



SALGA

SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION • NOVEMBER 1994 • VOL. 1 NO. 2

WHAT'S NEXT?

A SALGA Status Report

by Vinay

Like other social and political organizations of its size and scope, SALGA has been through its inevitable cycles of frenzied activity and slothful apathy. If the recent history of the organization in the past few months is any indication, we seem to be on a rather energetic upswing as more members are participating in the political work and social play that holds the group together. I want to summarize briefly some of the work that we have done in the past few months and outline the projects that we are working on in the future.

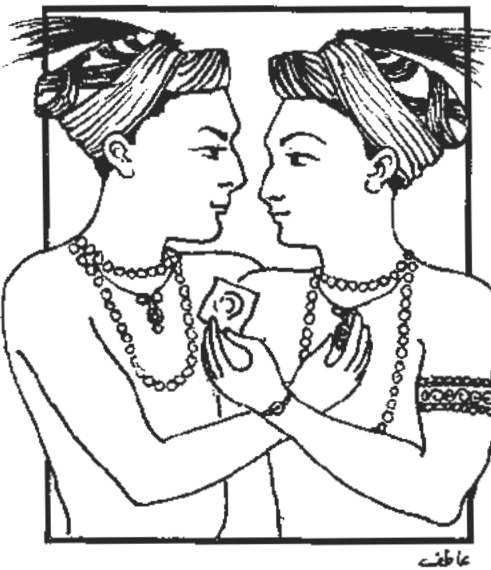
The Stonewall 25 March on the United Nations and the *Pride-Usav* Conference, both held in June of this year, played a significant role in catalyzing SALGA out of a period of inactivity. The euphoria of being surrounded by other South Asian queers from around the country and the bold example of Trikone's success as an invaluable community resource in San Francisco (and through its magazine, around the world), incited several SALGA members to re-organize and re-prioritize the missions of the group. Our angry and adamant response to the Federation of India Association's blunt denial of our right to march in the India Day Parade affirmed our commitment for recognition by the greater South Asian community (despite the limited rewards of marching through a largely disinterested or hostile crowd). It wasn't all work, though: many SALGA members will not soon forget that memorable summer evening when we dirty danced at the bhangra concert in Central Park much to the horror (or jealousy?) of the hip young banjee mall rats and their picnicking parents.

Issues such as coming out to parents and dealing with homophobia in the South Asian community still continue to haunt many SALGA members. Our frustration with the seemingly infinite capacity for ignorance and hatred in South Asian communities has lead us to begin work on longer term educational projects which aim to educate South Asian youth in high schools and colleges about homophobia and to provide information to our parents to ease the process of accepting their children's sexuality. By tapping into the well established (continued on page 2)

LET'S TALK ABOUT (SAFER) SEX, BABY!

by Javid Syed

Knowledge does not automatically lead to behavioral change. There are lots of factors that mediate the translation of any knowledge into behavior. In terms of 'Safer Sex' behaviors, the variables that have been shown to impact on its translation into behavior include self esteem, self efficacy, drug use, having peer norm and peer support regarding safer sex, and risk perception (do the individuals see themselves at risk).



In thinking about my personal history and through my association with various SALGA members, I have come to realize that issues such as suicide, eating disorders, and unprotected anal sex are quite common in our community. Though all these issues are very complex and have no single causative factor, I am certain that issues of low self esteem do play a part in them.

Risk perception is highly correlated with getting tested for HIV: people who perceive themselves at high risk are often people who get tested for HIV. Amongst my SALGA cohorts, I do not know of anyone who gets tested regularly. This is even more surprising in light of the fact that going to public sex places and getting drunk and picking up people at bars are not infrequent occurrences (continued on page 2)

COMING OUT AND OTHER CONTEMPORARY RITES OF PASSAGE

South Asian American Sexuality in the Nineties

by Priyamvada

Among my generation of South Asian American twentysomethings, I have been hearing grumblings of discontent lately. As the spectre of marriage looms in our not-so-distant future, more and more of us are realizing that we are not satisfied with the options accorded us in the heterosexual and "traditional" scheme of things.

Most of our families would prefer us to marry someone of the opposite sex, and of a similar ethnic, religious, and economic background, by our mid-twenties at the latest. Some of us, both queer and straight, have formulated alternate ideologies toward not only marriage as an institution, but also toward our sexualities in general. Some of us simply do not believe in marriage, like we do not believe in organized religion, while others wish to marry other than the choices offered to us by our parents in the "modern" arranged marriage.

I consider myself falling into both of these categories. In this era of sperm donors, increasing gender-parity in the job market, and extended notions of guardianship, women certainly do not need a traditional, heterosexual marriage in order to survive financially and culturally. And, I certainly do not want my options limited to any one gender, race, religion, or class.

However, as many of us South Asian Americans are realizing, there is a dear price to pay for transgressing norms of a cultural institution like marriage. Parents and other family members may be willing to accommodate the desires of their children, but only to a degree. Certainly, their racism, classism, and homophobia become painfully obvious when it is in regards to their own children. Some parents might be able to tolerate a white person marrying their child, but rarely have I seen South Asian parents whole-heartedly accepting other People of Color, such as African Americans or Latinos, into the family.

And I have only heard of a handful of South Asian families that would accept their (continued on page 2)

WHAT'S NEXT? (continued)

resources of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG), we hope to develop culturally specific brochures and support networks for our parents. The Heurick Martin Institute (HMI) for Gay and Lesbian Youth has offered to train SALGA members to do presentations at high schools in largely South Asian areas such as Queens. We have also been invited by gay or South Asian groups at colleges to discuss the problems and issues involved in being lesbian or gay and South Asian.

There is clearly much work that remains to be done before our presence in the South Asian community is accepted. With some perseverance, planning, and work, that time might come a little sooner.

If you're interested in participating in any SALGA projects, you can leave your name and number on our voice mail line or attend our monthly general meetings at the Center.

LET'S TALK (continued)

amongst members of our community. Both of these activities increase the chances of having unsafe sex.

I also believe that in order to facilitate a candid discussion of safer sex the people involved should be made to feel supported and not judged. Yet, when one SALGA member found out about another's unsafe sexual encounter, his response was, "I can't believe you would do this, even after you know better. If you do anything like this again just don't tell me. I don't want to know." Attitudes such as these need to be reconsidered as they impede the creation of an atmosphere in which people can bring to fore their concerns regarding safer sex.

I have no reason to believe that my view of the SALGA membership differs in any significant way from that of the rest of the group. Yet, I do not sense a pressing desire amongst the group to discuss issues relating to safer sex. I wonder whether it is because this need is met through some other communities that we access. But I think there are so many issues that come into play in safer sex that are specific to our South Asian identities that a discussion in SALGA on this topic would yet be productive.

SALGA will be organizing a discussion based on the issues raised in this article at our next meeting on November 12.

There will be no December issue of the SALGA newsletter. Look out for a special double issue in January!

COMING OUT (continued)

children marrying or becoming committed to someone of the same gender. As a South Asian American lesbian, I see myself as eventually finding someone to share my life, and nine chances out of ten, I am sure that someone will be another woman.

In the face of our families' initial homophobia, many gay, lesbian, and bisexual South Asian Americans have had to search out other means of support and nurturance in our lives. We have

"networks of 'created' families have often been the key to our survival"

forged wonderful communities in urban areas with a thriving gay and lesbian scene, as in New York City where I currently live. In many cases, such networks of "created" families have often been the key to our survival.

By "coming out," or publicly declaring their sexuality, some of my South Asian American friends have lost the emotional and financial support of their parents and the family network. Many have gone for years literally without speaking to anyone in their family, and have endured economic hardships of finding new homes and prematurely ending their schooling, among other things. For those who had depended on a student visa to remain in the United States, and who are not legally allowed to work anyway, they have had the choice either to return to their country of origin or to find under-the-counter jobs as undocumented citizens.

Faced with these weighty choices, many South Asian Americans choose not to come out. I, for instance, did not come out to my parents for two years. After receiving my degree and becoming financially independent, however, I decided that there was no reason to continue living a life of secrecy and subversion.

In addition, despite my protestations, my parents had been actively pursuing the perfect "modern" arranged marriage for me. After my first appointment with a prospective husband, who was actually quite nice, I realized they were extremely invested in the process. Though these "modern" arranged marriages work very well for some, I simply did not see it as a feasible option for my future. I had had a girlfriend for over a year, and certainly could never envision myself marrying a man, or even marrying.

My parents' pushing the card of marriage therefore made coming out to them an urgent necessity. I could no longer use the excuse that they were being premature ("Mom, wait till after college!"). Coupled with my increasing visibility in gay and lesbian activism, I was left with no other choice but to tell them.

After explaining to them that I seriously wished to pursue other options beyond the "modern" arranged marriage, I finally felt in control of my life. Also, I was sure I could now have a more open and mature relationship with my family. In time, my parents will learn to respect my decisions, especially as they see other South Asian Americans making similar, non-traditional, choices with their lives.

Certainly, the more South Asian Americans there are out there, who openly assert their desire for sexualities beyond the traditional, heterosexual norm, the easier it will become to take our rightful place within the greater community of South Asians. Indeed, with the increasing diversity of young peoples in the United States and their ever-broadening options, it may mean the very survival and strength of South Asian American family networks to accept all of those it now shuns. Otherwise, we risk dividing our families, and therefore seriously weakening one of our few sources of support and power in the United States.

This article will also appear in the December issue of Masala magazine.



Sexy SALGA T-shirts for Sale!



SALGA t-shirts are still available for \$10 at all our meetings and socials.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

◆ Check out the new novel, **Funny Boy**, by Shyam Selvadurai (published by McClelland and Stewart) about growing up gay in Sri Lanka.

◆ A new queer South Asian group has formed in Boston called **MASALA** (Massachusetts Area South Asian Lambda Association). Their next meeting will be held on November 20. Call 617- [redacted] or e-mail Rana at [redacted]@ [redacted].tufts.edu for more information.

◆ **KHUSH-DC** is a group for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the D. C. metro area. Their meetings are at 6 p.m. on the 2nd. Saturday of every month at Luna Books (1633 P St., NW, Washington DC). For more information, contact Sharma at 410- [redacted]

◆ The Naz Project, a London based AIDS activist organization, is hosting a conference in Bombay from December 27 – December 31, 1994 for "gay men and men who have sex with men" called **Emerging Gay Identities in South Asia: Implications for HIV/AIDS & Sexual Health**. For more information, call the Naz Project at 44- [redacted]

◆ **Out of Darkness**, the public candlelight march in observance of World AIDS day on the "Night Without Light" will take place on December 1, 1994 at 7:15 p.m. in Washington Square Park. The march will proceed at 7:45 to City Hall for the AIDS Memorial Vigil.

◆ **MIX 94**, the 8th. New York Lesbian & Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival, will be showing films of interest to us: check out their **Circuit Breakers** screening, a collection of short films "guaranteed to short circuit all your notions about ethnicity, gender, and desire." One of the films screened, *Destiny/Desire/Devotion*, is by Zahid Dar about "a generation clash in the South Asian diaspora." Sunday, November 13 at 8:00 p.m. at Anthology Film Archives (32 2nd. Ave. @ 2nd. St.). For a related event, check the SALGA Calendar on the last page. Call 212- [redacted] for more information.

◆ **KHUSH** is an Internet forum for discussing issues relevant to the South Asian lesbian, bisexual, and gay communities. If you have access to e-mail, you can subscribe by sending e-mail to [redacted]@ [redacted].harvard.edu

◆ **GAPIMNY** (Gay Asian Pacific-Islander Men of NY) meets on the third Friday of every month at 8 p.m. at the Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center.

Disco Diwali! ❄

❄ Join us for our annual Diwali Party and fundraising extravaganza! We will have a DJ spinning *bhangra* & house dance tracks; food and drinks will also be available.

❄ The Diwali Party is open to everyone. Bring your friends, family, and lovers. ❄

9 p.m. — 1 a.m.
Saturday, December 10, 1994

❄ \$8 Admission
Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center
208 W. 13th. St. (between 7th. & 8th. Ave.)
Call SALGA at 212-909-9081 for details. ❄

Tell all your friends!



SALGA CALENDAR

Saturday, November 12, 4 - 6 p.m.

SALGA General Meeting & Social

Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center
208 W. 13th. St. (between 7th. & 8th. Ave.)

Our monthly meeting and chill-out time at the Center. This month, we're going to talk about safer sex, focussing on the issues that confront us as South Asian lesbians and gay men. \$3 suggested donation.

Sunday, November 13, 2:00 p.m.

¿World Clique? Queer Festivals Go Global

Anthology Film Archives
32 2nd. Ave. (at 2nd. St.)

Mix 94, the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival will be conducting a panel discussion on queer film festivals around the world. Participants include Trikone member, Hima B., who will discuss her work in organizing the queer film festival in India.

Call 212-807-8258 for more information. Free.

Wednesday, November 16, 5 - 7:30 p.m.

Forum and Speak-Out for the Lesbians of Color Project

Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center

SALGA is a co-sponsor of the National Center for Lesbian Rights' Lesbians of Color Project. \$3 suggested donation. Call 212-343-9589 for more information.

Wednesday, November 30, 8:00 p.m.

Unhinging

Judith Anderson Theater
422 W. 42nd. St. (between 9th. & 10th. Ave.)
212-501-2106

SALGA member Gita Reddy acts in *Unhinging*. SALGA has reserved a block of tickets (\$10) for this show; if you're interested in attending, leave your name and phone number on the voice mail line.

Saturday, December 10, 9 p.m. - 1 a.m.

SALGA Diwali Party

Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center

This will be in place of our regularly scheduled SALGA general meeting in December. See inside ad for more information about the party.

For up to date information about all SALGA events, meeting times, and locations, please call our voice mail line at **212-909-9081**.

CLUB & BAR GUIDE

The following bars and clubs are frequented by South Asian lesbians and gay men.

Bars

The Break

232 8th. Ave.
212-627-0072

Friend's Tavern

78-11 Roosevelt Ave., Jackson Heights.
718-397-7256

Uncle Charlie's

56 Greenwich Ave.
212-255-8787

Wonder Bar

505 E. 6th. St.
212-777-9105

Clubs

Clit Club

432 W. 14th. St. 212-529-3300
Friday, \$5 (women only).

Club 58,

40 E. 58th. St. 212-308-1546
Saturday, \$7.

Crowbar

339 E. 10th. St. 212-420-0670
Friday, \$3 (80's pop music); Saturday, free.

Hatfield's

126-10 Queen's Blvd., Kew Gardens.
718-261-8484
Wednesday, free & Saturday, \$5.

The Monster

80 Grove St., 212-924-3558
Friday and Saturday, \$5.

Sound Factory Bar

12 W. 21st. St. 212-206-7770
Friday, \$12.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Free confidential legal consultation concerning immigration rights, anti-Asian violence, etc. For an appointment, call 212-966-5932.

Asian/Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA)

212-349-3293

Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV)

An organization committed to combatting racist violence and police brutality.
212-473-6485

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)

212-807-1700

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC)

212-807-6664; for GMHC Safer Sex Workshops, call 212-807-6655.

Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center

208 W. 13th. St. at 7th. Ave.
212-620-7310

Lesbian and Gay Immigration and Asylum Task Force

Meets 3rd. Monday of every month at the Center.
212-995-8585

Sakhi for South Asian Women

A NY based organization committed to ending violence against women of South Asian origin.
212-695-5447

South Asian AIDS Action (SAAA)

212-239-1451 x6126

YAAR

A South Asian civil rights organization fighting racism and discrimination.
212-886-1831

The South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) is a social and political group for lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men who trace their descent from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, Guyana, India, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tibet, Trinidad & Tobago, and Uganda. Our meetings are open to South Asians only; all are welcome to our social events. Our monthly meetings are held on the second Saturday of every month at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center from 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Credits: Editor: Vinay I. Varughese **Layout:** Alif Toor **Writers:** Priyamvada [redacted] Javid Syed, Vinay [redacted]

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