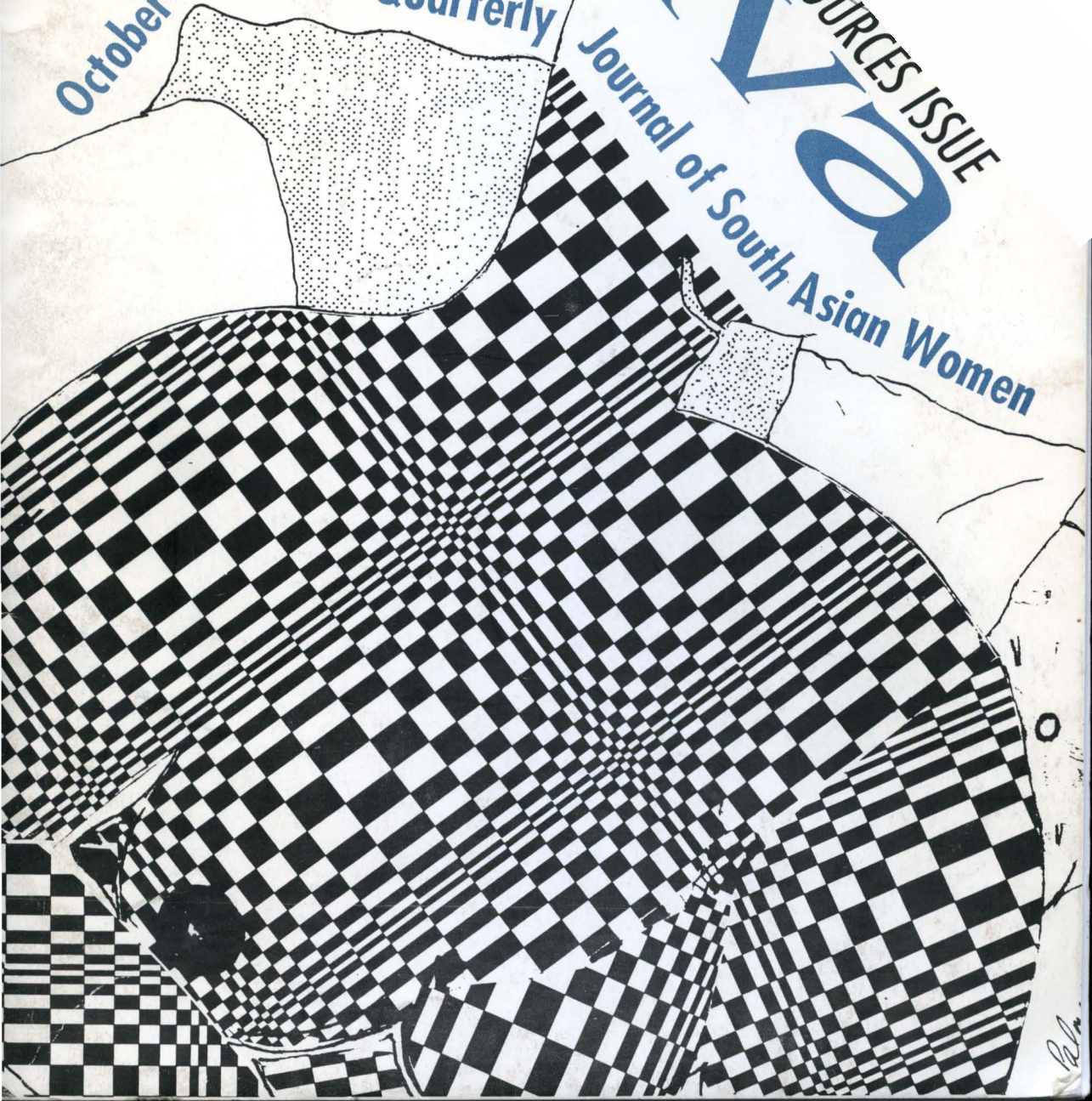


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EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

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Suda Comarasamy
Sharon Fernandez
Suman Goyal
Nudhrat Niazi
Fauzia Rafiq

• • •

SUPPORT TEAM

Mariam K. Durrani (word processing)
Lasanda Kurukulasuriya (office admin.)
Sharifa Sharif (funding)

• • •

COPY EDITING

Anna Melnikoff

• • •

ART WORK

Sharon Fernandez
Sandra Jensen

• • •

ART DIRECTOR

Anna Melnikoff

• • •

COVER ART & CENTRE SPREAD

Hazelle Palmer

• • •

REPRESENTATIVES

Bhooma Bhayana: London, Ontario
Jyoti Sanghera: Vancouver, B.C.
Nilambri Ghai: Montreal, Quebec
Rubya Mehdi: Copenhagen, Denmark

• • •

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The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

by FAUZIA RAFIQ

THE GOOD

- Education Wife Assault, a resource development, distribution and training organization of women in Toronto is to do a concentrated campaign against violence against women in the South Asian & Vietnamese communities. In conjunction with South Asian & Vietnamese organizations, the EWA will involve community media (print, radio & television), will provide training workshops for service providers working in the two communities, will hold training programmes with men for them to then do workshops with men, will hold group sessions with survivor of wife assault and will distribute the booklet entitled "The Wellbeing of a Community is in the Wellbeing of Women" (written in Urdu, Vietnamese & English).

DIVA supports this program fully and will work with the EWA to facilitate the process of interaction with the South Asian women and media.

- South Asian Women's Community Centre organized, what can be called the first Canada-wide (SAWCC) conference of South Asian women. Curiously named "Combating Family Violence: The South Asian Experience in Canada" (Montreal August 10-11, 1991), the Conference brought nearly 80 South Asian women together from different areas of Canada and USA. It was incredibly empowering to see that. We thank you, women at SAWCC.

An excellent feature of the Conference was a play presented by the SAWCC Theatre Group. Entitled "Devi-Dass" ("The Goddess and the Slave"), the play explored, in our very familiar cultural context, the oppression that a woman goes through and how she breaks out of that. Abuse of a woman, abuse of a wife was expressed passionately but in an un-complicated way, one of the strengths of the play. Written and directed by Nilambri Ghai and acted by the SAWCC members, the play has a powerful impact. This is a resource that has just been created that can be an extremely effective tool in campaigns against wife assault/woman abuse in South Asian community. It will be great to see it being staged in each city of Canada that houses South Asian people.

- We warmly welcome women who have just come in to work with DIVA: LEELA ACHARYA, SUDA COMARASAMY, SHARON FERNANDEZ (Editorial Committee members), NILAM-

BRI GHAI (Montreal/Quebec Representative) and LASANDA KURUKULASURIYA, SHARIFA SHARIF (Support Team).

Lots of love and appreciation for BRENDA CRANNEY, one of DIVA's founding members, and REETA KOHLI (the out-going Editorial Committee members). Just a reminder, women, "once a part of DIVA, always a part of DIVA".

- We do need multiple kinds of input for the HUMOUR ISSUE of DIVA (Dateline for contributions: August 15, 1992). We also need money to produce it because it is unlikely that anyone will be interested in enabling South Asian women to share laughs and smiles to the extent of providing money to produce this issue. Because, who cares? But, we do. Let us do something about it, woman beings.

THE BAD

A Toronto refugee panel refuses asylum to an Iranian woman even though she was whipped 35 times by male members of something called the Iranian revolutionary guards. The woman was flogged, while her hands were tied with a thick wire cable.

Why? Did she kill a man or something?

No, excuse me, she was not observing the 'Islamic dress code'.

What does that mean?

IT MEANS SHE WAS NOT WEARING THE FUCKING VEIL ON HER FACE.

And listen to what the 2-member refugee panel in Toronto says, that this action does not amount to persecution because authorities were "simply enforcing Islamic Law". The panel ruled the punishment was "not exceedingly harsh considering that she has not suffered permanent physical damage and was only detained (by the guards) for a day." The woman also lost her job with the Muslim Red Crescent because of not observing the dress code. The panel further says: "The fact that she could not choose the style of her dress and her amusements certainly impose limitations, though not serious enough to find that they violate internationally accepted standards". (Factual information and quotes taken from Toronto Star of October 11, 1991 in *Refugee Panel Rejects Woman Whipped Over Lack Of Veil* by Paul Watson, Page A2).

This ruling is not only unjust but is also inconsistent. Because if Canadian authorities begin to determine whether a refugee applicant could be awarded the Convention Refugee status in Canada on the basis of whether the persecution occurred because of the fact that the 'authorities' of that particular country were "simply enforcing Islamic Law" then the Canadian government needs to send countless people back to their home countries who have been awarded the Convention Refugee status precisely because asylum was needed from the authorities who were "simply enforcing Islamic Law". We have, in DIVA EDITORIAL COMMITTEE at least one woman who was awarded Convention Refugee status on the grounds of facing persecution from the Islamic laws in Pakistan.

A law that is oppressive to most members of its territory and is so fanatically imposed as to clearly



Sharon Fernandez

discriminate on the basis of gender, is a law that can not be respected. It is not respected by its victims in the home country and need not be respected in the country of asylum.

DIVA feels that being flogged by authorities, being detained for a day and losing one's job is persecution enough for the victim to be granted Convention Refugee status. As for minimization of the persecution by reducing it to the level of whether a woman can choose her dress or amusements, it is the result of a typical patriarchal blindness which does not let the decision makers see that what is told here by the woman is just the tip of the iceberg of the actual repression lived by a woman in that country.

DIVA demands that the Canadian authorities reconsider the decision made on this particular case.

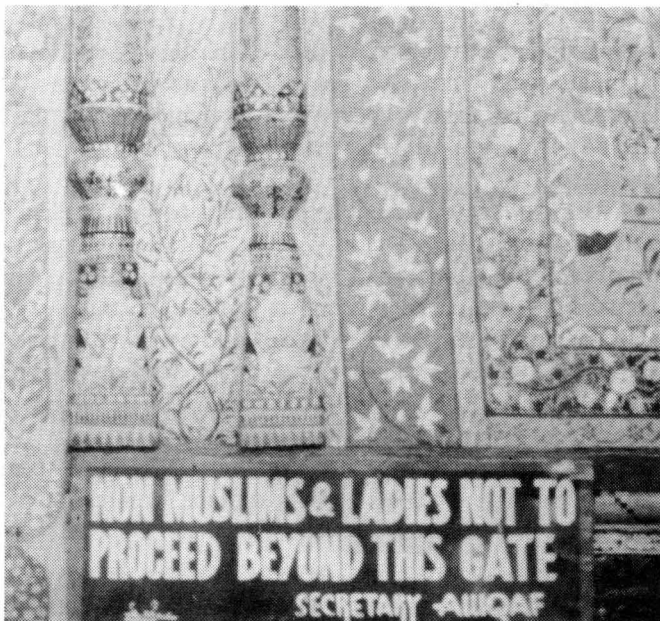
AND...

Talking about 'simply enforcing the Islamic law' brings us to an elite of privileged Muslim (so-called) 'scholars' who are proposing to incorporate Muslim Personal Law in Canada, ostensibly to provide the Muslim community in Canada the opportunity to practice their own religious code. Muslim Personal law, if incorporated in Canada, will deal with marriage contracts, divorce, separation, inheritance and domestic feuds.

A Muslim male is more privileged in his home country where he can marry up to four women at the same time (if he can afford it and can keep 'justice' between them), a woman divorced or separated does not have any right to her children, to her marital home, to the mutual assets, is entitled to a minimum amount of support for children, adopted children do not have the right of inheritance from parents who adopted them, and assaulting one's wife is no big deal. A man has the right to discipline his wife when he feels its required. That is why WIFE ABUSE/ASSAULT becomes DOMESTIC FEUDS here.

The proposal does not represent the Muslim community as a whole. There about 72 different schools of thought in Islam and this campaign does not represent them all; the section of the community that can be most adversely effected by it, i.e. Muslim women, have not been consulted; the proposal is gender-biased from beginning to end; it mocks the concept of Multiculturalism; it goes against the Human Rights Charter.

AND IT WILL HAPPEN IN CANADA OVER THE DEAD BODIES OF MUSLIM WOMEN.



THE GATE OF A MOSQUE IN KASHMIR, INDIA.

photo: Brenda Cranney

THE UGLY

In July 1991, 'boys' from a government boarding school in Nairobi, Kenya, disappointed at the cancellation of a soccer game, decided to play. They attacked a 'girls' dormitory, raped 71 girls, 19 of them died. We heard little about it till October 1991 when Michele Landsberg, our only hope, so to speak, in mainstream journalism, visited Kenya and brought some more information back. In her column (Toronto Star Oct.12, 1991, Page F1, "*School Attack Inspires Action By Women Of Kenya*") we found a comment from the vice-principal, a woman named Joyce Kithira. We declare it the statement of the day, the statement of the week, the statement of the month, the statement of the year, the statement of the decade and the statement of the century. It is as follows:

"THE BOYS NEVER MEANT ANY HARM AGAINST THE GIRLS. THEY JUST WANTED TO RAPE".

We, immigrant women, at least of the first generation, have lived the reality of a society where humiliation and abuse of women by men is an accepted norm. We also have a long history of struggling against it. It was no news that the Kenyan women are fighting against it. It might be news to white women who do not know or recognize that we are capable of fighting against multiple oppression in life and death situations.

What we want to find out is this: what are the Canadian women doing to support the movement of Kenyan women? Has Ontario Women's Directorate done anything except getting the press clippings together? Have women in privileged positions and the women in Canadian government thought of pressurizing the Kenyan government to make the struggle of women in Kenya, easier?

If the same had happened in the Soviet Union, for example, the whole Western world would have been activated at the highest levels of power and authority. But it only happened in Kenya, and what do the governments of Canada, the USA and Great Britain have to gain by putting any pressure on the Kenyan government at this time in history?

Let the 'boys' gang-rape the 'girls', even kill some of them, we do not have time. (Besides, Canadian women tend to bracket this incident with the Montreal Massacre, and we do not want to talk about that either. The poor man was a psycho. He did not know what he was doing. *HE JUST WANTED TO KILL THE GIRLS.*)



Seeking a Voice:

South Asian Women's Groups In North America

by JYOTSNA VAID

This paper was researched around 1985-87 and so does not include information about establishment of groups that were formed after that period. The paper is printed here to provide some background of the history of South Asian women's organizations in North America. The paper was first printed by the Beacon Press of Boston in MAKING WAVES: AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITINGS BY AND ABOUT ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN in 1989.

Although numerous regional associations of immigrants from South Asia exist all across North America, these organizations are largely cultural or religious in their concerns, and tend not to address issues of sociopolitical significance. Even where such issues are beginning to be addressed, there has been a noticeable lack of attention to the particular concerns of women immigrants from the Indian subcontinent. This neglect is especially interesting given the important role that women have played in overseeing the functions of the regional associations, from running language classes to cooking for festivals. Ethnographic studies of South Asian immigrants also do not generally acknowledge the contributions and experiences of South Asian women.¹

However, over the past decade a number of women, recognizing the need for a separate forum for articulating their unique concerns, have formed autonomous grassroots organizations in different parts of the United States and Canada. More than a dozen of these groups highlight the experiences, concerns, and contributions of women from the Indian subcontinent. In many cases the concerns of North American groups have been directly shaped by issues that have mobilized South Asian women thousands of miles away.

Who are these groups? How did they form? What areas have their members determined to most need services? And what internal problems have they encountered at various stages of development? Before turning to these questions, a brief description of Indian immigrant women and their contemporary situation will help provide a context within which to view the concerns of women's groups.

A Minority within a Minority

Ratna Ghosh points out that some of the problems faced by South Asian women are shared with South Asian men because both groups are part of visible minority. Some are shared with women in general due to sexist attitudes prevalent in North American society. Others are common to all Asian immigrant women, and several are unique to South Asian women.

She notes:

*"[These women have] moved from a society which is itself undergoing transition in the economic roles and personal status of women to an industrially advanced society which is also having to cope with somewhat different problems of changing roles and status of women. The conflict and uncertainty of the changing roles subject women to ambiguities both in their personal lives and in their working world. In Canada, additional factors of race, difference in culture, dependent status, absence of close kinship ties, and extreme weather conditions - all interrelate to make their situation rather complex."*²

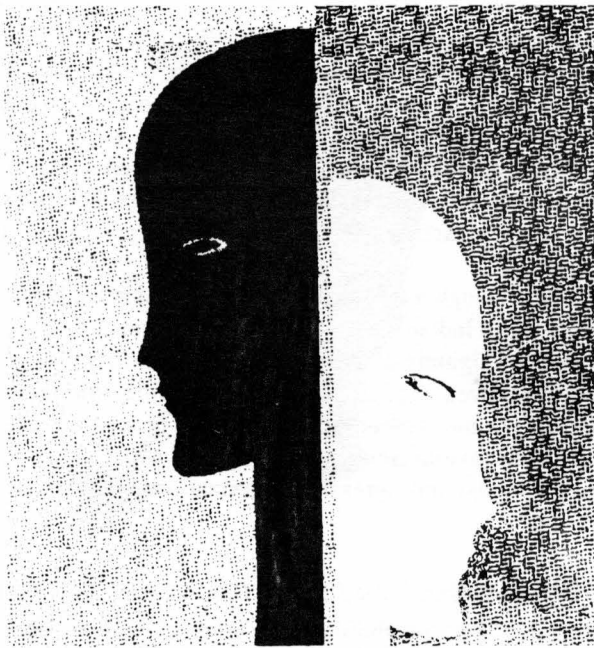
The situation described for South Asian women in Canada is not significantly different from that facing those residing in the United States.

One factor that has given rise to several of the problems experienced by South Asian women immigrants derives from the fact that most of them enter North America as 'sponsored' relatives. As Tania Dasgupta observes:

*"Being sponsored, our dependent status continues while we try to integrate into Canadian society. Given our socioeconomic background and often the inability to speak English, we feel a sense of isolation and alienation. Though more and more of us are entering the paid work force today, we are concentrated in low-paying and traditionally 'female' jobs. This is often compounded by the lack of recognition of our previous skills and education and lack of access to English language courses. Due to our social dependence, we are vulnerable to oppression at work, outside, and at home. Being visible minority women, we are also subjected to racism in every sphere of life. We are stereotyped as dirty, passive, slow. Thus, we face a triple oppression as women, workers, and as visible minorities."*³

These sentiments are echoed by Reeta Bhatia, who points out that working-class women, employed largely in service and production occupations, are the target of more overt forms of prejudice and discrimination.⁴ These women typically work in labour-intensive industries or in small businesses where they have a very marginal status in the economic structure. They are required to work long hours and are paid the minimal wage without any fringe benefits. Unaware of struggles launched by other women's organizations for improvements in labour laws, maternity benefits, and other reforms, they remain unable to articulate their oppression and demand their rights.

A 1984 survey of foreign-born women in the United States indicated that half as many South Asian women as men (48 percent versus 86 percent) are in the paid labour force. The women tend to be concentrated in service occupations and technical or sales positions, with less than a third (as compared to 72 percent of men) being employed in managerial and professional occupations.⁵ This difference may reflect the fact that many middle-class women work part time or interrupt their careers because their own upgrading of skills, re-certification, and preparation for qualifying exams must take second place to the similar needs of their husbands.



For South Asian women who work outside the home, there is the additional problem of a double workload, as they are still expected to take full responsibility for household and parenting demands - tasks that their middle-class counterparts in the subcontinent relegate to servants and members of the extended family. In North America, the woman alone oversees domestic and child-rearing duties simply because these do not fit the South Asian man's concept of appropriate work. Problems resulting from this situation have politicized some women.

In the social domain in particular, different standards seem to apply for women and men. As Ghosh has noted, the relationship between men and women is fraught with difficulty, affected as it is by perceptions of male honour and female chastity. However liberal a stance South Asian men may take publicly about women's rights, a rather different attitude is

revealed when the women from their own family (whether daughters, sisters, or wives) seek these rights. It is thus not uncommon to find young Indian women who came to the United States as children being sent to India for their undergraduate education to safeguard them from the social permissiveness of Western society.⁶

A similar reasoning underlies the preference of first-generation immigrant parents to have their daughters married in traditional arranged marriages. This practice is reflected in the increased number of matrimonial advertisements in the past decade in immigrant newspapers such as *India Abroad*, most of which are placed by family members on behalf of the prospective brides.⁷ Since many of these second-generation women are permanent residents or U.S. citizens, their secure legal status makes them particularly attractive to men who regard marriage as an easy means of gaining their own permanent resident status. In many instances, this mercenary intent is revealed only after the wedding has taken place. Cases of this type are increasingly becoming a concern for women's groups.

South Asian women who enter North America through arranged marriages are particularly vulnerable targets of exploitation. Lacking other support systems, they become overly dependent on their spouses - sometimes to the point of tolerating neglect, physical abuse, or infidelity. Because the sanctity of marriage is considered very important, such marriages continue until the stress experienced by the woman leads her to take some action. Many such cases have also come to the attention of South Asian women's groups.

THE RISE OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The factors just mentioned have prompted the formation of new South Asian women's organizations and have determined many of the groups' services. The eleven groups surveyed for this essay are located

across the continent, three in Canada and eight in the United States.⁸ The oldest group was founded in 1980, the newest in 1985. The groups are relatively small, ranging in size from just two or three to fifteen core members. All of the members are middle-class women in their mid-twenties to early-fifties. Marital status runs the gamut: unmarried, divorced, widowed, married. Some members are single parents. Some are very recent arrivals, only a year, others have been here for as long as twenty years. The women tend to be highly educated, most either possessing or pursuing graduate degrees. They work as social scientists, doctors, businesswomen, computer scientists, journalists, film makers, lawyers, counsellors, librarians, and community social workers. The group's core members include few women who work at home or in working-class occupations.

Most of member of groups emigrated from India, although a few of them are from Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. There is little representation of Indian women who have immigrated to North America from countries outside of South Asia, such as Uganda or Trinidad. Some minority groups, such as Ismailis, do not participate in the groups, even though they form sizeable immigrant communities in certain regions of North America. Some women active in these groups are also involved in their ethnic communities. There are also several South Asian women, many of whom are students or professionals, who are members of feminist or progressive organizations but who tend not to join the South Asian groups.

FACTORS LEADING TO GROUP FORMATION

Although all the groups surveyed are concerned with promoting the status of women, their orientation and priorities - which reflect the factors leading to their formation - differ. For one set of groups, events in the Indian subcontinent, such as dowry-related deaths or the impact of Islamization on women's legal rights, served as the impetus.⁹ These groups formed to work with women's groups located in South Asia. A second category includes groups which were mobilized by a desire to address specific problems experienced by South Asian women immigrants, such as domestic violence, unequal social and economic opportunities, or discrimination.¹⁰ The last set of organizations formed because the members wished to establish a visible identity, whether along lines of ethnicity or sexual preference.¹¹

A member of New Jersey's group, MANAVI, which wanted to establish an ethnic identity, described the conditions leading to the formation of that group:

"A few of us had got together to discuss Kavery Dutta's film project on Asian Indian women. Brainstorming for ideas, we found we had so many ideas to share, so many common concerns, anxieties. The meeting and the conversation sparked off a strong sense of commonality. As immigrant women, we felt there were many issues that were unique to our situation. We felt we should meet more often and for more than just a tete-a-tete. So we met again and created MANAVI. We felt there were many Indian groups that organized cultural events and family-oriented activities. We knew that there was a tremendous need for a group to be dedicated to women's issues. Our goal is to work towards social change and create a visible ethnic identity for Asian Indian women."

In response to the question about formation, the members of the lesbian group ANAMIKA, which publishes a newsletter of the same name, said, "The isolation in our lives and the reality of our lives,



which was never acknowledged either by groups 'back home' or by South Asian groups, here, have propelled us to start the newsletter."

The survey also asked whether the groups perceived themselves as 'feminist' groups. Responses to the question were evenly divided.¹² ANAMIKA members stated that although they consider themselves feminists, the women they hope to reach may or may not be so. The woman in Los Angeles who responded on behalf of the ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK explained that she would not refer to her group as feminist because the "women are still not ready." It is unclear, however, whether the 'women' in this case refers to the group's members or those whom the group hopes to serve. On the other hand, the respondent from the MADISON

COMMITTEE ON SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN noted that the term 'feminist' is appropriate for her group "because of our concern with the unique situation of women in South Asia and our long-term goal to help improve this situation." In a profile of MANAVI, Shamita Da Dasgupta sums up her group's stance:

*"Although we deal with problems and concerns of women, as a group we have refrained from declaring ourselves a feminist organization. This decision is a conscious one and taken for pragmatic reasons. We feel that, at present, identifying ourselves as feminist organization will create hostile societal pressures which may ultimately render our work ineffective."*¹³

The services and activities offered reflect what these women feel are the priorities for their community. While the degree of the groups' involvement in these services varies depending on available resources, the activities fall into four general categories:

- (1) information, referral, and networking;
- (2) counselling and crisis intervention;
- (3) direct social services; and
- (4) advocacy on issues affecting women's rights.

Activities may focus on issues in South Asia or North America. For instance the COMMITTEE ON SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN has donated books and given small grants to autonomous women's groups in South Asia and have sponsored visits by feminists from these groups. Montreal's SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE (previously known as South Asia Community Centre)* circulated an anti-dowry petition in 1984, which was delivered to the Indian prime minister. On a more local level, the centre's members also started a drop-in centre and women's cooperative. Along with the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S GROUP of Toronto, they participated in the Canadian government-sponsored

workshops on visible minorities and race relations in the workplace. Similarly, the New York-based ASSOCIATION OF ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN IN AMERICA took part in a White House briefing on Asian American women.

Many of the groups have used newsletters and other publications to disseminate information about South Asian women from their own perspective. The Committee on South Asian Women has published a monograph containing a bibliography on women's status, a statistical overview, and a directory of organizations and individuals committed to improving the status of women in South Asia. In addition, the group produces an internationally circulated quarterly publication, the COSAW Bulletin, which features theme-oriented articles, essays, interviews, book reviews, research index, and reports on the activities of other South Asian women's groups. In 1987 MANAVI published a tri-state regional resource directory providing social and legal referrals for Indian women immigrants. As mentioned earlier, ANAMIKA put out the first newsletter on South Asian lesbians. The SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE of Montreal produces a community-oriented newsletter in several different South Asian languages. The SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S GROUP and the ASSOCIATION OF INDIAN WOMEN IN AMERICA also circulate newsletters.

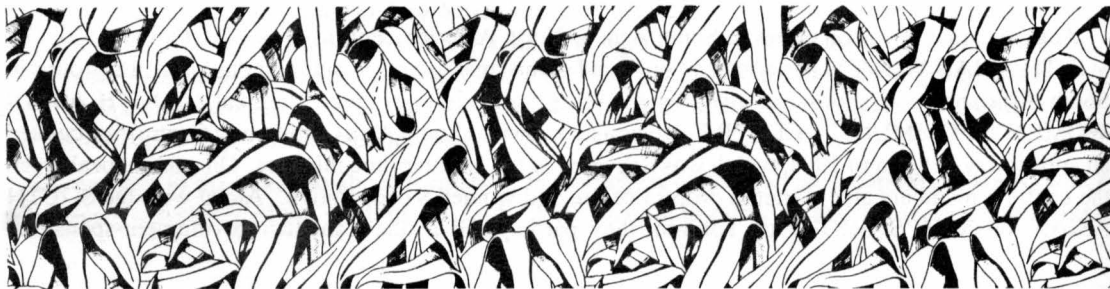
INTERNAL PROBLEMS

Despite the groups' achievements, members acknowledge that they have met with some problems, ranging from the pragmatic to the ideological. One of the most obvious and most prevalent problems is financial insecurity. Inadequate and unstable sources of income place severe restrictions on what the groups can accomplish. For example only two groups, the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE and the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S GROUP, both in Canada, have their own office space and telephone. The former is perhaps the most established of the groups surveyed; it offers a full range of free services and, in fiscal year 1985-86, responded to 7,200 various requests.

Another obstacle is limited time. The MANAVI respondent notes,

"Our members are all very committed, but we need to make MANAVI a top priority to do what we are targeting for. All our members are fully occupied in their careers ... so coordinating everybody's busy schedule gets to be quite a task."

The time spent on a group activity, such as production of a newsletter, is time that might otherwise be spent on professional pursuits or with family members. Several groups' members experience considerable stress from having to balance these competing demands. The situation is made worse in cases where spouses or other family members do not particularly encourage participation in the women's group.



The respondent from the ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK in Los Angeles cited "lack of support from spouses" as one of the most controversial internal problems of her group. In some instances, this lack of support betrays a defensive stance on the part of the South Asian men; in other cases, although disapproval is not overt, it nevertheless appears in the form of skepticism about the value of these groups or indifference toward the problems encountered by the group.

Support, however, also needs to come from the community at large. Here, too, problems have been encountered. These are aptly summed up by the respondent from the ASSOCIATION OF ASIAN INDIAN WOMEN IN AMERICA who noted that although the group has become quite visible in New York,

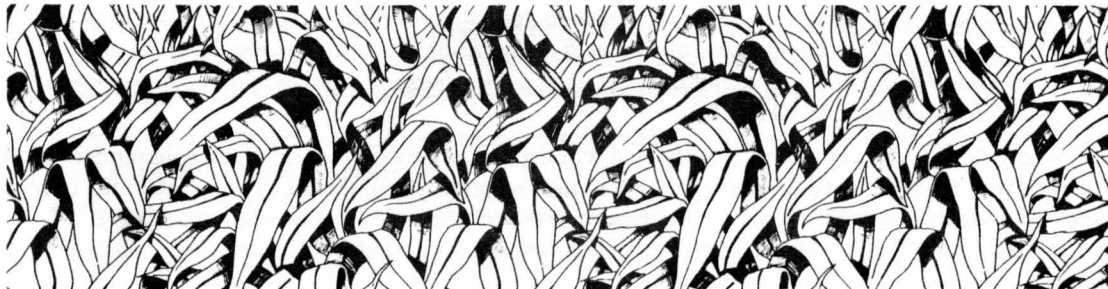
"Community awareness is 60 percent, community participation is 10 percent."

A related danger is failure of sister groups to recognize the efforts of the women's groups. In one instance, a women's group spent several months preparing a detailed survey to be administered to their clients, only to find that another organization in that city had appropriated the survey without giving them due credit.

Many yet unanswered questions confront the South Asian women's groups. Organizations that have gained some stability must decide whether to develop a more formal structure. While most of the organizations have a written statement of their aims and objectives, decision making follows informal lines and is based on consensus. Many of the policy-related questions are often left to the discretion of the groups' coordinator. There is also the question of whether to expand and, if so, in what direction. Should regional branches be established, or should the groups join existing national women's organizations? ANAMIKA chose to affiliate with an umbrella group, ASIAN LESBIANS OF THE EAST COAST, "for reasons of safety," says its respondent. Should special links be forged with autonomous South Asian groups in North America or, perhaps, in South Asia as well? Smaller groups may be able to retain the dedication and solidarity characteristic of many grassroots organizations, but larger groups may be able to accomplish more.

Another problem concerns the position that the group should take on issues that are ostensibly not 'women's issues' per se, but on which women are increasingly taking an active stand, such as nuclear disarmament, apartheid, or communal conflicts within South Asia. The question is twofold: where to draw the line between women's issues and other issues and whether such a line even can be drawn. The minutes of three successive meetings of the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE chronicle an internal debate about whether the group should participate in a rally against nuclear weapons. The debate sparked a number of fundamental questions having to do with the group's goals and the most effective ways of achieving them.

Because of the sociopolitical context of most women's issues, one danger that some groups face is that



of misconstrued political intent. Allegations have been made, for example, that a particular group is actually a front for a political organization. When key group members also belong to other organizations, the situation becomes even more complicated. To what extent can the group afford to have members with strong political ideologies and still claim to function autonomously? Though some criteria may be used to insure independence, such as refusing donations from other groups, it is difficult to refuse time and other resources.

Last but not least is the difference of opinion about the philosophy of the women's group, a difference that can be characterized as a 'struggle versus service' debate. While implicit or explicit feminist principles may have guided the group's formation and initial activities, the subsequent actions of the group may eventually become indistinguishable from those of social services agencies. There is nothing wrong with providing such services if that is the sole and explicit aim of the group. For those who embrace a feminist perspective, however, it becomes a serious problem if their efforts are directed toward providing short-term relief, which only helps their clients adapt to the status quo that keeps them subjugated.¹⁴

Here, more questions must be faced: what model of social change should be advocated for South Asian women settled abroad, and which solutions offered by which brands of feminism are appropriate or desirable for which South Asian women? In wrestling with these questions, tensions have surfaced between the women's groups that are interested in organizations that want to steer away from these solutions. These latter organizations are usually dominated by men with considerable clout in the immigrant community. Their endorsement of women's groups thus becomes important for the group's effectiveness.

Most groups have not yet resolved all these issues, but increasingly recognize the necessity of periodic self-appraisal. They also agree that to achieve their goals sister organizations need to improve mutual coordination and cooperation.

CONCLUSION

While the groups discussed in this essay are fairly diverse in their orientations, one shared feature is the women's enthusiastic dedication, as expressed in a report written at the end of the first year of the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE (SAWCC) in Montreal.

*"One of the most striking aspects of SAWCC as an organization is how organized it in fact is, despite radical changes in its internal structure... One thing that emerges quite clearly is that we are a rather stubborn group of people; we have stubbornly resisted attempts by others to take us into their fold; as well, we have stubbornly kept the idea behind SAWCC in mind during our periods of inactivity (when other pressures occupied our energies). What accounts for this steadfastness of spirit? No doubt it comes from the strong conviction that something must be done about the situation of women in general, and of our South Asian compatriots in particular. This conviction, coupled with the realization that no one else here has gotten around to doing anything about it has prompted the movement leading to the establishment and development of SAWCC."*¹⁵

Where this movement will ultimately lead will depend largely on the continued commitment of the women who founded these first few groups and the receptiveness of the society at large to the changes they promote.

** Since this paper was written, SOUTH ASIA COMMUNITY CENTRE (SACC) of Montreal has changed its name to SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE (SAWCC). This change is being incorporated throughout the paper by DIVA to avoid confusion.*

REFERENCES

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2. **Ratna Ghosh**, "Sarees and the Maple Leaf," in G. Kurien and R. Srivastave, eds., *Overseas Indians: A Study in Adaptation* (Delhi: Vikas, 1983).
3. South Asian Women's Group, "Memorandum commemorating International Women's Day," Toronto, 8 March 1985.
4. **Reeta Bhatia**, "South Asian Community Centre: Its Background and Objectives" (Paper presented at panel on South Asian Women at Home and Abroad, during Twelfth Annual Meeting of the South Asia Conference, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1983).
5. **Amaru Bachu**, "South Asian Immigrant Women in the United States: A statistical Overview," in J. Vaid, B. Miller, and J. Hyde, eds., *South Asian Women at Home and Abroad: A Guide to Resources* (Syracuse: Metropolitan Studies Program, Syracuse University, 1984), 8-14
6. See, for example, **Basu Baradhan's** personal account, "The Double-bind of Culture: An Indian Woman in America," in special issue on immigrant women, *COSAW Bulletin* 5 nos. 1-2 (1987), 4-7.
7. **Ramdas Menon & Jyotsna Vaid**, "The Ideal Mate: An Analysis of Matrimonial Advertisements in the Indian Immigrant Press" (Paper presented at panel on Dual Universes: Perspectives on the Female Immigrant Experience, during Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the South Asia Conference, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1987). See also essay by Rashmi Luthra in this volume.
8. My observations are based on a detailed survey circulated in 1985 to eleven of the sixteen exclusively South Asian women's groups in North America. The groups include: Anamika, New York City; Asian Indian Women's Network, Los Angeles, California; Association of Asian Indian Women in America, New York City; Committee on South Asian Women, formed in East Lansing, Michigan, and now based in College Station, Texas; Committee on South Asian Women, Madison, Wisconsin; Indian Women's Association, Pullman, Washington; Manavi, New Jersey; Samaanta, Vancouver, British Columbia (since disbanded); South Asia Community Centre, Montreal, Quebec; South Asian Women's Group, Toronto, Ontario; and Women from the Indian Subcontinent in Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (no longer in existence). The groups not surveyed were the Cercle de Femmes du Quebec d'Origine Indienne, Montreal, Quebec; the Club of Indian Women, Chicago; the Indian Women's Club, Houston; Diva, Toronto; and the International Sikh Women's Organization, New York city. I also relied on newsletters and telephone interviews.
9. Organizations that fall into this South Asia - oriented category include the Committee on South Asian Women in Texas and its branch in Madison, Wisconsin.
10. Sammanta in Vancouver, British Columbia, focused on domestic violence against South Asian women. Two other Canadian organizations - South Asia Community Centre of Montreal, Quebec, and South Asian Women's Group of

Toronto, Ontario - started in an attempt to foster social and economic integration. New York's Association of Asian Indian Women in America and Los Angeles' Asian Indian Women's Network had similar integration objectives.

11. The Asian Indian Women's Network and New Jersey's Manavi are examples of groups that wished to establish the ethnic identity; Anamika formed to establish a sexual preference identity.
12. The Committee on South Asian Women and Manavi responded affirmatively. The Asian Indian Women's Network and Asian Indian Women in America both said no, they are not feminist.
13. **Shamita Das Dasgupta**, "Manavi: A Profile," in special issue on immigrant women, COSAW Bulletin 5 nos. 1-2 (1987), 22-24.
14. On the ideological level, some of the problems encountered by immigrant women's groups are shared by groups based in South Asia. In a newsletter from the Bombay Women's Centre, for instance, activist Vibhuti Patel described various concerns of member of women's groups across India. One basic question each group confronted at the outset as whether to be a small group with a common understanding or a mass organization of women. Another question is related to the actual role of the activist - is it one of consciousness be raised if the group's perception of the importance of certain activities differed from that of most women? See Vbhuti Patel, "Introspection by Indian Feminists," Women's Centre Newsletter 2(1), 1985.
15. **Jyotsna Vaid**, "South Asia community Centre: A Report of the First Year" (Montreal, 1982).

COMING TOGETHER

Support Groups for Immigrant Women



The kit raises and answers the question that's often asked: "**Why special groups for immigrant women?**" It includes a User's Guide; 12 Session Plans, hand-outs for group members, and a Resources Section. **The hand-outs are in Portuguese and Cantonese, as well as English.** Sessions cover issues like: **Bringing up Children in Canada; Conflicts with your Teenager; Dealing with Anger; Stress and Relaxation; Wife Assault; Assertiveness Training; Dreams and Action Plans.** The simple language and attractive format make the kit easy reading.

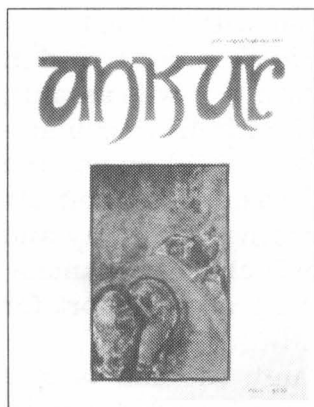
Order From: Access Alliance 509 College St. Toronto, ON M6G -1A8
\$15.00 plus \$3.00 postage & handling per copy. Make cheques payable to Access Alliance

● **Print Resources**

Toronto, Canada

AURAT DURBAR

AURAT DURBAR is to become a regular feature of DIVA to serve as a networking resource among South Asian women. Any info for this slot will be received with eagerness and warmth.



ANKUR

DIVA welcomes ANKUR (Hindi, A New Beginning) a publication of Vancouver Sath Literary & Cultural Society, which shows the promise of becoming a valuable community resource actively involving young South Asian members as well, an aspect that is desperately lacking with most South Asian publications. It has the beginnings of a progressive publication that also can have a wider readership.

The Collective says in one of its flyers that it is a publication for, by, and of, the Indo-Canadian community. The term Indo-Canadian community even if derived from the Indian Sub-continent of the pre-partition period, in reality, can exclude people who come from South Asian countries other than India. We have an example where that happened. The AWIC (Association of women of Indian origin in Canada) practically excludes so many of us. It may not be the intention of the Collective to do so. If not, we propose that it finds a more inclusive term to define its mandate.

DIVA wishes ANKUR a long life and good health.

Subs: 1 Year: \$12, 2 Year: \$24, 3 Year: \$33, 5 Years: \$50, Sustainer: \$100. Cheques payable to 'Vancouver Sath Lit. & Cultural Society', addr.: P.O.Box 67681, Station 'O', Vancouver, B.C. V5W 3V2, Canada

English. Quarterly.
Vancouver, B. C. 1991.
\$3 per copy.
Ankur Collective:
Sadhu Binning, Shinder
Brar, Sital Dhillon, Ameen
Gill, Pindy Gill, Anju
Hundal, Sukhwant Hundal,
Nirmaljeet Sandhu,
Baljit Sangra,
Amanpal Sara,
Sunera Thobani,
Sarb Walia.



AURAT KHUSH BASH HO TO QABEELA TARAQEE PAZEER HAI

*Urdu, "The Wellbeing of A Community is in the
Wellbeing of Women"*

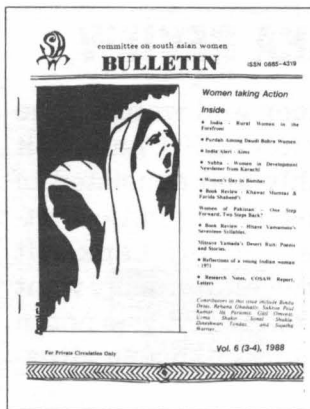
Produced by Education Wife Assault (EWA), this is the first 80-page booklet that is developed and written directly in Urdu. To be published within 1991, this booklet is to enable Urdu speaking women to read in their own context, the issues relating to wife assault, the myths that are prevalent in South Asian community, the effects that violence has on children and the fact that it is not just a 'woman's issue'; that it effects the whole community in the most negative way and that men need to take it as such. It also lists Canada-wide resources and places for help and support for South Asian women.

The text was developed through the efforts of a four-member working group which included women who have faced wife abuse\assault themselves, as well as the service providers who have or are currently working with the survivors of wife assault in one capacity or the other.

Calligraphed beautifully by Abid Jafferey, to be printed by Shawn Graphics, a South Asian community press, the Booklet will be available in Nov-Dec 1991.

Urdu, Booklet,
Toronto, Ont. 1991
\$5 per copy
The EWA
Working Group:
Rubina Durrani,
Kaneez Fatima,
Nudhrat Niazi,
Fauzia Rafiq

Will also be available in Vietnamese & English
To get more info/order, contact:
Education Wife Assault
472 Bloor Street W, Toronto
Ontario, M5S 1X7 Canada Tel: 416-968-3422



English. Bi-Annual. Texas,
USA. 1982
Editor:
Jyotsna Vaid

COMMITTEE ON SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN BULLETIN.

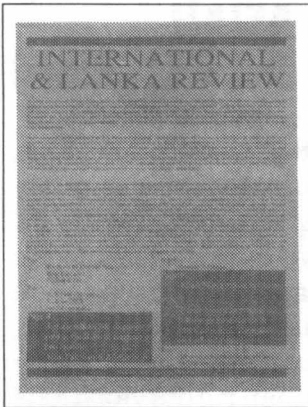
With a feminist perspective, the COSAW Bulletin provides useful information and critical articles on issues of pertinence to South Asian women. Its strength lies in the fact that though it comes out of an academic institution, it attempts to concentrate more on the actual struggles of women in South Asia and abroad. Direct coverage, basically from India, on communalism, dowry deaths, struggles of women and human rights violations, can be found in most of its issues.

Women working at Diva have a great respect for Jyotsna Vaid who kept the publication alive all these years almost singlehandedly.

It suffers the constraints of economic insecurity that we all suffer from in the systematic racism of our societies in the USA and Canada. This is one of the reason why it switched recently from being a quarterly to being published twice a year. Maybe it's time to get together and support each other in ways that can stabilize our publications.

Free to women's groups in South Asia, the Bulletin welcomes exchange subscriptions with other publications or organizations of women. Coverage from areas of South Asia other than India will be welcome.

Subscriptions: 1 Year: \$12 (unemployed & Students),
\$16 (individual), \$25 (Libraries and other institutions).
COSAW BULLETIN, Dept. of Psychology,
Texas A & M University, College Station,
TX 77843 USA. Tel. 409-845-2576.



English. Monthly.
Toronto, Ont. 1983.
\$2 per copy.

Editor:
Krishanta Sri Bhagyadatta.

INTERNATIONAL & LANKA REVIEW

Started in 1983 by a group of men and women who were concerned about the situation in Sri Lanka, it continued till 1987 as a bi-monthly and consisted of analytical and informative articles about political situation and progressive movement in Sri Lanka. It ceased publication in 1987 when the Indian army went into Sri Lanka because the group felt that it was not in a position to comment on the rapidly changing situation in Sri Lanka.

It began publishing on monthly basis as 'International & Lanka Review' in 1991 with a changed format. It is now collecting and reprinting news items that are important to South Asian people and which are not given appropriate place in the Canadian media. Divided under the heading of each country, the news items at this time are taken verbatim from electronic media. It can effectively feed useful information to most South Asian publication mentioned here.

Additionally, it can be much more valuable for South Asian community throughout Canada if the publication presented news items with commentary. Something the editor of this publication has done on weekly basis for CKLN Radio in Toronto in his programme 'Bourgeois news, Bourgeois Blues'. It also has the potential to have a larger section on news relating to South Asian women.

Yearly Subscription: \$25, Sustainer: \$50

Order copies from:

International & Lanka Review

700 Spadina Avenue,

Toronto Ontario M5S 2J2, Canada.

Khush Khayal

Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1991, 32 pages
\$2.00 (incl. postage) (Canada, USA, UK, etc.)
\$1.00 (incl. postage) (elsewhere)

Editorial
The first issue of *Khush Khayal* (KHUSH) is now available. It contains a variety of articles, including a special feature on the 'Diva' column. The magazine is published quarterly and is available to subscribers in Canada, the USA, and the UK for \$2.00 per copy (including postage). For other countries, the price is \$1.00 per copy (including postage). The magazine is published by the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA).

Khush Khayal (KHUSH)

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English. Quarterly.
Toronto, Ontario 1990. \$2
per copy.

Editing & Production:
A.S.Khosla.,
N. Carvalho,
M. Khaki.

KHUSH KHAYAL

A newsletter of 'KHUSH: South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association' this publication provides support and networking mainly to gay men, some input from lesbian women also is included. KHUSH, right from its name (Hindi/Urdu word, meaning 'happy') to the headings of columns and other published pieces, reclaims and owns a culture as its own where the largely heterosexual community tries to exclude its homosexual members. This commitment to reclaiming our culture as gay men, lesbian women or women is a struggle that we all go through if we are thinking or acting differently from the prevalent values of mainstream South Asian community.

KHUSH is a valuable print resource for South Asian gay men around the world.

DIVA considers South Asian gay men as kind of 'natural allies' of South Asian women in our struggle. The basis for this assumption is the experience of oppression faced by gay men that a heterosexual man would not have faced. It is then derived that the gay men fighting against one aspect of discrimination of a system, will fight against other aspects of discrimination of the same system.

We support gay men in their oppression and hope to make valuable alliances with them on the issues of sexism, classism, racism and right to express our sexuality.

Individual Subscription: \$6, Institutions: \$12.
Mail cheques/contributions to:
P.O.Box 6172, Station 'A', Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1P6 Canada. Tel: 416-962-9023

English,
Training Manual, Toronto,
Ont. 1991
South Riverdale
Community Health Centre
Written & Edited by Fauzia
Rafiq,
Project Coordinator:
Hersh Sehdev.

MAAN THANDI CHAAN

***Gurmukhi/ Punjabi, 'Mothers: the Cool Shade
[under the scorching sun]'***

Developed by South Riverdale Community Health Centre with input from South Asian women through a group process outreached by Shyamali Pal of Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, the manual is geared towards service providers enabling facilitators to do parenting workshops. Though the manual can be used with all South Asian women, there is an emphasis on problems confronted by women facing violence from their male partners.

The manual outlines ten modules: What is parenting anyway?; Naming the violence in the lives of our children; Manipulation of children by the separated spouse; Safety issues; Custody issues; Helping children make healthy choices; Helping children to deal with racism, classism and sexism; How can we help children keep their grades; Helping children maintain their cultural identity; and Issues around discipline.

"Maan Thandi Chaan" will have titles of modules and some basic questions translated in Hindi, Gurmukhi and Urdu. Art work is provided by a South Asian artist that supports the text in a way that enables women who cannot read any of the above South Asian languages can get the general drift of the topic.

For more info/order, contact: Hersh Sehdev
South Riverdale Community Health Centre
1091 Queen Street East, Toronto
Ontario M4M 1K7 Tel: 416-469-3917



English. Bi-Monthly.
Montreal, Que. 1988.
\$2.50 per copy.
Editorial Board:
Rana Bose,
Nilambri Ghai,
Dolores Chew,
Himmat Shinhat.

MONTREAL SERAI:

A political, cultural and literary magazine of the South Asian community in Montreal, which strongly believes in the marginality inherent in the concept of multiculturalism. The members of its Editorial Board continue to struggle against subjection to the ghetto of multiculturalism. The insistence on being a part of Canadian culture while operating within the dynamics of South Asian culture and art, is terrific.

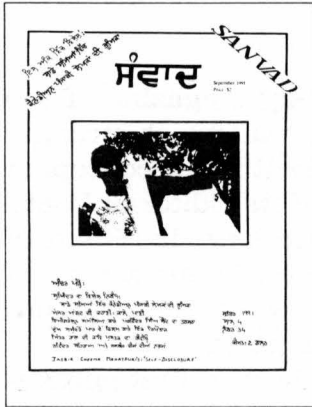
MONTREAL SERAI is one of the very first publications of South Asians in Canada and the fact that it survived all those years points to the commitment of the core group as well as the need of the community to keep such a vibrant publication alive. Serai provides useful information, a feminist perspective on issues of sexism, an analytical approach to values, cultural activities and creative art of South Asian men and women.

One of the few South Asian publication which has male members, Serai not only prints substantial materials on issues of any importance for women, it also does not offer excuses like 'there are no South Asian women writing' or 'women are not interested in writing'.

DIVA strongly supports this publication and wishes for it to go Nation-wide with representatives all over Canada and that the Montreal Serai cover national and community issues in other provinces as dynamically as it does for Quebec.

Mail contributions/cheques to: P.O.Box 882, Station H,
Montreal, Que. H3G 2M8. Tel: 514-485-9192.

To order back issues write to same address
or Telephone: 514-445-9192.



Gurmukhi/Eng. Monthly.
Toronto, Canada 1988.

Editor:

Sukhinder. Advisory
Board: Baldev Mutta,
Kuldip Deepak, Santokh
Singh Fiji, Joginder Singh
Grewal, Ashok Kumar,
Ranjit Viridi, Jasbir
Cheema, Balbir K.
Kandola, Kuldip Kandola,
Ajit Singh Johal.

SANVAD

Gurmukhi, 'Dialogue'

SANVAD began as a publication concerned with defining a role for the Gurmukhi writers in the Punjab and abroad. Once concerned mainly with men, it has expanded to discuss issues relating to problems faced by youth and women. Strongly opposed to the vulgarization of our culture in the mainstream South Asian community, it incorporates a critique while providing information and materials created by valuable Punjabi writers of the past and the present.

Sanvad published a social issue on the famous poet Pash in October 1989. Other Special issues include: 'Canadian Punjabi Culture' (April 1990), 'Gerrard Street India Bazaar' (Aug. 1990), 'Gulf War' (Feb. 1991), and 'Bhagat Singh-Pash' joint issue (March 1991). Sanvad has recently decided to make Bhagat Singh-Pash joint issue their regular annual feature. Dateline for contributions to 1992 issue is January 15, 1992.

Though overwhelmingly male in its Advisory Board and editorial staff, it is making a conscious attempt to provide materials on the oppression and struggles of South Asian women. A special request was made by the editor to invite women to write articles, interviews, poems, short stories in Gurmukhi or English.

Subs: Annual: \$30 in Canada, \$35 in USA, \$35 in Europe, India: Rs. 500
 (Air), Rs. 400 (Sea). Life : Canada: \$500, USA & Europe: \$500 US.
 Mail to: 3330 Michaud Avenue, Mississauga,
 Ontario L4T 1P7 Canada. Tel: 416-671-2476

Aurat Durbar



SHAKTI

An absolute pleasure to see a publication of South Asian women which exudes such compelling strength and empowerment through words, graphics and lay out.

SHAKTI is a quarterly publication of South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC), but does not necessarily represent the views of the parent organization. This way, it offers, apart from other aspects, a possible solution to the problems faced by women regarding limitations of a direct service organization and a publication that needs to operate at a larger scale in terms of the issues and opinions.

SHAKTI is doing a wonderful job in bringing women together from different areas of Canada, South Asia and other countries. Published in English, it incorporates writings of women in various South Asian languages as well as French.

The Collective owns issues that concern women's lives but are not yet recognized in the mainstream as women's issues: peace, war, communalism in South Asia, racism in Canada.

It was incredibly empowering to read at the bottom of every page the words: 'A Celebration of Our Strength'. We, women working at DIVA, felt we were not alone or isolated anymore. SHAKTI! Welcome and loads of hugs.

Contributions may be made in any South Asian language and/or in English/French. Mail contributions and cheques to: SAWCC 3600 Hotel de Ville, Montreal QC, H2X 3B6. Tel: 514-842-2330.



Danish. Bi-Monthly.
Copenhagen, Denmark.
1989
120 Coronas per copy
Editorial Group:
Hardarshan Kaur Gill,
Meryem Sert,
Gordana Krstnovska,
Rushy Rashid,
Andrea Meersohn.

SOLDUE

*Danish, the name of a bird that migrates
with seasons*

The only magazine in Scandinavia by and for immigrant women originating from Africa, Latin America, Asia and South Asia.

The magazine contains fiction, articles, poetry and art of immigrant women. In its content focus is on bringing to the fore the racial prejudice faced by the immigrant women in workplaces, schools, shops and homes. Fighting against the stereotypes of immigrant women (i.e. passivity, submissiveness etc.) generated by the mainstream media in Scandinavian countries, Soldue is actively representing the reality of our culture, thoughts and struggles as women.

It contains reviews of books, publications and films, write-ups on women's movements in other countries, even efficient and time-saving food recipes.

Though published in Danish and suffering from similar constraints around finances as we do in North America, it survives well.

Soldue encourages women who do not know Danish, to write in English. The group feels translations can be conveniently arranged.

Subscription: 120 Coronas, single Copy: 20 Coronas
Exchange Subs. with sister publications welcome
Mail contributions/cheques to:
Nansengade 1, 1366 Kobenhaven K.
Tel:33-144519.

Aurat Durbar

SRI LANKAN AUTHORITIES SEALED A PRINTING PRESS CALLED **NAVAMAGA PRINTERS LTD.** ON FRIDAY OCTOBER 3, 1991. NO REASON FOR THIS ACTION IS PROVIDED YET.

NAVAMAGA PRINTS **JUSTICE** IN SINHALA AND TAMIL, THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF **MIRJE : MOVEMENT FOR INTER-RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUALITY**.

ITS CIRCULATION HAD INCREASED BY 300% IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS BECAUSE OF ITS COVERAGE OF THE CURRENT MOTION FOR THE IMPEACHMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA. THE SEALING OF THE PRESS EFFECTIVELY STALLED PUBLICATION OF ITS FORTHCOMING ISSUE WHICH WAS TO BE PRINTED IN 50,000 COPIES.

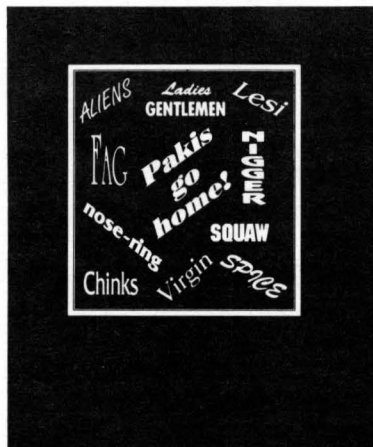
MIRJE SUPPORTS THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE TAMIL PEOPLE AND HAS DOCUMENTED THE DEATHS, DISAPPEARANCES AND OTHER FORMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BOTH IN TAMIL AREAS OF THE NORTH-EAST AND THE SOUTH OF THE COUNTRY.

SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL & LANKA REVIEW.

This column contains information about the print resources that were sent to DIVA by the parent organization/publisher. It is open to information about South Asian organizations, groups, activities, print resources, theatre, art exhibitions, cultural programs, radio/TV programs and other activities. DIVA reserves the right to print un-prejudiced and un-discriminatory information only.

Not to Understand

A collection of poetry
by a young South Asian Woman



NOT TO UNDERSTAND

Mariam Khan Durrani

"Here is a talent that must be cherished, nurtured and valued."

Marlene Nourbese-Philips

"Mariam is a Pakistani Canadian, and brings into her work sensitivity and understanding that helps in filling up the gaps in Canadian literature."

Nilambri Ghai

"A very special person shines through your poems."

Les Parsons

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SPECIAL OFFER: Order both *Not to Understand* and the special issue on wife assault for \$13 + \$3.90 postage and handling.

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Tel: (416)968-3422

For 4+ orders:

Canada: DEC Book Distribution
U.S.A.: Inland Book Company

Yearly subscriptions:

Institutional: \$40
Individual: \$20

Published by **DIVA** 364 Coxwell Ave., Toronto, ON M4L 3B7 Tel: (416)778-6945

SHARING SMILES,
**Special
Humour
Issue**
SHARING LAUGHS.

Upon a cursory review of Diva's past issues, we realized that there is almost a complete absence of laughable material in it. We know that the fight against sexism, racism & classism leaves little room for leisure and laughter; that laughable materials are based on sexist jokes & racist slam bangs that we are unable to share:

Having said it, let us try to reclaim humour. We propose to bring out an issue solely consisting of material that we, women of colour can laugh at or laugh with. We invite you to write:

A sentence.

A PARAGRAPH

a poem

A Story

a cartoon

AN

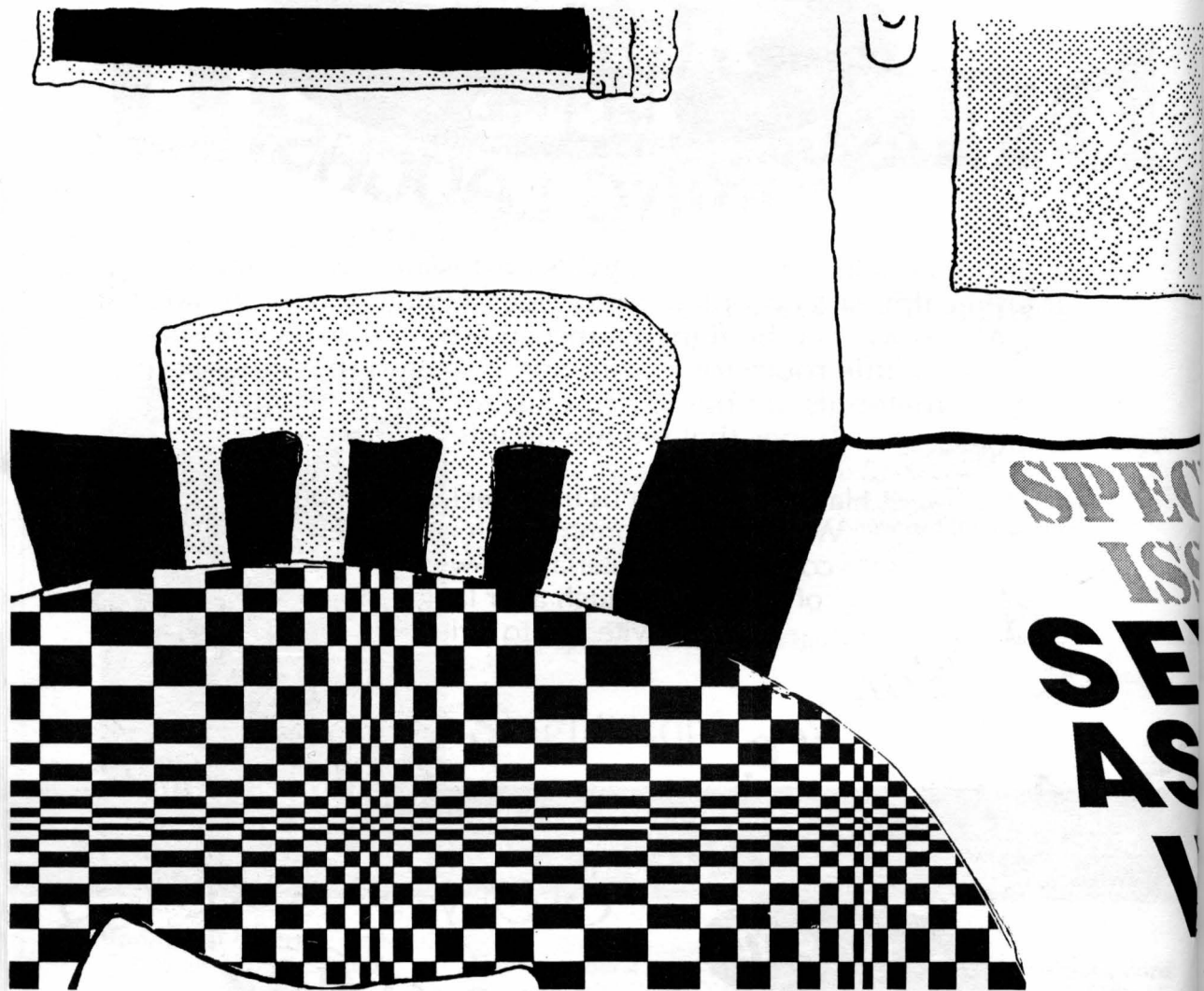
← article

A SKETCH

Or something - anything that made you laugh, **feel pleasant**, made you feel light

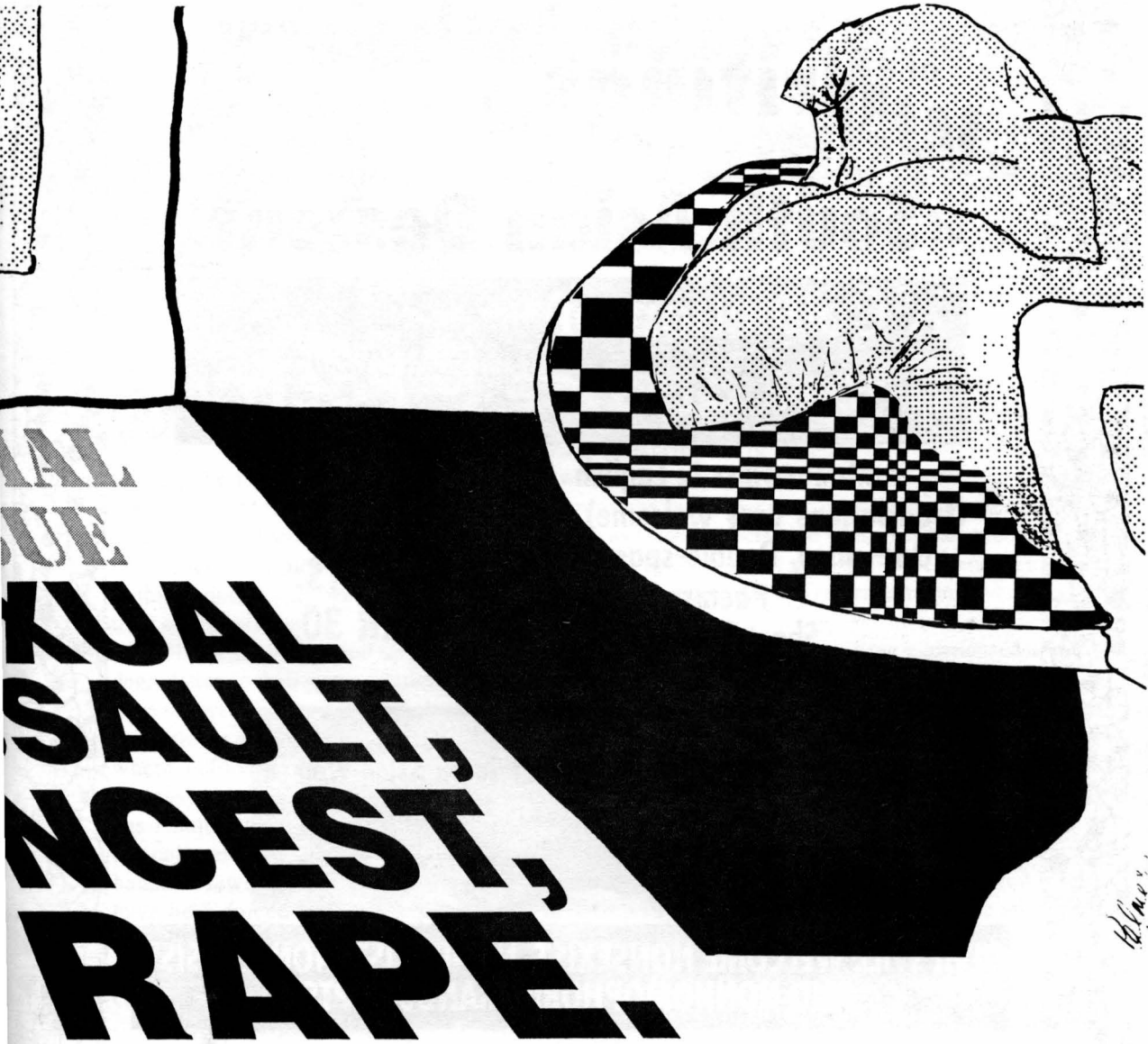
Dateline for contributions: August 15, 1992

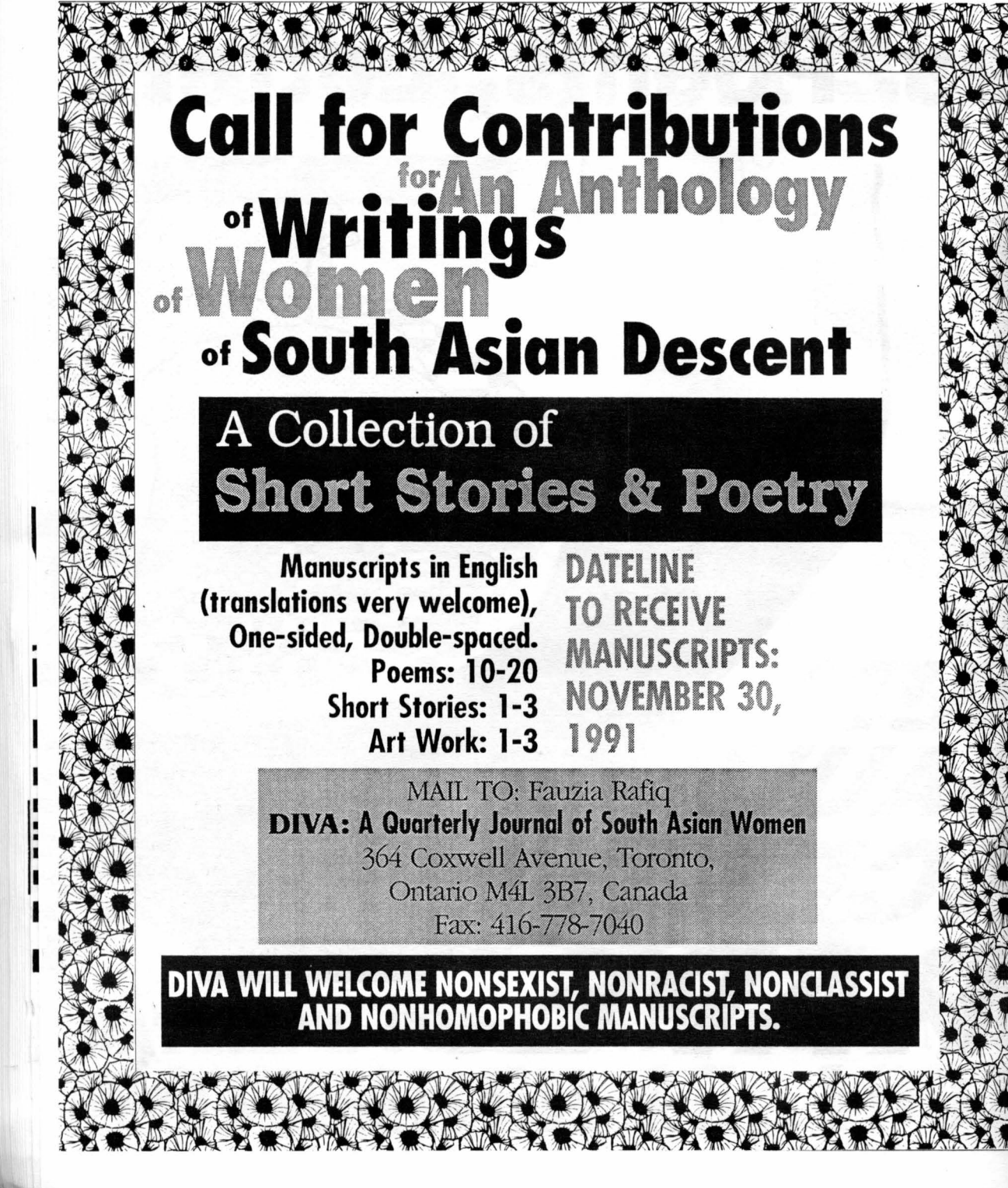
Articles, Short Stories



**DATELINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:
NOVEMBER 15, 1991**

ies, Poems, Letters





Call for Contributions
for **An Anthology**
of **Writings**
of **Women**
of **South Asian Descent**

A Collection of
Short Stories & Poetry

Manuscripts in English
(translations very welcome),
One-sided, Double-spaced.

Poems: 10-20

Short Stories: 1-3

Art Work: 1-3

DATELINE
TO RECEIVE
MANUSCRIPTS:
NOVEMBER 30,
1991

MAIL TO: Fauzia Rafiq
DIVA: A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women
364 Coxwell Avenue, Toronto,
Ontario M4L 3B7, Canada
Fax: 416-778-7040

DIVA WILL WELCOME NONSEXIST, NONRACIST, NONCLASSIST
AND NONHOMOPHOBIC MANUSCRIPTS.



Autonomous Women's Groups in India:

Impressions from a Study Tour

by TANIA DASGUPTA

The women's movement in India can be divided into three major stages:

- a) the nationalist period (pre-1947)
- b) the post-independence period (1947-1975), and
- c) the autonomous period (1975-the present).

Women's emancipation in the pre-1947 period was directly a result of the 19th century renaissance in India which ushered in an age of reform. Male reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar, led campaigns against such feudal practices as sati and widow remarriage, and women's education. Leaders such as Gandhi proclaimed women as the embodiment of non-violence and mobilized large numbers of women in the struggle for national independence. However, in this period women were by and large still followers and foot soldiers rather than empowered to lead their own liberation.

In the post 1947 period up to the present, the majority of Indian women have experienced a steady degradation in their status relative to men. Of course, a small minority of upper and middle class women have enjoyed an elevation in their status, most markedly in education and in employment opportunities.

With the erosion of traditional village economies and the parallel penetration of colonial capital, where before women and men had both enjoyed relative equality in access to livelihood and sustenance, today disproportionately larger numbers of women have been thrown off the land. This has resulted from increased modernization and capitalization of agriculture, the predominance of agricultural wage labourers as opposed to autonomous peasants and the privatization of land in the hands of fewer people. The same dynamics are true of forest lands. As a result, displaced women have been forced to migrate to big cities in search of alternative employment. In the absence of education and usable skills, women have in many instances been channelled into domestic work, sweeping, scavenging, working at slave wages in cottage industries such as bidi making, or in extreme cases have been led to prostitution.

The post-independence period is marked by an initial decline and then a dramatic rise in women's organizations, both in urban and rural areas. Major peasant movements took place such as the Tebhaga

movement in 1946, the Telengana struggle in 1946-51 and the Naxalite movement in 1967. In all of these movements, women peasants took a very active role under the leadership of Left parties. However, these movements did not focus on gender issues per se. Tribal women led many campaigns against atrocities perpetrated by police and landlords, such as beatings, tortures, rapes and murders. They also agitated against alcoholism of their menfolk, against the 'double day' and against the destruction of forest lands. In urban areas, women organized in thousands against inflation, artificially produced food scarcity, dowry, sexual harassment (eve teasing), obscenity and so on. However, with the imposition of emergency rule by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, most of these movements were repressed by widespread arrests of the leadership. Other remained dormant.

From the mid-1970's, the so-called 'autonomous' women's organizations started developing. They were led by women, independent from political parties, and discrimination and oppression against women was their primary focus. Many women activists had become disenchanted by the insensitivity of so-called progressive or left-wing organizations to the demands for women's liberation from a woman's point of view. Thoughts from the Western women's liberationists had flowed into urban India, mainly among the upper middle class women, and were often devalued by these organizations as being 'individualistic' or ridiculous. The autonomous women activists, while being mainly 'leftist' themselves, critiqued traditional left organizations often for perpetuating patriarchal structures and practices. The organizations and people I visited [see summary at end of article] are or have been a part of this autonomous women's movement. Although I was limited by time, i.e., the trip was only for two months, and by language barriers, I think that I was able to gather considerable insight into the functioning of various women's organizations in Delhi, Bombay, Pune and Calcutta. The following is a discussion of these.

Problem Identification

Some of the problems or issues around which women are organizing in India today are rape, dowry murders, police harassment, sexual harassment, housing, sex preselection/predetermination, pornography, resurrection of personal laws, literacy and general consciousness-raising, to name a few.

The way in which these issues have been identified as priorities to focus on has depended on a nature of the issue, i.e., whether it led to a dramatic event or whether it is an underlying, ongoing reality.

The anti-rape movement in which almost all the autonomous women's organizations I contacted became involved was sparked off in 1979 by the rape of a 14 year old girl, Mathura, by two police constables in the police station. The court in Nagpur let the constables go free on the pretext that Mathura was of questionable morals and therefore had consented to the sexual intercourse. The High Court of the state convicted the constables but the Supreme Court reversed the decision. Women all over India were enraged and rallied in protest over this case, demanding a radical change in the rape laws. This incident brought together about 25 women in Bombay who formed the *Forum Against Rape*, later known as the *Forum Against Oppression of Women*, a nation-wide campaign against rape, integrating social action and educational strategies, which ultimately resulted in the reopening of the Mathura case.

The issue of sexual harassment and murder on commuter trains is another example of how a dramatic incident initiated widespread organizing by women. Unlike the anti-rape movement, this was more localized. In Bengal, there was police harassment of young women on the trains. In one incident, a teacher protested and asked the police to get off the train. The police retaliated by slapping her. This led to protests by the *Progotishil Mahila Samiti* - PMS (the Progressive Women's

Association). In 1981 in Bombay, there were three women murdered on the trains in the course of one week, one of whom was in the 'ladies compartment'. This led to a highly publicized 'train campaign' by the *Forum*, focusing on the general deterioration of law and order and the apathy of the police.

Dowry Deaths

Dowry deaths are yet other cases around which women all over India agitated and organized. In 1985 there were 8,906 dowry deaths in India. According to government reports, in 1987, the number of such deaths rose to 1,786, up 37% from 1,319 in 1986 and 1,000 in 1985. These are grossly underestimated according to women's groups. Dowry deaths refer to cases where a married woman is killed, usually dowsed in kerosene and burnt to create an 'accident' simply because of inadequate dowry from her family to her husband. Upon her death, the husband is free to marry again and seek new dowry and repeat the 'accident'. Groups like the Forum in Bombay and PMS in Calcutta held demonstrations in front of the homes of the perpetrators, sometimes at the request of the victim's family.

The *Nari Samata Manch* of Pune responded to a dowry related murder with a street play and a poster exhibition.

In a slight variation, some women's organizations are contacted by affected communities to lead or help them in devising a strategy to address an issue. This happened in the case of organizations that have had a credible reputation among women of being effective and resourceful. For instance, PMS workers were contacted by the residents of a Calcutta slum when they wanted to remove a brothel from their midst which was recruiting young women.

In another case in a Bombay slum the residents, who were being evicted by municipal authorities, contacted workers from the *Society for Promotion*

of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) to resist their evictions. These residents had heard that SPARC workers had been successful in conducting community development programs in various slum areas around housing concerns.

A research organization, *Streevani*, originally engaged in a participatory research process in identifying issues or concerns of poor women, held informal dialogues with women in slums sharing life stories and later portraying these on a film name *Bai*. After the first experience poor women who viewed *Bai* asked the film makers to make a film on the subject of water and its scarcity. This led to making of a second film called *Pani. Stree Uvach*, a group of popular education matter, form regular 'rap sessions' with groups of women who meet and discuss issues of relevance to them.

A popular education group in Delhi called *Jagori* is regularly contacted by women activists for training workshops on theoretical issues around gender in India. The group also generates ideas for the production of new popular education materials through their work with activists and women in general.

The key worker in the *Manch* in Pune initiated her organization based on letters that she was receiving addressed to her as the editor of a popular magazine. In these letters, women and men were telling her of problems that they faced within their marriage. The *Manch* was a collective response to these expressions of individual problems.

Program/Action Planning

The organizations that I contacted varied in their programs and tactics to mobilize women around various issues. However, in my opinion they are all tied by the aspiration to empower poor women to resist their condition, whether it is against their individual families, 'anti-social' elements or the state. The women's movement today is fiercely politicized and would not hesitate to take direct action on an issue that adversely affects women.

However, the short term tactics used vary from extending support to education of, and political action by, women. Most groups combined either a supportive/educational model or an education/direct action model. Groups using these different models were knowledgeable about each other and were also linked up for the purpose of joint action.

Supportive programs and services are offered by such groups as *Maitrenyi* and the *Women's Centre* in Bombay, as well as the *Nari Samata Manch* in Pune.

In *Maitrenyi*, women meet every second Saturday to share personal experiences, focusing on one topic. Topics that have been discussed in the past included 'divorcees' and 'different relationships with men'. These discussions are facilitated by a core group member and are aimed at raising consciousness. Often these discussions have led to collective writing projects. For instance, the discussion on divorcees led to participants interviewing ten divorcees (including their ex-husbands), which was compiled into a book in Marathi entitled, *In Search of Answers*. Here we see a process of mutual support leading into an educational and research activity. Other core group members have conducted 'shibirs' with working class women on social issues, such as wife battering, health and income generation. One of these educational processes led to a group of women developing a street play on battering.

Staff at the Bombay Women's Centre handle cases of violence and distress experienced by women. They provide peer counselling and support to them. Once a month, women are brought together for workshops on mutually identified topics, e.g., legal and medical issues. Drawing, poster making and drama are also utilized to bring together women in crisis, thus reducing the isolation of individual women and also educating them on issues relevant to their independence.

The *Manch* in Pune combines a legal aid service for harassed or assaulted women three evenings a

week (donated by four lawyers), as well as 'shibirs', panel discussions and public meetings. The raising of public consciousness is further enhanced by organizing street plays on dowry murders, poster exhibitions and song writing. They are usually staged publicly on the street, and in places where they receive a wide exposure, and provoke discussion and action.

An organization doing purely educational work is *Jagori* in Delhi. They conduct training workshops on theoretical issues of women's subjugation. These are conducted mainly in Hindi. A new program titled *Education for Women's Equality* is being planned in four districts of Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Gujarat. This is expected to train 400-500 women in literacy, using popular education methodology. The literacy programs will be preceded by planning workshops, where the structure and process will be established by local participants. *Jagori* also produces educational materials for the community, e.g., an exhibition on women's life cycle and a book on birthing experiences of women.

Pratibidhan, the Bengali women's journal, involves about 13 women, all working voluntarily. The editorial committee meets every Saturday, and sometimes more often. The journal is aimed at intellectuals and students who are in many cases chief catalysts for action.

Mahila Milan

One of the most unique programs that I saw in a slum in Bombay was *Mahila Milan*, a cooperative loan scheme developed by women residents. The members have contributed to a common fund which can be drawn on during emergencies. A committee has to approve each application. General meetings are also held, where each area sends two to three representatives. The amount of women's contribution to the 'fund' is indicated by the colour of a strip of paper which each woman keeps. This is used because of the predominance

of illiteracy. The *Mahila Milan* was developed with the help of SPARC. The *Mahila Milan* has planned and designed a cooperative housing scheme for themselves. They are now in the process of building a model of this scheme in order to support their application for government funds to finance this project. The *Mahila Milan* has expanded their self-help and cooperative activities with the start of Hindi classes for small groups of women.

Direct Action

When it comes to direct action, the *Forum Against Oppression of Women* in Bombay and the *Progotishil Mahila Samiti* (PMS) in Calcutta are the best examples. The 'train campaign' referred to earlier is a case in point. When railway authorities failed to meet the demands of women for the safety of commuter trains, Forum members took matter into their own hands. to deter men who entered the 'ladies compartment' to harass women, or simply took up seats in a compartment which had been allocated only for women (because railway authorities had not bothered to publicize that), about 12 women set up a shift duty for about 15 days to guard the three entrances of the compartment and pushed men out of it. Women commuters also joined in. This shocked the men and also received a lot of press coverage. A demonstration was organized as well outside the General Manager's [of the Railways] office. In addition, the women were able to hold a joint meeting with top management of the railways. As a result of this type of consistent action, the "Women only - 24 hours" message was boldly written on the ladies compartment and was also advertised on T.V. Police were placed all along the train for greater security for women. Follow-up campaigns by the Forum resulted in an additional compartment reserved for women for 12 hours as well as a luggage compartment. All these measures have

greatly improved the safety and convenience of women commuters in Bombay.

It is noteworthy that even in such direct actions, women activists always take their guidance from ordinary women affected by the problem. The 'train campaign' was preceded by Forum members conducting a survey to find out what women commuters themselves felt should be the measures taken for increased safety. Within four hours, 700 women had been contacted by Forum members.

Education and action go hand in hand when it means empowering women to resist oppression. this is seen in the case of the PMS. A slum that I visited in Calcutta has been the arena of consistent consciousness-raising by PMS activists through study sessions on women's issues, coaching classes and other meetings. As a result, the women in the slum have become a strong and united presence, intervening in family and social problems. They have become an informal justice system, mediating disputes or solving problems with direct action. They have organized demonstrations before the police office, demanding action on such things as false arrests of people.

To make matters worse, the local police and the local goons have formed a team to harass the residents and keep them under control for partisan purposes. Recently, supported by PMS, the women were able to organize against a notorious goon who had raped a mother and daughter from the slum. As a result, the goon has been jailed and the harassment and assaults of women have declined. However, the police-goon partnership is most unhappy with the presence of the PMS and is constantly looking for ways to destroy it. When I visited the slum, a confrontation had just taken place, which had led to the arrest of a PMS activist on false charges, as well as to threats of arresting others (PMS activists had to hide) and to a smear campaign against the PMS. This was a striking example of women being oppressed by the state and also of organizing direct action against the state.

As is evident from the discussion so far of program/action planning approaches of different organizations, a key ingredient is the development of an alternative women's culture. This includes art, drama, song, poetry and film. Apart from the groups mentioned here, *Streevani* in Pune has produced a film using participatory research and production techniques where poor women were the actors, portraying their own life struggles. The generation of a rich alternative culture utilizing the non-print media has been very effective in reaching and involving women who did not have formal schooling.

Funding and Organizational Structure

Most of the organizations I visited were strongly opposed to taking funds from the Indian government because they believed that this would limit their ability to criticize government policies. The action-oriented organizations, such as the *Forum* in Bombay, the editors of *Pratibidhan*, and PMS in Calcutta, were the most adamant on this issue. They were also opposed to receiving foreign funds for the same sort of reason. They therefore worked completely voluntarily and raised funds by individual contributions. The *Forum*, which is an issue-based coalition, has no formal structure. It has no staff or offices, nor does it have a formal membership. The PMS on the other hand has a hierarchical and fairly formal structure, with local units electing a council of 19 women and headed by a state-wide executive committee.

Then there are those organizations that will not take Indian government funds but do receive foreign funds, e.g., the *Women's Centre* and SPARC in Bombay, and *Streevani* in Pune. Groups that have been operating by means of their own fundraising so far are now considering taking foreign funding, e.g., *Srujan* in Pune (a group of audiovisual producers formerly working with *Streevani*) and the *Manch* in Pune. Both of these

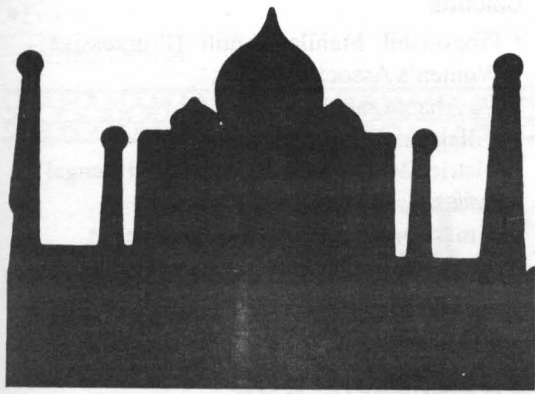
groups have formed charitable trusts and have sought individual contributions. Both groups operate collectively, although the film-making crew have specialized tasks with a hierarchy of responsibilities.

Women at the *Women's Centre* and SPARC in Bombay have paid staff members so there is more need for regular funding. The former operates as a collective along with an executive committee made up of activists. There is no specialization of tasks among staff. Although SPARC is a funded body, the *Mahila Milan*, which it supported in developing, is unfunded and totally voluntary. However, they are now seeking Indian government funds to finance a cooperative housing scheme for themselves.

Maitrenyi and *Stree Uvach*, both in Bombay, are unfunded by external sources. The latter raises money by personal donations and by sale of their books, while *Maitrenyi*, being a support group, does not need any significant funds for its operation. When it is involved in projects which require funds, it is usually supported by *Stree Uvach* or by *Maitryi*, a close affiliate, which receives Indian government funds for specific research projects. However, the activists associated with these three organizations are voluntary members.

I found that most of the activists who worked voluntarily in women's organizations sustained themselves by their 'own jobs' which were usually in teaching, research, freelance writing, community development, and other intellectual work. Some were students.

A group that has been accepting government and foreign funds for the last one year is *Jagori* in Delhi. They had operated with no formal funding for the past four years. They are now aspiring towards having a collective structure. Coordination of activities is rotated and the wage rates are negotiated with each worker. *Jagori* also adds to its revenue by sales of educational materials. It also has an executive committee.



Coalition formation

Another element in the operation of the organizations I visited is worth noting. Although they are distinct groupings, they have come together into coalitions to address major concerns, e.g., dowry murders, rape, and sati.

The *Forum* organized the first national conference with autonomous women's organizations in 1980 titled "Perspectives for the Women's Liberation Movement in India." Resolutions were passed for the abolition of personal laws and for the establishment of a uniform civil code. Other resolutions were to set up support structures for women subjected to violence and to build in measures to increase women's participation in the labour force.

Between Feb. 5-8, 1988, a National Women's Conference was held in Patna, Bihar, entitled "Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan," (Women's Liberation Struggle Conference) which was attended by 650 delegates. Despite the many differences between organizations, women delegates agreed that women's liberation is tied to the struggle against the caste-class society in India. They also agreed on women's right to land and other property, ecology issues and an anti-state orientation. However, for such coalition-building efforts to succeed, the level of unity has to be strengthened, both locally and nationally.

Groups Visited or Interviewed

Bombay

- Centre for Education and Documentation (CED)
3 Suleman Chambers, 4 Battery Street
Behind Regal Cinema, Bombay 400039,
Maharashtra.

Activities:

A resource centre with an extensive collection of books, newspaper and magazine clippings and reports on various aspects of social change, including women's issues.

- Maitrenyi
c/o Chaay Dwar, 7-8 Manjiri,
Makarand Society, Veer Savarkar Marg,
Mahim, Bombay 400016, Maharashtra.

Activities:

Support and discussion group for women. Undertakes some collective projects.

- Maitrayi
same address and contact person as above.

Activities:

A public trust, which conducts research, publishes bulletins, booklets and books and also undertakes community workshops and other activities.

- Stree Uvach
same address and contact person as above.

Activities:

A group of writers engaged in writing and publishing and selling books on women's experiences.

- Forum Against Oppression of Women.
c/o Nandita Gandhi
Fulchand Nivas, #19, Charupati Sea Face,
Bombay 400007, Maharashtra.

Activities:

This is a coalition which brings together individual women and organizes together on various local and national campaigns on

issues such as rape, dowry, sexual harassment, pornography, sex pre-selection and pre-determination.

- Bombay Women's Centre.
c/o Roma and Vibhuti Patel,
1048 Sunrise Apts., Nehru Road,
Vakola, Santa Cruz (E), Bombay 400055
Maharashtra.

Activities:

A centre for women offering services such as peer-counselling and mutual support for battered women, a resource centre, research services, workshops and cultural activities.

- Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC),
c/o Prema Gopalan,
c/o Municipal Dispensary,
Meghraj Sethi Marg,
Byculla, Bombay 400008, Maharashtra.

Activities:

Community development in the slum areas of Bombay, cooperative loan scheme, cooperative housing program, adult education.

Pune

- Streevani
c/o Sumitra Bhawe,
Ishvani Kendra, Off Nagar Road,
Pune 411052, Maharashtra

Activities:

Women's research, production of A-V and printed materials using participatory methods.

- Nari Samta Manch,
c/o Vidya Bal, Niramayee, 73 Sahawas
Colony,
Pune 411052, Maharashtra.

Activities:

Direct emotional and legal assistance to victims of violence, educational and action work around issues such as violence and harassment of women.

Calcutta

- Progotishil Mahila Samiti (Progressive Women's Association),
c/o Ahanta sarker,
Village and P.O. Katiahhat,
District 24 Parganas 763427, West Bengal

Activities:

A mass organization which engages in direct political action against police oppression by goons, rape, violence against women, etc. Also conducts study sessions on women's issues and organizes branches at local levels.

- Pratibidhan
c/o Shormistha Thakur,
29 Sadanand Road, Calcutta-26, West
Bengal.

Activities:

Publishes a magazine in Bengali on women and other progressive issues.

Delhi

- Jagori
c/o Abha Bhaiya,
B5 Housing Coop Society,
South Extension - Part I,
New Delhi 110049, Delhi.

Activities:

Has a resource centre of print and A-V materials, is involved in producing popular education materials using participatory methods, organizes training and educational workshops for women activists, new project - education for women's equality.

*[This article was first published in
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for letting us reprint it.]*



DESH PRADESH

A FESTIVAL EXPLORING SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE IN THE WEST

Nov.6 to 10, 1991

Programme

• **Wed. Nov.6**

7:30pm

OPENING REMARKS

KHUSH: a documentary film by Pratibha Parmar (U.K.)

READING: Rmabai Espinet (Toronto)

PERFORMANCE: "identity politics - being South Asian in Canada" by Aruna Srivastava (Vancouver) & Ashok Mathur (Alberta)

VIDEO: "Second Generation". Gita Saxena (Toronto)

INTRODUCTIONS: out of towners

9:30pm

RECEPTION: hosted by "Khush" at Nataraj Restaurant

• **Thur. Nov. 7**

7pm

READINGS: M. Vassanji, Fiction

PERFORMANCE POETRY: Jamila Ismail (Van.)

READINGS: Sadhu Binning (Van.), Poetry

READINGS: Ian Rashid (Tor/U.K.), Poetry

PERFORMANCE POETRY: Raj Pannu (Van.)

READINGS: Arnold Itwaru (Tor/Indo-Caribbean), Poetry

9:30pm

PERFORMANCE: Malika Mendez (Tor.)

FILM: "Tikari and Coke" (U.K. about South Asians in South Africa)

PLAY: "Beyond the kala pani" (Tor. the migration of women from India to the Caribbean to Canada)

• 3. Fri. Nov. 8

5:30pm

FILM: "Democracy in Crisis" - about the '91 Indian elections

DISCUSSION: with filmmaker Manjira Datta

7:30pm

FEATURE FILM: "Masala" (Tor.)

DISCUSSION: with Srinivas Krishna (filmmaker)

SHORT FILM: "Bhangra Jig", Pratibha Parmar

9:30pm

BHANGRA & DANCE PARTY: Desh Pardesh, Rivoli 332 Queen St. W.

DJ Michelle Mohabeer (Tor), Dj Ritu Khuvana (U.K.)

• 4. Sat. Nov. 9

Noon

DISCUSSION: "Violence Against women", Moderator: Sharmini Peries (Tor.), Sunera Thobani (Van.)

READING: Fauzia Rafiq (Tor.), Short Story

READING: Others

DISCUSSION

2pm

SLIDE PRESENTATION: "Identity, Sexuality & History", Nayan Shah (USA)

DISCUSSION

4pm

DISCUSSION: "Organizing around AIDS", Moderator: Leela Acharya sponsored by ASAP & VTape

VIDEO: "Bolo Bolo", Gita Saxena & Ian Rashid. Premiere Speakers: Anthony (ASAP), Kalpesh Oza, Aisha (U.K., Not-Conf.), Gita Saxena

7pm

THEME: WOMEN

FILM: "A nice Arrangement", Gurinder Chadha (U.K.)

FILM: "Knowing her Place", Indu Krishnan (U.S.)

PLAY: "Shameless" SASS, (Tor.)

9:30pm

THEME: BROWN & OUT, Lesbian and Gay arts

VIDEO PRESENTATION: "lesbians images in select Hindi movies", Pratibha Parmar

PAPER: "Gay images in Indian Literature", Sunil Gupta

VIDEO: "India Postcards", Sunil Gupta

VIDEO: "Jareena, Portrait of a Hijda", Prem Kalliat (U.S.)

EXPERIMENTAL FILM: "Lesbian Images in the Koran", Shakila Mann (U.K.)

DISCUSSION

WOMEN'S PARTY, Women's Common, organizer: Sharon Fernandez

• 5. Sunday Nov. 10

Noon

THEME: HYBRID MUSIC/DANCE

BHANGRA IN THE UK: Ritu K

CALYPSO/SOCA: Michael Latchana (Indo-Carrib., Not Conf.)

BHANGRA IN TORONTO'S SUBURBS (not conf.)

2pm

THEME: HOME AS A MYTHIC SPACE

DISCUSSION: Panel: Michelle Mohabeer (Tor/Guyana), Chris Creighton Kelly (Van/Anglo-Indian, Not Conf.), Vassanji (Tor/E. Africa), Pratibha Parmar (U.K.), Raj Pannu (Van/India)

4pm

THEME: PRINT MEDIA ALTERNATIVE

Montreal Serai: (not conf.)

Toronto South Asian Review: (Tor)

Ankur: (Van)

Trikone: (not conf.)

DIVA: A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women: (Tor)

Rungh (Van)

Bazaar (U.K.)

Mela (Tor)

7pm

CLOSING PROGRAM

WRITERS' CABARET. THEME: "Home" (5 min. each)

Sadhu Binning, Moyez Vassanji, Ian Rashid, Kaushalya Bannerji, Amita Handa (not conf.), Ramabai Espinet, Aruna Srivastava, Ashok Mathur, Jamila Ismail, Shayam (not conf.), Julian Samuel (not conf.), Mariam Durrani, C.C. Kelly (not conf.), Kalpesh Oza, Raj Pannu. and Others

CHOREOGRAPHY: "Modern Choreography of Traditional Pieces", Devika Chetram Dancers, (Guyanese, not conf.)

MUSIC: Tabla, Ratesh Das (not conf.)

PASSES FOR DESH PRADESH:

are \$35 and include admission to all programmes and workshops.
Dance admission is \$8 at the door. Advance passes are available at:

Women's Bookstore (Harbord Street)

This Ain't the Rosedale Library (Church St.)

Pages Bookstore (Queen St. W.)

The Indian Record shop (Gerrard St. E.)

**VENUE: EUCLID THEATRE, TORONTO
FOR MORE INFORMATION
CONTACT PUNAM KHOSLA
416-922-0554**

• • • • •

CONFERENCE

Toronto, Canada

South Asian Women's Group (SAWG) is sponsoring a conference entitled: "End Violence Against Women: A Community Responsibility." Being held in Toronto, it is a one-day event which will discuss women's experience of violence at home, impact of witnessing violence on children and the situation in the USA.

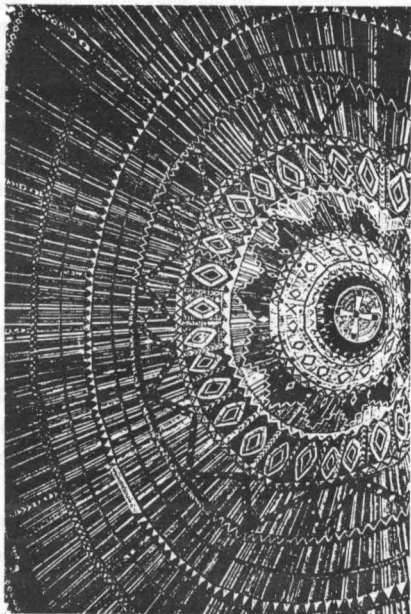
The Group is also presenting three short drama performances on some of the typical scenarios of wife assault/abuse.

All are welcome.

Refreshments, lunch and child care available.

***For more information,
call: 416-537-2276***





IN SEARCH OF EXPRESSION

MULTICULTURALISM and ARCHITECTURE

by SHERRY JAMAL

*"They cannot represent themselves;
they must be represented."*

In writing this article, I was worried that it would become more an article about writing an article than an article about my journey through this process we refer to as 'archi-torture'.

Writing about multiculturalism, in particular, my cultural approach to my architectural work, is not easy to do in a dispassionate, academic and objective manner. It is hard to objectify that of which one is the subject... like trying to write an autobiography in the third person plural. Objectification harks back to an academic tradition which states that it is only through the spyglass of 'distance', that the flaws of myopic conclusions can be overcome. Scholars and students in the Western tradition have been taught and conditioned to believe that objectivity equals acceptability and acceptability equals relevance. This conditioning compels us to negate and deny our emotions. Consequently, in arriving at conclusions, even within our own internal dialogues, we consider only that which the conditioning finds acceptable.

Yet, what happens when ideas are presented in a personal voice? Do such ideas automatically become less relevant, less worthy of consideration? Being personal makes people uncomfortable. It compels them to face their assumptions, presumptions, and prejudices. Yet, in writing about my experiences in studying architecture, I can be nothing but personal. Though I have been educated in the 'west', I am compelled by the intensely subjective nature of the design process to question my own assumptions and prejudices. To discuss my experiences in an objective manner only, would be to deny them for the sake of some form of scholarly rigour. In a sense, my architectural education has been a process of trying to find a voice with which to express my multicultural background in mainstream. In writing this article, I was torn between choosing the voice of objectivity or the voice of my experiences; it is the latter which I have chosen.

As an Ismaili-Muslim woman with an East Indian heritage, born in England but raised in Kenya, my entry into the halls of architectural academe was not without some fear and trepidation. I was one of a handful of visible minority woman students and I was hell bent on trying to fuse my cultural background into my designs. As a first year student, I lacked the necessary confidence to articulate my views. I made some of my instructors uncomfortable and I felt the brunt of their lack of comfort. I was asked, in ways direct and indirect, to conform, to be less of a pain but I would not bend and there's nothing worse than a mouthy, uppity, brown woman. It is only after four years of trying that I am beginning to find my true voice. A voice which asks questions and starts discussions which dwindle into homilies to the M-word (multiculturalism). It is still a wavering voice, now near the end of its architectural education and slowly gaining confidence, that now asks questions about the role of architectural education in assisting the profession to come to terms with Canada's multicultural reality.

What is 'multiculturalism' anyway? What does the word mean? In "The Multicultural Paradigm, An Open Letter to the National Arts Community", Guillero Gomez-Pena writes:

'Multicultural' is the hip word of the late '80's. Everybody agrees it is politically correct. Few know what it really means. It is an ambiguous term. It can mean a cultural pluralism in which the various ethnic groups collaborate and dialogue with one another without having to sacrifice their particular identities and this is extremely desirable. But it can also mean a kind of Esperanti Disney World, a tutti frutti cocktail of cultures, languages and art forms in which 'everything becomes everything else.' This is a dangerous notion that strongly resembles the bankrupt concept of the melting pot with its familiar connotations of integration, homogenization and pasteurization.'

— High Performance, Fall 1989.

Gomez-Pena's interpretation is one of many and a full discussion of the meaning of 'multiculturalism' is an article in itself. Suffice it to say that in my architectural work it is precisely the pressures which push toward pasteurization and the bankruptcy of the 'melting pot' concept, which I am trying to resist. I do not believe that I am alone in my 'movement'. I do not share in the conspiracy theory that architecture schools are plotting against visible minority applicants from non-western cultural backgrounds (M-students). There is a definite sense that such students serve to enliven and add 'spice' as it were, to the student body. What happens to such students after they enter the hallowed halls of academe is yet another story as they get caught up in the various pre-existing currents and cross-current of debate and controversy.

Current #1

Architectural education is in a state of flux and turmoil at present. It is caught in the cyclical dilemma of all professional schools, that between churning out 'professionals' ready for the 'real world' of practice or nurturing theoretical and historic scholars. Professionals or Artists? Caught in this cross-current is the M-student who faces critique from both sides of that debate.

The 'professor as creator of professionals' emphasizes conformity to designs which sell. The architect is presented as the Handmaiden of Developers and Mammon. What is essentially being reinforced is that there are certain ways to belong to what is still an essentially, white, middle-class, male profession. A brown woman who is interested in designing with the assistance of Islamic design principles does not fit into this world view.

The 'professor as creator of artists' encourages creativity from the M-students but when this creativity enters into the realm of non-Western precedents trouble ensues. Some professors in this second group either do not possess, or do not care to possess, a knowledge base from which to assist M-students in their development as designers using different cultural precedents.

When I design, I think of the beaches in Mombasa or Islamic mosques or a myriad of other sources which do not necessarily draw upon the history of Western architecture or the 'building as a shed' prototype so prevalent in Canada. I design in a 'language' which few professors either can relate to, or care to relate to. Does this necessarily make the professors anti-mul-



ticultural? No, but it does point out the added difficulties which M-students (who wish to design with M-view) face in developing their visions and articulating their ideas through their own voice. It is difficult to communicate with someone who does not speak your architectural 'language'.

Current #2

The search for relevance is, perhaps, architecture's greatest challenge in the next decade. The days when Modernism was the answer to every question are long gone. Post-modernism has responded with a panoply of answers ranging from new Utopias to Dystopias. The voices of post-modernism are fractured, divided and thin. There is lack of unity and leaders... no Corbusier, no Mies, no Messiah. In this diaspora of architectural thought, there is one school of thought which finds guidance from the belief that the future rests in a culturally sensitive design perspective (M-view). As opposed to the anti-cultural world view of the machine Age, this world view addresses the realities of world-wide multiculturalism and embraces the possibilities of Islamic style houses in Halifax and the 'Canadian shed' in Cairo. This M-view only serves to irritate those who reflect the lack of coherence they see in the style presently in vogue.

Deconstructivism speaks to the alienation, fragmentation, and incoherence of modern society with an architectural vocabulary of cold, exposed violence where surfaces, volumes and planes intersect to trap their seduced inhabitants. The M-view, by contrast, is concerned with accommodating extended families and achieving a synthesis between the architectural vocabulary of minority and dominant cultures. It is little wonder that both world views, Decon (dee-con) and M-view, have little to say to each other. It is hard to have a dialogue between coherence and incoherence (regardless of which world-view you choose to represent the former). It is Decon, however, which is garnering the covers of professional publications and in the academe of architecture of axiom is not 'publish or perish' but rather 'design like they publish, or perish'.

If the above sounds like an unsubstantiated attack against Decon, it is not meant to be such. I apologize to my friends who design in this vein and whose design integrity I respect. The point I wish to make is that the M-view is not a design perspective which is in vogue and as such it is relegated to the back pages in architecture's search for relevance. The voice of the M-view is drowned out

by the voices of various Modern and Post-Modern 'answers' to the problem. The M-student is faced with the dilemma being voiceless in a dialogue with many speakers each trying to be louder than the next. Whenever the M-student is heard, she is accused of ghettoizing, of dreaming, of not accepting reality.

The 'professional' professors warn of lack of work in the real world for such notions and label her work 'marginal'. The 'artist' professors preach the gospel of post-Modernism and/or Decon; the heresy of the M-view is unacceptable. It seems that a little 'spice' goes a long way in design and any attempt to concoct a real curry of a design is unpalatable. The M-student finds herself in an environment which offers little encouragement to fully develop an alternate world-view, and at the same time, criticizes her for not being able to fully articulate such a view. The academe first tells the M-student how the M-view is irrelevant and then asks her to defend it.

The confusion which is the necessary outcome of the two 'currents' noted above reflects itself in, and is perpetuated by, the process of teaching in most Canadian architecture schools today. The process is one of dividing students into small studios taught by a single instructor. The studios usually focus upon a particular project and the student has a period of time, ranging from weeks to months, to develop a design for the project. The instructors range from the fiercely ideological, who advocate and accept design which reflect their particular design perspective, to those who encourage adherence to the architectural vogue of the day (i.e. 'Style, no substance'). Admittedly, these classifications are gross generalizations and point to the extreme poles. Between them rest a whole variety of approaches and perspectives. For the M-student, however, there are few instructors, whether from the extremes or in-between, who care to encourage the development or acceptance of M-design or an M-view.

To understand why the M-student is left alone, you have to understand architectural faculties and the design process. Most architectural faculties are still the bastion of white, male instructors. There are few women instructors and even fewer, if any, women form a multicultural background. The design process is, in part, a process which requires you to tap into your personal self, and fuse that bit of 'self' with a series of design solutions that respond to a myriad of other constraints, into a



three-dimensional manifestation. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a white, male instructor to relate to the experience of a woman, let alone a brown woman. Without the ability to relate, a crucial aspect of the guidance required (by a student from her instructor) to grow as a designer is lacking. Thus, while other students find allies within the faculty more readily, the M-student is faced with developing on her own and, sometimes, develops more slowly. This slow rate of development and the factors which contribute to it, however, are never considered in the context of design evaluation. In fact, the M-student's poor marks are held up as evidence of a lack of design prowess and intellectual rigour. The M-student becomes an unwitting and bewildered actress in fulfilling the faculty's play of self-prophecy.

As I stated earlier, I do not subscribe to conspiracy theories or, for that matter, speak lightly of racism. Thus, I accept as a starting point that my instructors wish for me to become the best architect that I am capable of becoming. Why then is there such difficulty in communication? A major part of the problem, I believe, rests in the fact that my instructors and I do not share common body of experiences. While many of my colleagues disagree with their instructors, for the most part, they can speak a common 'language' and arrive at a resolution, even if it is to agree to disagree.

By contrast, I find that it is difficult for me to communicate by design 'language' to my instructors. While with some instructors I find a bit of common ground for discussion, for the most of my architectural education I have been left without encouragement for my vision and perspective. I am not arguing that brown, Islamic, immigrant women should be instructors. But what I am advocating is the need for more professors in architecture who have backgrounds of broader experiences and vision. If communication with the M-student cannot occur from a base of shared, common experiences, surely it can occur from one of parallel experiences. The reality is that there is a shortage of such instructors, and while architecture schools are accepting M-students, they are not sure how to deal with them (should such M-students wish to develop an M-view). Should there be more M-instructors? Hell, Yes! but where will tomorrow's M-instructors come from if not from today's M-students,

and how will they develop into M-instructors without M-instructors in the first place? The cliché of the 'chicken and egg syndrome' comes to mind.

Conclusions: The Road to Dialogue

All of the above noted 'currents' do not, of course, exist in isolation. They combine, intertwine and interact with results which can be discouraging, disconcerting and depressing. All is not doom and gloom however, there is some hope; but before examining some possible solutions, I feel that it is necessary to state that in the pursuit of my polemic I have painted my arguments in large, broad strokes. Such broad arguments, by necessity, require resorting to generalizations and dichotomies. For the record let me state the following: First, that I have had the privilege to be instructed by some professors who have encouraged me and assisted me in forming a M-view. Second, that my fellow students and friends have often been the source of comfort, mirth, strength and hope. Without my friends in the faculty, I would not have survived my four years of 'archi-torture'. That being said, what then are some possible 'solutions' to the problems encountered by the M-student?

First, I believe that what is needed is a recognition by architecture faculties that there is a problem. Faculties have to admit that there is a problem. Faculties have to admit that there is a group of students whose needs are not being met and in some cases, whose needs are being denied.

Second, there has to be a fundamental acceptance on the part of architecture schools of realities of the cultural fabric of Canada. Statistics indicate that by the year 2000 A.D., the English and French populations of Canada will be in the minority. This reality needs to be recognized and incorporated into the architectural curriculum. This is not just for M-student, but for other students as well, who may be called upon in future to design for clients from cultural perspectives and attitudes other than their own. Courses should be available to students that discuss M-perspectives and approaches to architecture. Design studios could also broaden their horizons by establishing design problems using non-Western programmes. Essentially, there has to be a commitment by architecture schools to enter into a dialogue with M-students and M-user groups to

find common ground for discussion and change. As Guillemos Gomez-Pena states;

"Whenever and wherever two or more cultures meet - peacefully or violently - there is a border experience. In order to describe the trans-, inter-, and multi-cultural processes that are at the core of our contemporary border experience..., we need to find a new terminology, a new iconography and a new set of categories and definitions.... What we need is dialogue, not protection.

...In order to have a dialogue, 'we must learn each other's language, history, art, literature and political ideas'. We must travel South and East, with frequency and humility, not as cultural tourists but as civilian ambassadors... Only through dialogue we can develop models of coexistence and cooperation."

References

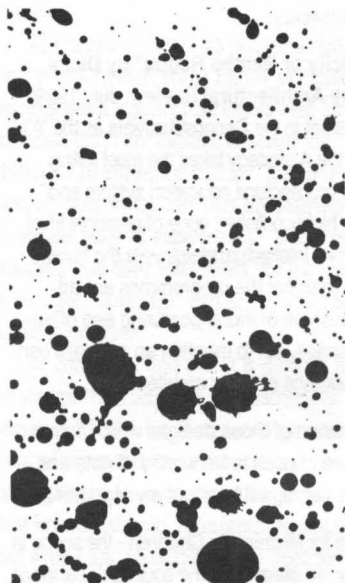
1. First I hate this word and all the bureaucratic, political fence sitting which it embodies. Second, I use the term which at least lets the reader know what I am referring to, since I cannot think of a better one. Third,, by the use of this term I am focusing more on visible minorities and recent immigrants who have not yet assimilated. Fourth, I limit my definition of the term since in a sense we are all immigrants to Canada (aboriginal peoples excepted).
2. This quote from Karl Marx's, **The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**, appears on the opening page of Edward W. Said's book, *Orientalism*. The book, highly recommended reading, is a study of
- the ideology and structures of how the West has dealt with what it terms 'the Orient'.
3. See, **Profession Or Art?**, by Peter Davy, in the *Architectural Review*, July 1989, p59, for an overview of this debate in Europe in the early 1900's.
4. Admittedly, in each scenario, climactic, contextual, and cultural concerns would need to be taken into simple account. The M-view does not speak to simply transplanting one design vocabulary, unchanged, into another political and cultural context but, rather, to the striving to seek synthesis. Accommodation between the design vocabularies of different cultures is relevant and necessary.
5. See "**Authenticity or Rambo Redux**" by Diane Ghirardo, in the *Architectural Review*, July 1989, p47. Ghirardo refers to the Deconstructivists as the 'A's' and states that "the A strategy takes the most telling weakness of the architectural education system and hones them to a highly polished edge of personal frivolity. Self-proclaimed intellectual status veils the frivolity and more often than not the programmes are advanced with a cushion of moral posturing and offensive pretentiousness, not to mention an arrogant contempt for the buildings of other architects."
6. A close examination of those designs which architecture schools have chosen to be worthy of note and award, in recent years, will bear out my argument.
7. Salman Rushdie for **Midnight's Children** - the scene in the pickle factory, an allegory for the social/cultural fabric in India resulting from British colonization.
8. I would venture to say most North American architecture schools but choose to limit myself to schools in Canada which I have either attended or learnt of from my colleagues.
9. See "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community" by Guillemos Gomez-Pena in *High Performance*, Fall, 1989.



POLICE VIOLENCE & RACISM

Part 1

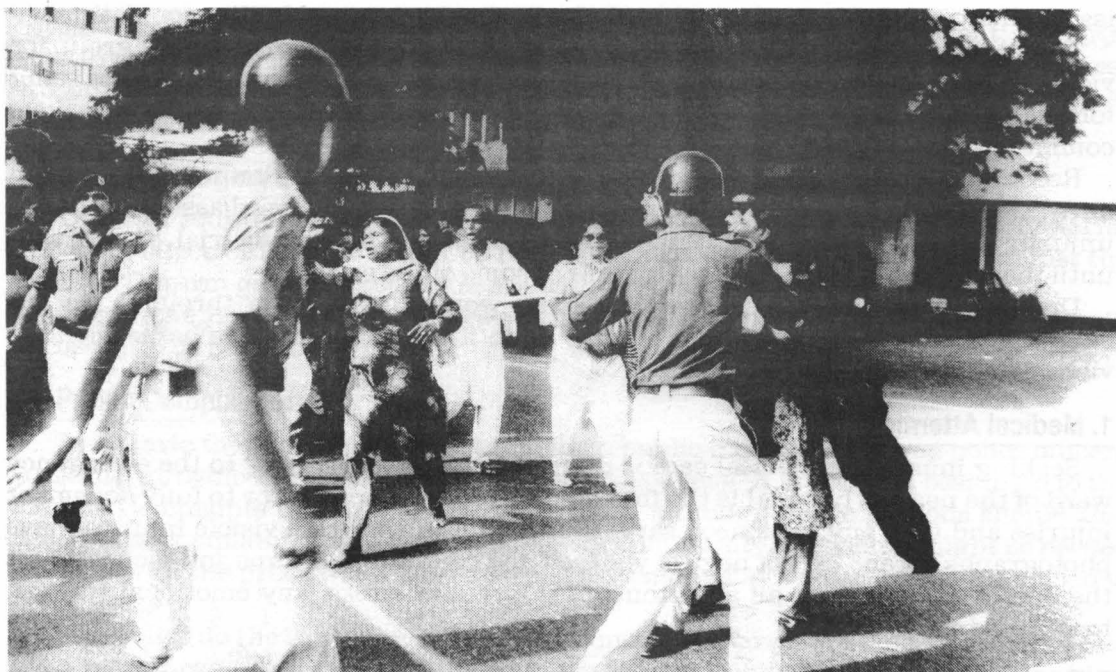
by WEI FENG



Since the police shooting of Sophia Cook two years ago, the issue of police violence and racism has become a growing concern in the women's movement in Toronto. The Black community has had a long history of being forced to organize against police shootings and against criminalization of Black youth. First Nation peoples have always had to confront an unjust white police and an unjust justice system in order to protect themselves. The Asian community in Toronto has had to respond to the hype about 'Asian gangs' as well as the recent police/media controversy over race-based crime statistics. Women from various communities have also had to actively organize against systemic police racism and violence, and have been a major source of support to police victims like Sophia Cook, Kay Poon and Yvonne Taylor, Black and Chinese women who have courageously decided to take an open stand against police abuse.

In the past year, community attention has been drawn to many other disturbing cases where Asian women, Black women and young people were assaulted or harassed by Toronto police and/or security guards. Furthermore, police victims who decide to fight against it by appealing to the justice system, often find themselves in a situation where they are having to face charges of assaulting the police instead. In the cases of Kay Poon and Yvonne Taylor, for example, both complained of being beaten by the police, but were made to face charges of police assault in the criminal courts.

Kay Poon was lucky to have a lot of community support and was able to get a good lawyer and a judge who dismissed the charge of police assault in February 1990 (a second charge of causing a disturbance was withdrawn). The outcome of Kay Poon's trial, attended by many women from different communities, can be seen as a real victory. Yet, almost two years later, Poon is still paying for being strong enough to



fight against an unjust practice. The expensive legal fees incurred while proving her innocence and the crime of the police, are still keeping her in debt.

Women working in the community have heard too many stories about Native, Black and Asian people being beaten by the police, about women being raped by 'on-duty' police officers, about police siding with men in wife assault cases, about the harassment by the police of our youth, working class people, and gays and lesbians. Many lawyers have noticed also the bias of most judges, who tend not to question the police or at least exhibit a strong tendency to refrain from ruling against the police.

The police force reflects and reinforces the systemic inequality, white and male domination, homophobia and violence in the rest of society. It is there to serve and protect the status quo. And that is what makes this form of racism and violence harder and scarier to fight. Victims are understandably scared from action and when they do bravely decide to act they are up against a system where the police still investigate themselves, court battles are expensive, process is often too prolonged.

The women's movement is becoming more and more involved in community organizing and in creating support around this issue. The Women's Coalition Against Racism and Police Violence, which was formed after the 1989 police shooting of Sophia Cook, is no longer meeting. But many women's and community groups in Toronto are working on the issue of police racism and violence. There still remains the long-standing broad-based community demand for an independent civilian investigative body, as well as the recognition of the urgent need for communities to work together on this

issue, and to set up a community-based monitoring system and hotline for victims.

The Coalition for Police Reform was recently formed. A women's support group for victims of racist police violence has also just been formed. Such organizations are being formed because of an increased number of incidents of police harassment in various communities.

Recently, there have been cases where Native, Black, Asian, lesbian and other women have come forward to speak out about how they have been harassed/assaulted and/or unjustly arrested by the police. Many of these cases are still awaiting trial. We will wait until the next issue of DIVA to give details of some of the cases.

Drawing from the experience that some women have gone through, we are suggesting here some guidelines to help us in a situation of police harassment or victimization.

1. Medical Attention:

Seeking immediate medical care is extremely important. Going to the emergency ward of the nearest hospital is the first step and getting the doctor to fully document injuries and take any tests necessary, the second. If there are visible injuries, have photographs taken. Do not neglect yourself and continue checkups and each time get the doctor to document all symptoms of injury and stress, any emotional trauma, inability to sleep, etc.

2. Community Support:

Contacting a supportive community organization is found to be useful in such situations. Black, Native, Asian groups, women's shelters, assault/crisis centres and legal clinics are a few types of organizations that can lend support.

3. Criminal Lawyer:

If the police have charged, getting a good criminal lawyer is crucial for defence. There are many progressive criminal lawyers who have had experience with cases involving police harassment and assault. Women are encouraged to ask around, check with neighbourhood legal clinics, shop around. If the lawyer does not seem satisfactorily supportive, change. Many lawyers will provide the first half hour of consultation, free, that an initial assessment can be made.

Calling the Legal Aid office might be helpful. If approved, the Legal aid will provide a certificate which would pay for the lawyer. Please keep in mind also that Legal Aid allows for a very low maximum fee in these kinds of cases. It may be that some lawyers might not accept the case on financial grounds.

Though we are up against class and privilege issues but that has not stopped many women to go ahead with the criminal proceedings. A criminal trial can be a scary new experience. Get family, friends and community people to support you in court.

It is advised by concerned professionals that consistency is important when you are giving statements, for example, on the stand, to the police, to your doctor, in your complaint, to the media. The prosecuting lawyer (for the Crown) will try to test our

credibility. We need to get (our lawyer to call) any witnesses to the incident; doctor(s) can give medical evidence/reports; character witnesses need also be arranged to attest to our honesty, credibility and non-violence (e.g. from work, school, church, old friends). A good lawyer should be able to assist with all this.

4. Countercharging the Police:

One can countercharge the police, e.g. for assault, assault causing bodily harm. Often Justices of Peace (JP) will be reluctant to accept criminal charges against the police. One can get the lawyer to assist with this process.

Even if the JP accepts the charges, it will still be up to the Crown to decide if they will prosecute the police on our behalf - if not, we will have to pay a lawyer to prosecute.

5. Public Complaints:

In Ontario there is a procedure for laying a public complaint against police officers (in other provinces, check with the police or a lawyer). It is thought best to go to the Public Complaints Commission in our district, although police stations should also accept the complaints. Someone with legal or community experience might be needed to help with the process, because a formal statement about what exactly happened is required.

The police do the initial investigation. Community pressure (letters, phone calls) can help move the process to the next stage of a Public Complaints Commission investigation, and eventually maybe a Board of Inquiry to look into the case (only some complaints, deemed serious, reach this final stage). This three person Board will conduct a hearing to determine police wrongdoing. If misconduct is proved at the hearing on clear convincing evidence, penalties range from admonishment to (very rarely) dismissal from the force.

This is a disciplinary process which can take a long time. The hearing for the officers involved in Kay Poon's case took place almost two years after the incident, the Board's decision may still take months.

6. Civil Suit:

If damages have occurred to our person, possessions or property, we can sue the police for damages in civil court. A civil suit can be brought by us, personally, against the police for remedies for the harm done. Although the police get free legal representation, we have to pay for our own lawyer unless we qualify for legal aid.

There are progressive lawyers with experience in civil suits.

There is a threat that the police can sue back for malicious prosecution if we lose our civil suit. Discussing the strength of the case with the lawyer can help assess the possibilities. Important: There is a six month limitation for these kinds of actions against the police. This means a civil suit against the police can only be started within six months of the date the incident took place, otherwise the law will not permit you to proceed. If the incident happened outside of Ontario, check with a lawyer regarding limitation periods.

7. Media:

Making the case public is a controversial option. If a criminal charge is in process, consultation with the lawyer(s) before hand, is important. Some lawyers want to avoid pre-trial media exposure because they fear the judge may see it as an attempt to influence the judge or jury. Others believe, the more public pressure the better. An option to consider is to have community groups call a press conference to speak out about the case, or just contact community media (e.g. chinese language coverage might not be seen as jeopardizing the case).

Particular reporters or alternative newspapers or radio stations can be called because it has been experienced that they would be supportive of the case. Some media are known for supporting the police, and for racist/sexist coverage. Let us remember that we do not have to answer any or all questions, "no comment".

Finally, just to reinforce, we are not alone.

*Special acknowledgements for input
from Catherine, Kati, and Susan*

(Part 2 of this article will be printed in the next issue. If you have any experiences to share, please do not hesitate to contact DIVA.)

News in Black in White

by SUNERA THOBANI



This article addresses racism in writing, specifically within the newspapers. The analysis of racism in writing often tends to be confined to school textbooks, journals, or the characterization of peoples of colour in fiction. The most widely and most regularly read form of writing, that in the newspapers, gets overlooked with disturbing consequences. Most people who may not read journals, novels, textbooks, etc., nevertheless make it a point of reading the newspapers on a regular basis. It is from this form of writing that people learn about what is going on in Canada and the rest of the world. The common sense notions of reality are re-created by what is learnt from this writing. An understanding of the larger society, in fact the whole world, is

pieced together from the news reported, as is the general framework within which current issues are discussed. It is within this social construction of reality that people make decisions about their actions, e.g., how they will vote, who they support, how they relate to the world and to each other. It is for this reason that we need to be concerned with this particular form of writing, which passes off as objective and neutral reporting of what is going on in the world around us. This objectivity, along with the ready availability and large readership newspapers command, is what makes this form of writing particularly significant.

Increasingly we see racism being defined as resulting from peoples' prejudices against, and intolerance of, other cultures and other peoples. Racism is presented as a natural reaction to that which is strange and new, and it is seen to be in the nature of people to be suspicious and intolerant of this intrusion in their lives by outside, alien forces and practices. This definition reduces racism to the level of inter-personal experiences, and it is generally argued that if people learned more about each other's cultures, they would become more tolerant of the differences in cultures. What this definition does is to obscure the fact that racism is institutionalized within the structures of this society, and that white supremacy has historically grown through the attacks on peoples of colour, on our cultures, and on tolerance.

It is that, no doubt, but it is not only that. These prejudices and intolerance are backed up by power, they can be enforced and perpetuated by the use of this power and which has historically been imposed and continues to be perpetuated through violence. In our society, racism means the power relations of white supremacy, where the question is not one of tolerance of other cultures, but rather a systematic attack on, and the devaluation of peoples of colour and our cultures. Race is a social construction, based

on alleged biological differences which are considered to be inherent in peoples. Historically, the concept of race has been used to impose and justify an hierarchy of peoples based on these socially constructed definitions of races. Racism has been, and continues to remain, the practices of recreating this hierarchy. It operates at the level of economic, political and social structures and institutions. It can be found at both the collective and inter-personal level, and to focus on only one level, the inter-personal level, is to misunderstand both the essence and the form of racism.

Writers, whatever form of writing they practise, do not work in isolation. Their work is created for and exists within this social context, and it is only within this social context, that their work can be addressed adequately.

Having defined what racism is, and the context within which writing will be analyzed, I will identify three trends in newspaper writing that this paper will focus on.

The Trend of Maintaining & Recreating Racist Stereotypes

The first, and probably the most obvious one, this trend is a disturbing example of the portrayal of Elijah Harper, the Manitoba MLA, in the media during the Meech Lake defeat. The strongest image that was portrayed of Elijah Harper was that of him softly saying no, with a feather in his hand.¹ This racist stereotype of the noble savage has been one that was created of First Nations peoples and had been used to justify their enslavement over centuries.

Another such example was a report by Associated Press, titled *World's most-married man*, 81, says 28th wife will be 15 year old.² The readers are informed that this 81 year old white American Baptist minister, the world's most married man, has in his possession two wedding dresses for handy use. Of course the dresses are different sizes. His current wife is a 19 year-old Filipino woman, and he wants her to pose nude for Playboy magazine so that she can earn the \$10,000 that he needs for a new wife. It is reported his current wife, Daisy, is wonderful. She is a sexually uninhibited oriental sex kitten, a stereotype that we know well. The words mail-order brides do not crop up even once in this report which poses as objective, journalistic reporting, despite the fact that this new wife will cost \$10,000.

In another piece by a medical reporter, we are told that Asians Shun Blood Clinics.³ There is a photograph of a worried looking doctor in his white lab coat. It is explained to us that Asians use blood from the Red Cross, but don't like to donate blood. Apparently Asians equate it with losing virility, and have trouble understanding that it's a totally renewable resource.⁴ The picture that is created by this report is that of greedy, blood thirsty (literally!) Asians, drawing out and sucking away the life blood of whites, and remaining unable to comprehend the most basic medical facts.

Yet another stereotype is perpetuated in a report by an immigration specialist. This piece is called *The motivation for a phoney marriage*,⁵ the focus this time is on the Indo-Canadian community. A much abused loophole in the Canadian Immigration service is phoney marriages, and arranged marriages are especially prone to being phoney. Arranged marriage is the only form of marriage which is singled out for detailed discussion. Whether it is in fact true that the rate of arranged marriages is high among marriages that are found to be phoney, or on what basis such an assertion can be made, the writer does not feel obligated to explain. No data is offered. In western society individuals choose their own spouses. But we are in the minority, he tells us. Who is this we in western society? Obviously this excludes peoples of Indian origins who are legal citizens of Western countries! So, are Indo-Canadian marriages phoney? Well, um, ah, here comes the gem. With a Western-style marriage it can sometimes be difficult. Towards the end of the piece we are told

that apart from fake refugees, phoney marriages create the most commonly abused loophole. Again, no dowry and arranged marriages by Indo-Canadians are linked to fraudulent marriages.

The Trend of Exclusion

Examples like these can be cited ad nauseam, but let us move on to consider the second trend. This is the trend of exclusion. Exclusion by silence results in not acknowledging or validating peoples' diverse experiences, while only white mainstream concerns and experiences are deemed to be valid and legitimate. We have seen how the piece on immigration excludes Indo-Canadians in the reference to western society, meaning of course only whites in western society, and excludes the experience of peoples of colour who live and are born in the west as being a legitimate part of this western society.

Let us go back to the example of the coverage of Meech Lake. The discussion in the newspapers was restricted to the concerns of the English-speaking white Canadians and the French-speaking white Canadians. In what is officially defined as a multicultural society, the concerns of First Nations peoples and peoples of colour were excluded from the discussion. It was only with the defeat of the Meech Lake Accord that some of the First Nations peoples' concerns were addressed. For the rest of us peoples of colour, to this day there is only silence. Total Exclusion.

It needs to be pointed out that apart from the exclusion in the actual writing, the media and publishing are dominated by white males. This is the experience that is written about, published and read. It is readily available and hence accessible. Thus people of colour are excluded from this industry, and we have white experts whose writing about us is projected to be more legitimate than our own writing about ourselves. Our voice continues to be excluded and silenced.

In a piece called *Newsrooms should include more minorities* panel told,⁶ a report on a panel discussion on multiculturalism and the media tells the readers that both visible minority issues and visible minority media workers are under-represented in this industry. And the report ends with the information that the Vancouver Sun will be establishing a quota system whereby reporters from visible minority communities lacking skills will be favoured over reporters from non-visible minority communities who are better qualified. The problem is thus turned from one of racist discrimination against visible minority peoples and their issues into that of the visible minority communities not possessing the required skills and qualifications for jobs in the media. There is no lack of skills and talent in our communities, such an assertion is an insult. It is statements like this that give rise to charges of reverse discrimination and obscure the real forces in operation, that of racist discrimination against the talented and skilled visible minority community members.

Universalizing the experience of White culture and identifying it with Civilization

The third and last trend is that of universalizing the particular experience of white culture and identifying that with world civilization. All other cultures are measured against the values of this white culture civilization, and of course are found lacking as the very development of this white culture was based upon the destruction of colonized cultures and societies. Thus the piece on arranged marriages and immigration equates courtship and romance with western style marriage. Arranged marriages are said to be decided upon by parents and family, and so are linked with phoney marriages. The question of the couple being married having some say in their marriage is not even mentioned, and the suggestion is also left hanging that they are forced. Rather than focusing on forms of marriage, and then putting them up for scrutiny, the similarity between arranged marriages and western style marriages, i.e. both are forms

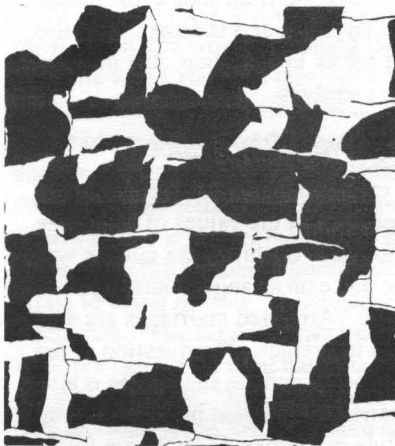
of marriage, is denied and instead the piece shifts to equating one form, i.e. arranged marriage, with deception and fraud, and the other, i.e. western marriage, as not being inherently prone to being phoney. In the report *Asians shun blood clinics*, all Asians are defined as being ignorant of medical facts, unwilling to donate blood for the good of all members of society. The underlying image being projected in all these reports is that of backward, uneducated practices in backward, uneducated communities. In February 1989, a poll carried out by Angus Reid⁷ showed the following results in British Columbia:

- 23% of the respondents said they believe immigrants take away jobs from Canadians. This figure rose to 36% in August 1989. The national average was 29%.
- 63% of the respondents considered immigrants to be driving up house prices. The national average was 29%.
- 36% of the respondents agreed that immigrants are a drain on the Canadian health care system. This figure had increased to 41% by August 1989.

In August 1989, 43% of the respondents felt there are too many immigrants coming into Canada.

And this at a time when there is so much concern for the falling birthrate in Canada that a fierce attack was launched on women's rights and accessibility to abortion by Bill C-47. This Bill seeks to criminalize abortion and will make both the women who have abortions and the doctors performing abortions, except in the case where the women's health is endangered, liable to criminal prosecution. The message is clear, white women should be producing more babies, but immigrant (read peoples of colour) are not wanted and are only a drain on the Canadian economy.

Polls often touch just the tip of the iceberg. The Angus Reid poll's results are indeed alarming, and if these results indicate just the tip of the iceberg, the times ahead look stormy indeed. The attitudes recorded by the poll are not unrelated to the increased level of racism that pervades newspaper writings. Of course other factors are also in operation that have heightened racist hostility and intolerance in Canada at this particular historical juncture. But as mentioned earlier, the newspapers are the most widely and regularly read form of writing, and their role in constructing social reality cannot be ignored. This form of writing poses a challenge to anti-racist forces in this country and the insidious forms of racism that pervade it have to be rooted out.



FOOTNOTES

1. The *Vancouver Sun*, Saturday, June 23, 1990. The Weekend Extra section carries a photograph of Elijah Harper with a feather in his hand.
2. The *Vancouver Sun*, Wednesday, July 12, 1990.
4. Dr. Noel Buskard, Director of the Canadian Unrelated Bone Marrow Registry and associate professor of medicine at the University of British Columbia, is credited with that quote. *The Vancouver Sun*, Tuesday, June 12, 1990.
5. The *Vancouver Sun*, Tuesday, July 24, 1990.
6. The *Vancouver Sun*, Saturday, June 9, 1990.
7. Reported in *Cultures West*, Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of B.C., Vol.9, No.1, April, 1990.

In The Heat Before The Monsoon

by SALONI NEGI

Last summer, my French Canadian colleagues never failed to be amused when I complained about the heat. My brown skin and Indian roots, they seemed to think would make me splendidly suited to hot, humid, energy-sapping days.

I started to think about the woman who did the ironing for much of my aunt's neighbourhood in New Delhi.

Once I went to visit New Delhi. I arrived there in late June, a few weeks before the monsoon, when the city is infernally hot. The heat hits you from all sides. Its weight bears down on your chest and shoulders, making it difficult to walk or breath or think.

My aunt's neighbourhood is a comfortable one. During the dog days of June, people nap away the afternoons or drink cold lemonade in air-conditioned rooms.

The woman who did the ironing in my aunt's neighbourhood lived and worked in a corrugated metal shack on the roadside. She was assisted by her seven year old daughter and nine year old son. They were the pick-up and delivery service.

One day I walked to the neighbourhood market to rent a film video so that I could while away the afternoon. The video rental store wasn't more than five minutes away, yet on my way back I felt giddy with heat.

It was when I was ardently looking forward to a cool bedroom, a video and a glass of beer that I saw the woman at work.

I saw the woman's slim muscular arms and callused hands, and the sweat that soaked them. Lifting that iron required an



effort every time. You see, it was one of those old fashioned types that have to be filled with coal. On that blisteringly hot afternoon, she and her children were heating coal in a metal shack.

Then next time somebody cracks a stupid, fatuous joke about my unIndian inability to tolerate the heat, this is what I will tell them.

I will tell them that people don't get used to misery. The poor may be forced to accept their lot in life, but that does not mean they don't suffer from it and chafe at it every day.

I will say that this woman, her children, and the hundreds of millions of others on this planet who are the poorest of the poor, are no better suited to hardship than you and I are. They are also no more deserving of it than you and I are.

I will tell them that pain hurts all the time. Yes, that is what I will say.



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In Canada

by *New Moon*

In Canada

The cold is like your conscience
It gets you, whatever you may put on
to cover up

Here we go again
Chilled to the marrow
Pacing an empty house in weird attire
Anything to keep the chill at bay
There's a one-day sale today
I heard a friendly voice
on the radio say
Ladies' coats gloves mitts
An absolute giveaway
...But who's to pay?

Perhaps the fault is in my resume...

In Uranium City

Gazing at aurora borealis
A man's legs got so cool they had to amputate them
It's around the time of year when
Accu-weather tells you in how many seconds
human flesh freezes

In Canada

The cold is your conscience and your guide
Survive it
or gently subside
into the snowy oblivion
of welfare cheques
at wintertide

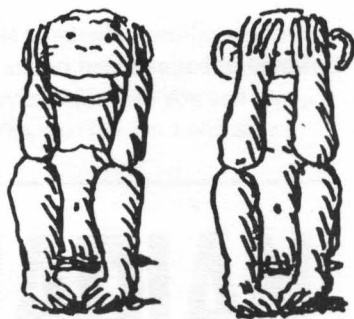


ALIEN PASSENGER

by Sharifa Sharif

The subway bus is full of men and women.
A woman is embarrassed and aloof
She pulls her skirt and
steels glances away
she sees
A naked thigh displaying a woman's body
and sinks in guilt and shame
looks around
An arm closes around another arm
With thirst and lust a man and woman sit
She sweats of shame and fear
And looks around
The faces, eyes and hands
Are held together firm
But her hands are numb and loose
Hanging from her own body
She rubs her palms together
Sweat runs through all her fingers
She blinks hastily, worried
And spreads her around
Scattered, left and right

The woman is a stranger
Her body shies away
Her 'whole' is smashed in unnumbered pieces
Her dress, her looks, her tongue
Are strange, exotic, weird



Prayers freeze in her throat
A muslim alien woman
Grown up in blame and guilt
Denies her 'self' and her nature
Curses 'womanly' needs
Feels rotten about sex
Feels guilty for her being

She learns
To not be seen
To not be heard
To not be touched
Feels guilty at seeing another woman
Being
So human, so free and so honest
with her needs

The subway creeps in the dark
The woman stands instable
in the middle
And the question burns her brain:
"Where is the stop for me?"

