastic facial cavity
That meticulously imitates
Contours of smiles in captivity
A series of conniving stalemates
consistently reminiscent
Of an insidious devouring quality

Characters in Order of Self-Assessed Importance

PRODUCER

Every crass manoeuvre
Of its body-parts
Matches its cerebral gormlessness
And coincides perfectly with
Its manipulative verbal farts

CASTING DIRECTOR

Prevarication is the name
Of its ostensibly innocuous game
Naturally - its main objective is financial gain
And - of course - negation of the auditionee's self-
esteem
Is its ultimate aim

DIRECTOR

Always opinionated
And usually denim-clad
Blase in its prattle
Unruffled - unflustered
Presumably a University Grad
Condescending to a degree
That epitomizes a cad

CAMERA PERSON

It is ambidextrous
A necessary prerequisite
States the Union ad
It could be dyslectic and dysgraphic
By ACTRA standards
But never lens-illiterate
Or focal-plane impaired

READER

Generally empathetic in its latitude
It refrains from utterances of pedantic semantitude
To the vulnerable actor's protagonist
It plays the role of antagonist
And for this endeavour
It receives a small measure
Of gratitude

AUDITIONEE

Its constant yearning to perform
To enter varied moulds
And assume their entire norm
This is its only motivating pain
It is a homo sapien specimen
It sometimes is allowed a face
Perhaps
But it hardly ever has a name





Audio Visual Command Rolling....

.Background.....Action.....!

Insinuated Demand (groaning).....(Anal retention).....(Reaction).....!

PRODUCER

"Preoccupied with thoughts of your genitalia
I visualize actual contact - and such paraphernalia
Grant me some element of favour
Feed my carnal appetite with your exotic flavour"

CASTING DIRECTOR

"Transform your physiognomy
To a 'Generic Canadian' commodity
Eliminate from you form
Your type of oddity"

DIRECTOR

"I believe you will gain unequivocal benefit
If you master our language and dialect
Your English smacks strongly of British tones
This foreign inflection does not blend with our drones"

CAMERAPERSON

"State the colour of your skin
And the shade of your cranial mane
Also - if you have it all
The nature of your brain
We will need to tag you
So you can be classified mundane"

READER

"Slate your agency - and why you are so keen
Underplay your origins - mode your accent on 'wean'
I will outline the parameters - to be seen
You will have to live through and interpret - each scene"
Auditionee.

"I am a mass of protoplasm
Nebulous - amusing in your view
Considered an inconsequential microcosm
Vacuous - to you
Should you scrutinize my resume
You just may assimilate my curriculum vitae"

EPILOGUE

Transpose the amorphous sexual attributes of each player
- to male
Consider the clearly categorized auditionee - a female
Stamp the dermis of the entire group
Caucasian white - oooh! awfully pale
The auditionee - a lone member of the troupe
Define as South-Asian brown - very like ale

The circumstance when actually exuded
Gives credence to every display of obnoxious attitude
Nothing of consequence remains to be concluded
And these words of frustration become a pointless
platitude

Preconceived notions are served on judgemental platters
And offered to the auditionee
Disguised as a snack
Immersed in substantial doses of overdone greasy batters
That mock the very concept of drama
The ultimate complete expressive act



Uh Huh!

Pragmatize

When you tire
Energative non-stimuli
Are the cause of your ire

You are fatigued
Hence you retire

You take recourse to actions
That placate
Rejuvenate

The consequences of which
Are never dire

Euphemism

I met a human from somewhere near
The city that I live in here
It had in its hand a list of names
Of agencies that play employing games

Why was it out of a job - I asked
When there were vacancies on the page till the last
It asked me to take a closer look
At the writing on the paper that bespoke
Every ad with no exception
Said "experience main consideration"

They need a doctor
a lawyer
an engineer
Maybe an artiste
a designer
or an auctioneer

But graduate qualification
Went into liquidation
If the applicant was fresh from training school
Or had attached itself to work environs
Apprenticing for
The better part of a year

An awkward situation will transpire
Some two-score years from now
Since most experienced personnel
Will have tired
And retired
Anyhow

Essential services will move into withdrawal
Eventually they will cease to function
At all



The 'Way Out' Coffee Shop

Imperial Donuts at Coxwell & Upper Gerrard

Originating from the province of the Punjab, I had problems assimilating. The major hurdle against assimilation here, came from my background and was not my fault at all. The problem is that it was only in my generation that my family, un-reluctantly and against the wishes of men, switched from lassi to tea. Upon coming to Canada many years ago, I kept searching for the blooming of my familiar taste buds around the concept of tea. Ah, the sweat, milk-dominated taste blended with strong, thick liquid of Lipton's superior tea, with cardamom thrown in here and there. After only a few attempts, each linked with wastage of some money, I reached the disappointing conclusion that a coffee shop is a coffee shop and its not fair on a coffee shop to expect it to serve 'good' tea.

So, I decided to do what Canadians do so I ended up doing what white Canadians do: drink coffee. I did not take long to learn the slang, 'D'D'.

My problems should have been resolved there but they did not. 'D'D' of Second Cup is as heavy as the normal conversation of a white political activist, 'D'D' of Bakers Dozen is okay if prepared by a person of Color otherwise consider your loony gone. Tim Horton is too Howard Johnsonish. In short, there was hardly a place I could enjoy coffee from till of course I found Imperial Donuts at the corner of Upper Gerrard and Coxwell, right here in Toronto.

Run as a family business, our South Asian-Caribbean friends serve coffee that makes me forget the sweat, milk-dominated, strong thick taste of 'Desi' tea. 'Desi' being the highest praise words can give, Imperial Donuts every day serve 'Desi' coffee.

I must admit that the imperiousness in the name made me a little un-comfortable in the beginning but believe me, there isn't much imperialism in the coffee, decor or the owners. Its almost like having 'Cafe de France' written in Urdu on a busy street of Lahore, constantly serving excellent 'nan & haleem' with suicide hot chillies as standard heat of the food.

In both cases, there isn't much in a name. If there was, I would never have named my daughter 'Madonna Bibi'. or my son 'Sky Lab Khan'.

Way to go, Cafe De France, Shah Almi Gate, Lahore & Imperial Donuts, Toronto.

Sincerely, NAC Akhtar



STOP THAT!



After living in a small two bedroom apartment for two years, our new three bedroom apartment felt like a penthouse suite at the Ritz Hotel. On our first night there, I lit a candle, poured two glasses of warm white wine, passed one to my lover and settled down for a night of hot sex.

"Time to celebrate," I said, looking deep into her eyes. "To sex in our new place," I toasted. "Ugh, this wine tastes like shit!" I sputtered.

"Don't exaggerate," Desmond said. "This is expensive shit."

"In that case we are going to drink the whole bottle, aren't we babe?" I asked coyly.

"It has been a while," she replied, settling into the pillows.

We chatted, drank wine, giggled and laughed. We talked, joked about politics, fags, dykes, work and the kids. After three glasses of warm wine, we both felt light-headed and relaxed. Soon we were necking, petting, groping, biting and talking dirty. We were hot, our bodies tense with sexual energy. Desmond groaned and moaned. Her sounds growing louder and louder.

"Shush!" I growled in her ear, "the neighbours will hear us." I completely forgot about Wendy and Luann in the next room.

"That's their pleasure," she answered. Her voice sounded husky. She thrust her mound into my soft tummy. I groaned and stuck my tongue into her ear. She shivered and bit my neck.

"Be quiet you two! Stop that! We can't sleep," came a frightened voice from one of the bedrooms.

We froze.

"Who was that?" I asked against Desmond's ear.

"Wendy," Desmond answered pulling away. "I don't believe it. The child is impossible. I can't take it any more. We have not had sex in over a month because of her. You have to do something." "The audacity of that girl. Imagine that, when I was her age I would not dream of interrupting my mother's love making" I said, switching on the lamp.

"That's what you get for teaching her to speak her mind," Desmond answered angrily.

I tried to kiss Desmond, hoping it would divert her attention and put her back into "the mood." She pushed me away. I was hot. The muscles around my shoulders felt tight.

Desmond and I sometimes wonder if Wendy can smell orgasms. She knows just when to come knocking on our bedroom door. Do you know how frustrating this is? Even when she is outside she smells sex. Right at that crucial moment, when you are concentrating on having a good orgasm, the buzzer beeps. Of course they are outside playing, so I can't ignore them.

"Who is it?"

"It's me mum, I need to go to the bathroom."

Then she comes in, and of course, her eyes miss nothing.

"What are you doing? Why is Desmond naked?" she asks.

I avoided answering it at the time. Later, Desmond and I had this conversation.

"Go in there and talk to her," Desmond demanded.

"What do you want me to say?" I asked nervously.

"She does this all the time, she should know better."

"How would she know?" I asked. I felt embarrassed and responsible for Wendy's behaviour.

"She is only a child," I said. "You know, I don't know what to do about the rivalry between you two," I said accusingly.

"Don't change the subject and stop being defensive," Desmond snarled as she turned her back.

"You are being unreasonable," I said. I tried to change the subject and make the whole matter light. "I guess this is it, eh? No more for me tonight?"

"Huh, go take a cold shower," she said as she flopped onto her stomach.

"Okay, tomorrow I will talk to her," I quickly promised.

The next morning Desmond sat reading a flyer at the breakfast table. She stopped and looked at me questioningly, as I took a deep breath.

"Wendy, don't you know it is rude to interrupt your parents when they are making love?" I tried to make the whole incident very light. Desmond and I have always spoken frankly and openly to Wendy and her sister about sex, racism, lesbian and gay life, rape and any other issues they wish to know about.

Wendy looked up from her bowl of cereal. She looked embarrassed and she giggled.

"Oh mum, do you have to use that word?" she said.

"You're lucky you even know the word at your age," I said, plopping onto a chair. "Anyway, you have heard the word before."

"Well, you are too loud," she said. "I used to hear you in the other apartment too, you know."

"I want you to know that adults who really like each other like Desmond and I, have sex together. We get pleasure from each other's body. That is why you hear those sounds."

Oh god, I thought, my mother never had to do this, why me?! Desmond saw the look of despair on my face. She tried to conceal a smile behind the newspaper. Luann giggled and spilled milk onto the table. I hurriedly got up and went to the sink for a rag.

"Don't interrupt next time," I said, turning on the tap. I tried to sound stern. I sat at the table and looked into her innocent face. Her eyes told me she was uncertain about my true feelings. I smiled and poked her in the stomach.

"Don't interrupt next time, okay?" She got up and came to me.

"I love you mum," she said sounding relieved.

"I love you too."

I bet it would be a while before anyone could get it up again.



Two Days of Picnic

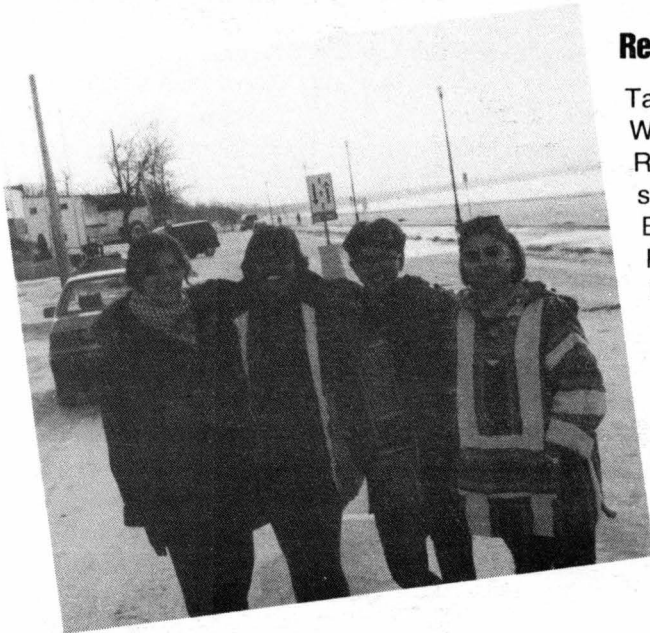
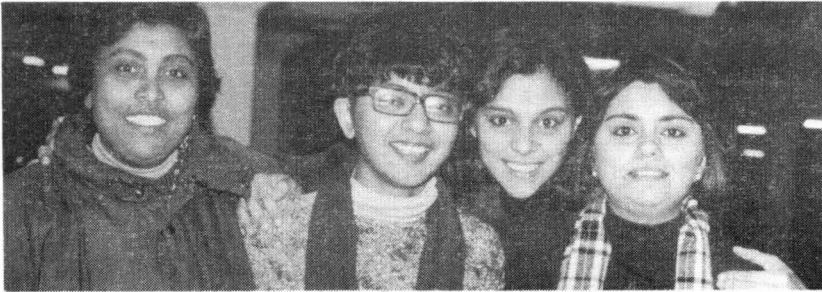
Ladoo

Monu

Chotu

Bitto

Names have been changed to protect the not so innocent!!



Recipe...

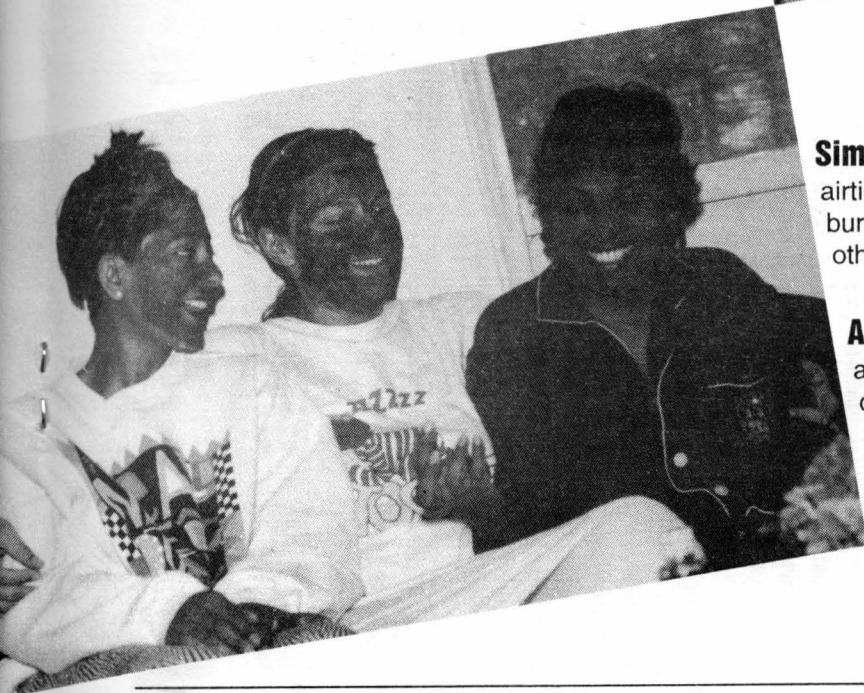
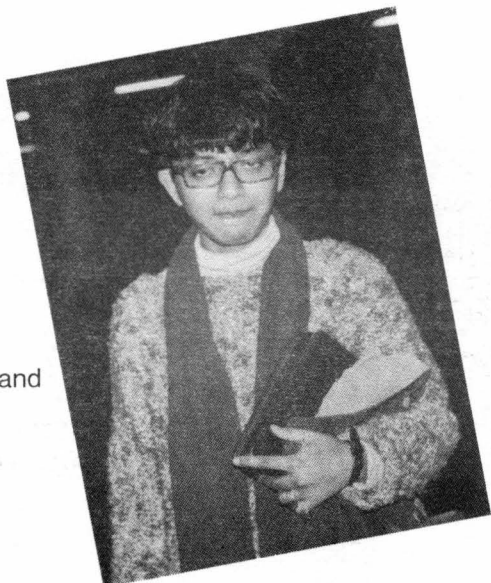
Take at least 4 South Asian Women Add two dozen Rashna Fish Cutlets with sauce A Kadai of Prawn Biryani Brand 777 Mango Pickle Chicken Dhansak, Palak Stir-Fry Vegetables and Pasta with Red Chilli 24 BUTCH (Busch) Beer Ayurvedic Face Mask and Coconut Hair Oil

cking in the Diaspora

Mix altogether and toss in a rusty dodge plymouth four door sedan (local immigrant car)

Sprinkle with erotic videos....

Garnish with tall tales of sexual adventures and Feminist (Lesbian and Bi) Politics



Simmer For Three Days in an airtight cottage with wood burning chullah, papads and other karka murkas...

And, What Happened?? Bitu and Ladoo compared notes on bowel movements while Monu and Chotu looked on jealously...

Field Excursions: a trip to the variety store for butter tarts

DEFINITELY NOT FUNNY!

by Jayanti Negi

As soon as I finished my Professional Diploma after Degree, I got a job in a rather upper middle class suburban high school. I was one of the two women of Colour among a very large, white academic staff.

(Tom reads "indict" as "indikt")

ME: Tom, it is indite not indikt.

TOM: What do you know? My parents immigrated from England to Canada because there were too many Pakis there and look what happens, I get a Paki for an english teacher.

(I shake with barely suppressed rage, almost boxing his ear, descending to his level)

ME: Listen you Limey, if they want to go to a place with no Pakis, tell them to go to the moon and hurry, otherwise Pakis will get there first!

Needless to say, the parents wrath descended on me, so did the principal. End of career!

Do I Know How to Use a Fork and Knife?

by **Nathalie Younglai**

For me, cultural imperialism is the imposition of western culture upon my life. The rape of my own culture, it is the crime of this dominating and oppressive culture that has stolen and cheated me out of my own identity. It is the deceit of making me want to be a part of it. It is the seduction of the promised sense of belonging, it is the sly assimilation of my person. Cultural imperialism has manipulated, directed and formed my life experiences. It is a factor that I now recognize and reject with disgust.

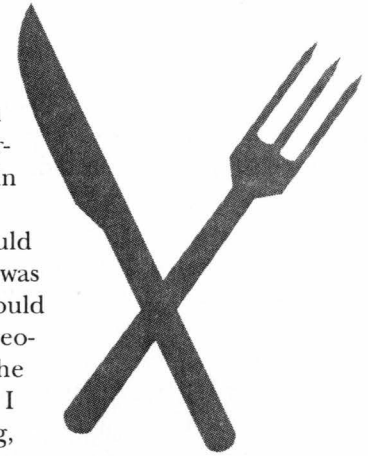
Isn't it wonderful that I now come to the university to find a term which encompasses my experiences of frustration and confusion, growing up in a society where I was always part of the "other." I can easily interchange this oppression of cultural imperialism, with another remarkably similar and related form of oppression: racism.

It strikes me now, in retrospect, that in my most impressionable years I was constantly bombarded by the contorted distortion of the world projected by the media here. Images of caucasian faces flashing across the screen, and dominating the beauty magazines. This image of the white ideal was internalized. This narrow vision of their world was now mine. Granted, there was the token "other" person presented, but these people were people that were considered ugly, scornful, evil and reduced to caricatures. I

cannot name one person of my culture being portrayed in a positive way in my youth.

As a young child, I could not understand why I was treated so differently. I could not comprehend why people couldn't accept me the way I was. Finally, I grasped at the meaning, the repercussions and consequences of being different. It meant that I would be treated very distinctly, very negatively. So I came to the twisted conclusion that I would have to be like everybody else. Yes I would have to assimilate. There are many ways I have tried to assimilate, not only in mannerism, but also in physical appearances. Mannerisms are not hard to imitate and emulate. I learnt very quickly what was acceptable, and what was not. And it definitely was not acceptable to be associated with my people.

This caused me to reject my language, my family, my traditions and my culture. I treated and regarded my own people with disgust and contempt. It was my association



with them, that caused me to be rejected and ridiculed by others.

Foolishly believing to be able to alter my physical appearance, posed a different challenge. Many times, my mother would tell me that all I had to do was to pinch the bridge of my nose every night to make it higher and straighter, more like the 'white' noses. This I did religiously for many nights, for many years, to no avail. I thought I could fool everyone to believe that I had the same eyes, by forcing myself not to blink, also constantly enlarging my eyes to look bigger. I always wanted someone to make that warm comment to me, "my what beautiful big eyes you have." I remember thinking, "why aren't my eyes big and beautiful too?" I walked around with pursed lips, squelching my natural smile into a tight one in order to hide my big, ugly horse teeth that nobody else had, and to make everybody believe I had normal, thin lips too. I sucked in my cheeks so I could have a normal, oval face like everyone else, not a fat, round face. I pulled my bottom jaw whenever I thought someone was looking at my profile, because I thought I looked too much like an ape. I tried walking around in shoes too big for my feet, so that nobody would comment on my small feet and ignorantly ask if my mother had bundled them up when I was a child.

A woman told me that the reason my hair was long was because my mother wouldn't let me have it cut, because I was Chinese. I ran home wanting to shave my head, vowing never to wear it in a bun in public again. When I was told that all Chinese were short and fat, I sucked in my stomach and tried to make myself look taller. When I was told that all Chinese were quiet and submissive, I acted as loud and

obnoxious as I could, just so that everyone around me would be sure to know that I was not 'one of them.' Most devastatingly, when I was told that all Chinese were geeky, nerdy, browners, who just naturally got good marks without trying, I did all I could to prove that I was not like them. I deliberately goofed off and didn't study, and as a result, adopted poor study habits to prove that I was normal, that I could fail too.

Oddly enough, no matter how much you believe that you have succeeded in being initiated into the elite crowd, no matter how much you believe yourself to be just like everybody else, the harsh reality of it is, although intellectually you are equal, physically you will never be. Consequently, you will always be treated as the 'other.'

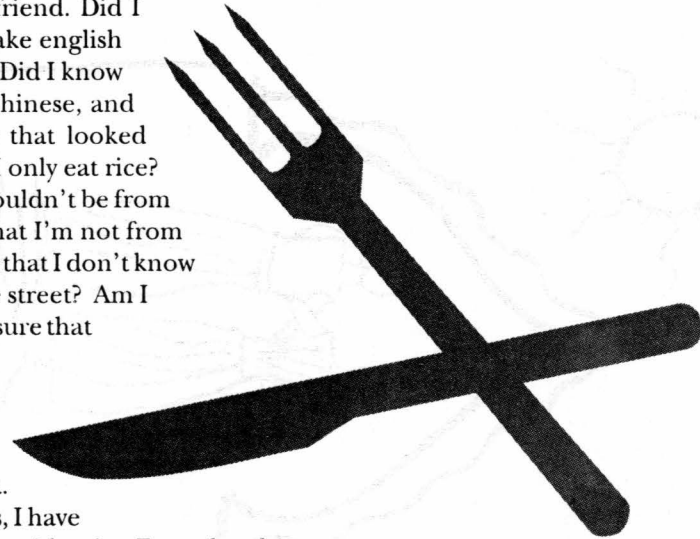
It is little wonder that I had come to learn to hate strangers because they looked like me. It is no surprise that I learned to hate the sound of my language, learned to be ashamed of my culture, ashamed to admit that I am Chinese. It is a disgrace to humankind when one person rejects another, on the basis of perceived similar cultural backgrounds, and tries desperately to suck up and find comfort and acceptance with those causing the disharmony, self-hate and oppression. The new coined phrase for this is internalized racism.

As a result, I do not know anything of my culture, except the distorted facts that were occasionally fed to me at school. Chinese girls always had their feet bound (was that done to me, or was my mom now civilized?). Chinese people came to Canada in a boat after the English and French had a fight. Oops! By the way, they helped a little in building the railroads (was I from China? Was my dad a

railroad-builder?). The Chinese were very strict with their children and forced them to only do homework and play instruments. It is no big surprise that the only music taught, recognized and admired is that of the European composers (Was I allowed to play? Could I play violin?).

There were many questions that were asked of me, that reinforced my shame at being different. I was the object of curiosity, a novelty. I was the sweet, shy, little Chinese friend. Did I speak english at home? Could my mother make english food? Did we only eat Chinese food at home? Did I know how to use a fork and knife? Could I read Chinese, and subsequently, could I translate any symbols that looked remotely Chinese to the untrained eye? Did I only eat rice? Was I a mongoloid? Where am I from? No, I couldn't be from Canada, where am I really from? Am I sure that I'm not from the west coast? Hong Kong? China? Am I sure that I don't know the owner of the Chinese restaurant down the street? Am I sure that I am not related to Judy Chang? Am I sure that my name isn't really May-Lee?

It is only recently that I have come to terms with my identity. I am only beginning to learn about the real history of my people's settlement and racist treatment in Canada. Trapped in the deep gulf between two cultures, I have been denied the right to know and affirm my own identity. Forced to shape my tongue around the english speech, I have been refused the chance to be able to communicate with my elders in our own language. Deafened by this ignorance, I have been forbidden to hear their stories, experiences and wisdom. Subjected to the shrewd manipulation of the dominant culture, I have been robbed of the pride of being who I am. These are the disgusting effects that this term, cultural imperialism, has forced me to swallow all my life. And now I think it is time to regurgitate.





Rentiki Cheddah Revadi, Nenu Ikkada Unnanu
Do Not Belong to This or That But I Am Here

by Kalpana Vridula

“Are you from India?”

“No, my parents are.”

“Oh, how exciting! You know, I saw the movie Gandhi, I thought

it was great...Have you been?"

"Oh, yes of course!" I've only gone once, I was already 23.

"The guy I work with is from India. You must know him? His last name, uh...let me think, oh yes, Patel?"

As I've grown older my immigrant past seems to have come back to haunt me. When I was a teenager, I ignored it and pretty much behaved as though it didn't exist. It was an occasional nuisance, which interfered when I wanted to stay out late or have boyfriends.

Now as I enter my mid-20s, I have begun to feel that I must somehow become more Indian. By becoming more Indian, or at least what I perceived was Indian, I am finding that I am becoming more and more judgemental and critical of so-called American ways. Yet, I was too shy to meet Indians.

I thought that I would seek them out, only to find that I had little to say. I was embarrassed by my slightly southern, and extremely American accent.

For a long time I thought I had the balance of both cultures. My morals made me Indian, but my progressiveness and independence made me American. I was undefeatable.

"Gringos like you and I..." Hold on a minute, I might have the same trained educated voice you have, but just because we walk down the same street, doesn't mean we got out of the same bed. My house smells of incense and spicy food, not meatloaf and apple pie.

"Say baby, is you mixed?" "Mixed?"

"You know, I knows you black, but you're sometin else too?" "No, I'm not mixed."

"Yes you is. You're black en,??..." Why the hell should I answer this guy? "Come on baby, what else is ya?" Ah...the bus.

"We want to introduce you to a nice Indian boy. You should marry soon. Who is this...John? Are you serious with John? ...why don't you take up a real profession? Be a doctor or an engineer...We are Indians, how will we feel with his family? They will not accept us. How will they react when his parents see us eat with out hands?"

But I love him. I wish he was Indian. But he's not, He's American...like me?

"Society will not accept you both. I will not. What will I tell people? You owe us, you owe our relatives, you owe our friends."

"Marriage is between two families, not just because you think your in love. It's not just this hot romance. That's what is wrong with America. Look at their success rate, see how many broken families, see how many divorces, don't they have any shame? They are weak. India still continues."

But at what cost?

"Are you from India?" "No, my parents are."

"Have you ever been?" "Yes, of course."

I went there by myself last year. I met my relatives for the first time, but I also travelled through India alone.

"How was it?"

"...Telegu matlathara? Conchum. How is your mommy and daddy? You should eat more. When are you getting married? What do you study in school? Yes, yes good. You should eat more."

"The poverty is horrible."

"Yes, yes, but India goes on. You are looking too thin, why don't you marry."

"Oh, it was wonderful." "It must have been exciting returning to your heritage?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Evandi, come here I will sell you this beautiful sari." (Oh Evandi doesn't speak Telegu, she only speaks English!) "Oh Evandi, please, please come here I will sell you this beautiful sari. Oh Evandi, it's very cheap." (And even if it isn't you won't know the difference anyway...silly American Evandi.) Oh shopkeeper don't be foolish. I don't care about the real price, but don't humiliate me. I am more American in India, than I am in America.

"Are you from India?" "No, my parents are"

"Oh, how exciting! You know, I saw the movie Gandhi. I thought it was great!...Have you been?" "Oh yes, of course!"

My new relatives and I crowded into the white car with the steering wheel on the wrong side. My flight arrived around 11 o'clock at night. There were still many people on the streets - motorists, pedestrians, cyclists carrying 2 or 3 people, scooters with entire families on them, autorickshaws, taxis, cars, buses, dogs, and cows. As we honked our way through the crowd, I reflected upon the fact that, though I imagined what it would be like I really had no idea. So many people. So many brown faces. The weather was hot and sticky. Still, I could not help but feel that this country was truly amazing.

I am staying in the house where my mother was raised. I've seen pictures of my grandfather and grandmother, and many more relatives I have never met, and who have long since passed. I stare for a long time at the photos hoping to recognize or detect any quality, any characteristic - a smile, the eyes, the hair, that may be found in my own features. Nothing strikes me in particular, yet I feel hauntingly attached. A lump rises in my throat as I am related the story of how one of my uncles's passed away. The wash girl, who has come with her mother (the washer woman), for the laundry, is standing nearby. I point to the pictures, "this is my grandfather." She looks at me with a blank stare, and the beginnings of a smile. Am I to be humiliated again? This time I repeat, "Naan tatagaru." She nods and smiles.

"Are you from India?" "No, my parents are."

"Oh how spiritual! You know, I saw the movie Gandhi, I thought it was great!...Wow, is that incense you're burning?" "Yes."

"Wow, you're so New-Age. Man, I just think Krishna is so cool!" Silly hippie, get a clue.

"When did you leave India?" "I was born here, I've only been once." "Wow, that must have been exciting, what was it like?"

Yesterday, I went on a tour, visiting some of the nearby temples. The temples were incredible. Standing undisturbed for hundreds, if not thousands of years. The delicate carvings, are in such fine detail. Each depicting some god or goddess, or some brave warrior, or battle fought.

Alongside these temples were the hard sell shopkeepers, and the "beggars." You know, the "deprived, less-fortunate." I was an easy target. Visibly a foreigner with my short hair, cotton pants, and t-shirt, slinging a camera bag on my shoulder - full of expensive American equipment. To serve the purpose of shooting "National Geographic-ally" satisfying photos. To give me a wonderful ethnographic display to take back to the States.

"Ma, ma, ma," the children cried as they pointed their small babies, hanging on their hips, then held out their hands for some spare change (to help release my guilt.)

"Ma, ma, ma," the old and handicapped cried as they crawled in the dirt, holding out their hands."

Head for the bus - we sought it out as a refuge, their hands clinging to the glassless windows, "Ma, ma, ma."

Holding up beads or chappals, or some ornament, one had a stuffed rat (which in all honesty repulsed me). "Ma, ma, ma"... "20 rupees," then later "15 rupees," then "10 rupees;" ...much later "30 rupees."

I saw a man who had no leg past his knee. He covered himself with a cloth and stood with his cane under his arm. His other arm was simply a stump, a little past his shoulder. With the arm that wrapped around his crutch, he held out his hand, "Ma, ma, ma."

"Are you from India?" "No, my parents are."

"Oh how exciting! You know I saw the movie Gandhi. I thought it was great! Have you been?" "Oh yes, of course!"

The thoughts on these pages have been a collection of my encounters and experiences as a first generation American. At one time, I used to seek out only brown faces, hoping for a smile, searching for a connection. I no longer look for that connection only in Indians. I am less angry about the questions.

Through the process of writing this essay and thinking about these issues, I have also reached a point in my relationship with my parents where I no longer blame them for their restrictions, or their reluctance to accept the American side of my personality. In fact, I think they realize, as I realize, that I cannot choose between cultures. It has been already chosen for me, I am a product of both.

I cannot erase my Americanness, just as much as I cannot whitewash my skin color. I accept my occasional confusion, at times I even embrace it.



Asha didn't crack up. she broke out!



And For the Third Time Dear....

by **Smita Vir Tyagi**

She was born in Bombay, lived there for 56 years. She is 62 years old. Her son calls her Elaine. By her first name, naturally. After all, this is North America. Nobody calls their mothers mom. But I can't know that, I've only been here 10 days.

As I travel up the elevator to the 16th floor to meet this nice friendly 'lady' from Bombay I subdue my natural instinct towards that more respectful mode of address 'Aunty' upon urging from my friend who's going to perform the introductions and settle for a bright, cheerful falsetto 'Hi, Lenny'!

I'm going to be allowed to rent a room and one and a half baths (!) in her three bedroom apartment considering my strained circumstances for a \$400 song. Mind you, this paying guest business is strictly between you and me, the landlord of the condo is not to know.

Definitely. Such a charming apartment. Large L-shaped brown velvet sofa with black-checked cushions sitting straight and strong against the back. Very comfortable. Pretty printed peacock-green curtains against pale lilac walls contrast beautifully with the slightly chipped parquet wooden floor smelling faintly of pine scent. The most dear little lamp on a round glass table all white and brass and shiny. A rectangular wooden cabinet broods darkly in a corner sporting photo frames with cute smiling children, ceramic sylphs and seraphs cavort with abandon between Las Vegas lives/mugs. An eight-seater dining table sits in the corner, off the kitchen covered by two table cloths the top one with a rose bud print primly covering the other.

She is so nice. Tall glass of orange juice materialises on a white napkin and is made to sit on a coaster in a steel Santa tray.

My room has 1.5 windows and 3/4ths of a mirror with half a dresser and one whole closet for my use. A regular bed and a child size comforter. I am going to be so comfortable.

I need to share the bathroom and keep it free between 6:45 and 7:45 in the morning. But of course. Somewhat long ablutions I must admit, a little tension inducing but I guess I could hold. I would need to share the housecleaning chores. Bathrooms every Sunday morning. Could I clean the tub and basin with comet bleach and Mr. Clean available in-easy-to-use handypacks at the convenience store downstairs and mop the floors while I'm at it. And yes, would I mind not adjusting the adjustable shower because it sprays so.

This is a new country. We can't be paying expensive plumbers for cheap repairs.

Dishes after each meal please. Indian left overs do smell. I would need to use kitchen paper to wipe the plates then clean and soak in hot water for 10 minutes before washing in luke warm soapy liquid. It pays to treat kitchenware gently. I would also need to buy gloves for the dishwashing. The hands that washed dishes twice a day for seventeen years would need protection. Obviously. And WATCH for the drain. You can't be leaving little bits of bread sitting there waiting to dissolve and disappear, they need to be weeded out. You know, pipes here can't be forced to do all this heavy duty draining.

We must remember, this is Canada!

I need only sweep and mop the kitchen before I go to bed and while the cooking is being done, the windows aft of the kitchen need to be kept wide open. Smells longer you know. Never mind you could get blown off the windward side yourself but you can't be too careful about smells.

After all, this is a Western country. Nobody smells here. You can understand that.

Also, remember to keep the gas turned on nice and slow.

All these clever fire alarms you know they lose their heads and go OFF! Such embarrassment. What with the neighbours and everything. I really must be very particular about packing my lunch. I must use that very hygienic disposable plastic wrap to wrap my sandwiches in and take them in those throwaway brown paper bags. That's the way to do it. No, no it's not done. My environment friendly Indian stainless steel lunch box which I was using everyday just won't do. After all, we do have a lot to learn you see. Just so. And mind you I'm letting you know in confidence, because in a new country nobody tells you these things and a little friendly advice always helps us to correct our mistakes. DEODORANT! Is an absolute must. You can't be found dead without it. You'll just have to get yourself a little aerosol can. It pays dividends in the long run to be smelling everfresh and tribe. It's one of the very first things to buy on landing. Your resume is incomplete without it [somehow I missed that in the New Immigrant's Handbook.]

And for the third time dear, do use the coasters in a tray for the tea and juice. And the napkins. After all, good manners make the wheels of society turn and here we are so careful about furniture. Please, I really don't like telling again and again, do take care of smells. It's not nice to repeat these things. You can't be forgetting to spray room freshener everyday. Not everyday. It's too much. We must learn without being told and I can't be sniffing about the house soon as I get in from work. After all, you have been here six days.

I am now looking for magic potions that will stop hair fall. This is not a fiction piece.

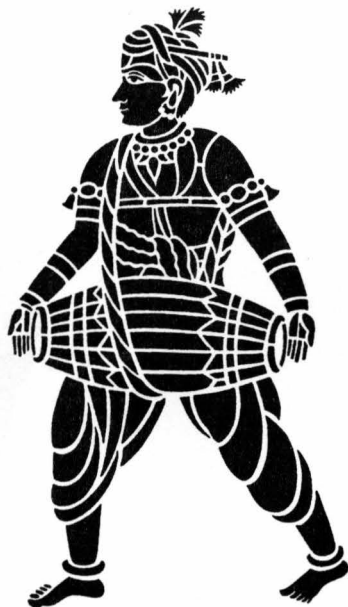


Communication Gap:

Dedicated to All Males

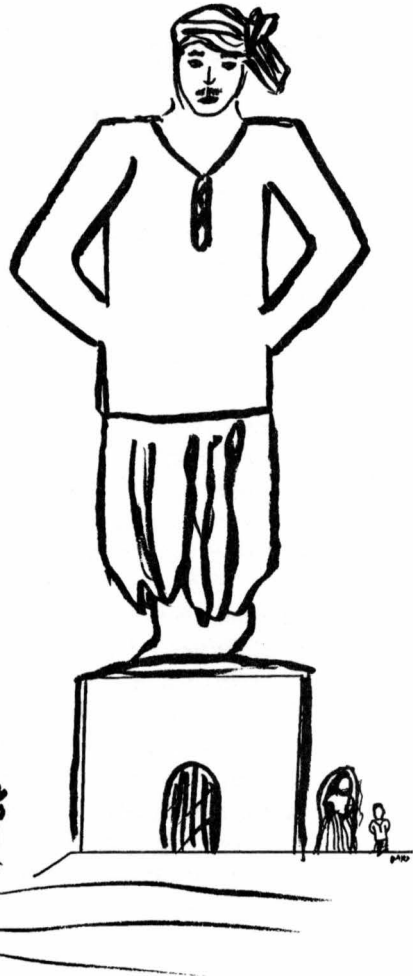
by Jasmine Favid

Don't misunderstand me, beware of a penetrating gaze
My sharing of "universal love" isn't passion that's ablaze.
My offerings: genuine frankness and sincere motives pure,
Somehow unknowingly desparateness they lure.
I do not want your body, affection's all I crave
Love includes no ownership — I'll be nobody's slave!
Friendship's not found in alleys or between naked creamy thighs
Beware of fleeting attractions that wear tempting disguise.
Are relationships made to endure or just to replenish holes!
You may live for sensual pleasures — those aren't my life's goals.
I've an open mind but not holes in my head
My goals in life aren't found in bed.
Don't drown in my eyes or my energy that overflows
Body language communicates more than my innocence knows.
Please don't be flattered — I treat everyone this way
If interaction's a game, shall I ever learn to play!
Don't let embraces tempt you or a provoking kiss
That's my natural affection, mistaken for sensual bliss.
Beware of enticing pleasures of blinding human touch
and leftover singeing scars whose torment haunts me much.
If I put my arms around you and squeeze or stimulate
Resist any inspiration or the pain may become top great.
I'm not against romance — these gestures I appreciate
But if you're after sex, I'm the wrong bait!
If impulses overwhelming murder your self-control
Then just keep off virgin territory and find some other hole.



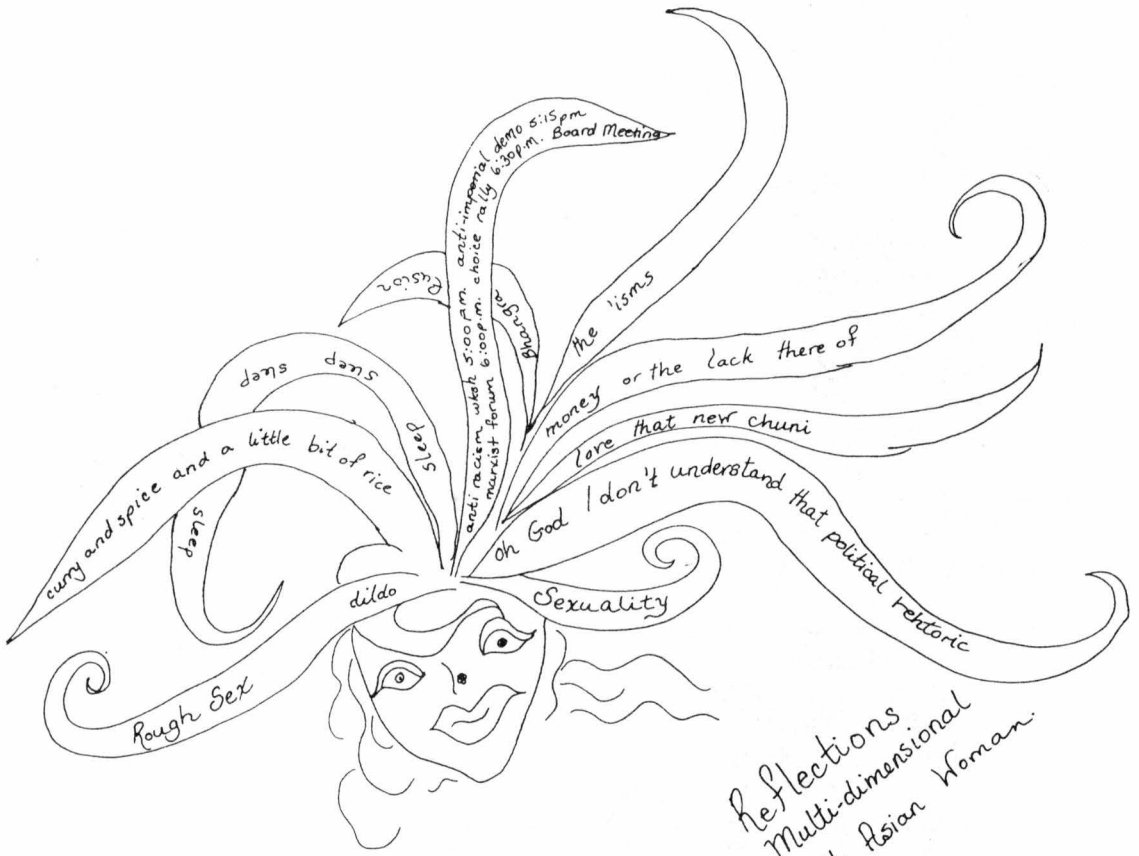
I detest beer breath and smoking — I'm into natural highs
Like massage, dancing and faithfulness from a bond that never dies.
I'm no maternal substitute for mom's nurturing device
My outlet definitely for carnal release won't suffice.
Don't play with my emotions, I don't like dangling
I'm no ping-pong or yo-yo or a puppet on a string.
Don't try to tame my spirit or capture my heart
The glue of false impressions will eventually fall apart.
Facades don't enthrall me — models aren't real
Painted air-heads don't sustain with their empty sex-appeal.

True value of a person is within man's exterior shell
— not appearances superficial, or DNA's arrangement of a cell.
It interests me not machos — pride is a hurtful sin
Gentleness is a sign of manhood, sensitivity was born to win.
Anatomy's for biology labs, for hookers or lovers' darts
What matters is your essence, not the size of body parts.
No offence intended to you guys, those visions don't turn me on
My drooling instincts are dry now, manipulate another pawn.





Important for survival is the element of caress
But why does spontaneity often land me in a mess!
It's not really flirting, that fervor in my smile
Don't let my fun-loving spirit your senses beguile.
Don't tell me girl I love you, flattery won't deceive
I'm no foolish sucker or a machine made to conceive.
Don't treat me like an object — I do have a mind
Creativity that' ignored is a sign I'm not your kind.
Besides, our beloved body eventually will pass
To a world beyond the maggots and a mere pretty lass.
Curvatures once tempting soon will disappear
As the physical's replaced with lasting spiritual gear.
Sure be fruitful multiply, but then what use are we!
A race of higher animals we must strive for unity.
Don't say that's idealistic — it's more practical than you know
We must learn to be productive with those seeds we mutually sow.
Life's not meant for joy rides so try to ponder this:
There's more to love than entanglement in a tongue-winding abyss.
Just because I'm a world citizen, don't misinterpret this
I don't mean tongues aren't foreign when involved in a french kiss!



Reflections
of a Multi-dimensional
South Asian Woman.



Regular Stuff



Making The Links:

Anti-Racism and Feminism

A Report on the CRIAW Conference

by Sharmini Peries

The 16th Annual Conference of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women [CRIAW], held in Toronto, November 13-15, 1992, was the first time in the history of the sponsoring organization that women had the opportunity to enjoy a mainstream conference in an extremely unconventional form. It was also for the first time that women of Colour [who were able to afford the cost of registration], attended this conference with some degree of comfort to express our vision, our theory, our analysis.

For this, a great deal of thanks and appreciation is owed to Rita Kohli, the conference organizer, and her team of volunteers that brought together some of the most insightful women from all over the world to demand changes and celebrate our unity and diversity.

The Conference engaged us in an exciting, provocative and challenging exchange between grassroots feminists, feminist in academe, health, community, social services, human rights, labour, policy, law and politics. It also focused on the media, on issues such as culture, academe, economic and labour, sexuality, health, violence against women, women and the state, identity politics disability, within an anti-racist framework.

The Conference opened with a First Nations ceremony. Sadie Buch and the Six Nations Women Singers performed while the key note address was given by Ellen Gabriel of Kanehsatake and Dionne Brand. Ellen spoke on the National Constitutional Referendum insisting on the inherent self determination of something that her people already had and that it need not be reaffirmed by the 'Canadian' People. Dionne, in her speech, added a poetical connotation to the many issues of race, class, gender sexuality (repeatedly), and noted that as her grandmother warned her she warned us that we should 'wash no man's pants'.

The Opening Plenary was not much different in terms of offering us a non-hegemonic opportunity with an impressive list of speakers. Nahla Abdo-Zubi from Ottawa, Joanne St. Lewis of Toronto, Fatima Alloo of Tanzania, Jo-Anne Lee of Saskatoon and Dorothy Christian of Barrie spoke on Feminism in the New World Order. The speakers explored strategies of struggle and the need to build political alliances across recognized differences based on class, race, ability, sexual preference and geographical boundaries.

The highlight of the conference was an amazing key note address from Rigoberta Manchu Tum of Guatemala, the 1992 Nobel Laureate for Peace. She spoke in Spanish (translated) to packed banquet hall.

Sunila Abeysekera, an activist from Sri Lanka, was one of the busiest contributors to the Conference. She participated at the closing plenary on Immediate Political Struggles and Feminist Organizing, spoke on how women should engage in order to put women's issues on the national and international agenda; led a workshop on Free Trade and Global Implications for Women; was on a panel for 'Women fight Back: Rethinking Strategy to Fight Violence Against Women Globally'.

Anissa Helie (Algeria), Ayesha Imam (UK) and Salba Husain (India) were on the panel on Women and Religious Fundamentalism. In a fascinating session, women discussed Christian, Muslim, Hindu fundamentalism and the struggles of women globally, counteracting and challenging religious fundamentalism as it affects women.

Sunera Thobani (Vancouver) and myself were on the panel on New Reproductive Technologies [NRTs]. As NRTs are becoming easily available in the market place, their implications on women, women of colour and under-privileged women were discussed with a critical view on who the NRTs benefit and at what social costs and costs to women..

Sunera also contributed to two additional panels: Violence Against Women, and Colonialism, Nationalism & Anti-Racism. In the latter, aboriginal women and women of colour discussed working towards a program of unity.

Yasmin Jiwani, also from Vancouver, lead a workshop on 'The Exotic and the Repulsive:

Racism and Sexism in the Media Critical examination of women of colour in popular film and television'. Yasmin explored the historical roots of these images and their implications on women.

Raminder Dosanjh (Vancouver), Ramabai Espinet (Toronto), and Amanthe Bathalien (Montreal) presented a thought provoking discussion on 'Women and Resistance to Racism: Black Women, South Asian Women and Indo-Caribbean Black Women'. Useful information around histories of women's struggles against racism was given, specifically around Black women's struggles prior to migrating to Canada, Indo Caribbean and South Asian Women's struggles within Canada. The workshop illustrated women's struggles with specific examples on how women challenged power resisting racism and sexism; .

Leela Madhavarao (London, Ont) presented a workshop on racism where she said "I am British but they think that every Indian has an arranged marriage", debunking racial stereotypes of a twice migrated population of Gujarati women with cultural roots in India and emotional and physical ties with East Africa.

Fatima Jaffer (Editor, 'KINESIS' Vancouver) talked about issues on feminist publishing where panellist elaborated on cultural imperialism, and anti-racist struggles within the organizations and the significant role women are playing in publishing the works of women marginalized through discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Amita Handa and Vinita Srivastava [our lovely bhangra CKLN DJs] gave a workshop on diasporic music

Himani Bannerji read a passionate poem, titled "The Day the Moon Fell To Earth".

Sharon Fernandez and Punam Khosla supported this important conference through moderating and organizing skills that kept things moving.

We congratulate Rita Kohli, a community activist and one-time member of Diva Editorial Collective, for organizing such a treat for women of Colour.



Speaking From the Great Divide

by Yasmin Jiwani

What do you tell the young, or sometimes not so young, liberal humanists? So inspired are they with the age-old, golden dream of a common united humanity, that they

fail to see how entrenched, historically and contemporarily, is the divide. For within this society, as with any other, the divisions are there. Race, class, gender or other, they

remain but ways to carve up the world - to divide and rule. In their fullness and in their articulation, they are divisions of kind - separating, never uniting, the masses of humanity, circumscribed and contained in the definitions handed down. Not that these definitions are static. No, they are fluid to some degree, but invariably, like the eddies of the flowing water, they cling to the sides of the rock that are well-worn, well-trodden with time. The very familiarity of these paths makes them seem appropriate - just as appropriate as expectations about the way one should dress, walk, talk and generally behave.

Tell these young idealistic fools about the "system," and they laugh derisively. They ridicule and accuse you of "reverse racism." Do they really know the pain of exclusion or are they so blind, so blanketed by the comforts of every day life that they fail to see the indignities heaped upon those around them - those who because of some great default have fallen within the crevices or categories created by the great division of society. For these humanists, the "system" works.

Whereas for us, the promise of rewards based on "merit" sounds hollow - empty of all that they elude to by virtue of their constant failure to materialize in our every day life.

What do I tell these young fools, who think that because it is far better for them today, that the pain of yesterday is but gone - vanishing in the dust of the sunset's unquenched thirst. Do they not realize that there are ills, cracks in the "system" that will sooner or later catch up on them? Do they fail to see, the endemic nature of the contradictions that wreck the very foundations of a social order built on divisions? Do they think that the liberal sentiment of the middle-class will anchor and provide them with refuge in a world verging on total chaos and destruction? Do they think that these divisions are but ephemeral mists hanging there, victim-

izing the all-too-ready victims?

I do not wish to berate my idealistic counterparts. For in truth, I too wish that I could believe in such a dream as their's. But the dream is a shimmering vision of what reality could be but is not. And in that instance, seeing the differences between dream and reality, I only wish to share with my compatriots, an insight into the blind path upon which they tread, unaware that at any moment, they may by-chance be left on the roadside even though they may be unwilling "victims" of the very system which made them feel so secure once upon-a-time.

But to even vocalize such sentiments is to invite condescension. It is to invite recrimination - after all, is it not better here than in your "country of origin." Lo and behold, if you are one of the Third World, then your claim to criticism is even more suspect. For the "Third World," that world so frowned upon, that world so backward and barbaric, - is the same world which is used to describe you, placate you and contain you. That the "Third World" is not a monolith is something that eschews the sentiments of the liberal masses. It is after all, plagued with similar evils - strife, corruption, famine and starvation. It is visualized in a similar manner - hungry children with bloated stomachs, thin, wraith-like skeletal masses, flies buzzing around open wounds, eye-sores and dribbling mouths.

I am the "Third World" and I am more. I am more because I have roots in the Third World but my structure is of the "First World." My sentiments are with the world that is forsaken, though my strength lies in my familiarity with the arsenal of the First World. But in the great divide of being, of the Third World in the First World, - is my weakness and my strength. For in that divide, I am both something and nothing - I am representative of the masses of humankind, caught in the divide by virtue of their race,

class, gender and history of colonial oppression. I am separate from this world by reason of my migration to this "First" world, embracing its divisions and living within the crevices created by them.

In my attempt to fit, I have come across the exclusion, silencing, and invisibility of my being. In my effort to carve some space for myself in the interstices of the divisions around me, I am accused of not "assimilating," of not being "thankful" for the niceties and opportunities of the world around me. In my bid to affirm my existence through nourishment in my ever-changing and vital cultural tradition, I am branded as being non-conformist, made to feel uncomfortable wherever I turn in spirit and body. My refuge becomes my internal cultural framework - that which I strive to piece together in my fragmented existence in different spaces and times. And in this quest for survival - for wholeness from the fragments, I am led into opposition - against the liberal humanity of the idealists - the humanitarians, and against the patronizing attitude of those who feel that I am but creating waves where there are none.

For these people, there is no link between the personal and political. There is no understanding that at the bottom of this great society of divisions, are the women of Colour, oppressed by class, race, and gender. There is no notion that it is the women of Colour who work piece-meal to keep the engines of the industrialized west in perpetual motion - who inhabit the great phallic structures that are but homages to the system of exploitation that affects us all. There is no vision of all those women of Colour who work the farm-lands, picking the foods that grace our tables, whose very labour endangers their lives and those of their children. But there is the ever-present perception of the "poor" victimized lot of women of Colour - a lot they have apparently "chosen" by the very fact that

they exist. After all, in the land of opportunity and plenty, these women too have the chance to "make it" if they choose to. But no, they choose to work in these exploitative conditions. Or, they choose to be victims because in the larger picture, they are sacrificing themselves for a better future for their offspring.

What better future I wonder. In a world where their children will have to witness the same indignities heaped upon people of their race and class? Is it really the same today as it was more than eighty years ago when the South Asians were driven out of British Columbia? Is it really not the same today as when the South Asians of a century ago, had to carve their own little communities in South Vancouver to survive? Does the Charter make that much of a difference?

I think not. For on the buses and on the streets, the exclusion is there. It may be veiled, but it is there. And the pain is there - always. From the little occurrences and mishaps of social life to the major transgressions of social norms and human rights, the same sentiments grounded in exclusion are there. The divides remain and in their perpetuation lies the continuous separation of those who are different by reason of their race, class and gender, from those who stand to benefit from these historically entrenched divisions within humankind. So I say to my liberal (with a small 'l') compatriots, that I wish I too could share your dream, but I am afraid my experience is different, and in the difference I see the connections that are so systemic in nature as to make the personal and political but one breadth of the social fabric that is reality. And I say, that it is not my imagination, my personal being that has created this great divide, but rather a whole legacy of historical experience as evidenced in my heritage, my people and my cultural reality.

For I am a woman of Colour.



Women Against Religious Fundamentalism

Diva presents the following as a basis for discussion on religious fundamentalism in the context of women's rights across the globe. Linking it with systemic racism and the recent neo-Nazi backlash increases our understanding of the struggles we are involved with in different countries.

WAF in Britain

by Georgie Wemyss

(This is a paper presented at a panel discussion on Women and Religious Fundamentalism at "Making the Links - Anti-Racism and Feminism" Conference by CRIAW in Toronto, November 13-15, 1992)

Here is a brief history of how and why Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) came to be formed, the principles underpinning WAF, the campaigns and other activities that we have

been involved with to-date and the current challenges that we want to prioritize.

What is WAF?

Women Against Fundamentalism exists as a network of women to challenge the rise of religious fundamentalism in all religions - Zionism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and so forth. Its members include women who grew up in various religious and cultural contexts and women who have been campaigning against, or resisting the power of fundamentalist leaderships or movements within their own

communities. A strength of WAF is the opportunity that it gives women from different backgrounds to share their experiences of the repressive processes of religious fundamentalism and to support each other in challenging the power of fundamentalist leaderships and ideologies. WAF members bring international experience to bear on the situation in Britain.

WAF opposes racism in its myriad forms, but has often come into conflict with other anti-racist organizations in its analyses and actions of issues which expose conflicts of interests amongst minority communities, particularly in relation to women's interests.

The History of WAF

WAF was formed in 1989 after the London-based campaigning and advice group, Southall Black Sisters (SBS), sought to establish a network of women opposed to religious fundamentalism. The impetus to the formation of WAF was the 14th of February fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie by the Iranian fundamentalist regime. The Rushdie affair brought onto the national political agenda, the issue of the rights of individuals or groups to be heretical, to openly speak out against religious orthodoxies, something that women in different contexts have been struggling for throughout history.

In Southall Black Sisters' ten year history, it had come into conflict with fundamentalist religious leaders over issues of violence against women and forced marriages within the local South Asian communities. SBS also often clashed with anti-racist organizations that objected to the exposure of conflicts within minority communities in the wider political arena.

Religious Fundamentalism in the British Context

In Britain, religious fundamentalism is growing within the specific contexts of the constitu-

tional power of the Protestant Church of England and the ideology of "multiculturalism." In order to explain the positions that WAF takes, it is necessary to understand the relationship between the state, the Church and the dominance of the ideology of "multiculturalism" in the arenas of education and social policy.

The church of England, as the established Church, has significant political, economic and ideological power. The bishops participate in the House of Lords (the Upper House of Parliament), and the blasphemy laws protect the Church against attacks that are legal against other religions. Since 1988, schools have been required to have a daily act of Christian worship. There is an assumed correspondence of national and religious identity which means that non-established churches and particularly non-Christians can be only partial members of the British national collectivity and are defined to a greater or lesser extent as outsiders.

The founding statement of WAF called for the separation of state and religion as a precondition for the defeat of fundamentalism. WAF opposes the political and ideological power held by the Church of England in the British state. WAF's activities are based on the principle of opposing the existence of the established Church and in demystifying the relationship between the Church and the state. That relationship between Church and state is often ignored in the discourses of "liberal multiculturalism" that has dominated many of the issues that WAF has been active on.

The Ideology and Practice of "Multiculturalism" in the British Context

"Multiculturalism" constructs every group as 'ethnic' except those who have the power. The ideology of multiculturalism has been dominant in education and social policy, in various

guises, for the last two decades. WAF argues that multiculturalist policies have attempted to legitimize heterogeneity in British national culture but have ended up creating the space in which...fundamentalist movements have developed and sought to impose uniformity and homogeneity on all their adherents. The multiculturalist consensus has defined minority groups by their culture, and culture has been increasingly defined as religious identity. It assumes that such communities are homogenous and can be fully represented by religious leaders. Often the most authoritative or dominant version of religion is interpreted by the multiculturalist policy makers as the most authentic. Such processes have led to fundamentalist leaders of movements being given powers to represent and control minority communities. Such control is in the context of the greater power of the Church of England.

What is the Fundamentalism WAF is Against?

WAF is not anti-religion. WAF opposes all 'fundamentalist movements' that claim that their version of religion is the only true one. Internationally and in Britain, there exist Christian Protestant, Roman Catholic, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic fundamentalist movements that are political movements seeking to use modern state and media powers to promote their particular religious ideologies and practices. They use political structures and processes to impose their values and practices on all members of their religion. Because of the importance of the role of women in the reproduction of a fundamentalist society, the control of women is central to the political agendas of fundamentalist movements. In Britain, fundamentalists have successfully used local government and education authority structures, underpinned by the ideology of

"multiculturalism," to gain more power in their communities and to restrict choices available to women.

Religious fundamentalisms are international phenomena. Funding from abroad supports fundamentalist Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic movements in Britain which in turn raise resources to fund organizations abroad. Anti-racist movements in Britain have often ignored this international perspective and have supported repressive organizations such as the fundamentalist Hindu organization the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad), and the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami. Many members of minority communities, in a climate of rising racism and intolerance, have been unwilling to speak out openly against such organizations. Women, who have been fighting against the orthodoxies of such organizations within their own communities and in different continents, have come together in WAF, and have found support for each others struggles.

WAF's Activities

WAF demonstrates, pickets, protests, organizes discussion groups and publishes a journal. We try, with varying degrees of success, to influence the debates, policies and practices with the WAF perspective which often conflicts with the views of sections of the anti-racist and feminist movements in Britain.

Rushdie

WAF's first demonstration, which received a lot of publicity, was a counter-demonstration against the anti-Rushdie demonstration in May 1989. WAF's counter-demonstration showed the right of "ethnic minority" women to dissent from religious and multiculturalist orthodoxy. Black and white women on the counter-demonstration were threatened by both anti-Rushdie marchers and neo-Nazis who were opposing the main march. WAF continues to defend the right of free speech

for Salman Rushdie and other dissenters from religious orthodoxy.

Schools

Over the following year WAF campaigned against the state funding of religious schools. The government funds Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish religious schools. After the Rushdie affair more confident calls were made for the funding of Islamic schools. The call was supported by liberal multiculturalists because the current position is obviously discriminatory. It was supported by right-wingers who were attracted to the conservative values and control of orthodox religious leaders. Racists opposed the call as a threat to the British way-of-life. WAF opposes the state funding of all religious schools on the grounds that all such religious schools, police girls' sexuality and reinforce their religiously defined roles. Religious schools in Britain have also become racially segregated schools. Some Catholic schools pander to white parents' desire to send their children to 'white' schools. Where I live in East London, hundreds of Bangladeshi Muslim and Hindu children have been denied education because Roman Catholic state-aided schools, with empty places will only offer 10% of their places to non-Catholic children (and other Christians have priority over non-Christians).

WAF also opposes the compulsory act of Christian worship in state schools that was re-introduced in 1988.

WAF's activities were centred around trying to influence the policies of the opposition Labour party, through speaking at Women's section meetings. We were unsuccessful since the party has adopted the liberal multiculturalist position of supporting religious schools of all denominations. Opposing the principle of reli-

gious schools and Christian worship in schools remains a priority in WAF.

Reproductive Rights

WAF supports the right of women to choose. WAF picketed the Irish Embassy alongside Irish women's and pro-choice organizations in support of the rights of Irish women to information about abortion and in protest against the Irish fatwa against a fourteen year-old pregnant rape-victim who was threatened with prosecution for travelling to Britain for an abortion. WAF organized a discussion group looking at the relationship between religious fundamentalism and reproductive rights which brought together women struggling against Protestant and Catholic fundamentalist opposition to abortion in Ireland, the U.S. and Britain.

Refugee Status and the Immigration Laws

Britain has a law, known as the 'one-year-rule' under which spouses from abroad have to stay with their partners for one year after arriving in Britain before they are given permanent leave to remain. Wives escaping physical, psychological and sexual abuse, if they seek refuge within one year, lose their rights to residency. WAF was active in a campaign for Rabia Janjua, a Pakistani woman, who left her violent husband and was threatened with deportation to Pakistan which she had fled from and where she faced flogging and a possible ten years imprisonment under the degrading Zina (unlawful sex) laws, which had found her guilty of adultery. WAF tried to focus the campaign on the issue of refugee status for women who suffer persecution on religious or sexual grounds, and on the immigration laws that are used by men to control their wives. Rabia won her fight to stay in Britain, but the principle of refugee status being available for women suffering religious

and sexual discrimination has not been accepted and in the current political climate, it is going to be a hard struggle to achieve. Southall Black Sisters is currently campaigning against the one-year-rule.

WAF has organized other discussion groups around the issues of the international organization of religious fundamentalism and on secularism and nationalism. We produce a journal which we are hoping to distribute in North America.

The Original Sin & Internationalism

by Marie-Aimee Helie Lucas

*This article was provoked by items on racism in an issue of the German feminist journal **Beitrag zur Feministische Theorie und Praxis** (Contributions to Feminist Theory and Practice). Written in French, the article was first published in German translation in the **Beitrag**, No.28, 1990, pp.135-7. Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas lives near Montpellier, France where she coordinates a network of "Women Living Under Muslim Laws."*

Once upon a time there was people known as North, white and rich, and a people known as South, non-white and poor. The North people exploited, attacked and killed the Southpeople, according to their needs. This was because the Northpeople were bad, terrible and had (almost) all the vices, and it was born so: such was its nature.

Even Those-Who-Tried-To-Cleanse-Themselves-Of-The-Original-Sin (one of its tribes)

were sad because of their impotence to free themselves of the curse which operated potentially, and was rooded ontologically in them, even when they were very wise.

All their dreams were directed to the poor Southpeople, so exploited, so courageous, so oppressed, so rebellious, so wise, etc... This was because the Southpeople had (almost) all the virtues - also by nature (or was it due to geographical location? Could one gain their virtues by emigrating to their lands? That was one of the dreams.) Those of the North Who-Tried-To-Cleanse-Themselves-Of-The-Original-Sin sometimes followed their dreams to the South. There they were, beating their breasts, demanding publicly (as publicly as possible) pardon for the faults of the Northpeople, and begging the Southpeople to aid them to change. (Such processions of penitents were sometimes cut short by the poverty, the filth, the mosquitoes and the other things that devoured the Southpeople. And, when one is not accustomed to such things, madam, well, it's tough. But those people there are so good, so gentle, they give you the shirt off their backs, etc.)

Sisters, stop telling yourselves tall tales and believing in fairies! A dichotomic vision of the world is an obstacle to internationalism. It keeps you comfortably settled, yes, settled in a position of impotence - and this despite the state of your soul concerning your original sin and the colour of your skin. You are not, however, impotent. Because you analyse, you think, and you organise yourselves against imperialism and racism.

The only thing lacking amongst you is a demystification of the 'South,' the 'Third World' - whatever label you stick on us equally inadequate. Because it confirms the idea of a world in which the good and the bad are geographically determined. Racism is not your monopoly, far from it. And we, we don't talk about our

racism, we hide it: therefore we do not analyze it, organize ourselves against it or fight against it - neither in ourselves nor in civil society.

Look, you have a major advantage over us. Heaven could be praised if we had anti-racism organizations at home. I have travelled some extent, and neither at home nor elsewhere in 'the South' have I found these. Our countries, nevertheless, are racist, very racist, perhaps amongst the most racist in the world, just because racism feels at ease here, has no finger pointed at it.

It deploys itself under the conceptual protection you have contributed to spreading, to theorizing, blinded by your white guilt, and which comforts the little crooks who, within our countries and our highest bodies, exploit racism to their own profit.

Firstly there is anti-white, anti-Western racism, which you are always ready to understand and excuse as a legitimate response to imperialism. This is a scandal! Are you prepared, in your own countries, to tolerate racism against immigrants on the grounds that your proletariat or sub-proletariat suffers so severely from the economic crisis? Are we, in your eyes, too primitive to have demanded from us the taking of political positions in response to specific economic and social situations?

Why do you tolerate this, our basic racism? Are the Westerners, the whites, and undifferentiated and atomised mass of similar and equal individuals - all imperialists - or do you also have classes, races and sexes, within which our allies struggle? Are we similarly an undifferentiated and atomised mass of individuals, without classes, races and sexes? Do you not see amongst us our national bourgeoisies (compradore or content with crumbs from the imperial table), allies of imperialism, to which they throw our gates wide open?

We cannot identify ourselves with anti-demo-

cratic regimes in our countries, any more than you who struggle within the 'North' can carry the banner for your imperialist states. If your governments (not you), produce and sell arms, despite your courageous opposition, it is because our governments (not us, against whom they are used) buy them. Just as they buy for their own benefit the ruinous equipment and myths of 'development.'

Stop denying the fundamental role played in the South by our bourgeoisies, our feudal castes, our military and our bureaucrats, in the expansion of imperialism, and the complicity of anti-democratic powers amongst them (from North to South and South to North). Stop beating your breasts about what your leaders do in your name and despite your struggles. Identify your allies in the South: they are in a minority, just as you are, but nothing will be achieved without our coming together - free of the ruins of your guilt, as well as of our good conscience as the long defeated, as the ex-colonized, which feeds our present basic racism.

The official dogma of national unity, favoured in all our countries, conceals xenophobia and allows it to flourish - a weed, a devouring parasite, a nursery of Hitlers and Le Penists. Whilst opening wide their arms to 'your' multinationals, arms and development, 'our' governments favour the expression of popular discontent, in the form of a racism toward you - individuals, whites, Westerners - thus preventing us from making the necessary alliances.

Once released, the racist snake does not satisfy itself with just one prey. All our countries exercise their xenophobia against or national minorities as well as toward non-white foreigners. You never speak about this. Neither do we.

You quite rightly use the word racism about the rise of anti-semitism in your countries, or of the laws and practices discriminating against minorities or immigrants. When similar phe-

nomena appear in our countries, you conceal them with exotic justifications, such as 'inter-ethnic' or 'tribal' conflicts. Those who govern us are neither stupid nor crazy, so they adopt these excuses for themselves.

Nevertheless, right-extremist Hindus massacre Muslims, just as right-extremist Christians massacre Jews, and the right-extremist Jews massacre Muslims just as the right-extremist Muslims massacre all those who differ from, or do not submit to, them.

In Algeria, my own country, the whites of the North throw stones at the blacks of the South. (Here is a brand-new North and South for you: to each his or her own South.) But we do not have either an SOS Racism or Rock Against Racism, so that Blacks can organize themselves and be protected. Official ideology denies this rock in the garden of national unity. And the democrats, the liberals, the progressives, the women, do not have the courage to betray the myth and proclaim the truth, of which every visitor from Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced

- just as do the Southern Algerians. This concealment of our own racism smothers us and prevents our advance.

Sisters, don't participate in this lie. Although you are doing a good job in denouncing your own racism and that of your country, nothing will be achieved until we do likewise.

The present definition of internationalism is a one-way one, running from you - the Rich White North - to us, whom it is necessary to 'aid' or 'develop.' Understand this: that we are already tied together at a quite different level, and that internationalist practice can only develop on a basis of equality; that - beyond all guilt and myth, and considering history here and now - our struggles reinforce each other's. When we write on our racism the kind of articles you write on yours, you will have a more global, less 'white', vision of what is at stake. And we too.

A liberatory process, to our common benefit. Unfortunately, back home, down 'in the South,' where we live, we still have far to go.

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Domestic Workers Protest Discriminatory Admission Rules

by **Amina Jamal**

Crushing poverty and low paid work drive thousands of women every year to leave “less developed countries.” For many, the only option lies in jobs in childcare and housework for working mothers in rich western states.

For the past ten years Canada’s Foreign Domestic Workers Movement (FDM) program has enabled unskilled women from the Philippines and the Caribbean to get jobs and immigrant rights. But a recent Canadian government decision to tighten entry requirements for foreign domestic job seekers threatens to cut off this immigration lifeline.

If these conditions were applied, there would have been no room in Canada for women like Cherry, a native of the Philippines who entered in June 1991.

A 30-year old mother of four and marketing graduate in her country, Cherry (who preferred to withhold her last name), could only qualify to enter Canada as a domestic worker on a temporary visa.

From a salary equalling 150 Canadian dollars in her own country, she now earns 800 dollars a month at her job in a Toronto suburb where she is required to live-in with her employers. She puts in a 44 hour week of housework and childcare. “I could get the same salary for similar work in Malaysia or Singapore but it’s the opportunity to advance that I came to Canada for,” she said.

In three years time, Cherry will be eligible for “landed immigrant” status but only if she upgrades her educational standard, devotes some time to voluntary work and can show savings in the bank. After that she can sponsor her family to join her.

Badrunnisa, a 45-year old widow from Pakistan, thanks destiny for bringing her to Canada. She recalls the years spent by her family to find a lucrative job overseas for one of her five children including a daughter who is a bank clerk. But it was Badrunnisa, with only primary school education and lots of childcare experience, who was asked to accompany a professional family migrating to Canada. “It was a big step for me but I had worked as a nanny in the Middle East and was used to living away from my children. I consider myself lucky to be in Canada because I may be able to bring one of my sons when I get immigrant status,” she said.

The trauma of leaving loved ones behind and the extended separation from families is mitigated in the minds of women like Cherry and Badrunissa by the prospect of a better future

for them all. They are concerned that such opportunities will be withheld from others in the same situation.

Domestic workers in Toronto, Ottawa and other Canadian cities joined a protest campaign against new admission rules announced last January by the Minister of Employment and Immigration. These will restrict the Foreign Domestic Workers Movement program only to those who have the equivalent of a Canadian grade 12 education, who have completed six months full-time training in a field related to live-in care and who speak either English or French.

The government said such changes will "improve" the FDM by ensuring that workers entering in the programme are equipped for vocations they may adopt once they become landed immigrants. But workers consider the entry criteria discriminatory and racist.

"They will create more barriers for women of Colour and reinforce systemic racism in Canada's immigration policies," according to Intercede, a Toronto-based Organization for Domestic Workers Rights. In a paper responding to the government decision, it said the changes close the programme to poor women in less developed countries who have no access to the specified education and training.

In other words, the new rules will hit women from the Philippines and the Caribbean who make up about 73 percent of applicants to the FDM since 1981. Over 51,000 women have entered Canada under the programme since 1982, according to immigration statistics.

The 2000-member Intercede and its sister groups in Canadian cities along with women's and worker's organizations have staged protests and sent letters to the government deploring the restrictions. They point out the new rules can only benefit women from European countries who ordinarily have Grade 12 education and have access to care-giving related training and certificates which are virtually non-existent in less developed countries.

Meanwhile, the lack of quality day care and childcare will continue to enhance the demand for domestic workers. Officials are aware that they must fill this demand from abroad since domestic work is such low-paid drudgery that few women will feel fulfilled doing it. They are also conscious that the supply will keep drying up as most house workers will not stay in the low paid profession once they are free to look for other work.

Carol Salmon, an Intercede official describes the country's admission policy for foreign domestic workers as "confused." Canada, which has liberal rules to attract investors and professionals as landed immigrants, has always reserved "special" treatment for much-needed domestic workers. Domestic workers cannot qualify under the country's points system for permanent resident status because their work is considered "low skill." But they are required to meet certain education standards to gain entry even though higher education is not needed to apply for domestic work. So domestic workers can only enter the country as visitors with temporary visas but they have to meet many of the criteria of permanent residents. And yet, once in Canada, they are considered only visitors while authorized to work here.

"It is this visitor's status, this temporary status, combined with mandatory live-in that makes foreign domestic workers vulnerable to abuse," according to Intercede. "Poorer women from less developed countries clearly have a bigger stake in the permanent residence status than other FDM workers from countries where living standards are not too different from Canada's," it says.

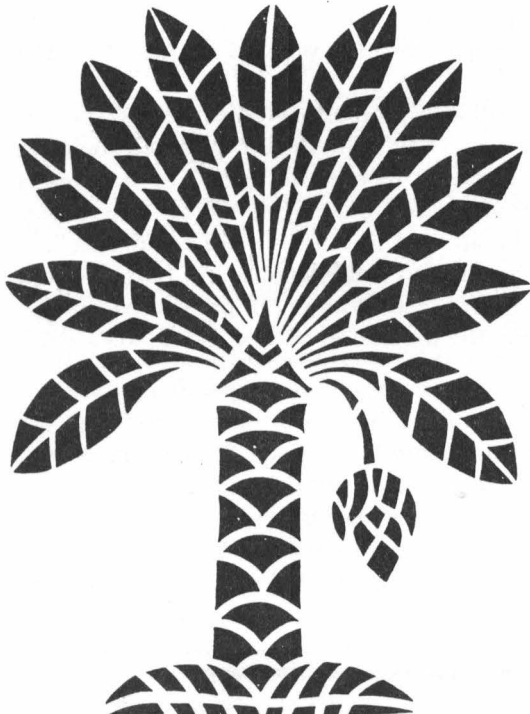
The fear or threat of deportation inhibits foreign domestic workers from enforcing the rights they already have, forcing them to endure oppression such as excessive working hours, unpaid overtime, restrictions in religious practice or diet and even sexual or physical abuse. Intercede officials say there is no justification for the way in which domestic workers are discriminated against as workers.

"Labour officials are afraid immigrant workers will leave domestic employment as soon as they can, but they're doing nothing to encourage them to stay" Salmon said. Intercede believes the problem can be resolved only by according domestic labour the respect it deserves as productive work including official efforts to raise standards and elevate status. The group demands that foreign domestic workers should be allowed to enter Canada as permanent residents similar to the entry facilities currently granted to professionals and businessmen. Otherwise, it says, the low status of domestic work, lack of security and poor pay compared with other jobs, will continue to discourage women from the profession adding to Canada's acute need for caregivers and domestic workers.

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Ponnamma

by Shyamala Parameswaran

Her name was Ponnamma. She came, as they said, 'looking a waif, lost and needy but showing some character...', so after a discussion among themselves, the Nallavar couple decided to offer her a deal: living space in lieu of services through odd jobs and a rent of Rs.25 per month. She lived in an alcove, off the farthest end of the back verandah in the Nallavar house.

Dawn and sunset were her friends and silent informants of time. For her, life meant weaving baskets in two or three sizes and

displaying them at the local bazaar. She attended only the morning sessions. Afternoons, she spent preparing for the next day, weaving more baskets, or fetching water from the village well, threshing grain, milling flour on the old grinding stone, sweeping up courtyards...

I met her first when I went to relay a message regarding some service that my relative needed. I was captivated by her. I could not tell her age, she seemed so graceful. She was rather thin, draped in a limp, battered-looking sari and blouse long past its better days. But it was not these that arrested me, it was her face...and her manner. Her little person, a face so piquant, her skin intriguingly wrinkled, lines criss-crossing everywhere but when it came to her eyes, where they were dark and somber as if they sought to tell a story but couldn't find the words. She spoke little. I did not know why I was drawn to her but I began to seek every chance I could to go see her. Sometimes I'd sit by her as she threshed the grain from the chaff, watching her face and her movements. Sometimes I'd observe her weave her baskets, the only sounds coming from some late afternoon birds twittering away or a distant radio playing local songs. There was such a sense of timelessness when I was

with her. Such tranquility. And such a strange sense of mystery.

"Ponnamma," I dared one day, "where do you come from?" There was a silence and I thought she wasn't going to answer. And I watched her continue threshing. "Karaikudi," she said after a long while. Oh, Ponnamma, you talked! And told me something personal, too! The Nallavars had watched me hang around their backyard practically every day of my vacation at Puttoor and had told me, Ponnamma is no great company, she'll do her job, no more. So you are wasting your time, haven't you got something better to do?

One morning, Appa and I were at the bazaar. When we went past the vendor selling banana leaves, I suddenly stopped in my tracks. "Appa, look, there's Ponnamma! Let's get a basket, please Appa?" I said excitedly, as I tugged his hand. "But we don't need a basket dear," he said. "Appa please, I want to buy something from Ponnamma, do say yes," I pleaded. My father relented, looking quite amusedly at me. We walked towards her. She didn't see us coming until we were very close. She was sitting there behind her wares, absently viewing the crowd, there, and yet so distant. Pensive as always. Maybe she had had a bad day and sold nothing. We picked out a basket that I liked, Ponnamma looked at me as if to tell me it was the best she had. I was so happy. Oh, Ponnamma, were you happy too? Later that evening I took off stealthily to see her. She was just preparing for bed. The mat, acting as her door, was down but I could see a light inside. "Ponnamma," I whispered. There was a shuffling movement. She slowly emerged from behind the hanging mat. "Ponnamma, we've kept potatoes in your basket. My aunt thinks it is quite useful." And I looked at Ponnamma's face eagerly in the faint light. A slow smile spread across her face and I watched,

fascinated. The skin stretched and there was a shine. The web of lines disappeared. She had lost some teeth, it gave her mouth a vulnerable look. Her lips quivered as she tried to speak. "It's late. You should go to sleep." "Yes, Ponnamma, I will but I'll come tomorrow."

The next day I was not able to see her because we left to visit a temple several miles away and when we returned, it was very late. And so I went on Saturday, the day we were leaving for Madras. I waited for her to return from the morning bazaar. She brought out a small bowl of boiled peanuts for lunch. And I watched her eat with a lump in my throat. I wanted to get some food for her from my aunt's place but I knew she would refuse. She was so proud. I remember wishing fervently she could have lived with us. To share all we had. My parents wouldn't mind, I knew that. But would she want to leave and travel more than a thousand miles to live in the north? I guess I'll never know. Because I didn't ask.

As the train pulled out of Puttoor, I felt tears in my eyes. Lush fields, swaying trees, thick green bushes and cool-flowing streams passed by: I did not really see them. I kept thinking I hope Ponnamma will be happy, dear Lord.

I was back at Puttoor a couple of years later. Ponnamma was there, her usual self, as busy as ever. Her movements were somewhat slower, I thought, and her hands a little shaky. In the quiet afternoon of a searingly hot day, we sat, I, with my book, and Ponnamma, with her half-woven basket. She spoke softly and haltingly. Her husband had died many years ago. She had had no children....I wanted to ask when it was that her husband had died and how old she was, but I was afraid to interrupt and stem the flow. She continued lingeringly. She had lived with her mother-in-law but she

and her husband had slept apart all the years she lived. When she had died, some things changed. But it was too late to have children by then. And, in any case, they didn't have much money, so perhaps it was aandan's doing to prevent more misery. Her hands. They trembled as she tried to force a strip of cane into a loop. Her beautiful, gnarled hands. I wanted so much to hold them that minute. Ponnamma.

She had been a flower-woman till then. Weaving garlands for braids and adornment. Malligai poo, kanakambaram, jadi mullai, maru kozhundu. Fragrant, exotic flowers that speak a universal language. Nature's treasures meant for all. But one day, some months after her husband's death, a woman stormed up shrieking, "You widow, you ought to be ashamed of selling flowers. You are a deliverer of bad omen, you wicked woman! You brought bad fortune to my house, here take these rotten flowers. A widow selling flowers! What audacity!" What could I do?, Ponnamma grieved. And she gave up flowers for baskets. And moved out of Karaikudi as it became harder to live in a town with the little she made. So here she was. In Puttoor. At the Nallavar house.

This time before leaving Puttoor, I gave

Ponnamma a silver coin and some material for a blouse. She looked so pleased that I tentatively reached out and touched her face. The skin felt so different from what I was used to. It seemed roughened from years of sorrow and harsh living. The lines seemed etched forever. Touching her face did strange things inside me. I became speechless.

I did not know when I'd see her again. And we did not visit Puttoor the next time we went because my relatives had moved elsewhere. But I did meet my uncle from Puttoor five years later. "How is Ponnamma?" I asked. He didn't seem to recall. But some minutes later he did. Oh, that Ponnamma you used to be pals with?" "Yes, yes," I whispered urgently. "She died." "Oh, no!" "Yes, my dear, they found her lying still one morning on the verandah where she lived. And the Nallavars called in the folks to get rid of the corpse before their children got to see it."

I spent the evening on the terrace. Watching city traffic and listening to the cacophony coming off the streets. My mind was so far away I didn't hear my name being called. A voice from the distance came closer. And Appa said he heard about Ponnamma when he got in. And quietly touched my shoulder.

(This is a small tribute to myriads of women who pass through this world, unknown and unsung. In recognition of those afflicted by destitution and other evils plaguing our times. Written with hope towards a just world.)



The Films

by **B. G.**

I dashed out of the theatre suppressing my tears in fear that someone might see me cry and then I let myself do just that - cry. What I really wanted to do was howl at the top of my lungs. I wanted to shout as the East Indian would, you don't understand! You don't understand me, you don't understand where "I'm coming from. Don't you see how hard I have tried all my life and it's because i have tried that I'm caught. Caught. Who am I? Indian? Canadian? I am a gymnast doing the perfect leg splits between two cultures. I am not completely comfortable with either.

Those films at the theatre - they flooded my mind with painful memories and thoughts of being a female, moreover a second generation Indian female. I think of my pain, my sisters, my mothers and other Indian women. What did we do to deserve it I question myself over and over again.

I can still remember the items in grade school when I wished that I had been born a male. To be born a female - an Indian female was a curse I used to think.

Freedom, freedom and safety, that's what being a male represented to me then, having the simple pleasures of being allowed to visit your friends, to be able to go to a movie with them, or perhaps even a party. "Come home before it gets dark." I used to be bold. What is it about the dark that made my father and I have endless battles, I used to wonder then. Now, I realize that it pointed to one thing - sex. A father's fear that his daughter would become sexually involved with a male before her marriage, or will be sexually assaulted. (Worry about this?) Sex - a reason to create suffering for a female. I used to think "How can they be think that? Why can't they trust me, don't they know me?" - that's just what the problem was, they didn't know me. Like the dust particles in the air, unspoken words were always there.

Now I still wish I had been born a male, my biological clock ticks louder every day reminding me of my gender, of my Indian heritage. The alarm went off when I turned 25 at least for Indian people. I was often bold, that no one would marry me if I become "too old". An Indian female's youth is highly valued by men searching a bride. "Why haven't you been married yet?" they ask, implying perhaps that you are not beautiful. "Are you beautiful? How much do you weigh," but never "What do you enjoy doing? What do you think about?..." He may be a two year old boy searching a bride no older than 25.

Is that what I am? A biological clock. Don't you want to know me. Do you know that I love listening to the sounds of the waves, that I love going for long walks and that I love being outdoors. This is apart of me. Don't you want to know me? If you must know, I haven't been married because i have been trying to please my parents and myself. I have been trying to find an Indian man who will accept me as a person. Don't you see, I too want to be happy. Can I not make everyone happy I ask myself over and over again. I'm a fly caught in a spiders web. To be married or not to be married? Is anyone really happy? I feel the pain of not having a companion in my life. Simultaneously I see and hear the pain of married women trapped in the castles with their rajahs. I have come to know that the backaches and headaches and the bolts of pelts is the mental anguish of a mother, an Indian female who wants only to be acknowledged, respected and perhaps even loved. Where do I go?

I want to cry for myself, for Indian women. When will the pain stop? I walk down the street with the tears rolling down my cheeks oblivious of the darkness outside. I walk back to the theatre with my friend who has come in search of me. I sit down and suddenly notice someone I haven't seen for several years. The pain is pushed down for another time.

Next Issue of Diva

Our Reproductive Rights:

*Abortion Rights, New Reproductive Technologies, Choice,
Women's Health, Links Worldwide*

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Dateline For Contributions

February 28, 1993

To a Kind Hearted Person

by Gulnar Lahor

The descending silence
all around
the increasing prominence
of the evening shadows
the playful chatter
of the birds
and your company
how delightful it all was

Sitting on a stone
in front of you
under the bowed branches
of a leafless tree
how secure I felt
like a child
snuggled up
with closed eyes
in her mother's warm lap
sleeps oblivious
of joy or sorrow

My hand
kept trembling
in yours
drop by drop

Your words
penetrated the thirsty soul
of the child within me

Like the thirsty land
yearning for water
I drank
from your words
I allowed them
to effect-me
to flow
through my veins
to heal me.

Oh kind soul
the child
within me
brings an offering
of love
I place
these flowers
at your feet
I leave to you their acceptance.

Moonless Sand

by Vinita Srivastava

the sand inside my body
rises and
falls

trickles
out
like
air
out of an effigy.

The tide of the sand
first is all brown
then coloured
pink
blue
grains of green

then once again
brown.

The
moon
tries to reach my sand.
to make

patterns with the
water
on
the

beach
to glisten like other grains.
But the sand inside my body has no moon
Only the tide
and the
waves.

the sand pulses
reaching the
tip
of my
finger
tips.
and my finger nails.
It pounds
into
my
head.
seeps into my eyes.
and
rests
in
my
feet
brown
sand.
brown moonless sand.



Channa - moon rising

(for Channa Bhanu - "moonbeam")

by May Yee

we live
in this land of lies
i don't know how
we live
on the blood
this overfed parasite consumes

sometimes
i just don't know how we live

and how
this beautiful baby
born today
how?

we see
the unending horror
see through
the thin shiny veil of lies
covering the sea of blood, flesh and misery

i don't know how we live
this life
of lies

and out of this
how can we care?
how can we not care?

this beautiful baby
bringing new life
to the centuries of death and despair
weighing heavy on our shoulders
and our mothers' and our mothers' mothers'



baby your very lightness
lightens the load
light of centuries

but my heart is heavy
with fear and hope
for you
and i cry
how can we care so much!
how can we not care too much!

i have cared too much
to bring new life
into this dying land, this lying land
i have held new life
 looked into new eyes
in pure wonder
but yet to see
how new life can spring
from me

we have wanted endings
to destroy all of this
which is destroying all of us
but what have we wanted!
less and more
to end without beginning
 begin without end
we have wanted all of it
and wanted none of it

how can we want new life!
how can we not want new life!

new moon rising
warm and orange in the dark night
holding the promise of tomorrow's sun
tomorrow's hope



Smearred Memories

by Dawinder Bansal

Each time hurt peeled the scabs,
unhealed wounds rapidly open,
overloaded anguish ooze,
dull ache lingers on and on
bitterness continues to go deeper
urge to yell *pain* surface
screams of anger echo in burning hell,
awakening my courage to speak and tell

I'm human too!
I've feelings the same as you!!
Human beings aren't perfect
Why should I be?

Fuck your verbal punches
Piss on your long emotional fight
I want to be me
Now my soul demands the right

Must expressing myself declare a war!
I want to own my inner self,
my thoughts,
my feelings,
and I deserve much more...

And can you believe it that
Putting up with the contest is
accentuating my womanhood rather
than detracting from it.



“The War is Declared”

by Sunera Thobani

a war on women
they say
and claim
it is a war undeclared

women
know otherwise

fearing the night
.....the day
heads pounding
bodies broken
spirits weeping
taste of blood on tongues
and the claim
this war is undeclared

prisoners of war
within the confines
of our own
homes lives hearts
they tell us
it is undeclared

the war
has been declared
every day
with every kick bite punch slap fuck shot stab
with every wound seen....and unseen
the war is being declared



2.4.92
Feb. 18/92

esteemed judge asks
did he mean to kill?
forcefully confining her...
violating her....
placing wire around her neck...
tightening it...
she can't breathe...
plastic bag over her head
beyond a doubt, judge cannot tell
if he really meant to kill
this war is declared

stripped and tied down...
he shoves red hot pepper into her...
eleven convictions already...
threatens to kill...
as soon as she lands...
Immigration Officers say she is no refugee
this war is declared

her life destroyed...
sexually abused by own father...
since age three....
for twelve long hard continuous years...
no feelings in her....
she says its as if she is dead inside...
he gets four years....
a declaration of war

found dead on a highway...
face eaten away by animals...
nameless faceless in death...
its her culure...
these bloody backward immigrants...
what can the police do with these people...
the community does not come forward with killer's
name...
police drop the case...
it's a community affair...
this war is declared

blasts her open...
with a shotgun...
how dare she defy him...

honour demands her death...
murmurs about cultural sensitivity warrant front pages...
striving to understand his motives...
desiring to understand his motives...
an entire community of women is warned...
WE WILL UNDERSTAND his motives...
this is no small war

to raise a storm in the desert...
fighter pilots arouse themselves...
watch pornographic films...
condemning women and children to living hell...
far far far away...
a tiny dot on the screen...
camera zooms in...
point of view of bomb...
quickly zooms out again
to catch surgical precision of explosion
this war rains from the skies

in every home street school office
inside outside
upside downside
supported by the forces of the land
this war is declared
at the pinnacle of power...
funds slashed for women run centres shelters transition homes...
ten million dollar peopl and surveys appointed...
eleven white males write the law of the land...
admit yes, true we left out fifty two percent of the people...
but it is our deal
and sell it we will

this war is declared

and women know
rising up in defiance
taking back the night

women know
taking back the land
taking back the night
so we can have our day

diva

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