



S.A.L.G.A.

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1996

SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION

Independence Day Parades / Moments of Oppression?

Once again this year, SALGA was prohibited from marching in both the Pakistan and India Day Parades. Manahar [redacted] President of Federation of Indian Association (F.I.A.), told SALGA that only member groups or groups sponsored by membership organizations would be allowed to march in the Indian Independence Day Parade. All of

Pakistan Day Parade. Mr. [redacted] abruptly ended the call by hanging up on us.

Faced with such a charming response what choice did we have but to turn up with our well made lesbian and gay faces at both parades. Dressed up in our *lungis*, *luchas* and *cholis*. Sahira, Vinita, Faraz, Javid and Chandan dragged it up in their various

gender appropriate butch/femme drag (with the boys wearing the dresses of course). Faraz did his Punjabi *mutyaran* look (fans of Anjuman can imagine the visuals) while Salim was wearing a red *chunney* tied around his waist and very little else. Judging by the number of cute 'straight'

boys who approached him, he certainly had a lot of reasons to celebrate.

Notes on the fashion choices of our SALGA freedom fighters aside, our protest at both the parades did manage to educate our community in a significant way. The response from the community at large was overwhelmingly positive at both the parades/ protests. We wanted to celebrate with our *desi* compatriots not oppose their celebration and judging by the response we got it seemed like most of the folks felt the same way. A lot of the younger folks were delighted by Javid's and Faraz's fab dresses and kept on beckoning us to join them. It seemed like our exclusion from both

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Pride- A Desi Love with apologies to Aretha

Hello Sweets,

What a great summer it has been for SALGA, lots of fun in the sun, . . . and actually a lot more fun when the sun is gone! Hmmm, anyway, moving right along . . .

The summer started with a *dhamaka* with the Queens Lesbian and Gay Pride March. SALGA was there in full force. The drag queens were there wowing the crowds while the boys and girls were the ones actually exchanging numbers. Still, their stunning outfits (thanks to our SALGA artist/seamstress in residence Zen) did not go unnoticed and the enthusiasm of the not so stunningly clad but still beautiful and enthusiastic contingent won SALGA the "Screaming Queen" award from the parade organizers. This award, as no doubt you will be proud to know, is given for the most original and expressive interpretation of this years parade theme 'Pride Without Borders'. I guess as a diasporic community we were in a good position to do so, you think? Anyway, the parade ended in the middle of the *desi* ghetto of Jackson Heights. Post-parade as SALGA went into the community some 'straight' individuals of our community got hands on consciousness raising on the existence of South Asian lesbian and gay people leaving them sweating in their *sadlas*, *salwars*, sandals, skirts, and such. But then honey, sweating doesn't necessarily only imply discomfort.

Between the beginning of June and the end of June (the Queens Pride and Manhattan Pride Parade) time and money was spent wisely and efficiently on creating outfits that would be so fabulous (and uncomfortable) they could be worn (read endured) only

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SALGA
South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association

Celebrates
India
&
Pakistan's
Independence

contact no. 212 294 2555

photo: Faraz

SALGA's Fabulous India Abroad Ad.

SALGA's efforts to find out further information about membership/ sponsorship were met with elusive responses, and general lack of options even though other groups in similar positions were given suggestions on how they could get sponsored and thereby participate in the parade.

The Pakistan Day Parade committee members did not even resort to the excuse of logistical problems to bar SALGA from participating. On the contrary, Mr. Mohammed [redacted] (the Pakistan Day person we spoke with), was quite blatant about his homophobia. "We don't want to see your lesbian and gay faces at the parade" he shouted. After threatening to get us arrested if "our gay & lesbian faces" turned up at the

(Pride continued.)

once, that too for a only 3 hours, once in a lifetime. Not true! Time was also spent re-focusing away from individual vanities to community possibilities as SALGA prepared for its Pride Celebrations. SALGA used the fact that a lot of out-of-towner *desis* visit NY during Pride and organized a reception for people to meet the townies/diaspora (this is not a misspelling it is *Mallu* phonetic spelling). The focus this year was on collaborating with the larger communities of Queers of Color and this was reflected in our reception and party attendance. Yaaay! The SALGA party and reception was cosponsored by various NYC based Queer People of Color organizations such as Asian Lesbians of the East Coast, Gay and Lesbian Arab Society, Colombian Lesbian and Gay Association, Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York, etc. and part of the funds raised were given to the Audre Lorde Project Queer People of Color Community Center in Brooklyn. The reception and party were incredible successes with Fiaz, Hamid, and Nina Chiffon regaling the over 600 people attending the later event. These social events were not only great moments of South Asian Queer culture production of a particular genre; they were also great because they brought together queers, primarily of color, from places as diverse as L.A., Islamabad, Taiwan, Boston, Toronto, Bombay, Trinidad, phew- I have one word for you-*arre* dissphoda (not misspelling-phonetic spelling Gujarati style so back up off this *bhen*).

After the party some of the SALGA folks went to brave the delicious *Nihari* of Shaheen Restaurant at Lexington Ave. which becomes increasingly Queer friendly the more money we spend there (hmm, maybe I shouldn't be so cynical). The people there are always very sweet and go out of their way (like re-open their restaurant at 5 a.m.) to welcome us. Anyway the daring folks who did eat the *Nihari* had a good incentive to run (oops-forgive my scatological humor) walk the Parade the next day. Even the constant rain that was falling must have felt like salve from heaven on their burning body parts (someone make me Stop!).

Despite the rain, the 70 people strong SALGA contingent *bhangrad* (a new verb that means to dance to

SALGA Women's Events

Do you want to see SALGA do more women specific events? Well, heres a shout out to all those *desi* dykes who want to hang, party, and politicize. Call the SALGA voice line and leave your number if you want to be invited to the SALGA women specific event and leave any suggestions you may have as well. SALGA sisters did get together a couple of times over the summer at a SALGA organized event that had a women only portion. The first time was at G.L. Chengs (the Asian drag bar/ restaurant on 23 rd between 7th and 8th) and then the party moved to the Her/She bar. The second event was a get together at the Kokobar (a lesbian of color owned coffee shop in Brooklyn) and went on to a night of readings from Audre Lorde's works at the Audre Lorde Project. There are going to be more such events coming up so put in your two cents and see them come to fruition.

There are other projects too that SALGA women are involved in such as an 'Asian Women Healing Themselves' named health collective (contact person

Bhangra continuously for over two hours) to our Goddess of Music DJ Geeta in full finery. The outstanding outfits ranged from a traditional *banjaran* outfit modeled by Ritu, to an embodiment of Meera bai and Madonna (I mean the gay diety not Jesus's



Sue [redacted] 212 [redacted] ext. 303), and the Audre Lorde Project named Queer People of Color Community Center in Brooklyn (contact Joo [redacted] 718 [redacted]). If you want to get involved in these projects or want to inform other SALGA women about your projects through our voice-line/ mailings call us.



mother) rolled in one modeled by none other than Neena [redacted] to a cyber incarnation of Medusa who was having a very bad hair day indeed.

The other wonderful thing about Pride was that a lot of the out-of-towners were housed by the various towny *desis*. The abode of Vinita became a *desi*-dyke heaven while Faraz, Salim, and SALGA's new co-ordinator Saeed's home became a sleaze fest for the boys. This type of 'being there for each other' happened at other instances as well when the SALGA family came through for each other in various ways - through heartbreak and paucity, immigration struggles and family trauma, and also in moments of joy and celebration- there was support to be found within the SALGA network. So on that note on our loving, warm and fuzzy SALGA community (that it has been for atleast some people) I bid you a fond farewell- till the next SALGA party my sweets.

P.S.: By the way for all you'll curious folks 'diaspora' is a word that I have learnt that basically means to be living away from your country of 'origin'. Next anicle I will introduce the word deconstruction'- I know you are waiting with baited breath.

Diary of a New York Queen on a SALGA Retreat in the Catskills

Friday 9:30 P.M. Leave NY 3 hours late- not just late, Royally late. Three hours drive ahead, three hours wait behind, and only grass and trees to look forward to- Am I CRAZY! Well I guess at least I am stocked up on a lot of MAC nail polish colors, just in case I get really bored.

Journey was uneventful except for certain someone's (no names of course) fully fledged 'Moonie' at Salim and the girls in the car behind us- and he hadn't even waxed his buns first. Of course they promptly threw up at the sight- any excuse to indulge in bulimic behaviors.

Sat. 10 A.M.: Too many cooks with, "My Mother taught me how to make the best omelet", and the usual, "Get out of the shower NOW-Bitch". Thus starts another happy, sunny day in the Catskills. After last years dismal failure of trying to find a country trail to hike we decided to go to the local family beach. Well, we're family no? Why not?

OK. So maybe Faraz shouldn't have worn his crochet bikini and his 'DEISEL GIRL' T-shirt. But girls will be girls. The hunky life guard was very friendly, but unfortunately clever enough to know when a Queen was faking it. No matter how much I

splashed about and held my breath under water, he still didn't come rushing to save me. OK- so it was just 3 feet of water. And I was in my pumps!

Well, we've all seen how many *desis* we can squeeze in a car- but ever tried *desis* and a rowing boat? After much pushing and showing and a little help of KY, we all fitted in quite well. Boys will be Girls- What else is new? FUN, FUN, FUN!

Sat. 5 P.M.: Leave beach-



descend on local Indian A&P for ice cream, beer, and candy. The pretty daughter behind the counter did her best to be helpful when we asked her for directions to the local gay bar. After frantic calls to NY and still nowhere to go out on a Saturday night, we resorted to asking strangers. "Oh look at her swish, she's got to be a Sister" was the only justification we needed to pounce on strangers. This strategy did work- Thank God, and we would soon be heading in the direction of Woodstock.

Sat. 8 P.M.: Back home- Shower, Shave, Wax, Pluck, Paint, Pout, and OUT- Looking for sweet little lonesome hill billy.

Sat. 10 P.M.: The last gay bar in Woodstock closed down 2 years ago. SHIT! Back to square one. But our pilgrimage wasn't over yet- only slightly interrupted. Pointed in the direction of Kingston, with the promise of a gay club, we set off once again. Met up with a bunch of dubious characters who asked us to follow

them down some dark country roads that supposedly led to some huge gay club- Ha! Think were stupid- Don't mess with us baby, we're New Yorkers. New York is full of creeps tempting you down dark alley ways. Ain't gonna fall for that one!

Sat. 11 P.M.

Bored! Frustrated! Faced with the prospect of going home empty handed. Desperate Queens =

Desperate Measures. "OK. We'll follow you". So off we went following a car full of complete strangers down a deserted country road, with one hand firmly on reverse- just in case. 20 minutes later- Nothing- Getting Worried- Scared-HELP! Then suddenly rising like the black stone in Mecca, in the middle of bloody nowhere, there it was- A HUUUGE Gay club- Fab Music, Friendly People, Cute Men- Phew!. God knows if it wasn't for
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Opening Ceremony and Fund- raiser for the Audre Lorde Project (ALP)

What is ALP?- A Queer People of Color Community Center in Brooklyn!!!! Where? What? Who? Well read on . . .

Audre Lorde Project (ALP) is named after the native New Yorker and daughter of immigrants, feminist, mother, poet, warrior whose work focused on the struggle for liberation among the various oppressed peoples and organizing in coalition across differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. As a Community Center for Queer

People of Color it is dedicated to promoting the physical, mental, spiritual, and political health of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Two-Spirited (a Queer Native American name for themselves) People of Color (LGBTTSPOC). The vision for ALP grew out of a need for unified community strategies to address the many issues that impact our communities.

In keeping with its mission ALP, since its inception, has been involved in working with queer youth of color, immigration issues and how they specifically impact queer communities, HIV/AIDS and a documentation project that will help us keep a history of

our community people.

To introduce the Center to the community and in order to raise funds for future programming ALP having a fund-raiser on the 15th of November, 1996. This event features speakers and performers such as Urvashi Vaid, Muriel Miguel, and Andie Montoya. The tickets for this event range from \$15 to \$ 500. Tickets can be purchased by contacting (718) 596-0342. For further information on all our up coming events and if you want to volunteer for any of our projects please feel free to call our Community Information line at (718) 670-3244.



(SALGA Retreat continued.)

the fact that some Queens only know how to enjoy themselves by getting sloshed & dancing in isolation, none of this would have happened.

Sunday: Slowly, the family wakes up- Late breakfast. Lying on the grass in the sun. Listening to the birds chit-chatty, chit-chatty- What a beautiful day! This is what it is all about. Peaceful, Mellow Sunday Morning. God knows we need it after last night, Un Huh!!!??*?! And the pilgrims progress ain't over yet!

(Independence Day continued.)

parades was based on the prejudice of a small group of organizers. These people were invested in having the parade participants represent the cultures of both India and Pakistan as homogeneous, heterosexual cultures while trying to make invisible the non-heterosexual cultures that have always existed in these countries. Meanwhile it seemed that the larger *desi* communities was more intent on enjoying themselves and seemed inclusive in their *laissez a faire* attitude.

Though it was tiring for SALGA to expend so much of energy protesting the parade organizers homophobia while questioning the value of participating in a parade that



is organized by such a sexist, nationalist group of people; the type of community support we got made it all seem worth it. This support could be gleaned by the fact that a lot of the people at the Pakistan Day Parade, took our fliers, read it, and kept it with them instead of responding in any negative way. This support was also demonstrated by the fact that after the India Day Parade a lot of people approached us for SALGA information, and congratulated us for being present! Hopefully in the years to come the parades will become instances of celebration that are inclusive of the

entire diversity of the South Asian communities. Till then SALGA has an uphill task of standing up against homophobia, and connecting it with the other types of oppressions that a narrow definition of culture and nation propagates.

**For up to date info about
all SALGA events,
meeting times and
locations, please call our
voice mail line at
212-294-2555**

New Friends from Familiar Places

Jump up! Wine down low! Move ya body! These were just some of the exhortations hurtling to us from booming speakers at the Caribbean Identified Lesbian and Gay Association's (CiLGA) blowout bacchanal at Flamingo East on Second Avenue in the East Village. SALGA was out in force to help support our friends in their inaugural social event and gladly complied with the lyrical demands and gyrated to the Island music - from soca and calypso to reggae and meringue.

CiLGA was founded in 1994 and provides a safe meeting place for Caribbean identified lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered peoples. CiLGA enhances member interaction through social gatherings, political activities and a regularly published newsletter. CiLGA also intends to build coalition with different organizations, both locally and abroad. SALGA welcomes the opportunity to be one of those organizations.

My involvement with SALGA has rendered a profound awareness of one facet of my Indo-Caribbean culture. It has been and continues to be a great learning experience and one that I embrace warmly. CiLGA and other Caribbean friends also remind me of my cultural roots. The music, food, people, language and shared experiences, all particular to my Caribbean heritage and culture, strengthens my sense of identity and belonging, and shows how the SA in SALGA means all of our exciting and varied life experiences.

This is my experience as a South Asian and Caribbean gay man and my association with the groups they represent. A delightful position to be in, no doubt, though not without it's moments of schizophrenia. These two organizations not only have an important role to play in the lives of dual identified gay individuals, they also provide an opportunity to form new friendships. This is what SALGA looks forward to- the strengthening of this coalition and the ensuing political and social interaction and support this unity provides.

For more information on CiLGA's activities or to be placed on it's mailing list, please call their voicemail at 212-460-1833.