



SALGA

SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION • MARCH 1995 • VOL. 2 NO. 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SALGA-NY

by Niraj

SALGA turns four years old this spring. It was in late February of 1991 that about a dozen men met for the first time, to form a group which eventually became SALGA.

In the early days, we made some decisions that have shaped SALGA ever since. That the newly formed group will be for both men and women was not a given. It was argued that men and women have very different concerns and cannot work together. This argument was overruled in favor of at least making an attempt to do so.

Pragmatically, the group decided to call itself South Asian Gay Association (SAGA), with the understanding that the term "gay" was used as a synonym for "homosexual," not restricted to gay men. As soon as the first women began participating in the group, the name was promptly changed to South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association.

Whether the new group was to be restricted to South Asians only was hotly debated. One side argued that any development of a queer South Asian identity or community could not take place if we were constantly interrupted by ignorant (even if well-meaning) non-South Asians. The other side wanted the group to be open to everyone. Again, a pragmatic compromise of restricting meetings to South Asian queers but opening social events to everybody was reached. This tension between these two different visions of the group has resurfaced repeatedly during the last four years.

And what was the purpose of the group? The varied answers to this question were codified in the form of the SALGA charter accompanying this article (*see right*).

After only a few months of existence, we marched in the Gay Pride March and have done so ever since. This serves not only as an expression of our pride and joy, but also increases our visibility within the queer community. Similarly, we have marched in the India Day parade for the last three years, fighting for our visibility as queer South Asians.

We have had wonderful parties and created invaluable friendships. Bringing people together and creating

(See History on page 2)



SALGA-NY CHARTER

To create and develop a South Asian gay identity in cooperation with other South Asian gay, lesbian and bisexual groups.

To create an enriching South Asian gay, lesbian and bisexual community in the New York metropolitan area which provides support in our lives as gay men, lesbians and bisexuals.

To provide a framework whereby South Asian gay men, lesbians and bisexuals can come together in a friendly and supportive atmosphere, creating solidarity and community through various support groups.

To encourage self awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem as South Asian gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, through discussions, seminars, workshops, and other like activities.

To deal with the issues that confront us as South Asian people and as gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, whether in the South Asian communities or in the general community.

To provide social and recreational activities that reflect our South Asian cultures and our sexuality.

To promote the practice of safer sex among South Asian lesbians, bisexuals and gay men and to provide support to South Asians living with HIV/AIDS.

To reach out into South Asian communities as a resource and a link for those who find themselves lonely, isolated, insecure, afraid and persecuted because of their sexuality, from family, friends and community.

To act as a resource for information/research and expertise to the community, both South Asian and general, through regular notices, articles, letters, conferences, etc.

To fight, in cooperation with other like-minded groups, to end oppression of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in general, and for our dignity as South Asian gays, lesbians and bisexuals in particular.

To fight racism within the gay, lesbian and bisexual community in New York in cooperation with other like-minded groups.

To fight for ending sexism and discrimination against women in all forms.

To link up and network with any and all South Asian gay, lesbian and bisexual groups, wherever they may be.

To assist, to whatever extent possible, groups and individuals working for the removal of social stigma from homosexuality and ending the oppression of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in South Asian countries.

The South Asian Lesbian & Gay Association in New York is a political, social and support group for gay men, lesbians and bisexuals of South Asian descent. SALGA-NY is open to all South Asian gay men, lesbians and bisexuals who have links with South Asia by birth. That is, those that come from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet or are descendants of those from South Asia irrespective of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, region, caste, marital status or political affiliation.

History (continued from page 1)

a safe space for them has been a big achievement. We have also contributed to the formation of similar groups in other cities on the east coast.

The biggest and the most intangible success is the gradual change within us, giving us confidence as queer South Asians, helping reconcile the queer and South Asian within us. We are closer to creating a South Asian identity based on our sexuality and in creating a gay, lesbian and bisexual South Asian community than we were four years ago.

SALGA has had only limited success in providing a comfortable and attractive enough space for lesbian/bisexual women to join in equal proportion to the men. While women have always been some of the most active members, their low numbers remain a continuing challenge in upcoming years.

Avoidance of dogmatism has enabled SALGA to not only survive and grow for four years, but to remain largely free of factions and cliques. May it continue to be so in the future!



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SPEAKING FROM THE VERY INSIDE

by Priyamvada

Written in the ground-breaking spirit of classic Third-Wave Feminist works such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua), the recently published *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Lesbian and Bisexual Asian and Pacific Islander Women* (ed. Sharon Lim-Hing) strives to bring together a diverse yet contradictory world of queer women of color concerns without yielding to cacophony. Fully aware that such endeavors into anthology creation spin out of control without clearly articulated parameters, Lim-Hing, a Boston academic, explicitly lays down her ground rules for the structure of her effort.

Falling into line with a burgeoning movement towards bi-acceptance, Lim-Hing stresses her need to include bisexuality within the rubric of queer women of color literature and art. While reinforcing crucial principles of inclusion, she also emphasizes the need to question ossified and archaic notions of sexual identity that result in phobias antithetical to queer empowerment.

Lim-Hing also wrestles with her anthology's complicated usage of identities such as "Asian" and "Pacific Islander." She asserts that "Asian" in her context

describes simply "women who identify some part of their heritage or origins in Asia," real or imagined. Therefore, women of multiple heritages (Asian and non-Asian), of white-adopted families, and of far-flung diasporic ancestries, all can and should be included. She admits her struggles with incorporating work by Pacific Islander women realizing that issues uniquely theirs are still in the process of being articulated within hegemonic Asian and Asian-American concerns.

Bringing additional fire to the debate over delineations of "Asian," Lim-Hing specifically highlights the need to involve women of South Asian heritage more fully in the discussion around Asian and Asian-American identity. She points out the vastly different meanings of "Asian" internationally, and the logic therefore of letting go of limiting notions of a geographic "Asia." Indeed, the anthology includes many South Asian names: some established and familiar, such as Shani Motoo and Suniti Namjoshi, some newer and rougher, such as Svati Shah.

The Very Inside ultimately poses more questions than it resolves, but beautifully. Speaking of such vital and necessary concerns as identity and community formation, desire and love, inspiration and the daily struggle to survive, the Asian and Pacific Islander lesbian and bisexual women within it take their many differences and similarities and create art.



Illustration courtesy of Sharmakarti

SALGA-NY DOES DC

by Malik

Khush-DC hosted its first party/fundraiser, the *Pakora Party*, the weekend of February 3rd, 1995. Six members of SALGA-NY rented a van to go down and actually managed to leave Atif's apartment only half an hour later than originally planned. It took an hour to go across town and through the tunnel and in southern Jersey we got caught in the worst snowstorm to hit the East Coast this winter. But Trent's careful driving got us through the storm as we skidded through Delaware and arrived at Yassir's apartment at midnight.

We were met by a welcoming committee of Khush-DC members, who promptly plied us with stiff drinks, as we relaxed in Yassir's well-appointed flat. Food was the next thing on our minds and so off we trotted to Kramer Books where we had dinner while listening to awful country music. We were joined by Vineeth, Vinay's charming sister, who can be an honorary queer any time she likes!

The highlight of the evening was the snowfight that took place outside the café with strangers joining in and tossing snowballs across Connecticut Avenue. We all piled into Vineeth's car and drove to Atul's apartment where most of us were being put up.

The next morning Javid made *upma* which we washed down with Atul's *elaichi* tea and spent a lazy day indoors. In the evening we went out to dinner and then to the party at Sanjay's apartment. There was a good turnout of about fifty people and it was an occasion to see old acquaintances and meet new ones. The party finally broke up around 3 a.m. and we staggered into assorted beds and arms. At brunch the next morning queers arrived, tricks in tow. We left at 2 p.m., dropped off Mohan in Baltimore, and arrived in New York Sunday evening, tired but happy.

OUR OUTREACH WORK CONTINUES

by Vinay

One of SALGA's major goals has been to persistently remind people that we exist, in the hope that we be readily available as a resource for South Asians who might want to peek out of the closet. To that end, we have spoken to student groups at universities, local community organizations, and at events held by other queer groups. We are further developing our outreach work by training SALGA members to conduct workshops.

Several SALGA members recently attended two workshops organized by SAAA (South Asian AIDS Action) and the Hetrick-Martin Institute. The SAAA workshop focussed on providing us with the latest information about HIV transmission and prevention and how to communicate that information effectively to South Asians. Important cultural issues such as the pervasive silence in South Asian communities on all matters sexual forced us to rethink the dominant models of discussing

safer sex advocated by most AIDS prevention organizations.

The Hetrick-Martin Institute organized a trainers' workshop to help us develop methods for talking about sex and sexuality with younger audiences. We hope to use the knowledge and skills acquired there to create workshops for South Asian youth to discuss their sexuality candidly.

Since the two training sessions, SALGA has been invited to conduct a workshop at Cornell University for South Asian college students titled "Let's Talk About Sex, Baby: South Asians Discuss Sex and Sexuality." We have also been invited by Manavi, a South Asian women's group in New Jersey, to be part of a panel discussing gender and sexuality. Several SALGA members will also be participating in a panel discussion at the *Black Nations/Queer Nations* conference on how queer people of color groups can work together (see *Calendar*).

OTHER QUEER DESI ORGANIZATIONS IN THE NORTHEAST

Khush-DC

Meets at 5 p.m. on the first Saturday of every month at Luna Books, 1633 P Street NW, Washington DC for gay, lesbian, and bisexual South Asians only. Social from 6 p.m. is open to all. Nearest metro is at Dupont Circle. Contact Sharma at 410- for more information or call the Khush-DC voice mail line at 202-728-3870.

SALGA-Philadelphia

Meets at 4 p.m. on the first Saturday of every month at Action-AIDS, 1216 Arch Street in Philadelphia. The meeting is open to lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered South Asians only. Others welcome after 6 p.m. For more information, call Kevin at 215-

MASALA

The Massachusetts Area South Asian Lambda Association meets on the third Saturday of every month at 4 p.m. at the Positive Directions office in the Downtown YWCA in Boston, Suite 805, 140 Clarendon Street. The meeting is for lesbian, gay, and bisexual South Asians only followed by a social open to all. Call Rana at 617- for more information.

The Khush List

To subscribe to the Khush list, a South Asian lesbian, bisexual, and gay e-mail discussion forum, send a one line e-mail message saying "subscribe khush" to @huse3.harvard.edu.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ◆ The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) will be marching in the **St. Patrick's Day parade**, despite opposition from parade organizers. Show your support — if you're interested in marching with them, show up at the steps of the New York Public Library at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, March 17.
- ◆ Check out *Strawberry and Chocolate*, a Cuban film directed by Tomás Gutiérrez about the relationship between an older gay artist and a straight college student.
- ◆ APICHA (Asian & Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS) is looking for a couple of SALGA men to serve on their Gay and Bisexual Men's Project advisory committee. If you're interested, call Jerome at 212-
- ◆ **Color Life!** is a quarterly lesbian, gay, and bisexual magazine for people of color. Available at fine bookstores in NYC.
- ◆ **Shamakami** is a newsletter for South Asian feminist lesbians. For more information, contact Nusrat at 301-
- ◆ K. S. Kulkarni's paintings will be exhibited at "The Figure in Modern Art of India" at the Bose Pacia Modern Gallery at 580 Broadway (2nd. floor) in Soho. Call 212-388-9089 for more information.
- ◆ The Hetrick-Martin Institute offers training for volunteers interested in working with gay and lesbian youth. For more information, call 212-674-2400.
- ◆ SALGA maintains an **employment folder** containing listings of jobs currently available in the New York lesbian and gay community. For more information, leave a message on the voice mail line.
- ◆ The **Jacks of Color** sponsor monthly safe-sex parties for gay men of color. Call 212-827-5302 for more information.

DESI + QUEER + DANCE = ONE DAZZLING NIGHT

SALGA STARDUST PARTY

SATURDAY • APRIL 15, 1995 • 9PM — 1AM

CELEBRATE OUR 4TH ANNIVERSARY AND PRIDE '95 FUNDRAISER WITH OJ GEETA [\$8-\$12 SLIDING SCALE]

AT THE LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY CENTER

208 WEST 13TH STREET • BETWEEN 7TH AND 8TH AVE • NEW YORK CITY



SALGA CALENDAR

Saturday, March 11, 12:30 - 2:30 p.m.

"Queers of Color Talk Together"

The Graduate Center of CUNY
33 W. 42nd. St., Room 732

SALGA members will be part of a panel discussion on how queers of color can work together more effectively at the *Black Nations/Queer Nations* conference. For more information about the BN/QN conference (March 9 - 11), call 212-642-2923.

Saturday, March 11, 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.

SALGA General Meeting and Social

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

Join us for our monthly meeting and social time. In addition to getting to know each other and chit-chatting, we will be talking about our plans for SALGA's fourth anniversary party in April. Afterwards, dinner in Jackson Heights followed by a wild *Eid* (you don't need to be a Muslim to attend!) party at Ahsan's apartment in Queens. Details available at the meeting.

Thursday, March 16, 7:30 p.m.

"The Curse of the Goddess"

Community Education Center
3500 Lancaster Avenue, Philadelphia
(take the 10 trolley from the 30th. St. station)

SALGA-Philadelphia member Mohan [redacted] (a.k.a. Ms. Tina Turner for those of you who were at the *Disco Diwali* party) stars in this show along with performances by other artists. Tickets are \$8 (\$6 for students and seniors). Call 215-387-1911 for more information.

Early April, Date TBA

A Language of Their Own

Joseph Papp Public Theater
425 Lafayette St.

An Asian-American gay play by Chay Yew starring B. D. Wong and others. Exact date and time to be announced later. If you're interested in attending, leave a message on the SALGA voice mail line.

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

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 Queens Blvd., Kew Gardens.
718-261-8484
Wednesday, free & Saturday, \$5.

The Monster

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

Soca Paradise

205-20 Jamaica Ave., Hollis
718-464-3600
A largely straight *desi* crowd
but hey, you never know!

Sound Factory Bar

12 W. 21st. St. 212-206-7770
Thursday - Sunday, \$6 - \$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)

212-620-7287

Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAY)

An organization committed to combating 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.

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