



SALGA

SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION • OCTOBER 1997

SUMMER REVIEW

INDIA DAY CELEBRATIONS

by Ashu

We kicked off the Indian Independence Day Weekend festivities with a poster-making party at APICHA (Asian and Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/ AIDS, Inc.) with Javid, Saeed, Richard, Roy, Ananya, Dimple, Jaishri, and I where we did our best to make the most provocative, incisive, colorful posters. We were also joined by a *New York Times* photographer who documented our session. We were already in the midst of a media frenzy with press coverage in *Newsday* and brief mentions on Channel 4 and Channel 7 News. Although *Newsday* provided a well-balanced story (thanks Jungwon!) the TV news stories provided a brief addendum regarding SALGA to their self-congratulatory pieces on 50 years of Indian Independence (i.e., see the recent Indian issue of the *New Yorker* which includes the most bizarre essay ever written by our megalomaniacal Salman Rushdie).

On Saturday, thanks to FOIL (Forum of Indian Leftists) we held a press conference at the Brecht Forum where the group from the Youth Solidarity Summer was concluding its week of workshops, performances, and lectures. A dozen or so teenage *desi* boys and girls from around the US were being prepped for community activism/ future academia, rather than the more traditional paths of medicine, engineering, etc. Why wasn't there something

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OUR PRESENCE AT PAKISTAN DAY

by Ananya

The Pakistan Day parade was somewhat better organized than the FIA's parade (which would have been better run if SALGA had been called upon to organize it— if not just participate in it). It started on time and completely caught SALGA folks (all seven of them still trying to recover from the night gone by) completely off guard!! The other aspect of the organizing that was perfect was the Police protection that was (over) generously delivered this time. We had prime seating to enjoy the full-view of the entire parade (all two-floats of it). One thing I was trying to figure out as I noticed some boys who were— erhm . . . apparently agitated by our presence— if so very angry, boys, then why take so many photos, hrumm?

The high point of the parade, for me, was watching Atif leap—no—sail over the barricade to join all the other Lahori *bhangra* boyz who headed off the procession. Afterwards, we wandered down to the *mela* (flanked by our police "protection") handing out SALGA flyers to a reasonably receptive community. Many people actually stood around and read our fliers that we had translated into Urdu and some even came back for more! We finished off the day with a rendezvous at our sweet Shaheen to celebrate the end of colonial rule in South Asia over *alu paratha* and *masala chai* victory—*desi* style!

SALGA DOES PRIDE 1997

by Faraz

For those of you un-lucky ones who didn't make it to New York City, SALGA celebrated Pride weekend with great fanfare and enthusiasm. The weekend started with a fab reception at Javid's loft. The party was basically to welcome out-of-towners to the Big Apple, and though the *samosas* were cold and cut into halves (heck, we are a small grassroots organization always in need of donations.... hint hint!), the atmosphere was warm and many long-lasting friendships were forged, if you know what I mean!

The "ladies" spent the next day putting last minute touches to their wigs and went out hosiery shopping. What a bonding session, like a masala version of "Waiting to Exhale". Mean-while the boys (yes honey, we *do* have a few of those in SALGA too) got the SALGA-Mobile ready and operational for the big day. All these activities were interrupted by regular tea & *samosa* breaks at Shaheen's.

Finally, night fall, and it was time for the much anticipated Pre-Pride SALGA dance called "Color me Queer", a fund-raiser benefiting in part the Audre Lorde Project. Needless to say, the dance floor was wall to wall with gorgeous *desi* dames and dudes. Not to forget the amazing drag queens who provided much Glamah and Drama to the floor. The boys and girls bumped and grinded to the luscious grooves of D.J. Rekha into the

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INDIA DAY continued

like this when I was growing up?!

At the press conference, SALGA was joined by reps from SAWCC (South Asian Women's Creative Collective), Workers Awaaz, and APICHA. Although there were promises from the mainstream and Indian newspapers to attend the event, the conference was a press-free zone. This may be attributed to the high-profile protests taking place in Brooklyn. Nevertheless, we had a fruitful discussion and fielded questions from the audience. Afterwards, I danced with the young *desis* from the conference and drank smuggled beer with the organizers.

The big day began at breakfast where I opened the Sunday Times metro section and saw a fairly large picture of myself and Jaishri with an accompanying article on the SALGA protest/alternative celebration at the parade. After I recovered from seeing myself in a national newspaper, I hiked over to 28th and Madison and joined the rest of the gang where we awaited the parade. I was happy to see all sorts of faces there from SALGA,

SAWCC, FOIL, APICHA, and the Youth Solidarity Conference. A very colorful Zen lead the chanting and the odes to Amitabh and Jeetendra's lost youth ("*Mera Sapno Ka Raja Kab Aaega Tu*") and the stone faced crew from the FIA (Federation of Indian Associations). We received a welcoming gesture from a member of FIA, who elegantly gave us the finger. Other than that, the response was quite nice and sometimes extraordinary, especially from the high school floats who cheered our group. In fact, I detected an excited smile and nod of recognition from a few over-eager high-schoolers. Oh well, give them a little time and the SALGA voicemail number. Our chants ("We're here, We're Queer, We're Vegan!") and signs were met with puzzlement. However, it was quite a fun time and good to see the various South Asian progressive groups together at one event. Afterwards, we joined arms and walked through the crowds while Zen shouted various slogans including "Shabana Azmi Zindabad! Go See Fire!!" A chant which confused some aunties who thought that Shabana was a relative of ours.

PRIDE continued

wee hours of morning. On the big day, Vidhur's hotel room at the Grand Hyatt doubled as drag head quarters for SALGA, nothing but the best for the *Desi Divas*! The room was a mess of safety-pins, saris and shrieking primadonnas trying to cover up their eye bags from the night before.

The parade itself was spectacular. The SALGA contingent was amongst the most original and colorful. The crowd was wowed by their dancing and D.J. Geeta's music. The Salga-mobile, although not a Mercedes, had a hood ornament no less glamorous—Vidhur decked out in full bridal garb (courtesy SALGA's diva designer—Zen).

The most memorable moment was when the generator for the sound system ran out of gas, but was soon revived by the heroic efforts of Tim who ran several blocks to the nearest gas station for supplies. The loud cheer let out by the entire SALGA contingent, as "*Choli Ke Pechay*" came back on, depicted the true meaning of the parade: Love and Unity!

FUN AT THE FILMS: THE NEW FESTIVAL'S PROGRAM

Desi Dykes and Divas was a clip show lecture by SALGA's very own Dyke and Diva—Gayatri and Javid. This program, that was part of the New Film Festival, examined Queer images in popular Indian cinema that are available for Queer South Asians both in the subcontinent as well as in the diaspora. The images ranged from same sex interactions that were ripe for queer readings (e.g.: *Mughal-E-Azam*, *Sholay*), to a celebration of camp classics that redefined the category of camp (e.g.: *Mandi*, *Utsav*, and *Helen*—need I say more!). It also showcased clips that depicted strong women, femmy men, and those that shed light on the treatment of characters that were explicitly non-heterosexual (e.g.: *Subha*, *Holi*). The clip show

concluded with a collage of images from Queer film makers of South Asian descent, both from the South Asian subcontinent as well as the diaspora (e.g.: *BomGay*, *Hindustan*).

The New Festival also had a program celebrating a diversity of depictions of South Asian Transgendered Experiences. The films in this program included *Jareena: Portrait of a Hijra*, *Julpri*, and *A Mermaid Called Aida*. These films were stories of gender, immigration, class, and community and dealt with how these various realities intersected to allow for certain options of gender identity, work, and community to emerge, while closing off other ones.



By Jungwon Kim
STAFF WRITER

South Asian gay rights supporters say they are planning an "alternate celebration" to the city's annual India Day Parade Sunday because of an ongoing dispute with event organizers.

The South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) said it has been effectively barred from participating in the parade since 1993, relegating it to the sidelines of the Indian community's largest cultural celebration.

The clash between culture and sub-culture is reminiscent of the six-year dispute between organizers of the St. Patrick's Day Parade and the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization.

The Federation of Indian Associations, which has organized the parade for the past 17 years, has prevented the group's participation for the past several years through "bureaucratic obstruction," said SALGA member Javed [redacted] in order to mask its "virulent homophobia."

"Their tactics have changed, but I think the intent is still quite the same," [redacted] said.

The president of the Federation of Indian Associations, Kamal Chaudhary, said SALGA is not allowed to march this year because it is not a member of the FIA.

Although SALGA was allowed to march in the 1992 parade after the city's Human Rights Commission intervened, its status as a nonmember has prevented it from joining the festivities since then, SALGA said.

[redacted] said his organization requested federation application materials several times over the past few years but has been met with a "trail of unresponsiveness."

Despite the conflict, members of the 600 member group for gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the tri-state area said they still want to participate in the festivities.

Friday marks India's 50th year of independence from British colonial rule. Parade organizers said they expect more than 200,000 people on Sunday to watch the parade.

SALGA announced yesterday it will hold its own celebration of Indian independence with members of other community organizations — including the Asian and Pacific Coalition on HIV/AIDS and the South Asian Women's Creative Collective — along the Madison Avenue parade route at 32nd Street.

"We are just as important a part of the community, and we need to be heard," said SALGA member Jasanti Abichandani. "FIA isn't the only organization that represents the Indian community. This is about being able to come to the parade as we are and represent ourselves the way we choose to."



Members of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) who took out a separate parade to mark the golden jubilee and to protest the decision of the FIA to bar them from taking part in the parade. (Photo: Mohammed Jaffar/Snaps India)

SALGA received quite a bit of media coverage for our exclusion from India's 50th Anniversary and alternative celebration with The South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC), Forum of Indian Leftists (FOIL), Members of the Youth Solidarity Conference, and Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA). Some members formally responded to *The New York Times's* misrepresentation of our coalition, which described us as "upstart organizations that are more interested in American-style political advocacy than in maintaining cultural ties to their home countries..."

New York Times 8/17/97

Groups Plan Protest At India Day Parade

Gay Organizers Barred From Celebration

By SOMINI SENGUPTA

It has become an annual August ritual: for the last three years, as New York City's Indian-Americans have celebrated their homeland's independence from British rule with a march down Madison Avenue, gay and lesbian Indian-Americans have been barred from the parade have held an independent, boisterous celebration of their own.

At today's India Day parade commemorating 50 years of independence, it will be no different. Members of the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association and their supporters plan to wave gay pride placards along with the green-and-orange Indian flag on the sidelines.

The controversy has exposed rifts in one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the New York region: small, upstart organizations that are more interested in American-style political advocacy than in maintaining cultural ties to their home countries are publicly flouting the authority of established leaders like the parade organizer, the Federation of Indian Associations.

"I think it represents a bigger issue of younger leaders with alternative definitions of the community and a different kind of leadership for the community," said Madhubika Khambhwal, acting director of the Queens College Asian American Center. "The lesbian and gay issue is just part of that."

The parade protest, she said, signals an inevitable shift in the way a new ethnic community defines itself in the United States. Dr. Khambhwal said the protesters see themselves as South Asians rather than as members of ethnic groups like Gujaratis, for instance, or even as Indians in

Delhi status. They also tend to be concerned about issues like racial and sexual equality. The federation, on the other hand, is more rooted in India than in this country.

In many New Yorkers, the controversy may be reminiscent of the St. Patrick's Day parade, that other midtown march of green and orange flags that has drawn protests from excluded gay and lesbian groups.

Officials with the federation, an umbrella group of dozens of Indian ethnic organizations from the Rajasthans of the north to the Tamils of the south, had said in the past that the parade was open only to groups that were dues-paying members; the gay group and others proving the federation's line also said they considered displays of gay pride to be incompatible with a parade celebrating Indian pride.

This year most, but not all, of the parade participants belong to the federation, said its president, Kamal Chaudhary. He stressed that he did not personally object to homosexuality, but he said he was vexed by all the fuss about gay participation. "We are here celebrating the 50th anniversary of India's independence," Mr. Chaudhary said. "There are people wasting time talking about these gays and lesbians."

The gay group said it did not apply to march this year because it had been repeatedly rejected, an allied women's group said it applied and did not receive a response. Mr. Chaudhary said he did not recall whether either group had applied to the federation's 22-member board.

Still, the protesters who collected by all themselves the South Asian Progressive Task Force, say they want to celebrate being Indian and



Jasanti Abichandani left and Ashu Rai of the South Asian Progressive Task Force preparing protest sign calling for the inclusion of a gay and lesbian organization in today's India Day parade on Madison Avenue

gay. "We are contesting their construction of our sexuality," said Javed [redacted] who is Indian. "That if we are present, we are not legitimizing India."

In the past, the gay group was also barred from the Pakistan Day parade, which will be held next Sunday. Last year, a parade official said homosexuality was against Islamic teachings and "against common sense."

But this year's parade committee, headed by Dr. Chaudhary, has agreed to let members of the gay group march, so long as they leave their gay pride banners behind. Dr. Chaudhary said he was concerned about their safety. "Sometimes, one little troublemaker can cause a lot of

trouble for the whole crowd."

Mr. Chaudhary said his group was still negotiating with the organizers about how they would participate in the Christian Day parade.

Those negotiations were unlikely even 10 years ago, Dr. Chaudhary recalled, because gay and lesbian South Asians were simply not a visible, organized presence. Mr. Vaid, the director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, said she was dismayed by the federation's decision to exclude the gay group from today's parade.

"We could be working together," she said, to address concerns about immigration, racial discrimination and violence. "But she was optimistic about the fact that gay and lesbian

South Asians would be at that parade — even if on the sidelines."

In another twist this year, there are new divisions among the protesters. In the past, the gay group was joined by a women's organization known as Sakhi. But a few months ago, one faction of Sakhi that organizes domestic workers seceded, leaving better feelings on both sides. This year, Sakhi will not be among the protesters, the organizers will

For the moment, we see the child being born of the old trade ship," Dr. Khambhwal said. "But the challenge is not really unified. There are divisions among them that are very obvious. There are also rifts, she said. "I think it happens with all immigrant communities."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, October 16th

Shifting Grounds for Asylum: A Symposium on Female Genital Surgery (FGS) & Sexual Orientation.
Time: 1:30 pm – 8:00 pm
Location: NYU School of Law, 240 Mercer St.
For more info: (212) 998-6374
This symposium examines the role the U.S. asylum law plays in the debate between "universal" human rights norms with "local" cultural values and practices and how that plays itself out around granting asylum to women fleeing FGS and people fleeing from anti-gay persecution.

Monday, November 3rd

Persimmon Space: Coming to Fruition and Coming Out
Time: 6 pm – 9pm
Location: Cendrillon, 46 Mercer St. (btwn Grand and Broome St)
For ticket reservation info: (212) 620-7287 ext. 317
Join APICHA in celebrating the opening of Persimmon Space, the first NYC based Asian & Pacific Islander HIV women's project to serve API women who have sex with women.

Saturday, November 8th

SALGA Monthly Meeting
Time: 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm
Location: The Center, 208 W 13th St. (btwn 7th and 8th)
This meeting will feature Giti Thadani, one of the founding members of the Sakhi, a lesbian group in Delhi, India. Giti has published work on the ancient Indian gynefocal practices and traditions and how they were subverted or subsumed by the advent of patrilineal, phallogocentric traditions.

Saturday, December 6th

South Asian Women's Creative Collective Event
Time: 6:30 pm – 10:00 pm
Location: To be announced
For more info call: (212) 631-3532 or email: SAWCC@juno.com
This evening will showcase the works of various South Asian artists. After the performances there will be a panel discussion on conservatism in the South Asian community.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25TH!

SALGA's next fabulous fundraiser bash: THE 3RD ANNUAL DISCO DIWALI PARTY at Studio 18 • 6 East 18th Street from 10pm to 3am. See enclosed flyer for more details

THE AUDRE LORDE PROJECT'S First Anniversary Gala

Saturday November 8th, 1997

Program (to begin promptly) 6:30–8:00 PM
Mingling and light reception 8:00–9:00 PM
Photo exhibit: Coloring Our Pathways: People of Color Building Communities

Speakers and performers

KATHERINE ACEY
Executive Director of Astraea
National Lesbian Action Foundation

DR. JACQUELINE [REDACTED]
Veteran activist

DR. GLORIA I. JOSEPH
Black feminist writer & social activist

DIANA [REDACTED]
Latina spoken word and video artist

SHY WOMEN SINGERS
Native women's singing group

REGIE CABICO
poet, performance artist

MC: SULTANA

The Audre Lorde Project is a recently created center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, and Transgender People of Color communities.

Initiated as an organizing effort by a coalition of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, and Transgender (LGBTST) People of Color, The Audre Lorde Project was first brought together by advocates for Gay Men of Color (a multi-racial network of gay men of color HIV policy advocates) in 1994.

The vision for ALP grew out of the expressed need for innovative and unified community strategies to address the multiple issues impacting LGBTST people of color communities.

The Audre Lorde Project secured and moved into its Fort Green home, in the parish house of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, during the summer of 1996 and held a grand opening celebration in November 1996.

Directions to ALP

The Audre Lorde Project in the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church (LAPC), 85 South Oxford Street, Brooklyn, NY
Take the A train to Lafayette Avenue – South Oxford Street exit or take the 2,3,4,5,B,D,Q,N,R trains to Atlantic/Pacific Station – Hanson Place or LIRR exit

Space is limited. Reservations are strongly encouraged. For ticket and contribution information call: (718) 596-0342

All proceeds will benefit The Audre Lorde Project, Inc.

If you require child care, please call (718) 596-0342 ext. 12 by Friday, October 31st to make arrangements.

THE AUDRE LORDE PROJECT, INC.
85 South Oxford Street, 3rd Floor
Brooklyn, New York 11217
Tel: 718-596-0342 • Fax: 718-596-1328
Community Info Line: (718) 596-0016

SALGA-NewYork is a social and political group for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people who trace their descent from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet as well as people of South Asian descent from countries such as Guyana, Trinidad, Kenya, etc. Our monthly meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month from 3:30 to 5:30pm at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center 208 West 13th Street. Our meetings are open to South Asians only. All are welcome at our social events. For up to date info on SALGA events, call our voice mail line at 212-358-5132. For inquiries, leave your name and number so your call can be returned.