

WINTER 1993/94

diva

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

LITERARY JOURNAL OF WOMEN OF SOUTH ASIAN ORIGIN



VOICES IN ART & LITERATURE



diva

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

LITERARY JOURNAL OF WOMEN OF SOUTH ASIAN ORIGIN

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Dear *diva* Women,

I write to congratulate you on the recent excellent issues of DIVA. In particular, I would like to mention the Humour issue and those on Family Violence, both of which aired hidden dimensions of the South Asian female personality.

DIVA magazine is the only outlet in Toronto (and indeed, in Canada) specifically focusing upon women of South Asian descent for the expression of their cultural, artistic and political concerns.

The processes of deconstructing the myriad effects of the entrenched patriarchal systems in which we find ourselves locked, are extremely slow, complex and often contradictory. The demands upon the psyche, create a separation of art and literature of politics/social action & consciousness raising. But these cannot be addressed in discrete categories. At least, not in our community.

In enlightened Western feminist quarters "to



write" i.e. "to form utterance" is regarded as a primary political act. For us South Asian women, the act of "utterance" moves far beyond theory; we live this reality daily in our bodies, our tongues and finally in the construction of the creative word or act.

For me, DIVA is a site of urgent and necessary exploration for South Asian women, and for the larger community: cultural in the broadest sense of the word, artistic, committed to change and to the enhancement of women's lives, and literary in its fostering of creative expression. I strongly support DIVA's continued progress in publication and in your other endeavours. Whatever I can do in the future to nurture your efforts and to ensure its success whether by contributions, discussions or in any other way, I shall endeavour to do. Zindabad!!

*Yours Sincerely,
Ramabai Espinet*

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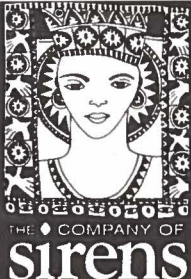
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On pages 3 & 84, please read Mina Kumar in place of Meena Kumar. We regret any inconvenience this might cause our writer and our supporters. Diva



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December 6th

is Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

On this day in 1989, 14 women were killed by one man in Montreal, Canada.

Violence is a global issue. Women and girls around the world face emotional and physical abuse, rape, sexual assault, genital mutilation, dowry deaths, sexual slavery, female infanticide...

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Our Associations also provide a network of shelters for survivors of violence as well as residences, special needs, second stage and permanent affordable housing for women and their families.

The YWCA of/du Canada is proud to sponsor the December 6th commemorative button as part of our struggle to end violence against women and children.



ON BEHALF OF DIVA

BY RACHEL KALPANA JAMES

Artists are subject to stereotypes such as the “struggling artist” or the “self-indulgent genius”. I would like to counter the latter type by arguing that the artist has a duty to express her vision. (Unfortunately, the former plight of the artist still holds true for the majority of us). As women of colour artists, we must express our true selves, so that society can provide effective mirroring to its people. Without this expression and mirroring, we cannot develop healthy self-esteem as individuals or as people.

As a girl growing up in Nova Scotia, I would avoid the mirrors in the school washrooms whenever my friends were around. I did not want to see the part of me that was visible to everyone...the brown-skinned girl with dark hair all over her face and arms... the brown-skinned girl with the slight and boney body...the brown-skinned girl whose countenance revealed shame.

Consider the Greek legend of Narcissus. Narcissus sees himself in a pool of water and falls in love with his own beautiful face. He wants to be one with his idealized image, and in doing so is changed into a flower. Because the reflection revealed only his perfect, beautiful self and not his other parts, Narcissus can no longer exist as he is.

My aversion to my own reflection is the flipside of Narcissus’ dilemma. I reject parts of myself that I believe are unacceptable in a white culture. Like Narcissus, the inability to accept all parts of one’s self ultimately leads to death of the self.

In psychology, mirroring is important for the

healthy development of self-esteem in the individual. Effective mirroring occurs if the true self is seen, accepted, understood, and supported. The true self is realized when one’s feelings are a part of one’s self.¹

In the first few weeks of life, the child needs to be mirrored by her mother. Without any conscious tools to substantiate her existence, the child realizes herself by being reflected in the mother’s gaze. If the mother projects her own needs onto the child, the child cannot find herself but sees the reflection of the mother’s own predicaments. The child remains without a mirror. She is alienated from her true self and is always looking outside herself for validation.

I propose that the concepts that govern the healthy development of self-esteem in the individual can be applied to society. Therefore, the tendency for low self-esteem in marginalized people can be attributed to a lack of effective mirroring in society.

Mirrors are everywhere in...the media, art, family, people. For marginalized people, the mirrors tend to prescribe ways of being rather than reflect the way we are. The attitude of some people working in the media is expressed by an advertising instructor of mine. She reasoned that a black person is rarely featured in an ad because such a presence distracts from the product. The consumer would wonder why the black person is

¹ Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*

there. As people of colour we internalize the message that we must justify our existence. The promise is that we will be accepted if we remain invisible.

Our families also act as mirrors. They too prescribe ways of being to some degree. If our family is transplanted into a different culture, preserving our heritage takes on monumental proportions. Usually we must abide by values that are rigid. "Respect your elders, your culture and its traditions", though valuable, leaves little room for expression that is dynamic and challenging.

Accommodation to external needs forces us to reveal only what is expected of us. It is a constant and tiring effort that squeezes the expression of the true self to such an extent that we become the false self. We cannot develop and differentiate the true self because we cannot live it. And we are

unable to live it because we believe it is unacceptable to do so. The judgements, however, that imply we do not have the right to exist as we are continue to operate in our unconscious unless replaced. It is these judgements that must be replaced for our survival.

I encourage people to make it their duty to express their true selves, especially artists. For artists can provide that mirror through which our communities can be reflected. It is essential that society ensure effective mirroring through support of the arts and accountability to its marginalized peoples. Just like the child who is effectively mirrored by her mother, we must see ourselves in society...not for society's sake, but for our own.

This paper was presented at the 'Voices In Art: Tools Of Resistance' Conference in Kingston, Ontario in November 1993.



Everywoman's Almanac 1994
Women Against the State

The 1994 Everywoman's Almanac tackles the tension between the lives of women in Canada and the interest of the state. Women activists and artists describe their chal-

lenges to the forces of exclusion, silence and oppression. The almanac features women like Mary Pitawanakwat and the West Coast Domestic Workers who have - in the name of justice - withstood tremendous government pressure, as well as artists and musicians like Faith Nolan, Alanis Obomsawin and Winsom who use their talents to document injustice, celebrate cultural communities and enhance all our lives.



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Indian Robber-Talk

A POETRY/DANCE PERFORMANCE PIECE

BY RAMABAI ESPINET

Indian Robber-Talk premiered at Desh Pardesh 1993. On stage at Harbourfront, Sudharshan and Ramabai were joined by Sharon Lewis as the Midnight Robber and Sheila James, doing movement and vocals. Luther Hansraj, well-known in Toronto theatre circles, directed the performance. Patricia Dookie-Perrotte was stage manager.

What follows is an excerpt from the text of Indian Robber-Talk.

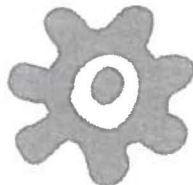
Written by Ramabai Espinet and choreographed by Sudharshan, one of the foremost exponents of Bharata Natyam dance in Toronto, this collaborative poetry/dance piece tells another story from the land of Carnival and bacchanal. Indian Robber-Talk is a South Asian story of journeying. It focuses on the journey from India to the Caribbean and elsewhere, particularly the wide-ranging effects of this journey on a people's imagination.

The metaphor of "robber-talk" is taken from the character of the Midnight Robber, an exaggerated, mock-heroic figure from the Trinidad Carnival. The robber's monologue, which renders his audience immobile throughout its duration, is full of heroic exploits, improbable feats and a sense of having survived insurmountable odds.

The Indian Robber Speaks

Rum sweet rum
When a call yuh
Yuh bong to come

Rum glorious rum
When ah call yuh
Yuh bong to come



Yuh was made
From Caroni cane
Yuh is de best ting
In Port-of-Spain

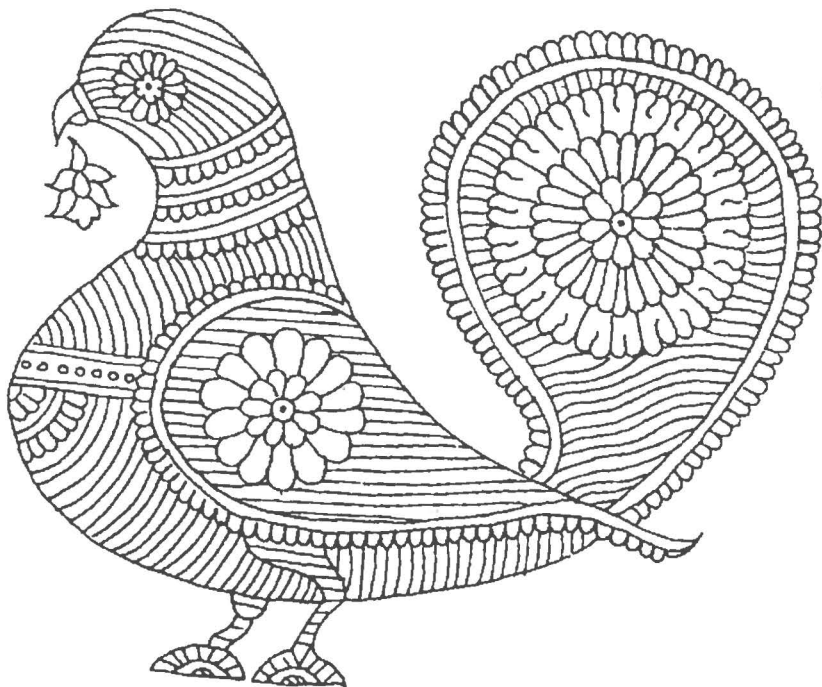
Ah go send mih scorpion
To bite yuh santipe
San-i-manite

Thousand...Thousand
Ten thousand to bar
Me one
And after
I pass dis bridge
I go be
Like cutlass in water
When cutlass cut water
Dey say
It doh leave no mark
But hear what I say
When dis cutlass pass
It go leave a mark
Dat nobody cyah see
In--del--i--ble
Dey coulda never
Rub it out
As I pass thru here
Once only
All yuh cyah forget
Dis mark--
Yuh cyah see it
yuh cyah feel it
But it dey
In--vis--i--ble
Is me
De Indian Robber
Yes I, de Coolie Robber....
I done get a blessing
From de ghost
Of Boysie Singh
From RaffiqueAnd Joe Poolool
From de madwoman
In Sangre Grande
From Amoy and Babounie
From de baa-d-est a we
From de maa-d-est a we
And ah tellin yuh

Brudder
It eh have no way
Yuh could stop me now
Mih hair loose out
Mih tongue loose out
Mih body buss out
And wha I have to say
I go say
An you go hear:
I walk through acres
Of Himalaya snow
Ah dead a thirst
In de Gobi desert
Ah lie dong flat
In de Deccan
Ah travel distance
Immobile as wind
When ah pass...
The miles I walk
To come here
Nobody coulda see mih
I was born in Varanasi, in Agra
My mother a Devadasi
Shah Jehan was my grandfather
Dey dip me in water
From a pond in front
De Taj Mahal
Before I was seven
I kill and eat
Two tigers - drink dey milk
And ride on a next one
My brother was Ramu -
The wolf-boy
My father was a hijira
My grandmother was a bandit-queen
Baa-d-er than Phulan Devi
Allyuh see me here
I is a woman

With de heart of a tiger
Like a man
With ah iron hand
I is mih grandfather
Whip and lash and curse
Mih grandmother
Bending low
In de cane-field
De mark ah dis cutlass
Is a sure mark
When I had five years
Mih uncle lif me up
He put me on he shoulder
And say
When yuh get big
Yuh eh go fraid notten
And look mih here
I eh fraid notten

If anybody touch mih
If dey push mih
Yuh only have to think something
And I go slice you up
Small small small small...
Dey go have to bring
Toothpick to take you up
From de floor
If yuh think ah too baa-d
Lef mih for tomorrow
I still passing
Me eh stopping
And when de cutlass pass so
Leh me see de man
Who go wipe it out
Ah telling yuh
Ah go send mih scorpion
To bite yuh santipe
San-i-manite.



EXCERPT FROM

CANADIAN MONSOON

WRITTEN BY SHEILA JAMES

Sunita: It seems like my life - my work and play consists solely of cleaning up. . . but never in the daylight in front of an appreciative audience. . . no it always happens in the dark, after hours, in back rooms, bedrooms, dark alleys. I go from room to room wiping, cleaning, scrubbing - from operating room to kitchen, to operating room - human blood, animal blood - on my clothes, on my hands.

The other night I dreamt I woke up in a puddle of blood - it was the blood of women I knew; Mummy, Gina, Shanta. They were all crying and screaming and blood was pouring out from between their legs. I was running around frantically trying to find napkins, tampons, diapers. Anything to stop the bleeding - I finally found a box of pads - I reached inside only to find condoms as a new population control relief package. The condoms were defective - they all had little holes in the tips which were dripping with semen. They were being tested and marketed in the Third World. And now a pregnancy epidemic had broken out in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bangladesh. . . Girls and women twelve to sixty years of age were pregnant and knocking on my door demanding abortions. "Please Doctor Ji, my daughter is only thirteen - she's been raped - her father will

beat her if he knows she's pregnant." "Doctor Undee, I am an old woman, I have already 13 children whom I cannot feed - I cannot bear another." No Doctor Ji, please see me. . . my husband is impotent - if he finds out that I'm pregnant he will know I've been unfaithful, he'll kill me - I swear he'll kill me." Okay, Okay - I'll do you all, just lay me down and spread your legs - quickly there's no time. Oh fuck the Pope, the prime minister, Mother Theresa, you fundamentalists, politicians, murderers.

. . . and as I start to operate, one after another women start going into labour. It's as if time doesn't exist - its lightning. Children are bursting from wombs some of them sprin into life, healthy and vibrant, rosy red cheeks on fairer skin - but the others - the brown skinned babies - they are all abnormal - some with several heads, animal limbs, others, oh God, others with big bellies - ready to give birth to themselves. It's too much, they surround me with their cries, their helpless pleas. And blood just keeps pouring off the tables onto the floor - red rain into red rivers - overflowing into fields, the streets. When I woke up, my body was damp with sweat - and menstrual blood began a sluggish flow between my legs. Ah - the monthly reminder that I can still.

Becoming an Artist the Second Time Around

HAZELLE PALMER

As a high school student, my love for words and literature had begun to turn my life in a direction that would lead me to becoming a writer. I took art classes to avoid science and biology which were much less interesting if not downright intimidating for me.

It took a trip to France in 1990 to bring me back to brushes, conte pencils, charcoal, pastels, acrylic paints and ultimately to watercolours.

The scenery was even better than I imagined, but in France I was shocked at how much I had forgotten about drawing, perception, mixing colours and the use of brushes.

After some time I realized that I was not going to paint as I did years before. Too much had happened to me and in my life between then and now. All of these experiences created a different kind of artist which guided my pencil and even my use of colour in a way that revealed a new, creative part of me. So I abandoned trying to find the artist that was to embrace the artist that I am now. I was relieved to know I could still draw and paint, I just did so differently. I started to paint not so much what I saw in front of me, but what was familiar. I started with women's bodies—nudes or women lying with cloth draped seductively over them; then, women with colours exploding around them. My fascination with colour has been



especially challenging in watercolours. Capturing rich, deep colour in watercolours is difficult. But I wanted people who viewed my work to be surprised that I had in fact used watercolours.

In my earlier artwork I used oil pastels and acrylics so I was accustomed to their vibrancy and intensity on paper and canvas. I wanted this same effect in watercolours so I worked on finding a brush technique that would achieve this.

My interest in colour also led me to paint flowers and trees, not as I saw them but as I thought they should be—bursting with unusual hues and rippling with texture.

I have not used my artwork as an expression or outlet for my politics or opinions. I sense this is because so much of my writing and other work concentrates on social issues that my artwork is an escape for me—a way to distance myself from the other work and activities I am involved in.

My work has evolved over the past three years but I don't think I have consciously pointed it in any particular direction. I much prefer to see it develop at its own pace and in its own way. I mostly think I am just along for the ride.

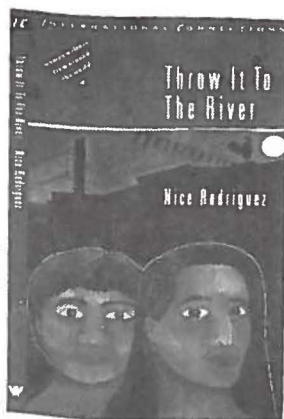
Artist's Profile

TORONTO, CANADA

Nice Rodriguez

Nice Rodriguez didn't start out to be a writer. She had always been interested in the arts, doing illustration for her student paper and later studying painting at the University of The Philippines, but there was little potential for work or money as an artist. Instead, she first went into accounting because her father was an accountant – she felt guilty about being a lesbian, so to make up for her parents' frustration she got an honours scholarship in accounting and ended up as a certified public accountant for *The Financial Times of Manila*, where she wrote stock market, trade and corporate reports until union-busting efforts closed the paper.

She moved on to Manila's *People Magazine* where she had her first break writing feature articles on The Philippines' leading celebrities and artists. When oppositionist Benigno Aquino was killed, she created and drew Marcial, an anti-Marcos comic strip that was published in *Malaya (Freedom)*. During the People Power Revolution that ousted the Marcos dictatorship she became a photojournalist. By the time she mi-



THROW IT
TO THE RIVER
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grated to Canada in 1988, she was an assistant section editor for *The Philippine Daily Globe*.

Nice describes her country's business climate as homophobic, and conditions in general as oppressive and enclosed. She had always wanted to see the world but visas were very difficult to get, so she left at the first opportunity. Despite all of this she still loves the country of her birth.

Currently working as a production artist for Toronto's *NOW Magazine*, Nice has continued writing and her stories have appeared in *Piece of My Heart* and *After Glow: More Stories of Lesbian Desire*.

Also just published by the Women's Press is a collection of hilarious, erotic and poignant short stories entitled *Throw it to the River*. Nice writes stories that speak of personal experience in the world of butch/femme relationships in The Philippines and Canada. In fact, this may well be the first collection anywhere of short stories about Philipina lesbians at home and as immigrants in Canada. Her plans are to continue writing short stories for anthologies.

GITANJALI

Anjali was born in the twilight of an afternoon mist in a small town in Germany, to parents who did not have the ability to see one another. She seems to have been looking for them ever since. It made for a fairly difficult situation because they could, as a result not see her very well either. Now and then they would catch breathtaking glimpses of one another and it would remind them that they must somehow be mysteriously connected.

Whenever her mother would put puffy, little girl dresses on her, Anjali would crinkle up her little light brown face and cry. She felt like she had somehow grown petals like a *Wallflower* disappearing into the wallpaper. She was only truly happy when she wore the scarlet lederhosen with a heart as clear blue as the sky. It made her mother throw her invisible hands up in the air to declare "Funf von deiner Sorte!!" (Tumhari tara Panch!).

Little Anjali wondered what her mother meant by the remark, and pondered that if there were others like her, then she would certainly like to meet them.

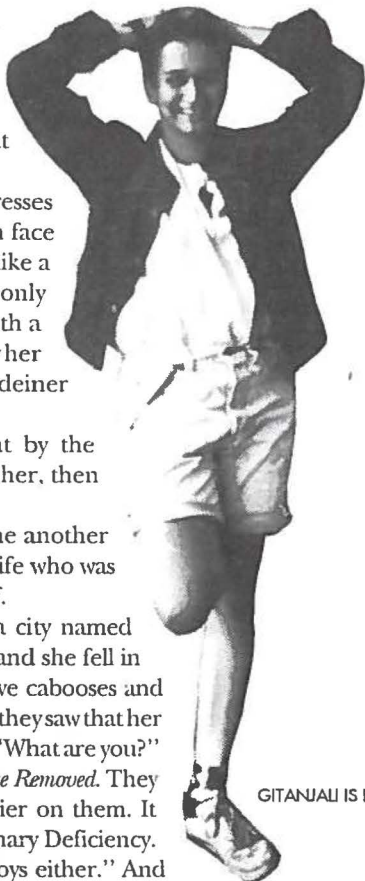
One day her parents grew tired of looking for one another and they had a divorce. Her father went to marry a wife who was more visible and her mother went to look for herself.

Anjali followed her mother out to the prairies, a city named Edmonton. The people wore intriguing cowboy hats and she fell in love with their music. She learned to ride horses, drive cabooses and tractors. The hat people grew suspicious of Anjali when they saw that her mother looked much paler than her. They would ask, "What are you?" She wasn't really sure, and said, *Second Generation, Once Removed*. They said, "What?" So she said "German" to make it easier on them. It turned out they were rural Albertan Nazis with Imaginary Deficiency. "No such thing as Brown Germans. No Brown Cowboys either." And they sent a couple of Motorcycle Mamas to teach her some Manners.

At that time Anjali decided some self-protection was needed. She split



GITANJALI IS PICTURED HERE WITH
HER PARENTS



GITANJALI IS PICTURED HERE WITH
HER PARENTS

herself from her body and created an amnesiac called Gita. She learned how to deal with multiple identities, holding down jobs such as truckstop waitress, drug dealer, credit card thief and furniture refinisher.

Through this time, Anjali was never far away, but remained invisible. She would whisper wise things in Gita's ear. "The possibilities of colour are wonderful. A study entrancing and unlimiting."

Gita decided to clean up her act and go to Toronto to go to art school. She spent five years there. Making art was the only time Anjali and Gita could directly communicate. During this time they both remained invisible to everyone at the school except for the paintings, drawings, sculptures, videos and films that were made on a regular basis. Anjali would whisper "A filmmaker just keeps making the same movie over and over all of her life, just in different ways. Life is actually a big, long movie. When a movie becomes tiresome, it may be because the motive is not worth the effort." Gita learned to trust the voice that spoke inside of her. It was extremely perceptive and NEVER wrong. Sometimes the artmaking brought up painful things. The whisper said, "Art must also be useful to the community, it must contribute to healing. The more doubtful and painful the process, the more power it contains. It is only a gift if it is given. Reach deep inside of your experiences and be willing to look honestly." The voice also warned her, "The more power you have, the more vulnerable and valuable you will be to people's political agendas."

Gita started going to queer bhangra dances. She met beautiful women there, very seductive, dancing on the dancefloor. One woman made graceful come hither motions with her hands. She had the most beautiful hands. Gita's stomach nearly went through the floor. Their eyes met. It reminded her of someone she knew but could not quite remember. Gita was in love instantly. She went shyly

forward, swaying awkwardly to the music. But alas! The woman seemed to have changed her mind and her exquisite hands were making gestures that were pushing her away. Gita was crushed. Then the come hither gesture started again and the whole thing whole thing went back and forth for awhile. Finally Gita became frustrated and asked, "What on earth are you trying to do?" She said "this is Bhangra, these moves come from Punjabi folk dancing." So Gita joined in and learned some of the same moves as they circled around the dancefloor. . . The dance became a lot of fun once you didn't take the movements too seriously. She looked around and noticed all the women doing the same moves to each other. The women became curious and asked her "So what are you?" She looked down into her cowboy hat because she wasn't sure so she said *Avocado Vegetarian Turtle*. They said "What?" So she decided to make it a little easier on them and said "South Asian." They smiled politely because they were from nice brown homes in the suburbs, and they shrugged their shoulders rhythmically, as they whirled away, hands clapping across the dancefloor. Anjali looked on, quite pleased, and started to pack her bags to meet the family in India.

When they arrived the strangest thing happened. Gita was hardly seen at all and Anjali appeared, smartly garbed in salwar kameez. She embarked on an epic journey through a land she could not see.



GITANJALI IS PICTURED HERE WITH HER PARENTS

Pretty soon Great Big Galleries and Great Big Funding Bodies took interest in Gita's videos. She walked through these Big Galleries and felt a chill. This was not the home she had imagined for her work. She became very sad and almost decided she would return to the street and be a pedestrian again. She began to see her name written in unexpected places. She remembered what the voice had said about political agendas. She said, "I think I need a *New View, New Eyes*.

She found a door marked ENGINEERS OF CHANGE with a HELP WANTED sign taped to it. She remembered back to her times driving the caboose. She brought her resume and met with the hiring committee. They immediately wanted to hire her based on her Previous Life Experience. "HmMMM, ENGINEERS...Engineers of Change?" she glanced at them. "It looks and sounds like some kind of middleclass occupation, I seem to be moving something in the world." She joined many anti-racism committees and boards of Arts and AIDS organizations.

The voice whispered in her ear. "The Emperor has no clothes."

One day, Gita was invited to an antiracist lesbian conference in Berlin. She went to a Bhangra dance there, and she met a group of five other funny/funky looking women. They were exactly like her, wearing

sexy lederhosen, jaunty cowboy hats and elegant Kulu shawls, shuffling joyfully to the rhythms. Gita could not believe her eyes and immediately rushed over to see if they wanted to start up a support group.

Bolo! Bolo! she said, "Kuch To Bolo!" (Sprich! Sprich! Sag mir etwas! Sag mir dass du liebst mich)

They all began to spout antisexist, antiracist, antihomophobic, anticlassist, proaddict, proartist rhetoric. All at once. She could not keep up! She just could not keep it up! She began to scream and scream and scream.

When she was through screaming, she opened her eyes, all the women in the Bhangra dance had cleared out of the room. Even the DJ had left. There was a sinister looking row of teeth hovering and gleaming in the smoky multicoloured air in front of her. She was about to begin screaming again, when she was caught by surprise. The teeth broke into a huge grin and a laugh, a huge laugh which echoed every which way. Gita also got the joke; she finally realized what her mother had been trying to tell her so long ago. Their laughter mixed together until they were indistinguishable. Slowly around the grin Anjali appeared wearing a magnificent wedding dress. The heart on Gita's lederhosen turned orange like the big autumn sun.

They got married on the spot.

The Truth is indeed stranger than fiction.

Gitanjali's Videography and Films include:

The Avocado Vegetarian Turtle c 1988, 16mm colour, claymation, oils on glass, dist. Women in Focus (Vancouver) Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Center (Toronto)

The Wallflower c 1989, 16mm, 5:05 min. claymation, dist. WiF (Vancouver), CFDC (Toronto), London Filmmaker's Co-op (England)

Second Generation, Once Removed c 1990, 19 min, colour, video, dist. V-Tape (Toronto), Video Out (Vancouver)

Bolo! Bolo! (with Ian Rashid) c 1991, 31 min, colour, video, dist. V-Tape (Toronto), Video Out (Vancouver)

New View, New Eyes c 1993, 50 min, colour, video, dist. V-Tape (Toronto), Video Out (Vancouver)

Lesbian Flirtation Techniques (work in progress)

Ausgangspunkt (work in progress)

Do Me Justice (work in progress with Melina Young)

Ambika Jalwar

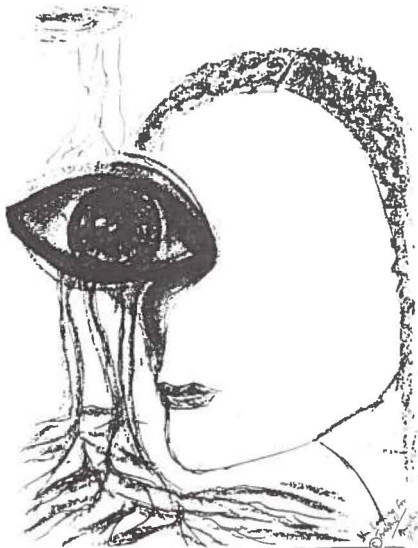
I began to paint only because I needed to channel my hopes, my desires, my angers – all the emotions that were bottled in me. A particular emotion or idea evoked in my mind an image or a series of images. I then transferred it to canvas – attempting to remain as true to the image as possible. Now, painting has such an allure that I have no choice. It is easiest for me to express myself through colours and gestures on canvas.

My works are a dialectical reflection of my inner self and the outer world. They help me to come to terms with external and internal stimuli. Sometimes, they are just a playground – I mean literally a playground on which I play with colours.

Despite the full (and sometimes distracting) imagery, there is a specific center in the paintings, an energy center which draws attention to itself and which moves the viewer's attention to other areas.

These works are marked by a distinct dualism which may be seen as ambiguous. While I may deal with certain aspects of the shadow, I cannot help but introduce an element from the light, for there is also hope or an escape or a way out of dilemmas.

Lastly, I invite you to draw what you wish from the works and make your journeys as I do mine. I urge you to your own "symbolic unfoldment. . ."



Lee Pui Ming

Music has always been an important force in my life. I started playing the piano when I was three. Ever since I can remember, there was always music in my home because my mother was a voice teacher and ten to twelve hours a day, students would file through our apartment, good and poor singers alike. At age 19, I left Hong Kong alone to study in the United States.

My world literally went flip-flopping, and music became a powerful source of equilibrium in the midst of major upheaval and uprooting. Hours would be spent in the practice room with the piano. In that tiny space I could just be – myself with all my contradicting emotions. It was a haven away from consuming efforts to learn how to behave, to think, to feel in a different culture - in short, to assimilate. It was from then on that music became a crucial vehicle for self expression. In the next ten years or so, I “did well” - I learned how to function and get what I wanted in this North American society, and I accumulated academic degree after degree for my piano.

Then, all this “wellness” came to a grinding halt. Through a chance encounter with a sister, another Chinese lesbian (and I am sure, due also to the conjunction of the



planets), all the suppressed parts of me being Chinese came flooding forth. Wave after wave of tears followed, the pain of years of white-washing unleashed. Thus began another journey - this time towards listening to the whole of myself. I stopped playing European classical music, supposedly written by the “gods.” I figured I had given enough of my life and my attention to it. I started writing and playing my own music. Melodies from childhood, songs my mother sang came floating back to my consciousness. As I got more confident in work-

ing with Chinese music, I started using the spoken language as well, Cantonese and Mandarin.

It did not matter to me that others may not "understand" it. It still communicated anyway.

When I was ready, I put out my first recording, "Ming," and with that I started my entry into the music business. The music business. Well, it is run mostly by men. They are the decision makers.

I have been hired in both jazz and folk music circuits. My music is rooted in improvisation, Chinese music and jazz. It starts from

these sources and proceeds to break their boundaries. What is created is a new beast that is all three but now in a totally new context. My artistic drive does not allow me to stay within the confines of any one defined genre.

If I played "straight-ahead" jazz or traditional Chinese music, I am sure more work would come my way. Folk music festivals are already taking a chance if they hired a Chinese music act since that is stretching the understanding of what "folk" is. To contemplate hiring someone who contemporizes Chinese music is perhaps getting a bit more uncomfortable. This music can no longer be treated as "other" as it begins to share commonalities with their own musical language. It is just one step too much for many folk music festivals to venture taking.

On the other hand, if a white musician was to dabble in music from other cultures, it may be more easily acceptable because the frame of reference is white and the music is made for white consumption (witness the phenomenon called "world music"). For me, my frame of reference is Chinese and often times I do write for a Chinese audience. All this is to say that I had my opportunities in the music business. In that sense I have been lucky. I am simply speculating that with the same amount of talent, more doors might have been open to me had my music or my race been different.

But that is speculation. I am here, and I am here to stay. In time, I will carve out my world I am sure it will surprise even myself, what that world will look like.

Lee Pui Ming is a pianist/composer active in the new music/jazz/folk music fields. Her first recording is a cassette entitled "Ming." Presently she is working on a CD of original music for piano, Chinese instruments and percussion due out in early 1994.

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SARITA SRÍVASTAVA

About the photos I make. . .

The photos I make are often about who I think I am: Sometimes I think I'm a brown, hairy woman, sometimes a South Asian. . . born in North America. In trying to make images of hairy bodies, brown and beige bodies and scarred bodies clothed by colonized textile industries, I'm trying to use and maybe create another language for talking about racism, sexism, sexualities, gender, colonialism. . . And trying to make myself laugh about the serious.

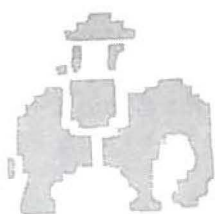
But the same time as I value my work of making photos, I question and doubt it. I worry that my intentions in taking photos don't correspond to their effects. How could they? I worry about the implications of making, manipulating and keeping images of other



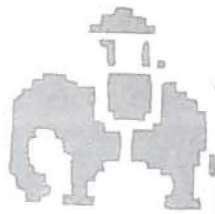
women. So for now I've stopped. I feel more comfortable doing that to myself. As much as I think I'm doing something "different" in representing women's bodies, or women's body hair, I feel I'm reproducing the fragmentation and conventions of dominant image-making. I want to know if it's possible to *not* reproduce something when you re-define yourself in opposition to it, when you *re*-create yourself using the same tools.

I think that's why I've become more and more deliberate about posing and constructing my photos. I want to be aggressive about what I'm rejecting, or resisting, or re-presenting, not pretend to capture a supposedly "natural" pose.

But I'm also playing.



Biographies



Brenda Joy Lem

Brenda is a writer, film-maker and visual artist. Her films (*The Compact*, *auntie's Story*, *Open Letter: Grasp the Bird's Tail*) have been shown in festivals in Los Angeles, New York, Hong Kong and across Canada. Her artwork has been exhibited in galleries in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia and her Chinatown Street Poster Series, "You can take the girl out of Toison, but you can't take Toison out of the girl", was shown in Chinatowns across the country.

Marrie Mumford

Marrie Mumford is a Chippewa-Cree from the Cypress Hills in Southern Alberta. She has worked in theatres across the country and was associate director for Native Earth Performing Arts Inc and De-B-ah-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group. She has been actively involved in Theatre training with professional studios in Toronto, at the University of Toronto and with Native Theatre School. She has worked with Lillian Allen and Itah Sadu to develop "Fresh Elements", a cultural job training program for Black and Aboriginal youth - now in it's second year across the

province of Ontario. She is past president of the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Bisexual Arts (ANDPVA). At present she lives in Toronto and is on contract as part of the cultural equity team for the Ontario Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Recreation (MCTR) as a result of Lillian Allen's report on racial and cultural equity.

Djanet Sears

Born on the cusp of Leo and Virgo, in London, England, Djanet Sears accounts for the breadth of her accomplishments as a writer, director, actor and singer by blaming it on the stars. She describes herself as a woman of African descent, and speaks colourfully of the enormous move her family made from London to Saskatoon, when she was barely 15 years old. Having survived life in the prairies, Ms. Sears felt well prepared for virtually anything - especially life as an artist. She is the author of the recently published stage play *Afrika Solo*, (Sister Vision Press), which played to critical acclaim both at Toronto's Factory Theatre Studio and Ottawa's Great Canadian Theatre Company.

Afrika Solo has been adapted for the CBC radio, where it took a first prize at the International Major Armstrong Awards, and a silver prize at the International Radio Festival of New York. Her other stage writing credits include Double Trouble, Shakes, and both The Mother project and Stolen Lands as a contributor. She is currently working on Harlem Duet, a sequel to Afrika Solo and a new children's drama commissioned by Carousel Players Theatre.

Winsom

Winsom studied art at the Jamaican School of Art. She has taught art in both Jamaica and Canada and has given numerous workshops, lectures and demonstrations in fabric art, dyes and textiles. She has exhibited in many group and solo shows across Canada and the United States. In 1989, she travelled through 10 countries in West Africa documenting traditional textile techniques and working with master dyers and Andinkra printers.

Teresa Marshall

I was born wrapped in swaddling cloth of
red and white.

it gave me the blues.

I was propped on a thin white-line,
bordering a red picket fence,
spoon-fed little white lies, 4 cents and
welfare.

I'd have swallowed what I could,
Curtsied for the agent,

Digested feasts of historical ridicule,
Mimicked,

Regurgitated for tourists pumping wooden
nickles.

I'd have stood on guard for free.
Whistled dixie.

Danced in circles in beige gatiques and
turkey feathers

To Simon says but,
I saw the right.

To wipe the tears that rained red for 500
years.

To unfold the blankets stained red with
fear.

To take down the fences built on ancestral
bones

and to dance lies in circles

Round the root

To the bone.

Some nudity may be involved

BY RACHEL KALPANA JAMES

It's been over four months since I first put out the word calling for South Asians to pose for my camera. What seemed like just an inspired thought, is now a photo/graphic collage that includes photographs of South Asians expressing their experience of sex.

The aim of the artwork, *AS WE ARE*, is to make visually explicit what is commonly denied in the South Asian community: 1) sexuality and 2) HIV and AIDS, with the hope that when we accept the sexuality of our community, we will be better able to understand AIDS.

I conducted interviews to introduce potential participants to the project. With every response, the objectives of the artwork evolved. The first change was the scope of my outreach. For some South Asian women, the taboo of uncovering one's body is so ingrained in them that the thought of wearing a bathing suit in public let alone posing nude for a camera is unimaginable. Although this is a place of shyness for the majority of us, it is harder for an older (or less westernized) generation to overlook. So, I narrowed the focus of the project to the sexual expression of my generation (20 to 40 year olds, growing up in the West).

The interviews and photo shoots became a forum for my peers to express a voice that is separate from family and which challenges our invisibility in western culture. Amid knowing nods and relieved smiles, issues of sexuality and AIDS became a shared experience. Issues of shame, body image, sexual orientation, racial stereotyp-



ing, racially different partners, and HIV testing came up for both men and women. Women also were concerned about related issues of menstruation, sexual assault, abortion, as well as feminine stereotyping, erotica, and spirituality. And men commented on masculine stereotyping and displacement.

An overt barrier in attracting participants was the issue of nudity and family. One woman put it this way, "I have no family, so there's no one to object". No one can deny the impact of family, so I placed the photographs of sexuality in the context of family.

The completed artwork of family and our experience of sex, is designed to imitate the process we could take to redefine our community: 1) Abandon the assumptions that limit the definition of family, 2) Look closely at our sexuality to discover the diversity that exists within our family and community.

My hope is that this artwork will give others validation to what they know and do. The act of participation in the interviews and photo shoots can be interpreted as a gesture towards tearing down the barriers of shame within ourselves. And the commitment to a public display demonstrates a refusal to accept the barriers imposed upon us.

AS WE ARE is part of an international group exhibition titled, *Dismantling Invisibility: Asian and Pacific Islander Artists Respond to the AIDS Crisis*. It is currently on display at A-Space 183 Bathurst Street, Toronto 364-3227 until December 18, 1993.

The Secret Life of Gujjar Mal

BY NINA SIBAL

THE WOMEN'S PRESS LTD., LONDON, 1991

REVIEWED BY FARZANA DOCTOR

In *The Secret Life of Gujjar Mal*, Nina Sibal presents seven short stories which take the reader through the struggles of her Indian characters, who search to understand the emptiness that pervades their lives. In "*The Secret Life of Gujjar Mal*", Gujjar Mal, a writer and merchant, leaves his wife and heads to the Himalayas to understand where the images in his stories come from. Ujjala, a physician and a volunteer at a Delhi women's resource centre, gains insights into her life's choices through another woman's struggle in "The Face of Dadarao". In "Swimming", Parvati copes with the death of her son, and the anger she feels for her husband, who predicted the death. "Fur Boots" describes the tragic ending of a love affair between an Indian civil servant and an Eastern European government official by government sponsored repression. Sibal's poetic writing takes the

reader slowly from thought to thought, observation to observation, grounding the reader in her characters' moment. In "Sanctuary", she articulates her writing style while the narrator describes a deserted construction site:

No girders or secret iron rods have been fixed today, no trowels, no equipment, no women breaking stones, no children playing, their naked bottoms smothered in dust. It is impossible to tell you when all this stopped, because I will not tell you, I cannot look beyond one moment at a time. It is not, you know, a matter of patience; it is a matter of being so utterly drawn into one moment, you have not the energy, even if you close your eyes and pray very hard, to look beyond it.

At the same time, in Sibal's writing style there is a whisper of something unexplained, of something deeper to understand. This book kept me engaged, wondering and thinking beyond for a few days.

I really recommend it.

Good Girls Are Bad News



BY SUBHADRA SEN GUPTA
RUPA AND COMPANY, 1992

REVIEWED BY SHAHEEN LAKHANI

Set in Delhi "Dilli," and other cities and towns of India, Subhadra Sen Gupta's collection of short stories *Good Girls Are Bad News*, is a reflection of Indian culture, traditional values, religions, and social attitudes. Many of these stories focus on the social attitudes toward women, which still hold true today.

A look at society's definition of a

"good girl's" roles and duties versus a "bad girl's" is portrayed in the second last story. Bineeta Sin finds herself weighing the definition of the two after experiencing the consequence of smoking a cigarette in a puja pandal. Although the story takes place in 1953, the social unacceptability of a girl smoking is still relevant today.

Perhaps more open to scrutiny than a woman who smokes, is a woman who is divorced. A divorced woman, like Sundata in "Durga" faces a crowd of curious, judgemental, "well-wishers."

Then again, not all women allow themselves to be subjected to any form of scrutiny. In order to do this however, women must be "perfect." Perfection not only involves beauty and wealth, but hiding one's inner self as Haidari Bai does. She is a courtesan of Mughal Delhi "Haidari Bai." Vain, self-absorbed, and beautiful, she demands on 'having things done her way.' Haidari Bai is therefore forgiven for her vices, being so beautiful and wealthy, and her behavior, if not accepted, is at least tolerated.

Haidari Bai's fate is better than that of Pari Bano's, a poor harem girl, brought to the court of the Mughal Empire in "Old Fateh." Pari, although beautiful, is of a low rank in wealth, a common slave-girl who rebels against her oppression only to find her protests neither acknowledged nor tolerated.

Social status can be viewed not only in terms of wealth, but also in terms of purity of religion. But Mrinalini, a girl of Hindu and Christian parents is not accepted by her grandmother in "Baroma."

Although strong issues have been approached concerning women's roles, cultural taboos, and social acceptability, these and many other stories are quite light-hearted, even humorous. With a strong flare for imagery, Gupta manages to capture for us, the lifestyle of the time, and leaves each story with a whisper of something to reflect upon.

SIEGE of Azadi Square

A NOVEL OF REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

BY MANNY SHIRAZI
THE WOMEN'S PRESS, LONDON, ENGLAND, 1991

Iranian women have never been passive in their pursuit of freedom. It seems fitting then that Manny Shirazi should dedicate her novel, *Siege of Azadi Square*, to the women who resisted the oppressive regimes, both imperialist, under the Shah, and fundamentalist, under Khomeini, for their courage and love of life.

Beginning in 1978, millions of Iranian women participated in demonstrations every day and joined in social and political protests to overthrow the Shah. What was important for these women, veiled or unveiled, workers, peasants or middle class was that they all felt that this was the time to fight not only against the Shah's repression, but against all the repression they face as women imposed on them for so long by their fathers, brothers, husbands and even male comrades. In early February 1979, after 18 months of violent clashes, demonstrations, sit-ins and strikes, the Shah was forced to leave the country and one of the regime's best known opposition leaders, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran and began instituting patriarchy

in the name of Islam.

On March 8, hundreds of thousands of women who had been preparing to celebrate International Women's Day and the victory of the Revolution after so many years of repression, understood that they had to turn the day into a day of action against the new regime. Mass meetings were organized against Khomeini's laws. The demonstrators marched in the streets of Tehran and shouted the slogans "In the dawn of freedom, our freedom has been taken away" and "We gave our lives for freedom, and we will fight again."

This was the first mass demonstration of women since the revolution where women marched against Khomeini and not the Shah and it is within this context that Manny Shirazi's novel is set.

Her story is about the lives of four women;



Malihe, Fatemeh, Goli and Zareen, and their resistance against the regime. Malihe is a 45 year old strong and dynamic woman. She is a seamstress who strives to form a sewing cooperative with other women, only to have it sabotaged. She is the most politically experienced and skeptical of the four. After spending all of her youth in political activism in opposition to the Shah, she is prisoned and tortured after her son and daughter join the PLO and go abroad to become freedom fighters. After her release she vows to be even more committed to the fight for women's liberation than ever before.

Fatemeh is a 25 year old upper-middle class lawyer, who has, by her own admission, led a relatively privileged and sheltered life. She comes from a political and religious family who abhor violence and oppose the Shah. She allies herself strongly with leftist Islamic groups and defends her comrades to the bitter end, or until she learns that within these groups the "women's issue" is always the last to be considered and the first to be compromised.

Zareen is a hairdresser/beautician whose beauty parlour doubles as headquarters for the four sisters in the struggle; a sort of women's conference room after the revolution.

Goli is a 21 year old second year student of sociology at Tehran University, who was brought up in a professional middle class family. She is brutally raped by three militia men of the revolution during the night of the March 8 women's demonstration and accused of being anti-

revolutionary. She is rescued by Malihe, Fatemeh and Zareen.

The four women together realize that they need to do something about the fact that since the victory of the revolution the government and clergy are increasingly attacking and removing what few rights they had fought so hard to win. Although the four come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, each had learned a lot during their dynamic days of the revolution and each decide to use all their skills and strategies exclusively for the fight for women's rights. What unfolds is an exciting and ingenious plan of action by the women to undermine the government attacks against women. The writing is so rich with detail, and the story so compelling that one feels absolutely invincible after reading it.

Although this is a fictional novel, fiction is a way of structuring reality, a way of perceiving and conceiving the world. And this novel, in a very real way captures the deep mistrust and sense of betrayal many Iranian women felt with the government after the revolution. Yet, it also demonstrates how women find support and strength in each other and with each other invent creative forms of resistance to patriarchal oppression.

The strength, courage and commitment of the women in the novel is truly inspirational and empowering. As Fatemah says to her sisters in the struggle at the end of the novel, "We have proved that the state is not omnipotent, just as we can create it, so we can dismantle it!"

WILD WEST

STARRING NAVEEN ANDREWS AND SARITA CHOUDHRY

The British release *Wild West*, David Atwood's first feature film, addresses the efforts of young South Asian protagonists to break the restrictions of white British society, while also attempting to challenge the restrictions imposed by South Asian communities within this white society on its' members.

Wild West tells the story of Zaf (Naveen Andrews), who plays in a Pakistani country and western band with his brothers. His dream is to hit the big time, and leave London's Little India for Nashville. Early in the film he meets and automatically becomes smitten by Rifat (Sarita Choudhury of *Mississippi Masala*), a South Asian woman who is in an abusive relationship with a white taxi dispatcher. Suddenly, Zaf decides to become her knight in shining armour coming to her rescue. Without even hearing her sing, Zaf is convinced

that she should front the band. His instincts prove to be true and the whole band comes together in a way that should make success imminent. The stumbling block is that, as Zaf's mother so mournfully puts it, "There are no Pakistani cowboys."

They are confronted by blatant racism from the music industry in general and by the producer in particular, who wants to take them on when he hears their music but changes his mind when he discovers that the music makers are "Pakis." Consequently, they are rejected because they do not conform to the racist standards of western and country music. Simply put, their music is great, their lead vocal is fantastic, but they are not white boys and nobody wants to hear Pakistanis do country and western. Although the message is loud and clear (stick to Bhangra boys!) Zaf and

gang are an ambitious lot and they persevere – Nashville or bust!

In the film the aspirations of its protagonists are challenged by the society they live in. The film makes good use of extremely appealing characters who seem simply too large for their society's limited expectations. Narveen Andrews, as Zaf, is just plain fun to watch! Zaf is not exactly put through an emotional meat-grinder, but Andrews lends him charm which is undeniably charismatic.

Where the film falters is in its overall structure. It seems to lose its narrative thread somewhere after the half-way point, and does a lot of injustice to important issues which it

raises. It inadequately and unrealistically deals with the very crucial issue of wife assault. After being enlightened by Zaf that she should not remain in an abusive relationship, Rifat just ups and leaves one day and heads straight into the hands and bed of Zaf. By doing this the film attempts to provide a very simplistic solution to a very complex problem. The character of Rifat lacks substance and depth. This is a shame since Attwood could have really used her character to address the issue of wife assault.

Despite its faults however, it is worth seeing for its brief moments of laughter and most importantly, for the reaffirming image of South Asians on the big screen. . .

Desh Pardesh

Festival & Conference

is Toronto's annual exploration and celebration of new and emerging patterns of living, loving and left culture being created by South Asians in the Diaspora. It is five days of new and recent work by South Asian artists, activists and cultural producers. It features film and video, visual art exhibits, poetry, fiction, critical writing, theatre and performance art, workshops and panel discussions, dance parties and more.

If you are an artist or activist with work to share, have programming ideas, or just want more information please phone, fax or mail us at the address below, ASAP!



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Black on Screen

IMAGES OF BLACK CANADIANS 1950'S-1990'S

THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA HAS PRODUCED A CATALOGUE OF FILM AND VIDEO ABOUT BLACK CANADIAN EXPERIENCES. IT IS THE FIRST-EVER, BROAD COLLECTION OF TITLES WITH BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF BOTH NFB AND INDEPENDENT PRODUCTIONS. IT'S NOT COMPLETE IN ANY SENSE, BUT HERE'S A BEGINNING IMAGE BANK.

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Racism in existing distribution structures (the assumption being that every film/video is drawn from a universally white experience), and in the creation of headings (you can't find Black content under "Canadian") means the available system of indexing makes no connection between Africa and Canada.

It is empowering to see this compact catalogue with a last page for feedback.

Here's to even more empowerment when we create and build the much-needed catalogues of film and video containing the creative works of each and every non-white community living here in Canada.

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Tama Ba? Tama Na!

TAMA BA? TAMA NA! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

PREMIERED ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1993 AT THE

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS!

I-SIS PRODUCTIONS IS A MULTI-RACIAL FEMINIST FILM AND VIDEO COLLECTIVE.

We use film and video to critically examine this place where we live.

Tama Ba? Tama Na! Enough is Enough is the effort of three immigrant women: Maltese, Afro-Caribbean and Filipina, with varied knowledge and experiences in the immigrant and people of colour communities. We have direct experience working with assaulted immigrant women in and out of shelters as well as extensive knowledge in film and video.

Tama Ba? Tama Na? Enough is Enough!, 1993 is a 45 minute drama on wife assault. The film explores the complexities of the life of a Filipina living with an abusive husband in an interracial marriage. The story is told by the teenage Filipina daughter of the abused woman. It is a story about a woman with socio-cultural experiences far removed from that of members of the dominant culture. It is a story of displacement and cultural confusion. It explores the dynamics that occur in women's experiences at that place where race, gender and economic position come together.

As women, and especially as women who come from cultures and ethnic groups which are historically outside of North American dominant culture, we are often denied access to

telling our own stories in front of and behind the camera. We need to challenge the popular practice of legitimating white telling of non-white stories while banishing to the margins these same stories when told from within that culture.

To date, I-SIS has also produced:

anOTHER Love Story, 1990 A 30 minute documentary on Women and AIDS with an emphasis on lesbians

My Mom's A Dyke, 1993 A 15 minute drama on children of lesbians (in post-production)

I-SIS is also in development for a 20 minute animation film about Marie Joseph Angelique, a Black woman who was enslaved and in her bid to set herself free, was hanged in 17th century Canada. This project is a collaboration with Afua Cooper, writer, historian and poet.

Women's organizations, schools, public libraries, shelters or any other groups or individuals interested in viewing the I-SIS film and video productions can contact them directly at:

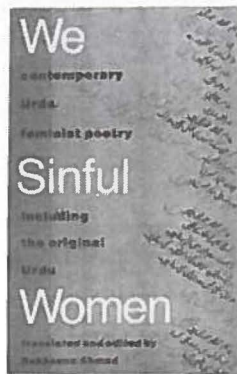
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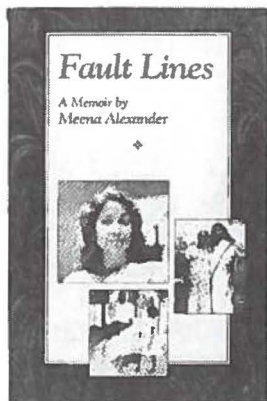
We Sinful Women

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A moving and courageous reversal of an old, male literary tradition of South Asia: the courtly Urdu love poetry, transformed by contemporary Pakistani women poets to express social, political and personal resistance to the Islamisation campaigns of the eighties. Bi-lingual, features Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, Sara Shagufta, Zehra Nigah, Ishrat Afreen, Saeeda Gazdar, Neelma Sarwar.



The Women's Press,
London, England 1990
ISBN 0-7043-4262-6

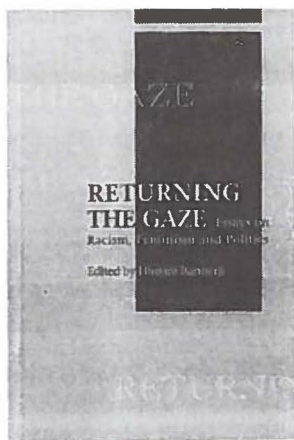


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MEENA ALEXANDER

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The Feminist Press
New York, 1993
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Toronto South Asian Review
Toronto 1989
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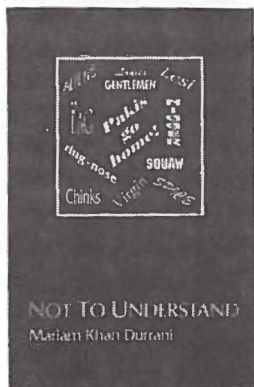
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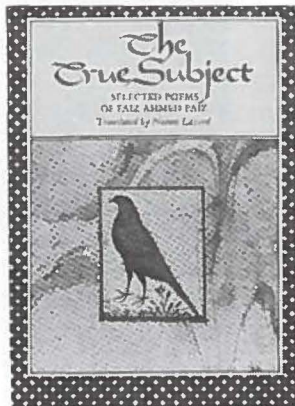
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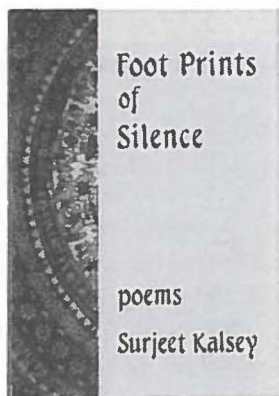
Third Eye

London, Ontario 1982

ISBN 0-919581-44-7

ALSO Speaking to the Winds.

ISBN 0-919581-04-8



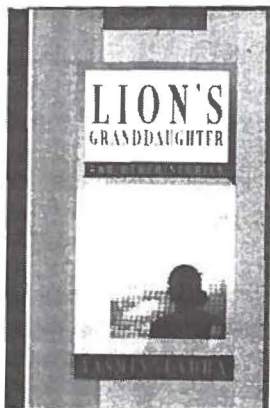


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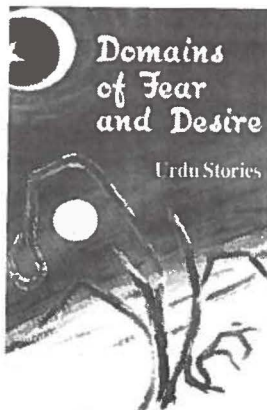


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Chicago, 1992
ISBN 0-226-73043-3



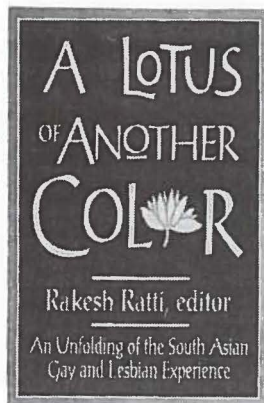
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The Women's Press
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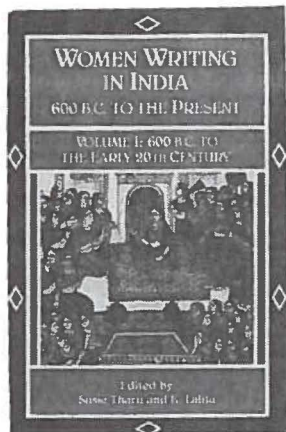


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The Feminist Press
New York, 1991
ISBN 1-55861-027-8

"Ambition Is Not Enough; NECESSITY IS EVERYTHING"

— MARTHA GRAHAM

BY GILLIAN M'CANN

Let it first be said that I decided to interview the two women that I did because I found them personally interesting. The theme of dance that runs throughout is what offered itself as common thread between Madhuri Bhatia and Joanna Das. However there are others.

Both exemplify my childhood notion of a dancer/performer as someone who takes risks and is true to themselves. To my amusement both don't consider their lives unusual. I concluded that this is because they follow their hearts and assume that everyone else does the same.

Interestingly both Joanna and Madhuri have turned down work that they felt would be demeaning to themselves and their art. They are purists, and that is high praise, indeed, in an age that values continual exposure over self-respect, particularly for women. It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to get to know them better.



MADHURI BHATIA

Madhuri Bhatia is a person who can wear many hats and would have it no other way. Born in New Delhi, India she went through many incarnations before eventually getting a Bachelor of Performing Arts from Khairagarh University, Madhya Pradesh in 1979 and a Certificate in Yoga in 1981. She has performed in South East Asia, Europe and Africa and has taught yoga, chaau and aerobics. Since moving to Toronto, Canada Madhuri has performed on television and played the role of Bibi Solanki in the hit movie "Masala".

GM: Could you give me an overview of your past?

MB: Originally I wanted to be a singer. I studied history at Delhi university because I was in awe of my aunt who was a historian. I knew I wanted to do something with my life. I was also really interested in working with people who had moved from a rural setting into urban areas. And I wanted to wear tight jeans.

When I was eighteen I met an architecture student who was studying in England, and we were cross-eyed about each other. So I went off with him to England. I had never worked before in my life and I learned to deal with the Cockney accent and racism. Indians are hated all around the world, but especially by Anglo-Saxons. But I could go on about that for hours.

I joined the Socialist Labour League and we held Trotskyist and feminist marches on Oxford. This was 1969, 70, 71. And I sang in my bedroom. I like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. This was the time of Enoch Powell (right-wing politician of the 60's who opposed non-white immigration to England). I joined my husband's folk group and three years later ran back to India. By this time the marriage was falling apart, but I got a daughter out of him who is eighteen now.

Back in India I joined another band and a group of people called "Mobile Kreches for Working Mother's Children".

GM: Which was?

MB: An NGO funded by a European group called "Brothers To All Men". We worked with rural, unskilled laborers, teaching them how to live in jhugris (tenements). We provided daycare facilities and education for the women in the evenings. I also did street theatre at construction sites illustrating points about hygiene, family planning, and women's rights (that is women's rights within the parameters of their experience). This is when the theatre bug bit me. I woke up at age twenty-five and decided to audition for the University of Dance, Music and Drama called Yatrik (nomad), never for a moment thinking they would accept me.

GM: Had you studied dance before?

MB: I had attended workshops by other schools and I was an amateur actor and singer. After being accepted into the programme I studied set design, light design, choreography and yoga and Indian classical dance. I do more acting now, particularly as I have injured my knee and can't sustain long performances of dance anymore.

GM: Was your family supportive of you?

MB: They were very supportive. All my father said was, "Remember, you'll always be broke." I sang as a child and my father used to sing. He loved North Indian classical and my mother loved Western classical, and I used to buy pop records. Now I have an extremely supportive man in my life.

GM: Tell me about chaau.

MB: It's Eastern Indian, from Orissa. It began in the folk tradition as a martial art. And it was originally done only by men, as most folk dancing is, because it's a warm up for the hunt. The exceptions were the devadasis (temple dancers) and courtesans. It began to be practiced in the courts of the Rajas and was influenced by Russian ballet as these kings had Russians staying at their courts. It is done bare foot and now the dancers wear ankle bells. The basic difference between Indian classical and Western classical is that in ballet and modern dance it focuses on point work and leaps where the Indian tradition is grounded. Chaau is both. It works on off-beats using North Indian music. It uses mudras (hand gestures), abhinaya (emotional expressiveness through facial expressions and body postures), point and flat foot and leg kicks.

It was a dying art form until recently they began reviving the old forms. I studied seven years under Guru Krishna Chandra Nayak, who is from an Oriya village. I asked if there was any reason why a woman couldn't study it and he said, "Why do you want to? You'll never get the chance to be a soloist" I told him I would worry about that if he would teach me.

He made classes interesting, he could teach with love. He was very old school; he would come up to me and slap me and say, "Fateh" I wanted criticism but finally I said to him, "If you hit me one more time I'll kick your ass", and I left the classroom. He followed me outside and gave me a coffee and a cigarette and calmed me down. He was completely open-minded and he said, "One day take me to one of your discotheques". So I did. And we're there my friends and I and this guy sitting cross legged in a chair in white with his chappals on and they're all staring at me. But I didn't care, I thought he was fabulous. Then a song came on and he said, "I like this one", and he got up to dance. He started dancing mixing chaa and modern and they made a circle for him and he got encore after encore and later everyone wanted to know who he was and where they could take class! (Laughter at this point!)

GM: What has your experience in Canada been as a South Asian woman in the arts?

MB: I've only seen Toronto and individually I have met a lot of people who are supportive, but they are always broke. Derwood Allen is a Canadian, mai stream director who has been a tremendous source of encouragement. But it's hard to get regular repertory work.

This word, *multiculturalism*, is crap. They give you a role here and there, but they are isolationist and completely nepotistic. It's hard to break in, notwithstanding the recession, we could be getting a little bit more of that cake. These stupid asshole directors have pre-conceived notions about your age group and nationality. They think we are basically idiots but (here she puts on an exaggerated Indian accent), we are knowing how to fornicate as we produced the Kama Sutra, we are obsessed with family and are wanting to have so many babies, and we always smell. But here pedofiles are all right: liberal and all. (She switches back to her regular accent.) Mainstream theatres don't even audition you. My accent is British and they say, "Can you tone down your accent?"

GM: You must confound them on many levels being a feminist as well. Have you always been a feminist?

MB: I think I always was. I come from a family where my mother was treated like a queen. My father was so concerned about how women were treated outside, he perhaps overdid it. She was really spoiled. I have an elder brother and I was never made to feel inferior. It was considered to be his responsibility to be there for me. I was married to an emancipated man who treated me as an equal. We broke up because we couldn't get along as people not because of inequality in the relationship. We didn't role play. I'm very very lucky and in whatever small way I could I have contributed (to the cause of women).

GM: But you have had difficulties as an actor in Canada?

MB: I find that communities in Canada, including my own, stick together. No one wants to mix except when they go to each other's restaurants. Indians talk about racism, and I ashamedly admit that we are colour conscious too. It's very sad. I wish we could outgrow this crap. I'll be happiest when I can say I am a citizen of the world. As far as being Indian is concerned, I am neither proud or ashamed. My commitment is to where I am; to being a productive person. I have an emotional attachment to India. I have family there and I'm grateful that I was exposed to the positive parts of that ethos.

GM: Can we talk a little about the actor's role. About what it takes to be a good performer.

MB: Talent. A penchant for the field. But it's not enough to just think you're good. You have to read and think and train. It can't be whim. Technique is the essence of the medium.

You also need to do a certain amount of theatre. It teaches discipline. Television is like a meat packing factory; it's not satisfying. You want to express a thought to an audience and try not to make it esoteric. You want to communicate. Technique also washes away any of the prima donna mentality.

GM: We talked before the interview about your view on the rights of actors. Can you expound on these?

MB: My point is simply this: any artist is there to perform a function like a doctor or a lawyer. We try to educate or relax, make them philosophize or indoctrinate them, there are so many objectives.

I was asked if I was willing to take my clothes off for "Masala." I'm from a clothes conscious society and I feel self-conscious. I have been refused roles because I refused to give another actor a big tongue filled kiss. I'm not talking about conservatism here, but the way it is the director can violate me as a person.

I feel if I'm an actor I can get across the idea without this. However, people out of jobs will do anything and *ACTRA* and *Equity* feel it is enough that the casting people warn you before hand that there will be nudity. But we need to discourage it. Analyze it. I shouldn't lose a role, if I can do it, but it requires graphic sex scenes.

GM: What characteristics do you feel have contributed most to your success?

MB: Get me a role and then I can tell you! It depends on what you mean by success.

GM: I mean working consistently in your field.

MB: I have had the chance to work quite a lot. And I do genuinely love the arts. It's like a relationship; you have a moral obligation to the arts. Whenever I dance I like to do a namashkar (a preparation to dance that invokes various deities and consecrates the dance space). It centres me and I acknowledge the powers that be. My religion is communication. Success to me is the chance to do something challenging and get a positive response. A bit of praise, not necessarily bright lights, and to get a few dollars too, to pay the rent. I have tried to be honestly critical and I have allowed myself to be vulnerable and have had three or four honest open relationships. The whole world is always striving for that.



JOANNA DAS

Joanna Das is a Canadian born Kathak dancer who studied under Chitresh Das in California. Chitresh is one of the foremost teachers of the Lucknow School of Kathak. Kathak is a classical Indian dance style that combines Hindu and Muslim elements. Like all classical Indian dance it demands much from the student on all levels: emotional, intellectual and philosophical. I interviewed Joanna, who was accompanied by Eric Parker (a musician who plays Indian classical music and her significant other.) It was the morning of the worst snowstorm since 1944 and we drank cheap cappuccino at eight in the morning they smoked bidis and the three of us watched the world go by and talked about her genesis as a dancer.

GM: Let's go chronologically: Have you always had an interest in dance?

JD: No. My background is in figure skating which I did to Western classical music.

GM: Was there anyone in your family who had a great interest in the arts, say?

JD: No. I mean my dad was a good dancer, but no.

GM: What had you been studying up until the time you began studying Kathak?

JD: Piano, flute, guitar and I did an intensive course in Afro-Brazilian dance. I studied forestry at Lakehead University for a year. I quit because I realized I didn't want to work in an office. I decided to take a year off and moved to Victoria, B.C. In B.C., I focused on music again and did some improv theatre. I had a friend in California and I went to visit. Shortly after I arrived I saw a Kathak performance at the Fisherman's Wharf, the Cannery.

GM: What's that?

JD: It's a shopping complex with a stage set up in the centre. The performers were students of Dada's (Joanna's nickname for Chitresh Das). I went the next day on the bus to take a class. Then I stayed.

Eric: What she usually says is she went for three days and stayed ten years.

JD: Yeah, that's right.

GM: When you attended class was it one of those moments or was it a gradual building of interest?

JD: It was one of those moments. I was registered in an alternative university called New College; I was going to study mime and modern dance, but when I went to Kathak class I realized what I wanted to do. And the college kindly gave my tuition back.

At first I took dance only on Saturdays. And I

was working in an Indian restaurant called "Anjali". Our uniforms were shalwar kameez. I got the job through a friend who was studying flamenco guitar and who has since moved to Spain. I lived in a rent by the month hotel, which was not as seedy as it sounds and one of the other women who lived there had a sister who was doing her Phd in India. She used to read me the letters.

That woman who was in India is currently the most respected foreign practitioner of Odissi dance there is.

GM: What in Kathak do you think caused you to react so strongly?

JD: I had a very good teacher. And I had the sense that I was getting involved in an ancient and ongoing tradition. And it involves everything: culture, lifestyle and it's something quite universal.

I went through a period where I stopped for a year. I knew intuitively that if I wanted to continue I had to become more focused. I saw how sincere and completely imbued the dance Dada was, and I felt incompetent and that I wasn't honouring his time.

GM: Then what happened?

JD: I woke up, it was a Saturday morning and thought "I have to go back." As it turned out my class was having their first student concert that night. From that point I got focused and starting taking class three times a week. I was taking it at an ashram in San Francisco. Within six months I wanted to study in Marin County, which was the advanced class.

Eric: Did any of you have jobs?

JD: Everyone did odd jobs: cleaning houses, waitressing. None of those classes exist anymore. You would have to drive all over now to East Bay, Berkeley and San Francisco.

GM: What has changed: Are people more conservative now? Or is it that there's less money?

JD: It's both. When I asked to switch to the Marin County classes which were Mondays to Fridays 9-12 a.m. He wouldn't let me at first. I had to ask him three times. He bases a lot of things on threes.

GM: Why was he refusing?

JD: He said if I switched to Marin that would signal to him that I was very serious and he would become very ruthless. He said I should stay in the "happy" class. And it's true there was a feeling of sisterhood and support in the class I was in. He finally agreed that I could try it out and I lasted a month commuting three hours each way and then I rented a room in a house in Marin. It was a Sufi qonqua actually. There was a big Sufi community there. It was a very loose set up most of the people were older and had like philosophies of life. I lived there three months then I moved to a house in San Anselmo. I was attending class five times a week then riding with Dada on Saturdays to take class in San Francisco. There was a vibration in the Marin class that was different. It was very competitive and terrifying for me. Up until then everyone in my life have been very supportive. My parents were older when they had us and they really wanted children. I had a real extended family on my mother's side, they were farming people and there would be 150 people together every Christmas.

So this kind of thing was a mind blower. You know I have felt my innate Canadianess since I have come back here. They're on a hype there, they are very friendly but they don't really want to know you. It's superficial. They'd be talking to you and then just turn away and start talking to someone else. Anyway, the first day I attended the advanced class we all sat down to recite tal (rhythmic patterns of Kathak) and Dada starting making these comments and all of

a sudden all these people were crying. There was all this fighting. And suddenly he says, "And has anyone welcomed Joanna?" And I'm really green and I say, "Jane did", because this one girl had been nice to me. And back in the change room they all say to me, "You fucking bitch why did you say that for?"

I used to hide in the back, but he had me up front almost immediately.

GM: So you knew at this point this was for you?

JD: I felt it from day one. As soon as I got back into it, I don't want to get too cosmic about it here, but I felt as though I was picked up and put on a wave; the dance, my marriage to Ritesh (tabla player and brother of Chitresh). Dance was something I had picked for myself and I felt absolutely refreshed on all levels. I was absorbed in it.

GM: What made you decide to come back to Canada?

JD: Circumstances brought it about. Ritesh and I went to India. I was there for ten and a half months then I flew to Canada and sponsored him from here then went back to India for eight months. I took the theoretical exam at the *Prayag Sangeet Samiti* in Calcutta. Because I was Dada's student they allowed me to go straight to my bachelor of Dance. On my return to Canada, I auditioned for the Canada Council and received funding to complete my Master's Degree in dance.

Eric: And she placed first in the all India competition done by the school.

JD: I wrote two three hour exams and had a one on one interview with the teacher. He fired these questions at me. Gretchen, a dancer from California was there and she looked at me in total sympathy. Then I had to do a forty-five minute performance that I choreographed myself. I remember Ritesh's mother had made me this blue outfit and it was so hot and by the

end I was so soaked in perspiration I was completely blue. The dye had come off, and it was all over my face too. When I went to do the Pranam (opening section of the dance) the examiner clapped her hands and said, "Oh good, I love Chitresh's pranam!" You see Kathak is far less stylized than South Indian dance. Each guru is different. I have two little girls in my class who study Bharat Natyam and one day I asked them to do a demonstration for the class. They did a pranam together and it was exactly the same, even though they had different teachers. That would never happen in Kathak. Dada developed his pranam based on readings. He's a very spiritual person, he takes styles from all over India.

GM: Was India what you expected?

JD: It felt very natural. I attribute it to Dada's mode of teaching. I knew what to expect. I had learned culturally appropriate behaviours.

GM: Such as?

JD: How to show respect. Basic attitudes toward art and life and spirituality. It felt very comfortable. When you walk off the plane the hot wet air just envelops you. You know who the first person I saw was when I got off the plane in Calcutta? Mother Theresa! She was there meeting someone on the plane! India has this magical ability: just when you're at wit's end, something magical happens.

Eric: One time I was sitting in a car caught in traffic all you can smell is diesel fuel and there's black smoke and then suddenly you get a waft of fresh jasmine in the air.

GM: How did you find the scene when you returned to Canada?

JD: Very open. Very receptive. People wanted

to hook into something that has history.

Eric: And a very disciplined tradition.

GM: What was your biggest challenge? And what was easier than you thought it would be?

JD: The biggest challenge was trying to maintain everything with integrity and enthusiasm. Initiating classes is easy preserving and maintaining is where it's hard. My schedule is pretty grueling. The part that was easier was the receptivity. People wanted to study. On Saturdays, I teach 42 students, on Tuesdays 30. It's in the suburbs mostly.

GM: How did you find it working in an Indian milieu and not being Indian yourself?

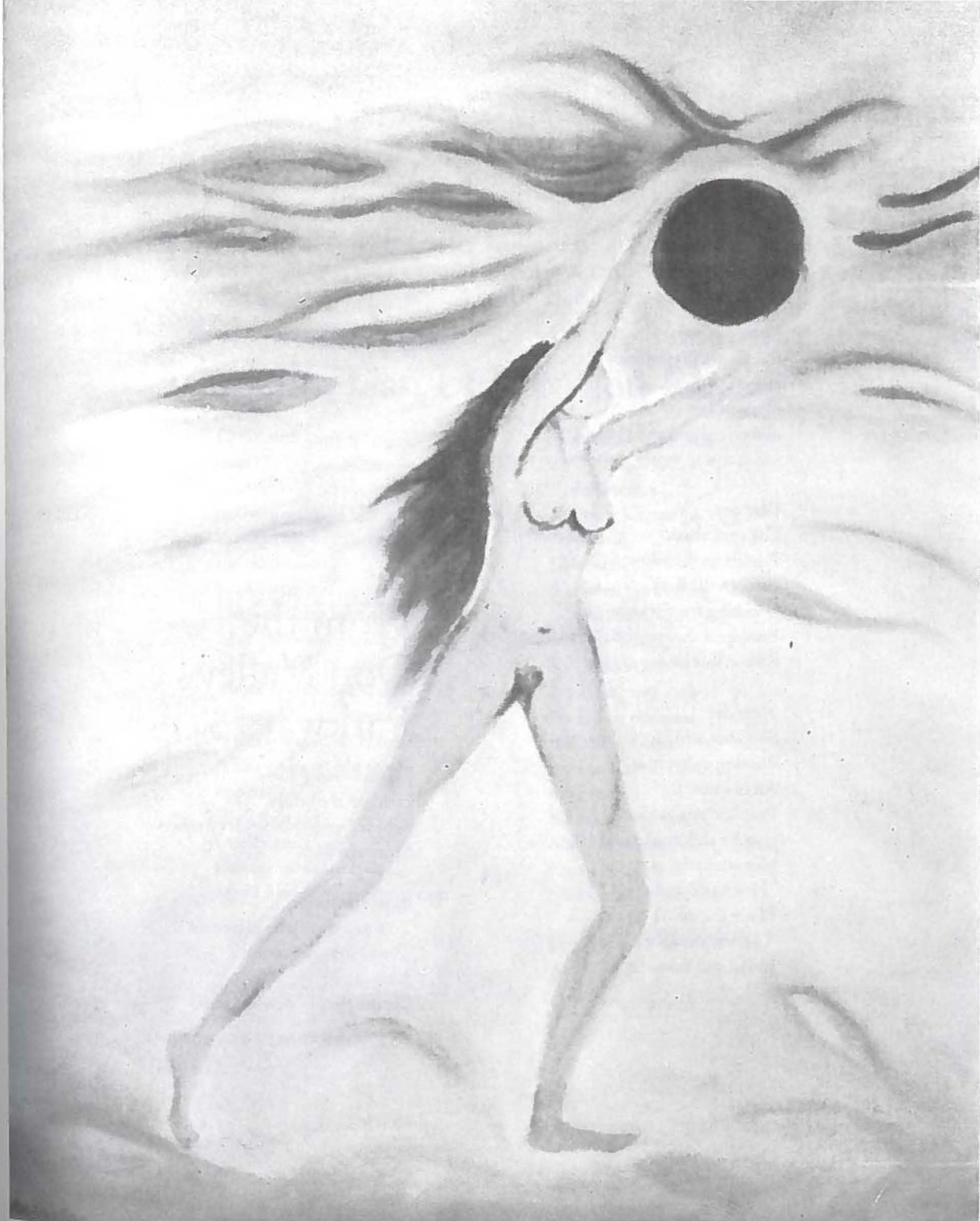
JD: The Indian community accepts you. More than the non-Indian community like at WOMAD.

Eric: All the community sees is that you put in the time to learn your art. Joanna gets calls all the time to dance at weddings or on India Independence Day. Yeah, I remember one wedding, a guy came up to me and gave me a hundred dollars. I said, "Oh no no," and he said, "You will take it", and I said "Oh no no.... Okay!" I phoned Chitresh when I got home and told him and he said "That's good, that means they liked you. It's their tradition."

It was intimidating at first. I thought, can I really pull this off? But I knew I had something to share. And Dada always said that this art was for everyone that was his trust. And that this is inherent in any classical tradition. It is universal.



artwork on these pages by *Ambika Jalwar*



Tactics

SRI LANKA 1989

Most evenings
there's a young woman
at the bus halt.
Flask of hot tea
and pillow in hand.
On her way to see someone in hospital.

One day
She's searched.
Posters in the pilow
paste in the flask
Working for the cause
Enemy of the law and disorder
Rife in our land.

Next day
She's but a thing on the road side
Burning in her byre
An old tire.
People come gawk
Pass by and don't talk.
Her comrades say:
"Hey its do and die
Hope she didn't croak".
The way things go
Blood will flow.



From the Don Valley Parkway

Massive steel grids
Hold up the bridge
Which I with thousands of others
Cross everyday.

Mute testimony
To those that came before me.
Their sweat and blood
A sacrifice
On the altar of development.

— DHARINI ABEYESKERA

Hello, Can I Help You Please?

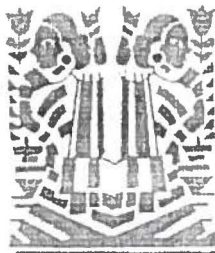
Crisis after crisis
may I help you?
nothing is good enough
nothing works
the system, the frustration
the oppression
I can't help you
I have nothing left to offer you
May I have some energy please?
Meeting after Meeting
whose agenda item is this?
Is this going to stop violence?
Is this going to fix the world?
Is this going to end female
oppression?
Well then
I really don't care
Can we move on?
May I have some energy please?

Conflict after conflict
STOP IT!
I can't breathe
24 hours it must go
on and on
I'm sinking,
Something is choking me
STOP RAPING!
stop the beatings
STOP! STOP!
It's killing me
It's killing my spirit
It's killing my mother,
my sister, my cousins,
my friends
It's killing WOMEN
May I have some energy please?
I must go on
Hello, may I help you?

FAWZIA AHMAD

Conquer and Divide

I looked at her
She stared at me
I saw her scorn as she stood there
All dressed in her sari
Like an expert on Indian reality
I felt her disapproval of my existence
She made me feel guilty, ugly,
homeless
You've lost your heritage
she told me
Speak your *real* language
she told me
You don't wear saris
how could you be Indian
she told me
My horror
My anger
My outrage
My hurt
at her cruel words



It has worked
We criticize each other
We doubt each other
We divide ourselves
We weaken our bonds
We play into
the white manipulations of
CONQUER AND DIVIDE
I'm brown
My accent is sweet
My language is irrelevant
I am proud
I am Indian
I am Caribbean
Why, that makes me an
Indo-Caribbean
And I am REAL!

— FAWZIA AHMAD

Oh! To Live But Once . . .

Hold me gently, friend.
duty bound I have served
my term under one roof.
motionless I have lain -
voiceless I have borne,
traditions, duties and expectations.
Hold me gently, friend.
My wounds are still so raw
from violations I still bleed.
Your tenderness so new, so raw
always evoke a sigh -
Why, oh why did you wait so long?
Would it be too late now?
Hold me gently, friend,
my journey's end is near
I leave now but will return
at the birth of our lives to begin anew.

— SUDHA COOMARASAMY
JULY 1991

Sheltering Turn

My grief lies out in the sun
 My first intention was to shake
 off,
 the dust and the stale noisome
 it had befriended.
 So I shook it well,
 dislodging the dust from the
 blood,
 that reeked with remnants of
 the bile,
 the red and the black,
 and the phlegm of an old
 comfortable disease.
 But on reconsidering,
 how empty I would feel
 after catharsis and renunciation
 from it;
 I settled to relinquish
 only half my thoughts.

It isn't time yet
 to live a lifetime
 in 10 years.

My mother still prays,
 bows, smiles, loves and embraces
 compassion.
 I haven't imbibed yet,
 fidelity to the smiling Buddha
 and his entourage of deities.
 She has to remind me often,
 that my life is just a dream.
 A dream of a dream,
 propelled by a storehouse of
 karmas.

And that demons chase you.
 In your heart,
 your mind,
 your mouth.
 Only my legs entangle with their
 arms.
 "Dislodge them", my mother says.
 I say, "I'm trying".
 But after deliberations,
 I don't try.
 I like the weight of bone and hair
 on me.
 I think it isn't time yet,
 to throw all that grief away.

The five faced tiger
 still stalks silently in me.
 So we are safe.
 I am safe.
 I will not live to see my child
 grow teeth and beard,
 in my womb.
 And learn the jargon of life
 in the amniotic fluid.
 But, maybe it will
 So I wear,
 the sacred threads and talisman
 and press it to my breasts.
 Maybe I should invite the naked
 spirit,
 into the house.
 And ask it to stop,
 intruding into my mother's sleep.
 the sun's losing strength
 But I can't throw all my habits away.
 Today.

I'll just alienate myself slowly from
 them.
 Shake hands cordially.
 Give them time.
 Give myself time.
 To love the emptiness and near
 purity.
 But not now
 I just massacred some cockroaches
 yesterday
 and saw my mother,
 drop some tears and prayers.
 I have to love what I hate.
 So I'll court love,
 and have love court me.
 (But there's time ahead for that,
 and indifference is easier to cultivate
 And hate.)
 I hate.
 hate snake, moustache, tears, hairy
 legs,
 and cockroaches.
 I can't kill a moustache.
 But I did.
 I spoke. And it was uprooted.
 The sun is down now.
 I have to collect something
 I left out for cleansing.
 No. It isn't time yet.
 I must be unfaithful still,
 For a while.

— TSHERING WANGMO
 DHOMPA

1022-191 Sherbourne



To the joy, the pain, the ecstasy
I have shared here with you.
To the countless Revelations;
To the unseen pictures unveiled.
To the growth of love and nurturance;
To the comfort and convenience.
To the quiet moments,
To the loud vibrations,
To the many libations.
To the safety and protection;
To the many showers and baths.
To the peanut butter and honey ricecakes;
To the martinis and beer.
To the sunshine that welcomed my awakenings;
To the moonlight that sang me to sleep.
To the lights of the city;
To the water of the harbour.
To the activity in the streets, I've been privy to share;
To the broken dreams and bursted bubbles.
To the future which is unknown, yet already in the past;
To the next tenants who will give new life to this space.
As I leave with an aching heart and teary eyes,
I leave fulfilled ...
Looking back with only love and gratitude.
From my soul,
I thank you for this time together.

— SHANTI DHORE

For Maimuna

i have come in your dream
to stand upon this holy bridge of prayer
 and give myself
you have opened my skies
a vision of peace burning deep my heart
 imagining your tenderness unfold
 child of pure beauty
 mother's tiger rising with your sun
 holding you to her bosom of love
you will one day rise proud
filled with her
 womanpower
show your eyes to the moon
bursting with the joy of being
 a woman
strong and deep your roots
 of woman
and we will cradle you in our arms
i have come in your dream
to kiss you, send you spirit
i have come to ensoul myself
in your new power
 bless me with your grace
 breathe serenity into the bones
 of this earth
 you have honoured with your presence
i see you as a miracle of faith
come to embrace us

— LITTLE EARTHQUAKE



Draupadi

FOR SOUTH ASIAN DYKES

Draupadi
moves across his young body
searching for compassion in his eyes
wanders over thick warrior skin
slides into caves and shields of stone
his sword bites into her stomach
she gasps, he pulls out
when she twists her tongue into screams
she knows how she longs for another

Draupadi
sits near the open door
smoke rising into her eyes from incense
she slips her jasmine hand over gold bangles
five gold bangles adorning her wrist
watches herself in the sky's mirror
reflected dark in a celestial pool

Draupadi
wants to live inside me
seeks a place in the heart of my dreams
where she is free from their flesh
and her own proud breast will rise with mine

— LITTLE EARTHQUAKE

Exile

FOR LESBIANS AND BISEXUALS REJECTED BY LOVED ONES
AND THOSE AFFECTED BY HIV AND AIDS

each breath of exile is a memory
of be/longing
i feel the distance of banishment
recalling the removal of my soul
from your territory, my anger driven
out of your land
i am condemned to desertion
meant to be abandoned by you
i am abdicating the throne of my flesh
to uproot myself from my own desires

— LITTLE EARTHQUAKE



Burning of the Sun

Drink the potion
of the secrets
of the red fire
of the burning sun
embrace the truths
and confront the wounds
heal them
keeping up to date
your conscience
for you must
get ready to fight
brave woman
be so pure
bring back your eyes
brave woman reveal the light
for all to see
they need
to heal
uplift
and embrace
the evil in their eyes
then be restored with the secrets
of the red fire
of the burning sun

— MARIAM KHAN DURRANI

Main Man

My man
my main man
is unconsciously
cruel
because
my man
my main man
is blind
this man doesn't see me
as a person who may
want something
who may ask for something
this man thinks
that I just give
I give because I choose to
not because I don't have a choice
this man thinks he can take
and not be accused of stealing
or kidnapping
Look
I can't take it
and I won't give it
so don't shoot
because
I'm walking away.

— MARIAM KHAN DURRANI

Competition

Competition, competition,
competition

The name of the game
This workshop, that workshop,
This committee, that committee
This course, that course.
Is there an end?
When can I play?

Recession

Depression

The heat is on
People are scrambling
People are sweating
You need food to eat
Clothes to keep you warm
Shelter to keep you protected
It is cold outside.

Eyes are watching

Ears are listening

Jobs are scarce

Security no longer

Guns are pointed

Knives are sharp.

Do you dare to think, feel, act?

Do you dare to risk?

The tape is on
Child is put to sleep
It must not play
Times are hard
playing is risky
Don't be frisky
Be serious
Be accountable
The day is done
Tape stops playing

Child awakens
Ready to play
Off to the playground
Swimming long and hard
Hands touching feet,
Swimmers race to get ahead,
Arms hitting arms
Ouch - the pain
Stroke after stroke
Feeling good again
Then suddenly, teeth knocking
hands
The pain of it!
I thought it was safe in the pool!
I endure the sharks
Swimming is important
My mile is done.
I feel great - I think.
The bruises begin,
The pain of it!

Home at last
Supper is eaten
Alone again
Silence is loud
Walls encroaching
On the phone
Child awakens
Looking for other children
Ready to play.

No one is home,
This committee, that committee,
This workshop, that workshop,
No one is home,
Competition, competition,
competition
The name of the game.

Child remains standing
Looking, waiting,
Waiting to play, waiting to play. . .

— BHUPINDER GILL

Migratory Birds

We
the migratory birds
are here this season
thinking
we'll fly back to our home
for sure

No one knows
which invisible cage imprisons us?
And the flight begins to die slowly
in our wings.
Some of us are drawn with
the chain
some lag
in the swamp.
No sun, no earth
where to look at, what to look for?

How shall we reach the threshold
of our home with crumbling self?

. . . The next season is never our own
and every season
makes mouths at us.

— SURJEET KALSEY

The Journey Unbegun

A desert
with yellow thorns
and my feet naked
on the lost paths

When my breath leaves
on these unending trails
I will find myself
looking at my feet,

bleeding
and the journey unbegun.

— SURJEET KALSEY



A Distance

Last night
life sang such a song
whose every word's poison
seeped down into my body
You were absent
though I was listening to your heart throbbing
I tried to initiate
but you remained indifferent
The night
wandered without dreams
passing over the valley of silence.

In the morning
when a bird came to speak at our window
it looked at our faces with its sad eyes
as if it were watching
the distance between you and me.

— SURJEET KALSEY



Reprinted from *Speaking to the winds*, Third Eye
Publications, 1982, London, Canada.

My Sadness is My Joy

When I feel sad
my joy is rekindled
because my sadness
and my joy
are one
and they are many

My sadness is
the clear cold light
of the rising moon
fed
on the glowing embers
of the dying sun

It contains
the joy in my soul
the way my veins
hold my lifeblood
in my body

It is
the bland rice
to the spicy curry
that sustains
my existence

It is
that moment
of silence

between two notes
in the symphony
of my universe

It is
the implosion
that checks
the explosion
of my heart

My sadness
is a stranger
to that ugly
modern impostor
called
depression

Depression
is the faded foliage
of a sickly plant
the sputtering
of a choking engine
the cloak of anger
turned on itself

I welcome
my sadness
because
it hones my mind

sharpens my vision
pulls and tugs
at my heart-strings
and reminds me
that I am still
alive

My sadness
and my joy
are one
and they are many

They are the yin
and the yang
the flip
and the flop
the flip-flop
of the eternal dance
of my Lord Shiva

My sadness
is the tear
that flows
when the cup
of joy
spills over

— MAYA KHANKHOJE
(New Canadian Review, Mtl,
1988/89.)

For Mishka

This is a poem
for my friend Mishka
whom I have spoken to
a thousand lives
of estranged children
and life
and death
and lovers
who love
no more

It is for Mishka
whose quiet faded beauty
slowly emerged
before my weary eyes
like a sharp image
from a tenuous negative

For Mishka
who led me gently
down that winding path
of friendship
sometimes known
as love

Mishka
remember?
the thistles
had blocked our path
in purple arrogance

Remember?
we stood there
in wonderment
and curiosity
and as we touched
hesitantly at first
and then with boldness
our freshly moulted skins
oozed and bled
painful purple drops
into the dusty earth

— BY MAYA KHANKHOJE

Expression

I had words for every thought;
I could express
The picture of a soul
And the soul of a picture.
The heart demanded happiness,
Eyes demanded a scene,
And nights, a bed.
Like Emily's Dickinson's
My life was a loaded gun
With cartridges inserted
By my own hands.
I felt like a corpse in my head
And described it, too.
I had words for every thought?
Like squirrels flitting through trees,
I used to go to you
But you retreated in my silence.
Through the window of my conversation,
You could feel the breeze of union.
There was no crack
In the wall of your determination.
The light of a million years
Was focussed in your two eyes,
And indescribable
Even in me.

— KISHWAR NAHEED

The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice

Whatever the breeze wrote on the water
Was trustworthy,
Since the time was such
That the night appeared more beautiful
Than the day;
Since the time was such
That a smile peeked through sad lips.

Whatever the breeze wrapped around its arm
Was trustworthy,
Since the time was such
That pupils don't burst like bubbles;
Since the time was such
That the message of happiness
Took the form of blisters on the feet.

Whoever the breeze sent to the town
Was trustworthy,
Since the time was such
That words had not become beggars incarnate;
Since the time was such
That footsteps had the support
Of the illusion of the destination.

Then, the breeze donned the robe of such revolt
That every creeper, every nest,
Every lamp on the pathway of desire
Looked for the way, sought solace,
And asked at every corner:
Would any dream ever become a reality?
Would the previous trust of the breeze
Ever become the second nature of the threshold?
If these sleeping writings of black words
Become the beckoning mornings
For ships anchored ashore,
The wealth of feelings
Can become the sustenance of the touch of love.
Wait, how that the rain has stopped.
Wait, that the breeze will blow again.
Wait, that the terms of defence are harsh.


— KISHWAR NAHEED

Poems reprinted from *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice*,
Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1991, Lahore, Pakistan.

Woman

strengthening the bonds of friendship anew,
becoming a new meaning to the word 'love',
setting a tune to the battle song of justice
which has yet to be sung. . .

as darkest night draws near,
those who would devour
your pound of flesh
lie in wait
at every threshold.
how could you then
not let life flow out from within,
how could you not shout out
about the tomorrow that is yet to dawn.
from this day onwards
let us no longer cleanse with milk
the myth
that is WOMAN
let us, instead,
shed the last tears of our serfdom
and seek a path that is clear.



oh you sorcerers of the night
who chant your mantras against us,
open wide your eyes
and see -
that drop of freedom-loving blood
that flows from breasts
that have nurtured the entire universe
that which is
WOMAN.

— LEENA IRENE HAPUTHANTHRI
(1950-1987) MARCH 8, 1986

Reprinted from *Kantha Maga* a Progressive Women's
Front Publication, December 1992, Yakalla,
Ibbagamuwa, Sri Lanka.
(Translated from Sinhala by Sunila Abeysekera)

No New Experience

It is a recurring experience
this identity definition
confronting me repeatedly
since I became me.

This drama is continuous,
on the inner stages
of my mind,
drawing its fire
from the cultural friction
of my calculated origin.

It is a dialogue
between two selves;
me and my alter ego
both have collaborated
to forge me into
this shape of earth.

The drama revolves around
who I am not,
yet who I personify,
and
who I really am,
Indo-Caribbean parents child.
Often I become indistinguishable
making the world define me
differently from who I think I am.

Two selves in one
contrasting, contradictory, yet
complementary and complete,
I am the light and darkness
of the same day.

I am the point on the globe
where east is also west.

The drama is not new
from my native land
it evolved and grew.

An inheritance,
for my parents too,
had wrestled with the issue
through and through,
coming from the east
to live
according to the west.
the drama is uninhibited
by geography
leaving Caribbean sands
transcending Atlantic sea,
to transplant in Canadian snow,
never breaking the dual ego.

No new experience
in this secondary place
in a multicultural mosaic.
The confusion thickens,
the crisis heightens,
the identity remains obscure
behind my Canadian door.

— SHEILA RAMDASS

For My Unborn Sister

Yesterday there were no flowers
blooming on either side of this road
There were only thorns and bushes.
Today . . .
A flower waits expectantly;
waits to burst into bloom.

Yesterday there was not a blade of grass
to be seen on either side of this road
There were only stones and pebbles.
Today . . .
The grass waits expectantly;
waits to receive the drops of rain.

Yesterday,
my feet were tiny and dainty
Today . . .
I possess a pair of feet
That have been torn and bloodied
by the tough path I have trod

What do you seek
when you look deep into my eyes?

If at first you want to hug me and cry
in the corner of my eyes
a tear lies waiting
a tear that could make the whole world cry.
And if at first you want to hug me and laugh
in the depth of my eyes
joy lies waiting
joy that will call out your name
in an explosion of love.

— SEETHA RANJANEE

Reprinted from *Kantha Maga* a Progressive Women's
Front Publication, December 1992, Yakalla,
Ibbagamuwa, Sri Lanka.
(translated from Sinhala by Sunila Abeysekera)

War Time

Amidst the tension of
the night-time hours
of war time
our children come of age;
they loose
their childhood

Each blood-soaked body
destroys
their beautiful dawn
which soared like a bird.
Walls crack open
at the sound
of their childish laughter.

A burst of gunfire
from an automatic weapon
shatters the silence
of the star-lit night.
The meanings
of fairy stories
fall dead.

They learn
to shut the gates early,
They learn to discern
the subtle differences
in the sound of dogs barking
in the village.
They learn to remain silent,
without asking questions.
They learn to remain silent,
when there are no answers to their
questions.
They learn to accept
whatever situation confronts them.
In fun
tear the wings off
a captured dragonfly.
They play at war
with bits of stick
for guns
As they play,
they kill each other,
laughing

— SHIVARAMANI

Reprinted from *Kantha Maga* a Progressive
Women's Front Publication, December 1992.
Yakalla, Ibbagamuwa, Sri Lanka.

The Interrogator:

'Look Here, Bibi, here is the Search Warrant;
The contingent were with me,
but I left them around the corner
I thought, I can manage on my own.
we are looking for a piece of writing.
Whats the point in making a scene?
Why don't you find it,
Fetch it yourself?
Or else, where it lies hidden in the house,
Show us, without a fuss, yourself.'

Never have I seen my house in this light before
I can hear a heartbeat throb in its very walls
Blood drips from the veins of stones and steel
Warm breaths, wakeful eyes, parted lips surround me
Repeat their whisper to me once again
Of the promised eternal bond with my country
My four walls, dear land, nestle in your arms
the few moments of refuge I had, I owe you.
Countless sellers arise before my eyes
Countless possibilities open their doors for me
Beneath my feet opens the tunnel of my hopes
all seven colours of life glowing on its walls.

New words will be inscribed now on the walls
of this city
O passing moment! I swear by your desecrated
honour
Red is the dust around my house
Beyond this window blooms red flower.
All these tribulations I endure
over a book buried in my past?
Look beyond the curtains instead
At the dreams my future holds!

— FAHMIDA RIAZ

Both of Fahmida's Urdu poems are translated by
Rukhsana Ahmad. Reprinted from '*We Sinful Women*'
Women's Press, England, with permission from the
author

Akleema

Akleem*,
the sister of Cain and Abel,
is born of the same mother
but she is different.
Different between her thighs
And in the bulge of her breasts
Different in her gut
and inside her womb
Why is the fate of all these
the sacrifice of a fatted lamb?

Imprisoned by her own body
burning in the scalding sun
She stands on a hilltop
like a mark etched on stone
Look at this mark carefully
above the long thighs
above the high breasts
above the tangled womb
Akleema has a head too
Let God speak to Akleema sometime
And ask her something.

— FAHMIDA RIAZ

* A version of the legend claims that the brothers
fought over their sister Akleema's hand.

A Little Nothing

"Your mind is dumb,
your skills a little less
than those of a child.
And when you speak,
your conversation lacks
almost everything - for the most part -
specificity. You never listen!
You have so much to do, and yet,
you do so little,
with all things left undone.
Dust gathers on shelves. . .
clothes are never aired. . .
windows never done. . .
the vacuum cleaner never moved
except once a month. . .
food never made. . .
your time is used
for things that do not matter,
for those you are not yours. . .
you claim you do a lot,
but that can be seen nowhere. . .
except in areas of no concern.

You are a little nothing,
and will remain. . .
for these are mental bondages
that skin your identity,
and leave you looking
like someone else you know
you never wanted to be!"

— NILAMBRI SINGH

Yitika

"I am forty six," she says,
"too old to start anything new.
My nerves are shattered,
but sometimes, I have good days. . .

"Will you sit with me?
I'll buy you coffee?
I don't want to impose,
but I'm very lonely?"

"You're sweet, very good to me.
No thanks, I wouldn't want your sandwich,
I still have some money left for this month,
or else leave me a bite, whatever you wish. . .

"I have so much to say, so much I've written.
My specialization is linguistics -
five years in the University of Prague,
then Chicago - but I'm nothing anymore,
just fit for feeding out of garbage cans!

"I've written hundreds of letters
to this friend of mine in Sweden. . .
She's still sane, but, like you,
very busy. She never writes back,
but I'll try just one more time again!

"Do you have a job for me?
I can clean and scrub,
I love to scrub!
My friends give me food
for cleaning their homes.

"Eastern Europe is a mess!
Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia,
Everything is a mess!
They don't like dark skins there -
remind them too much of Turks
who had dragged their women by the hair
and raped them!
The white race in Eastern Europe is a mess!

"Did you know that the people here
are descendants of the victims of the inquisition?
and in Sweden people were skinned alive
by our so-called civilized nations?
but of course, those who can be strong
have power, and for ones like me. . .
well, there's welfare.
"I'd love a donut, thank you.

"As I was saying, Chomsky said it all
for linguistics.
The roots of words are fascinating,
'trisna' is 'thirst'. . . trisna, triste, thirst. . .
is it not wonderful?
I have it all worked out.
Someone told me I should write
to the University of B.C.

"You have to go. . . I'm sorry
for keeping you from your errands,
but I appreciate it.
Call me, you have my number,
I'm very lonely!"

— NILAMBRI SINGH

Silence

Wandering in the meat section
pausing to look

how he carves it
just under the wings

I walk away wounded
I have caged it

in the hollow of memories
when the surgeon

split it open
and dipped his hands in it

on a stormy night
walking back from nowhere

the wind unbuttons it
and scatters it on the soft, powdery

first snow,
so beautiful, so irresistible

I indulge in it
over the dinner table

I see it in blank eyes
a hand so mechanically

feeding a mouth
full of it

I watch him chew it quite distastefully
he gets up and disappears

in the laundry room
I bet he is folding it

I talk to myself at the sink
trying to drown it

the telephone rings
and breaks it into pieces

talking to this voice
for twenty minutes about it

I try to reconstruct it
piece by piece

I lose it in the clatter
on my way to the bathroom

when I have convinced myself
that tonight it doesn't really matter

I find it in the mirror
staring at me

just when I think
we are reunited

he knocks for his towel
I open the door

we exchange it
he disappears again

I am left all alone with it
for the first time

today.

— BY RINA SINGH

Supermarket Convention

Imagine a tomato that doesn't bruise
imagine a tomato with a brain
that knows
how not to bruise
how does one not bruise?
could the bio-technologist experiment with me
and train me
to be indifferent
to the urgent fingers of frost?
For every tomato
a bio-engineer
to make it larger
can he inject any enzyme into me
to make me more efficient?
with spliced genes of a flounder
every tomato will now be
more nutritionally sound
the tomato will get to live longer
I get a smarter tomato in my salad
(which he promises will not smell of fish)
but what does he get out of
playing with my food?
Does he not see that
every tomato will still carry a wound
from our knives
Does he not know
that we all bruise
eventually?

—BY RINA SINGH


Moving Too Fast

Angry, hating, feeling like
you want to punch and kick
someone, yourself
wanting to bruise every
piece of your flesh to
show the world how much
pain is inside
wanting to die, wanting
to kill myself, wanting
to so desperately sleep
forever
Afraid of death, scared to
die, where will I go,
unknown space, cold earth
cut my wrist, bang my hand
against the wall, burn my flesh
drink to get drunk to get numb
to forget to never remember time
Eyes swollen red streaks of blood
pool in my eyes, devastated and filled
with despair, so much unhappiness
in this world,
so much pain
want to cut my limbs out
so I never move
want to cut my lungs out
so I never breathe
want to cut my ears off
never to hear
pull my eyes out
to never see
rip my heart out
to never love

Part of me, all of me
tonight wants my body
to display the wounds from
within
the scars are inverse
they line my chest cavity
and my stomach
I can't breathe
Panic attack coming
hands, cold, wet,
heart racing
Can't breathe, breathe
shallow deep, breathe,
head spinning, fainting,
slowly fainting
Lying on floor, on back,
limbs outstretched,
knees bent
Deep sharp pain in stomach
Wanting to scream
No air to talk
lightheaded, nauseous,
headache, feel like
my insides are burning.
No control over my body,
No where to go,
No where to look,
No where to hide
longing to die
Maybe tomorrow night
things won't be
Moving so Fast.

— BY ZARA SULEMAN

Sexual Colonization



Eyes meet blue to brown
skin touches light to dark
lips softly kiss
hearts race
breathing fast
legs intertwined
arms outstretched
back arched
hearts race
breathing fast
dry throats
teeth nibbling
flushed cheeks
hearts race
breathing fast
bodies sweating
words whispered
tensed muscles
hearts race
breathing fast
cries of ecstasy
deep sighing
relaxed muscles
hearts race
breathing fast
conquered in the
most intimate way
truly colonized at last.

— ZARA SULEMAN

Bane and Blood

In every age
a man has spoken
through chains
that made few a Houdini;
and some decocted and sold
to others who drank the bane
that left them
banefully will-less

Cries whined through muted lips
parched sighs
cracking other lips
Spirits tore unfeeling flesh
with claws digging into lustreless gazes
pupils dilated, came apart
red eyes - intoxicated

Blood flowed through
winey veins, through headlines
through sad wailing women
who still remain:
the wailing women
hoping to save
their sons and daughters
from the memory
of painful deaths
of whips chains
contaminated machismo

Hooch elicits merely
anxiety from anxiety

— AMBIKA TALWAR
FALL 1978

On first love *and feminism at 16*

Sunray in a crack
of a half-opened door
your love edged past it's half-resistance
tip-toeing from behind
holding me captive, unawares.
In your wide, firm embrace
diffused, translucent
I radiated your light.
Splashed about,
played, danced even
like weightless particles in the air
bathed in delight.

Held powerless
to gravitate toward my own suns
I stayed
encircled within your radii
unconscious
that somewhere in the pull and push
of our interplay
orbited the foot-prints
of an unknown singularity,
the real me.

I might have scattered my being thus
fading star, shower of sparks
sharp points of light
lost quickly beyond the pale.
Great gusts of passing winds
gathered the particles of my dispersed self
and flew them,
across bright galaxies, limitless skies
limitless skies,
into the palm of a new universe.....
Now,
my feet are poised
on the curvature pointing to infinity.

— SMITA VIR TYAGI

Untitled

abuse
being abused
abused

physical
mental
emotional
spiritual abuse

soulshattering
painful
dreadful
reality

twisted
tormented
dehumanized
childhood
adolescence
adulthood

look inside me
see
proof of my worthlessness
my hatred of
myself
look deep
see
proof of my uselessness
my running away from you from the world from
myself
deeper still
see
proof of my wounds
my comfort in continued abuse of
myself
unable
unwilling
to give
to receive
love

i will
deny
run
hide
kick scream shout taunt ridicule
swamp myself in pain
do anything
go anywhere
to drown myself from it
not face it

i will
build a wall
strong
isolating
comforting
impenetrable
insurmountable
stone upon stone upon stone
wall
which
will drown me in the pain
not seeing
not wanting to see
the abused
all around
me

who to blame?
my broken
dehumanized
warped
people?
lost in the bitterness
of their own
unfulfilled
unhappy lives?
inhuman
exploiting
oppressive society?
ruled by a few
bent on
killing
maiming
destroying
everything human?
i beat my breast until i bleed
the seas run red
i howl
and moan
the mountains tremble
i weep
the world drowns
in the flood of tears
i cut my heart into
tiny pieces and trample upon them
i destroy my humanity
not to feel the
pain
of my
abused humanity

to face it
means to move on
to grow on
to change the world
behind facing that reality
lies growth
lies power
freedom to be myself
freedom to change the world
freedom to become human

— SUNERA THOBANI

journalism school. Nobody in the community knew what this journalism thing was really all about— it was unclear what one actually did after getting a journalism degree. I didn't really know myself.

At the age of 19 I landed my first summer job at the Wynyard Advance, a weekly newspaper in central Saskatchewan. I drove 45

This Journalist

It was in grade 12 that I decided I wanted to be a journalist. I longed to travel and I had a keen curiosity about the world. When my friends were reading *Seventeen* and *US Magazine*, I was paging through *Newsweek* and *Time*. I was deeply disturbed by natural disasters, moved by acts of courage, and overwhelmed by the plight of women in the developing world. And I wanted to write. Just to write about it all.

I had never met or seen a non-white reporter. My entire world was white. From grade five on, I lived in Lanigan, Saskatchewan, a town of 1500 people. My family was the only Muslim family in town, and not surprisingly, I spent most of my time being ashamed of who I really was. We drove to Saskatoon on special occasions, and saw other South Asian children up to four times a year. I didn't really fit in with the South Asian girls either. They spoke of marriage, money and medical school. I vowed never to marry, my family had no money, and I yearned for

minutes every day in my red Toyota Corolla (nicknamed 'the beast') I felt like quite the little reporter, dashing from summer fairs, to town meetings, to the annual chicken chariot races. Wynyard is world famous for this event. Paper chariots are tied to real chickens and the chickens race as the crowd cheers. Really, it's true. I have pictures to prove it.

And then there was the big fire in the nearby town of Foam Lake. It was my big break, and I blew it. Reporters from all the other towns, as well as some of the big city types descended on Foam Lake as fire raged through the main street. I remember the exhilaration as I snapped away with my camera. I ran from one end of town to the other to get quotes from people. When I got back to the paper I rushed to the darkroom, only to realize the film had not advanced. I had no pictures and I was devastated. My boss made me go back to Foam Lake and grab whatever pictures I could. But it wasn't the same, the excitement was gone and the fire had died

down. Despite my disappointment, I realized I really loved reporting.

By the time I finished journalism school I had visited and written about refugee camps on the Thai/Cambodian border, travelled to different parts of the country for French immersion, and reported for a television station in Regina. I had developed a deep

Thing

BY SADIA ZAMAN

love for the CBC and I was in heaven when I was offered a summer reporting position in Saskatoon. By the end of that summer I landed a permanent job as a radio and television reporter in Sydney, Nova Scotia. I loved the maritimes, but it was clear to my colleagues that I was a prairie girl. After all, I never acquired a taste for lobster and never developed an immunity to sea sickness. I nearly threw up the first time I had to do an on-camera on a fishing boat in the Atlantic. At one point the camera man held me steady with one arm and hung on to his camera with the other. It was a pose we'd repeat the day an angry mob of steelworkers decided to go after the premier of Nova Scotia. I nearly got trampled in the process. But boy, I sure loved this journalism thing.

After two years in Sydney I was offered a job at TV Ontario in Toronto. I reported for a consumer show for one season and then went back to the CBC. This time, to the national radio newsroom as a writer and

editor. It was a very exciting time in journalism. First there was the stand-off at Oka, and then the Gulf war. Those events affected me profoundly. I realized how dissatisfied I was with the narrow scope of opinion in mainstream journalism. For the first time, I questioned the stereotypes and assumptions prevalent in the media. I believed the problems were systemic. And so I began to question my own role within the system.

It was at this time Vision TV asked me to work on its human affairs program. I quickly left the CBC. The move provided me with a work environment where I was not afraid to challenge old images and stereotypes about my fellow Canadians, and I felt free to explore issues that I was really interested in. The more I do this work, the more I see the connections between us all. Connections between a Muslim woman working in a South Africa squatter camp and a Jewish family trying to preserve a way of life in the Northwest Territories. Connections between a disabled woman struggling with her boundaries in her friendship with an able-bodied couple, and an HIV-positive man trying to find a way to tell his family that he wants to control his own death through euthanasia.

I am learning about devastating events, incredible courage, and women of strength. I'm learning the nature of our commitment is the same. And that social justice is social justice.

So here I am today also committed to work that is motivated by a scene of social justice. Yes, this journalism thing really is great.

Sadia Zaman is a journalist and co-host of "It's About Time" on Vision TV. Last year the program won a Gemini Award for its exploration of critical issues in a multiracial context.

Jeannie

BY MEENA KUMAR

Neelam undressed and got into bed and dreamt of Jeannie with the sweet pink pussy. Jeannie was as dark as espresso but her pussy was candy pink and pink champagne bitter. Neelam had always dreamt of Jeannie, even when the dream had a different name and even when she thought the dream had only dream logic.

Before she met Jeannie, it seemed such a strange, mysterious thing to like a woman. Neelam worried over what she was and why she was what she was and what women like her wanted and whether any woman would want her at all. She didn't think the latter was possible. There had been women who had liked her, liked the way she sucked their breasts, like having her on their arm, liked dancing with her, but she wanted to be wanted. She wanted a woman to desire her body, as ludicrous and impossible as the idea often seemed. She told herself all lesbians really wanted to be wanted by a woman or wanted to possess a woman more than they wanted to make love with a woman, and she had a lump in her throat of the cries it seemed she would never utter. It wasn't so much that she wanted a 'butch' as that she wanted a woman who would desire the corporeal reality of her, her breasts, her stomach, her cunt, and this didn't seem altogether likely. Why would a woman

want her pussy? She had never particularly been overcome with a desire to eat pussy. It didn't repulse her, and she was certainly willing to do it, but the idea didn't particularly excite her. She didn't know she just hadn't met the right pussy.

The night Neelam met Jeannie began with Neelam sitting alone in the park in Sheridan Square after yet another failed date. The only other people left in the park were sleeping homeless men. Neelam stretched her arms out on the back of the bench. Her blouse was short-sleeved, and the metal of the bench was cool against her skin. She sighed. It had been a long damn day.

The first thing that had gone wrong was that she got out of work late. There had been no time to change her clothes. She had rushed downtown to make her blind date with a pudgy, androgynous Chinese-American dyke who was not what she had been expecting. After the movie, they walked down Seventh Avenue and Neelam suggested they go to the Box for a drink. The Chinese-American dyke said she only went to Crazy Nanny's, the white bar, because she had heard that the women at Pandora's Box smoked crack in the bathroom. The date ended soon after.

Neelam continued sitting in the park after her date left. She didn't feel like moving. It seemed such a shame to be home on a ripe summer night. She took a sip of D&G's ginger beer and watched the women go by.

The furthest back Neelam could trace it was to when she was eight years old and living in Kluang with her mother and her stepfather. Her mother passed the long, empty days sitting in an enormous wicker chair in the garden, doing the crossword puzzle in every magazine or newspaper she could buy. When her mother went into the kitchen to get her lunch, Neelam would sneak up to where her mother had been sitting and carefully pull out from the pile of Australian tabloids with the half-naked girls on page three. She would enter the house from the back yard and go into the room where she slept. There she sat hunched on the tile floor, poring over the pictures of bare-breasted girls, and listening for

the sound of footsteps coming towards her, ready to shove the magazines under the mattress if anyone came to the door. "Why does that girl sneak the magazines away?" her mother once asked her stepfather. He had shrugged.

A cop came in to the park to get the homeless men out and Neelam rose along with them. She tossed the empty bottle into the garbage bin and turned the corner.

The Box wasn't very busy. There were some women at the bar but the only people dancing were one couple and a voguing transsexual. Neelam set her bag down on a chair on the edge of the dance floor. Jeannie was standing against the speaker with her arms crossed.

Jeannie was the one woman in the world who actually was the colour of bittersweet chocolate. She was tall and Junoesque, if Juno wore a pair of tight jean shorts and football Jersey, she had big breasts and big legs and long, thin braids that flowed over her shoulders. Neelam walked by Jeannie and into a corner of her own. She wasn't in the mood for rejection. Jeannie was too femme for Neelam to think that she would have any success with her.

Although Neelam hadn't aligned herself yet, people presumed she was a femme because of the low-cut, high-hemmed way she usually dressed. She went along with it because she thought it would be slightly ludicrous to be aggressive when she was small and soft and unathletic.

It was different when she was a kid. Neelam still had her fourth grade class photograph of herself, tall and dark, standing in the back row with her arm wound around the waist of a small Chinese girl with big, moist eyes. She had towered over the petite Chinese girls in her class and she was always carrying them or tickling them. Neelam liked to regale her friend Billy with tales of herself as an elementary school butch, but there had also been a tall, older girl whom she had had a crush on. Neelam had anonymously sent her little gifts like a small hand mirror or a paper coronet of salted almonds.

Neelam had come to like only tall women. Tall, and strong and curvy. Just like Jeannie, whom she purposefully ignored. Neelam tried not to want what

she couldn't have and she was sure she couldn't have Jeannie just because she wanted her.

Another couple came on the dance floor but it was still more or less empty. Beams of coloured light made swirling pools on the ground. Neelam turned and danced with her reflection in the mirrored wall. Jeannie was now standing against the mirror on the other side of the room, talking to a slim, dark girl in an orange Lycra bodysuit. Neelam watched them for a few minutes to see if they were together, but the girl in the bodysuit noticed her and Neelam had to turn away. Neelam went up to the DJ booth to make some requests and then down to the bar.

The bartender, Jamie, was a puertoriquena who looked like Nargis. "Mimosas are on special," Jamie said in her throaty voice.

"I'll have a screwdriver."

Jamie shrugged and smiled. Neelam could see the gap between Jamie's front teeth. "Are you having a good time?" Jamie asked, bringing her her drink.

Neelam didn't answer, and Jamie had another call at the other end of the bar. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Jeannie dancing with the orange bodysuit girl. Neelam sipped her drink. The apex of existence in Indian philosophy was not to care about anything, to root out the 'I', and Neelam was trying hard to reach this peak, but she couldn't help wanting Jeannie to come over and grab her.

It's the drink, she thought, setting it down. Alcohol made her want everything more loudly, and they always say you will never meet someone when you're looking. She sighed. She was sitting at an angle to the bar counter and the mirror behind her reflected her in profile, brooding over her drink like Amithab Bachan in a gangster movie.

When she was a kid, she used to escape herself in masala movies. Nearly every weekend, her mother and her stepfather and she went into the Indian section of Singapore, to eat at Komala Villas and to watch a film, preferably an Amithab film.

Neelam spent her Saturday afternoons mesmerized in dark, cool movie halls. The theatres had at least fifty narrow, steeply ascending rows and the

screens were enormous. The movies were four hours long, plus the intermission when the crowds poured outside to buy salted or roasted nuts, candy, sundal, garam masal, kara boondhi, soda. Her mother insisted that they stay in their seats so they wouldn't lose them, and she handed Neelam film gossip magazines to read to keep Neelam quiet. And so in the middle of the movie, Neelam would read about the real-life exploits of the stars who towered over her on screen.

Neelam identified with Amithab completely. He was tall and angry and misunderstood, usually abandoned by his father, usually forced to rely on only himself. Amithab was the 'angry young man'. Amithab was a criminal, a man whom injustice forced outside the law, illegitimate, fatherless, a drinker, a club-goer, a sophisticated lover of beautiful women, a wrecker of revenge, consumed by his past, lean and dark with a deep, rich voice, consummately urbane, strong and unafraid, melancholy, a man who won in the end or died. Neelam was all these things. But to her confusion, she also identified with the women in the movies. She wanted to wear make-up and lots of heavy gold jewellery and sari-bordered bright silk clothes and be beautiful and have designs in henna on her hands and brow and writhe and sing mujras like Rekha and Zeenat Aman and Parveen Babi and Helen and Bindu. She was torn between being Amithab and being the heroine, knowing that she was both. And if she was corrupted by being both, how would she have the only solace Amithab ever had – the love of a beautiful, sympathetic woman?

Amithab movies stirred her and consoled her and discomfited her. She watched Helen swivel her hips in the den of the dacoit Gabbar Singh and felt a strange wave of something between queasiness and joy. She watched the scene "Muqaddar ka Sikandar" where the rich girl who will grow up to be Raakhee comes out of her house in the dead of the night. The poor boy who will grow up to be Amithab is sleeping on her front steps. He has nowhere to go and no one to help him. The girl leans forward, and without waking him, covers him with a blanket. Which one did she want to be? The girl or the boy? She thought about it until her head hurt. The blanket, she

thought finally, but it was an answer both witty and inadequate.

Neelam took her half-finished drink to the table next to the chair she had set her bag on, and returned to the dance floor. One of the songs she had requested had come on. She stood facing the empty centre of the floor and waited for the music to enter her. Neelam danced with a slowly disintegrating edge of self-consciousness. This was exactly what she needed after her lousy day. The DJ played all her house anthems one by one.

"Coming on Strong." "Ride the Rhythm." "Let No Man Put Asunder." "Love Dancing." Neelam's moves became deeper and showier. She slid and gilded on the waxed wooden floors. "But tonight is the night, that I'm gonna make you mine."

Dance was how she made up for not having any sex. The first black woman she had ever had a crush on had been Donna Summer. She was looking for some hot stuff herself. When she told her mother she was in love, her mother had said, barely glancing at her, "Well, as long as it's not Dionne Warwick. That would be going too far."

That was when she first came to the West. She was about ten years old. They lived in Scarborough, a bleak working class suburb of Toronto. They were the only Indian family in their neighbourhood. Lisa Erwin was fawn like girl in her new school, who wore a burgundy cloak with a fur-lined hood. When they played tag on the snowy banks outside the school and Neelam was it, Lisa was always the first one she caught. The other kids noticed it and even remarked on it, but when someone finally called her a lesbian, it was because she kept her hands warm in the back pockets of her jeans. She accepted this. She had just read Claudine at School, and the relationship between Claudine and Aimee had felt so right that she knew she was one. It didn't seem odd that putting her hands in the back pockets of her jeans was what gave her away. When her stepfather picked her up to take her to the ophthalmologist, she announced, "I'm a lesbian."

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY
JEANNIE, WRITTEN BY MEENA KUMAR.

BODYTEXT

BY FAUZIA RAFIQ

Dedicated to women who
retain the capacity to
dance together.



In the furiousness of its fire, the core of the sun clung to the rays forcing them to burn. The earth, unable to yield moisture any more, assumed the posture of a monolith: dry, rigid and painful. Flowers, young trees, small birds and barely clad people remained unprotected.

The softness of petals melted onto the seething flowerbeds, the scent, agitated, dripped on the slab of earth. Young trees continued to shield each other while tiny insects clung to

the moving shadows of the clusters of leaves. Birds stopped the quest of water burying their heads into the smouldering arms of huge trees. Scattered around fields, the barely clad people, worked with dehydrated bodies. Stiffening minds resisted all thoughts lest they die in passing.

Old men and women lay listless under the hot shadows of huge trees, no one braved the ovens of the flat-roofed mud huts. Fairly clad people remained in their cold rooms letting the heat pass. Women were busy taking the afternoon beauty sleep. Children, unaware of the intensity of heat, waited restlessly to come out of the cold rooms.

The earth was aware. The sun was not.

Burning rays pierced the skin of the earth attempting to reach the deepest reservoirs of water. The waves, purely in self defence, dived below the surface bringing the water level lower down. Roots of the plants, trees and bushes started to go after it but were not able to sever themselves from their trunks. The earth, knowing the futility of the desire, held them down.

Wait, let me try one more time.

She collected all her strength and took a deep breath. A large portion of heat got sucked into her, pushing dry particles of dust in the vacuum. The particles, helpless, began swivelling around in a mad dance of meaninglessness. The earth held her breadth willing the water level to come up. Waves, aware of the danger above, took this persuasion as an unfair demand on the reservoirs.

We have suffered enough.

The earth, undaunted, stood her ground. Her lungs bursting, caused her heart to beat at an incredible speed.

Her heart missed a few beats.

Don't. The earth wretched her lungs clear, causing commotion in the atmosphere pushing the swivelling particles of dust away.

No.

Is it becoming too much? The sun, concerned, bent down.

No, don't.

Don't what? The sun in his attentiveness tilted towards her.

Don't come near me.

The rays of the sun appeared to have blurred with a little hurt.

What is it? The sun forcibly tried to dis-

tance himself away.

The earth took a deep breath.

What is it? The sun was becoming impatient. Why are you mad at me?

Can't you feel? The earth turned slightly. Why do I have to say it to you for you to realize what you are doing.

What do you mean? The sun allowed himself to get visibly flustered.

Get away from me.

I don't understand.

Back off.

I hate to leave you.

Then why can't you feel what is happening to us?

I don't understand. I am shining well, making you bright. Still, you don't seem happy. The yellow core of the sun blushed with frustration.

Don't concern yourself with my happiness, just get away from me.

The sun insulted, changed the colour on his face. The bright of yellow was shadowed by dark grey.

Flowers, young trees, small birds and barely clad people breathed.

Do you love me? The sun turned orange with uncertainty of his emotion.

The earth decided to turn away.

Do you love me? The sun was insistent.

I cannot take it any more.

Why, why are there so many conditions to your love? The sun tried to suppress his anger turning it into anguish. Orange receded quickly.

My conditions? The fire inside her burned, creating a glow of unbearable heat around her. No, none of these are my conditions, damn it. You are drying me out and when I say this to you, you pretend as if I am hurting you. Back off, you bastard. The earth tremored with anger.

Tremors were felt all over. Tiny flowers nearly rooted themselves out with fright, insects banged into each other leaving their hideouts in utter confusion. Small birds screeched and threw themselves out of the big trees fluttering around with a sense of total insecurity. Barely clad people numbed with the intensity of heat, did not register the anger of the earth and so continued to work it. Fairly clad people and their women moved in sleep. Fair children craned their necks to see if there was any thing out there that they could extract excitement from.

The earth, mad with anger, turned sharply towards the sun clawing at the edges of the rays.

No, no, please I never intended to hurt you. The sun coiled with the fear of impending loss.

Bastard. The earth clutched at the rays. Resisting the sudden impact of ambush, the rays threw themselves onto the water for momentary refuge. The eye of the water flashed open, providing passage for the upward movement of the waves. The waves, carrying the force of the deep reservoirs, jumped high up in the air hitting the rays. The rays, staggering, reverted back to the core of the sun.

Why? Why this hostility?

A slight realization amounting to self-criticism, gripped onto the warmth of the rays. Is she hurt?

She is hurt. The thought slowed them down a bit, the core of the sun received guilt waves seeping right through.

She is hurt! Is she really?

Unbelievable! The sun was amazed.

How could she do that to me?

I cannot even see her hurting. Then, how can I hurt her?

The yellow engulfed its own fire rendering it mellow.

I love you. The sun bent way down its station.

The earth, a fraction earlier, had turned to sustain a little longer, the tiny flowers, young trees, small birds and barely clad people.

I love only you. The sun, feeling unattended, said just before he decided to recede into self pity causing the rays to dip in soft orange.

The earth continued to tend its offspring. Her face darkened a little. No tears. Dried out.

That was a sure sign that the earth was hurt.

But why?

Depression clouded the sun's face. The rays, in apprehension of losing their spark, burned heavy-heartedly.

The waves sensing the fear, triumphantly turned inward, forming the water again. Tiny birds came back to the trees and sat waiting. Barely clad people put their tools down. The earth took a long breathe.

The sun turned deeper into glowing orange allowing himself the rare depth of pain and suffering.

Deeper orange fell heavy on earth.

The sun came further down wanting to touch the earth in his bid to reassert the universality of his love.

The earth moved away.

The ego of the sun suffering a great loss, began to burn inside. Orange glowed one last time sliding into red, almost marooning itself.

Water, reflecting the soft glow of orange, began to float peacefully. The waves played with each other encouraging the waterlings to come up to the surface. The children of barely clad people woke up in utter excitement of dreams. Birds began to talk to one another all at once. Tiny flowers bereft of softness and scent, waited patiently for a droplet of water.

2.

The huge inner yard of the landowner's house was full with fully clothed women, mounds of wheat and naked children. Tall, thick mud walls surrounded them assuring privacy. The air was heavy with the smell of dried sweat and freshly cut wheat.

A wall stood in front of the huge wooden entrance door making sure no one outside was able to peep inside. An elderly woman worked in the outdoor kitchen, diligently assisted by two young women and a male child. The left side of the yard was lined with huge storage rooms, an inside kitchen and the seemingly mysterious door which led to the dwellings of the only rich household of the village. Not everyone could enter this yard; not everyone who entered the yard could enter the inside kitchen; not everyone who entered the inside kitchen could enter the wooden door.

To the opposite of the outside kitchen, at the farthest end of the yard, stood a sizeable walled area that was the toilet of the household.

The place displayed a preference for utility as opposed to luxury. A medium level landowner, the Sardar (The One With The Head), owned all the cultivated, uncultivated, barren and residential land in this village of fifty households.

Traditionally, women and children came to the landowners' house to separate husk from the season's wheat that the family of the landowner can store it for one whole year. Women remained under the scrutiny of the leader of the group who would be in the pay of the landowner, or if an elderly woman, her husband or son would be in the pay of the landowner. It was the landowner's land, whatever grew in it was his, the huskers were only to receive a tiny portion of wheat as their wage for hours of work every day.

Women waited, patiently dealing with their

children, disciplining them in low voices in respect of the unseen presence of the Sardar, the Waddee (Big, meaning older) Begum Sahib and the Chotti (Small, meaning younger) Begum Sahib. They waited for the women of the landowner's household.

The women of the landowner's household were asleep.

Outside, the men, on their way back from the fields, slowly began to prepare the designated men's area for the Sardar to come out. Water was sprinkled under the three barged trees that joined their heads on top, making a perfect canopy could be penetrated only by a heavy thunder storm accompanied by a thick downpour. Two charpoy were brought out and placed on two sides. Sardar's personal young servant brought an off-white handwoven cotton bedspread and four cotton filled cushions.

Meanwhile, another group of men was busy starting a small fire with round cakes of dried cow dung. Sardar's brass hookah with its long colourful pipe was refreshed by changing the water inside it and then giving it a wholesome shower. The top bowl of the hookah was cleared of ashes and burned tobacco. The stone covering the hole at the base of the bowl was dipped in water, fresh tobacco was mellowed in palms before being placed in it. A thin layer of brown sugar was spread over and then the slowly burning pieces of cow dung put on it.

It was ready by the time Munshi Jee strolled out all bathed and combed.

The Munshi sat on the bare charpoy and

started to give the hookah the running in that it required before it could be ready for the Sardar to smoke it. A small clay hookah, prepared with less fanfare was nonetheless ready for everyone else. The men stood around or sat on the ground in a semi-circle in front of the Sardar's charpoy, waiting for him to appear.

Inside, their women were still waiting.

The Begums and the Sardar were aware of their duties. They heard the women and began waking up.

The servants brought in sweet drinks with ice jingling in the glasses. They sleepily drank and then went, one by one and in accordance with their status, to make use of the only bathing room. Their maids prepared their clothes, brought combs, scents and kajal. They dressed, combed, put vanishing creams on their faces, kajal in their eyes, wore their sandals and softly walked out.

Women jerked back to life greeting the Waddee Begum Sahib, some stood up to receive her.

"Freshen up Hookah for Waddee Begum Saab." Someone called someone. Another brought a peerah (a low wooden chair) and put it at the head of the congregation.

The Begum sat and asked in a loud voice, "Have you drank sherbet?"

"No." Women murmured in unison organizing huge bundles of wheat.

"Nee, Jeevan!"

"Jee, Begum Saab"

"Nee, how many times have I instructed you to make sherbet for women when they

come back from working the fields in summers? How many times?"

"I was cooking food Begum Saab jee."

"Cooking, your head! Next time this happens I will turn you straight out of here."

"Jee" Jeevan went about making sherbet in a huge copper pail.

She did not like this treatment. She was an old hand and was annoyed somehow by such gestures of the landowner's mother. She was here from the time of landowner's mother's mother-in-law. She felt this Begum, though had style, did not rule with absolute authority. She showed unnecessary compassion for peasant women. As a result, women developed a certain confidence in her undermining Jeevan's influence as an intermediary. Where before, in the time of the mother-in-law, Jeevan was the one between the ruler and the ruled.

And now she even threatened to turn Jeevan out in front of the whole village. But Jeevan knew it was an empty threat. She was the one who raised the Begums's husband as well as her sons and daughters. One of the sons that she raised was the Sardar at this time. Now that is a status that is never easily undermined.

The process of husking and cleaning the product had begun with older women taking the lead and younger ones following them. Each woman voluntarily took positions to work towards it. The Begum observed the movement with a shrewd eye but felt free to talk to who ever she chose to.

"Dano, again you were walking like a road roller dangling your breasts for everyone to see, why can't you keep your dopatta where it

belongs?"

"Begum Saab, its difficult when carrying two pails of water on the head and one at the side"

"It is difficult only for you, Dano. Every other young woman can keep it there even with three pails of water on the head and two on both sides. Now do the wheat."

"Acha Jee"

"Nee, Nacho! Don't you have any sense? Let Channo drink sherbat first, she is with the baby. These young girls have taken leave of their senses all at once."

"Jee, I have second month too". Nacho said shyly.

"Hayn?" Begum's eyes dilated with excitement. "Really? Nee, Ibra!"

"Jee, Begum Saab!" Ibra scrambled from the other end.

"Nee, your daughter-in-law is with the baby?"

"Jee." Ibra smiled proudly showing her full mouth with hardly any teeth in it. "Allah took mercy on us after 12 months. Her lap is green."

"Congratulations. Is Jeejoo happy now?"

"Ha jee. Very happy. All we wish is for a male fruit."

"Allah will turn your one into eleven. Don't you worry. Look at her, she is healthy like a horse."

"Your word is as good to me as if it has already happened. May Allah give you your heart's desire, Begum Saab."

"I need your prayers." Begum said absent-mindedly while looking at an arm full of red and green glass bangles, jerkily and slowly

making small bundles of wheat to go into the long stone pail to be hammered by a huge wooden rod separating wheat from the husk. The jerkiness of the movement had distracted the Begum.

"We pray for you Begum Saab, for your life and your childjen's life and your grand children's life." Ibra kept going oblivious to the fact that the Begum was not listening to her any more.

"Nee, What is that on your arm?" Very little of importance escaped the Begum.

"Jee?" Jeeno snatched her sleeve down.

"Nothing Begum Saab, nothing>"

"Nee, you lie to me? Bring your arm here, come near."

Jeeno came near, the Begum turned her sleeve over.

"What is this blue on your arm here? And your neck!" Begum's face turned pale. "Take your chaddar off, girl!"

Jeeno slowly bared her neck for all to see.

"He hit you again?"

"Jee."

"I will get his legs broken this time." The Begum's body shook with anger. "Why did he do that? What did you do?" She needed to quickly get hard facts before proceeding any further.

"I only asked if I could go see m-my m-mother. He said you are all the time going to your mother's village and -"

"When did you last go?"

"Last summer, Begum Jee, It's a year now. I miss her, she is sick too and old."

"JEEVAN!" Begum's voice rang around half the village.

Children stopped running around, women fell silent, the sparrows left the sheesham tree in shock, the men outside held their tongues and listened to their heart beats.

"JEEVAN!"

"Jee, Begum Saab." Jeevan's hands shook nearly dropping the lamb curry on the floor.

"Go and ask Sardar Sahib to come inside. I have something important to say to him."

Jeevan hesitated.

"Go, don't hesitate. I am his mother, he is not mine."

...THE STORY CONTINUES...

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SARITA SRIVASTAVA

Maybe it all started with my little brown wool parka, with the fake-fur trimmed hood. "Just like a little eskimo!" they would say.

Or was it earlier, with "That's a pretty name?" Of course, I used to think that meant I had a pretty name. When people started calling me "Chiquita" and "burnt toast," I learned that "What a pretty name" meant something else.

.....

For weeks we cannot sleep. For three days after the victory I can still hear the frenzied screaming and the honking horns through my earplugs until four in the morning, and all the next day. What a ball. Baseball. A celebration, they say.

But the crowd of blue faces on the subway platform, Blue Jays partiers waving their flags, unsteady on their feet, crushes me, pins me in fear. I think of the racist "subway incidents." Dread fills my stomach, flutters in my brain.

I make my escape, leaping after the last whistle into the train. Then I am wriggling, frantic as the car doors hold me in their grasp. Pulling free, I try to retreat from everyone's gaze, and slip on the vacuous gaze that belongs to everybody, settle into the rocking rhythm.

So at first the words bounce around me, over me, swirling with the train's roar, and dulled by my armour.

Then I hear the high loud grating voice. And one word, one word ricochets off the glass doors and meets its target. It finds me, and penetrates.

". . . bitch! . . ."

Then,

"Why don't they go back where they came from?!"

I look, and the voice is waving her Blue Jays flag. She is screaming defiantly menacingly, "We're the best, Canada's the best!"

I feel the blood dripping down the back of my throat. I swallow it. (I'm very careful not to let her see it.)

Why do I think my eyes can hurt her? Black, glaring, terrified? I pretend anyway, I pretend I am silencing her with my eyes. But her blue eyes snap back viciously,

"You got a problem?"

I think maybe her boyfriend will slam me against those glass doors, so I stop pretending to hurt her with my eyes. I look away and let her wave her flag in peace. In peace. Peace on earth and good will to man. Amen. All men.

I'm late for my sociology of Race Relations class, where I never say anything. I still feel safer on the subway.

.....

We are rushing to the American consulate, on a sunny May afternoon. Out of love and fear we are rushing to the American consulate. Once again. But the police are already taking home their barricades. The street is painfully empty of those wit whom we want to share our pain.

Pain full that night we watch the news together, over the phone, separately, silent, holding our phones as if we are holding each other. We are watching the cavalry, the cops on horses, charge, charge the crowd that left the consulate for a sit-in on Yonge St. Our hearts are hearing the white indignation at a real protest for Rodney King, for us, against them. A riot, they say.

Violent, violence, insolence! the voices are saying. The voices are shoving broken glass in our faces. Commentary, condemnation; damned nation.

Maybe we are also savouring their shock, Brian Mulroney, Frank Jones, the Canadians who knew that folks here were just too nice to misbehave like those nasty savages in L.A. (No

racism up here, eh?)

On the Spadina bus the next morning a black woman is telling us how many times her young son has been stopped by police demanding to know where he got his car. "Next time" she says, "just tell him you stole it!" We smile in resistance.

I place my hand next to another brown one on the hand rail and we both hold on, as we are thrown around.

.....

A ridiculous fuss over "a bunch of American men," I snort *disrespectfully*, about a sacred institution, about the Blue Jays.

"Well, how would you feel if India won the world cricket championships?" he counters . . . my birthplace U.S., my citizenship Canadian, my skin brown.

Oh yes, well, *cricket*, I love cricket. It's one of the ways the British improved India - like the railways (see Encyclopedia Britannica...).

.....

She is still waving her flag.



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