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Qu'en pensez-vous?

- Let us know your thoughts about the bulletin.
- Que pensez-vous de notre journal?
- We encourage you to send in your stories and articles for upcoming newsletters in any language by the 25th of every month to: **adisun3@gmail.com**
- Écrivez – nous à

By: Dolores Chew

CENTRE UPDATE



Centre Hours

Monday & Thursday 9am—9pm

Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday 9am—5pm

The Centre is wheelchair accessible

Le centre est accessible aux fauteuils roulants.

Membership

Have you renewed your membership this year? If not, you can do so by sending the fees to SAWCC.

Volunteers

If you are interested in helping out at the Centre, please contact Homa (Ext. 102 or homa@bellnet.ca) to coordinate a meeting!

Come to a SAWCC Executive Council MEETING!

All Executive Council (EC) meetings of SAWCC are open to all members. Members are encouraged to attend and participate in SAWCC discussions and decision-making. It's a great way to learn of new initiatives and make a tangible contribution to the organization. The next EC meeting will be on *Thursday 24th April 2014*. We arrive at 6pm, share some food and the meeting starts at 6:30pm.

2014 is an election year for SAWCC!

At our Annual General meeting in June we will elect our Executive Council (EC) which will serve for two years. If you are interested in serving and want to know more about the EC, please contact Dolores Chew: dol-chew@hotmail.com

Membership Renewal

Don't forget to renew your SAWCC membership for the upcoming year!

Please fill out the form below and send it in with the renewal fees.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015

Name:

Address:

Tel. No.:

E-mail:

Amount paid:

(Membership fees: \$7.00 for unemployed people; \$15.00 for employed people; \$100.00 for life-membership)

Signature:

SAWCC statement delivered at the anti-Charter demonstration, Friday 21st March, International Day Against Racism (which marks the anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 in South Africa by the racist apartheid regime in which 69 people were killed). SAWCC was one of the many organizations that endorsed and participated in the anti-Charter demonstration.

I bring a message from the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE of Montreal.

We are so glad that everyone is here this evening to show total opposition to the sexist, racist and xenophobic charter of the Parti Québécois government. We are totally opposed to any attempt to “fix it”, any attempt to modify it, any attempt to say “hijab is okay” but “niqab is not”! We are also totally opposed to those who speak in our name, claiming to be feminists, who wish to save us from ourselves. We are also opposed to those who say that we don't know the true nature of feminism. We are also opposed to secular fundamentalism in all its forms and in all its manifestations.

We are hugely angry with the totally irresponsible and dangerous game that is being played with our lives and our bodies. Those who launched the charter and those who support it have legitimized attacks against women; they have legitimized hate speech; they have legitimized violence by those who seek to teach us a lesson: “Two bullets; it's hunting season, let's go”! and “Let's burn these women and rape them like pigs!” These are the kinds of comments that are circulating today. They demonstrate terrifying misogyny, but they also demonstrate fear of women and the power of women. It is comments like these that the Charter has legitimized.

In Québec, like in other parts of the world today, and in history, we see how nationalism is the last resort of bankrupt regimes. The Charter of Values is a deliberately formulated strategy for a bankrupt nationalism that has run out of steam. And we cannot let the other political parties off the hook as well, when they say,

“Hijab is okay, but niqab is not”, or when they say that in some public sector areas of employment, there should be no hijab worn. We accept nothing less than total equality to self-determine how we live our lives and how we dress.

The Charter of Values is also a distraction – it takes focus off the economic precarity that many women live in. The Charter of Values and the obsession that we hear in the media and in government and semi-government circles about honour killing and forced marriage imply that all other women and children are safe. That is totally untrue. We only have to look each year at the growing number of women and children who are murdered in Québec by male intimates and fathers to know that it is a total lie that only women and children in minority communities, especially Muslim communities are at risk. This is a conscious manipulation of people's fears and insecurities after 9/11. It is also a continuation of settler-colonialist ideology that does not own up to the violence that has been done and continues to be done to indigenous peoples on their own lands.

The Charter is a tool to divide and conquer. We do not accept the tactic of divide and rule – while Québécois vs. minority Québécois. We do not accept the tactic to racialize and marginalize minority communities by focusing on women of these communities. We do not accept the exploitation of marginalized communities in the service of capitalist and neo-liberal agendas. And we do not accept any impositions on women's bodies, by priests, pundits, imams, or the state!

SAWCC is in solidarity with people, including women-identified people who struggle for a dignified life. We oppose all coercion. We support women who refuse to wear the veil because they are being forced to do so, just as we support women who refuse to remove their veils because they are being legislated to do so. Our solidarity is our strength, and we will continue to struggle for our collective liberation, rooted in our diversity and vision for a just society.



Montreal Friday 21st March 2014 – Anti-Charter demonstration

INDIA – THE NATIONAL ELECTION WOMANIFESTO

Sunday, 16 March 2014

As India gets ready to go to the polls for the 2014 national parliamentary election, and as Narendra Modi, 'the butcher of Gujarat' is poised to make himself Prime Minister of India, Indian feminists – individuals, autonomous women's organizations and progressive party affiliated women's organizations have issued a Womanifesto. See below.

A freedom movement for women has caught fire. Citizens across the country are demanding an end to the generations-deep violence and suppression faced by hundreds of millions of Indian women and girls. Voters are calling on elected officials to commit the resources and political will for change now. This Indian Womanifesto is a 6-point plan critical to the freedom and safety, equality and flourishing of India's women and girls. All candidates for the 2014 Lok Sabha should commit to:

1. Educate for Equality: We will implement comprehensive, well-funded and long-term public education programmes to end the culture of gender-based discrimination and violence. These will include: SMS, radio and TV public service campaigns, accessible lesson plans for schools, modules for training teachers and to train professionals such as doctors and lawyers. To this end we will reach men, women, boys and girls in both urban and rural areas.
2. Make laws count: We will ensure each government agency produces a detailed action-plan to implement laws to end violence against women, and we will fund it. We will work with state governments to provide comprehensive services to women who are victims of violent crimes, helping them to fund and set up one-stop, 24-hour crisis centres and safe shelters in each police district, and to give swift financial compensation. We will create and fund a comprehensive scheme to prevent sexual abuse of children, including safe childcare for children in villages and urban jhuggis, and awareness campaigns among children and parents. We will work with state governments to establish responsive and fair fast track courts for crimes of violence against women and raise the number of judges to at least 40 per 1,000,000 population. We will also ensure increased access to accountable legal aid, ensure that money damages are rapidly paid by the State in cases of sexual violence, and create robust witness protection programmes.
3. Put women in power: We will support the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha, and ensure that women will be represented in all councils, committees and task forces related to policy and practice across the board. We will support the adoption of a Code of Conduct to disqualify electoral candidates who have committed offences of gender-related violence and end misogynist comments and behaviour in the Lok Sabha. We will strengthen the autonomous functioning of the National and State Commissions for Women, with experienced professionals being selected through a transparent process.
4. Police for the people: We will establish and enforce a comprehensive response protocol for crimes against women, and publicize it. We will work with state governments to change service rules and ensure police and prosecutorial recruitment, promotion and penalties are made on attitudes and performances based on gender. We commit to implementing police reforms and to ensure that police personnel who breach the new procedures are investigated and disciplined accordingly. We will also establish rape crisis response teams, with rural and urban pilot projects. There will be zero tolerance of moral policing by State/non-State actors.
5. Swift, certain justice: We will support amendments to laws that perpetuate violence and discrimination against women and sexual minorities, and those that directly/indirectly sanction discrimination against women on the basis of religion, caste, sexuality, age, economic status or disability. We will stringently implement the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostics Technique Act. We will support the amendment of existing laws, to remove the marital rape exemption, repeal Section 377 IPC and make sure that the rape of any person is criminal. We will change the law so that consenting couples aged 16 and 17 do not fall foul of rape laws. We will remove the impunity to perpetrators of custodial rape under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and will appoint special commissioners in conflict areas to monitor and prosecute sexual offences. We will enact the Prevention of Atrocities (Amendment) Bill to stop crimes against dalit and adivasi women and commit to a strong law against communal violence that holds state and non-state actors accountable. We will take strong action against racial discrimination and violence against women from the North-East. We will push to enact a special law to combat honour crimes. We will take steps to bring speedy justice in long-pending cases of communal and caste massacres, as well as custodial rapes.

Continued...

6. Economic flourishing: We will ensure secure, dignified, remunerative employment for women. Action plans will be created to secure equal pay for equal work in all sectors; provide creches and other critical support to MNREGA workers; rights, dignity and minimum wage women workers in the organised and unorganised sectors. We will grant government employee status to ASHA and anganwadi workers in 'voluntary' schemes where women work with informal honorariums. We will push to amend the law to address the range of unfair discrimination at work, including in the unorganised sector and we commit to implementing the Central Government mandate under the sexual harassment law. We will bring universal, non-contributory old age pensions for women. We will create action plans to accelerate quality education for girls. We will devise a scheme to ensure that women achieve equal property rights in natal families and fair shares through marriage. Public toilets shall be set up, especially in the poorest areas, and all women will have access to regular, safe public transport. We will ensure development justice for women and respect community rights to resources. Action plans will include infrastructure, personnel, training, monitoring and evaluation, supported by central finances.

Initial signatories

Kamla Bhasin, Adviser, Sangat South Asia • Karuna Nundy, Advocate, Supreme Court of India • Suneeta Dhar, Jagori • Akhila Sivadas • Devaki Jain, Economist and Padma Bhushan Awardee •
 Stree Mukti Sangathana, Mumbai • Urvashi Butalia, Zubaan and Padma Shri Awardee • Juhi Jain
 Ritu Menon, Women Unlimited and Padma Shri Awardee • Indian Women Theologians Forum •
 Kavita Krishnan, General Secretary, AIPWA • All India Progressive Women's Association • Indian Christian Women's Movement • Shweta Goswami, Food for Life, Vrindavan Society • Kavita Srivastava, Peoples' Union of Civil Liberties • Sheba George, SAHR WARU: Women's Action and Resource Unit •
 Swarna Rajagopalan, Prajnya • Ayesha Kidwai, Professor, JNU • Prabhleen Tuteja, Jagori • Janaki Nair, Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU • Kiran Shaheen • Anita Ghai, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College • Ayesha Kidwai • Aatreyee Sen, Foundation for Integrated Research and Development • Amba Salelkar, Inclusive Planet Center for Disability Law and Policy • Lalita Ramdas • Asmita • Kavita Panjabi, Professor of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University • Sheba Chhachhi, Artist • Astrid Lobo Gajiwala • Ramlath Kavil • Supriya Madangarli •
 Amrita Shodhan • Geetanjali Gangoli • LABIA • Sagari Ramdas • Antara Ganguli • Shraddha Chickerur •
 Monisha Behal, North East Network • Anuradha Kapoor, Swayam • Kavitha Muralidharan • Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, Ebong Alap • Helen Saldanha • Rohini Hensman • Satyashodhak, A Feminist Collective •
 Lena Ganesh • Amrita Chhachhi • Nimisha, Olakh • Kiran Shaheen, Writer and Anti-Poverty Activist •
 Shreya Ila Anasuya, Avaaz

There is also a Women's Charter for the 2014 Parliamentary elections in India which can be read at: <http://sacw.net/article7952.html>

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM—GENDER GAP REPORT 2013

Top 20	2013	2012	
Iceland	1	1	→
Finland	2	2	→
Norway	3	3	→
Sweden	4	4	→
Philippines	5	8	↑
Ireland	6	5	↓
New Zealand	7	6	↓
Denmark	8	7	↓
Switzerland	9	10	↑
Nicaragua	10	9	↓

Top 20	2013	2012	
Belgium	11	12	↑
Latvia	12	15	↑
Netherlands	13	11	↓
Germany	14	13	↓
Cuba	15	19	↑
Lesotho	16	14	↓
South Africa	17	16	↓
United Kingdom	18	18	→
Austria	19	20	↑
Canada	20	21	↑

CONSERVATIVES REJECT INQUIRY FOR MURDERED, MISSING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Friday, March 7, 2014, Ottawa

The federal Conservatives rejected appeals for a national inquiry into murdered and missing aboriginal women Friday, drawing the ire of aboriginal groups and opposition critics.

The federal Conservatives rejected appeals for a national inquiry into murdered and missing aboriginal women Friday, drawing the ire of aboriginal groups and opposition critics.

A parliamentary report tabled Friday afternoon made 16 recommendations intended to address the violence faced by aboriginal women in Canada, but did not suggest the government set up an independent public inquiry — something that aboriginal groups and others have long called for.

“We continue to be, I find, treated as second-class citizens. You know, an aboriginal woman could be disposed of and that’s it, that’s all,” Claudette Dumont-Smith, executive director of the Native Women’s Association of Canada, said Friday.

“There’s no new action, just a continuation of what’s in place . . . So what’s that going to change, really?”

Citing police data, the report notes aboriginal women accounted for at least eight per cent of homicide victims in Canada between 2004 and 2010, despite accounting for only four per cent of the total female population in the country.

Statistics Canada data has shown aboriginal women are at least twice as likely to suffer domestic violence than other Canadian women, and the report notes aboriginal women are much more likely than other women to be attacked by strangers.

In all, aboriginal women are three times more likely to become the target of violence than non-aboriginal women, according to the government’s data.

Despite those shocking statistics, the report notes that the scope of the violent situations experienced by aboriginal women is not “fully understood or quantified.”

Numerous groups, as well as opposition politicians, have called for a national public inquiry. Justice Minister Peter MacKay rejected the notion on Friday, saying the time for study is over.

“I do not want to stop the action and the forward-looking policies of this government to stop and have an inquiry,” MacKay said in the House of Commons Friday. “I want to say we will keep doing what we have been doing.”

MacKay has said the Conservatives intend to continue “strengthening” Canada’s criminal justice system to respond to the concerns, and pointed to a number of pieces of legislation passed by the government to do just that.

The report noted that the situation facing aboriginal women in Canada is exceptionally diverse, encompassing the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women, as well as those living in urban and rural settings. Indeed, it suggests a national strategy may not even be possible.

“This diversity of experiences makes it impossible to develop solutions solely at the national level,” the report notes. “The most important role the federal government can play is to support initiatives coming from communities themselves.”

In a dissenting opinion from the committee’s report, the New Democrats suggested the government’s response amounted to little more than the status quo.

“What is shocking is that the government continues to ignore the very passionate calls from families across this country that the status quo is simply not good enough,” said the NDP’s aboriginal affairs critic Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan).

“We had certainly been hearing that people had been waiting anxiously for this report and they’re simply not going to accept (the) status quo, and so I look for indigenous women and children and their families to have a response to this.”

In addition to a national public inquiry, the NDP are calling for “adequate funding” to address the lack of resources for Aboriginal women’s shelters, for housing, and for education for women and girls.

The Native Women’s Association of Canada has identified at least 583 cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women and girls across the country.



By: Alex Boutilier, The Star

http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/03/07/conservatives_reject_inquiry_for_murdered_missing_aboriginal_women.html

To show your support for this issue and demand further inquiry into the cases of these missing women sign the petition below.

To:
 Hon. Kellie Leitch, Minister for the Status of Women
 Hon. Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs
 Dr. Carolyn Bennett, Member of Parliament, St. Paul's, Liberal Critic, Aboriginal Affairs
 Niki Ashton, Member of Parliament, Churchill, NDP Opposition Critic, Status of Women

Call a public inquiry into the hundreds of cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

Sincerely,
 [Your name]

To submit this petition go to :

<https://www.change.org/en-CA/petitions/hon-kellie-leitch-minister-for-the-status-of-women-call-a-public-inquiry-into-hundreds-of-missing-and-murdered-aboriginal-women-like-my-cousin-loretta-saunders>

“SUCH RECOMMENDATIONS JUST CREATE CONFUSION ABOUT ESTABLISHED LAWS”

Sunday 23 March 2014

The News on Sunday (TNS): The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) has declared that it is not mandatory for a man to seek permission of his wife/wives before marrying again and that underage marriage is not un-Islamic. How controversial are these two recommendations? Do they suggest regression as far as women's development is concerned? How do they challenge the Muslim Family Laws?

Khawar Mumtaz (KM): Both positions are controversial and unnecessary at this point and time when the law and procedures related to personal laws are finally becoming known and are being applied. Such positions create confusion and doubts about established laws and reinforce patriarchal thinking. Let us not forget that the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) was promulgated in 1961 after a Committee headed by Justice Abdur Rasheed and comprising of scholars, deliberated on personal laws from the perspectives of different schools of Islamic thought, reviewed personal laws as implemented in different Muslim countries, consulted authorities in Islamic jurisprudence, looked at the current conditions and then framed their recommendations for MFLO.

To challenge them after 50 years, instead of promoting adherence and stronger implementation mechanisms, seems out of place. As I said earlier, such recommendations just create confusion.

TNS: The track record of CII (though its recommendations are not legally binding) has been controversial: it declared that men who practice family planning would go bald; DNA tests are unacceptable as primary evidence in rape cases, and now it is attacking the civil rights of women in Pakistan. Does Pakistan need a body with such rabid views? Does it serve any purpose or further target women in society?

KM: Frankly, in a Muslim country where the constitution is based on Islamic principles, the CII has perhaps lost its utility.

TNS: The CII views come as a reminder of long and winding debate over how the principles laid out in the Quran and Sunnah are to be applied in a changing world; that constitution be declared un-Islamic for being ultra vires of the Sharia. How has this thought affected women's rights, implementation of Family Laws in Pakistan?

KM: There are diverse opinions, as are likely to be on various issues in any society, so also in Pakistan. Important for institutions is to ensure that justice is being dispensed fairly and to ensure that negative practices are not reinforced. The challenging of aspects of the Family Laws from time to time by institutions like the CII of course affects women's rights and leads to violations of the law.

Continued...

TNS: What can be the socio-cultural consequences of the CII recommendation?

KM: The issue of under-age marriage has been discussed extensively in Pakistan. The adverse effects of early marriage on girls, the negative health consequences, stunting of physical and mental growth, denial of their development potential etc. have been documented and discussed thread bare. Permission from existing spouse before remarriage has been a deterrent and helps in ensuring that the first wife gets her due maintenance and rights according to the law. I don't understand how mechanical interpretation of Islam can be used to justify denial of rights. Mechanical interpretations of Islam divested from social reality of today cannot be used to deny justice to weaker sections of society. Such recommendations have socio-cultural implications and undermine equality of genders.



Khawar Mumtaz, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women, Pakistan

TNS: What is the stand of NCSW on this issue?

KM: NCSW has expressed its strong exception to the recommendations. It holds that the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961 was promulgated after serious and in-depth deliberations of an eminent Committee representing all Islamic schools of thought. The Committee reviewed personal status laws of other Muslim countries in the light of contemporary conditions and challenges and then made its recommendations in keeping with the spirit of justice and fairness. The CII should give attention to curbing practices like Vani, Swara and Karo Kari and ensure that women get their due constitutional rights instead of unnecessarily re-opening settled matters. Marriages in Islam are contracts between two consenting adults any recommendation that violates that basic principle is not acceptable. Further, it has been medically established that marriages before 18 years of age have far reaching damaging consequences for the health of young girls and their children and, therefore, must be avoided at all cost.

By: Alefia T. Hussain, The News

RECIPIE

Jugu (Peanut) Cake

A Tanzanian snack best served with masala chai

Ingredients

3 cups raw peanuts (skinned and chopped)
 ½ cup peanuts (skinned and kept whole)
 5 cups flour
 2 cups sugar
 1 tsp baking powder
 1/2 cup oil
 2 eggs
 2 cups milk

Directions:

Heat the oven to 350F.
 Beat the eggs and milk in a large bowl and keep aside
 Mix all the dry ingredients including the whole peanuts
 Add the oil and mix with finger tips to make a crumbly mixture
 Add the egg and milk mixture slowly. It will remain sticky.
 Pour into a 12 inch by 12 inch tray
 Bake for 30 minutes
 Cut into diamond shapes and place on an oven tray
 Heat the oven to 400F
 Bake again for 15 minutes



Lessons from my Grandmother

You were kept at home just as you got excited to read
 They didn't want to send you to school because you reached the grand age of nine
 For fear that school will sow grand ideas in your head.

Just when you were ready to leave your childhood behind,
 You were married off to a man who was more than twice your age;
 At fourteen you found yourself with a five year old step son.

You sailed with your new family to a far off land...
 Before you were eighteen, you had three children of your own.

You were uprooted from all your references,
 But your curiosity made you reach out to the world.

You made friends who inculcated your passion to create,
 Knitting and sowing became your new friends.

You taught me, your granddaughter, how to knit;
 I understood the importance of patience, diligence and utility.

When a room was messy, you said it looks like a girl was born in the room.
 As a woman who gave birth to eleven children,
 You surely knew that giving birth to a child regardless of its sex,
 Amounted to an equal amount of mess?
 You taught me to ask questions.

When you alluded to the future
 You always added ... "if I am around to see it"
 You taught me the impermanence of my existence.

You reminisced about your incapacity to resist your husband's insistence
 To pawn your gold jewellery, so he could wheel and deal.
 You were deprived of your only insurance in your old age.
 You taught me to look after my own back.

-Anonymous

A Love Letter to Feminism

Dear Feminism,

You are phenomenal. I don't have much else to say to you.

I have been struggling to write this letter to you. I have been very confused to say the least. I wasn't and still am not able to put my thoughts on paper. But the fact that I am writing this is in itself proof. Proof of your effect on me.

I don't know if I could list the effects, because I am sure I would miss some. I probably miss half of the mysterious ways in which you affect me. So I will generalize. You have given me a better understanding of myself. And with better understanding came the confidence, and courage to do things. Courage to accept myself. For this I will always be grateful.

-Anonymous

TO APU WITH LOVE

Shortly after arriving in New York from Hyderabad, I remember skipping ecstatically behind my father as he carried a naked, used B&W Zenith through the streets of Astoria, Queens. Since it was before he learned how to drive, there was no old apple-red Impala the size of a boat just yet. And we couldn't afford to take a taxi--a rickshaw, certainly, but not a taxi. So, my father took an Atlaslike stance and up it went on his shoulders.

"Can you even see?" my mother asked him, nervously. "Careful, it's wet over there. Are you breathing?"

Her voice faded as I became lost in the appliance teetering above me. Soon, this innocuous gray box would become my saviour in a new country where I had no grandfather to tell me stories, no rickshaw drivers to take me for rides, no evening walks with my mother and sister to pluck jasmine blossoms for our hair.

It didn't matter that the channel featuring "The Wonderful World of Disney" was a mess of lines and squiggles. At 4 years of age, I sat with my ear to the speaker, using the TV like a giant radio and listening to the tinkle of the magic dust spilling from Tinkerbell's wand. When I think about it now, I know it was a blessing in disguise that I had to fashion my own images of Snow-White and Sleeping Beauty.

One day, after a healthy dose of that wascally wabbit, I discovered NBC was coming in loudly and clearly. I was thrilled that I would finally put pictures to the words. Little did I know that fairy skin was a smooth and hairless alabaster and that fairy hair was blonde and perky.

And so marked the start of my re-education.

During the year's wait to enroll in nursery school, I sat glued to the TV set, a bowl of spaghetti-Os in hand, and absorbed the world inside the tube. By day, I was bombarded with pitches for Barbies in evening gowns and townhouses and for giant doll heads on which I could smear Avon pinks and blues. By night, my one-eyed doll Judy and I slept in between my parents, my head reeling with wishes that my brother and sister would soon come live with us and that I could play on *Romper Room*.

Well, one of those wishes came true when my siblings joined us in New York a couple years later. I welcomed their companionship which I had sorely missed. My sister and brother, who are seven and six years my elder, were flung into the turbulence of an alien culture rather suddenly, since they had to start school as soon as they arrived.

While whisking them off to the local Salvation Army for clothes, my mother and I bestowed bits of American culture. We taught them English (according to Bugs Bunny) and how to ride the subway (never get on the train going to Manhattan) and which foods were "safe" to eat (pizza and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches). What we couldn't quite impart to them was the scoop on American style.

My mother had always been a step ahead of the Hyderabad fashion world, was still contemplating whether the ruffles on a pair of American-made panties went in the front or the back. In India, we all had our clothes custom-tailored to suit my mother's tastes. In Astoria, thrift stores became our fabric shops and my mother, the family tailor.

Silently, we were all going through some kind of transformation, which we faced with a mixture of resistance and naïve enthusiasm. While my parents struggled to support us, my sister and brother were trying to fit in at Junior High School 141 and I was wending my way through Public School 122. At first there were the usual complaints of not having many friends, or not receiving any Valentine's cards. But by kindergarten's end, I started to feel a visible separation between myself and the rest of the children. Through, the third grade, I complained that I never looked like the other kids, that my mother didn't know how to dress me, that my hair was ugly. My mother never denied her cluelessness about kindergarten couture. However, what she absolutely couldn't understand was my fervent hatred for what she saw as a thick head of beautiful, satiny black hair.

In India, she had massaged oil into my scalp and plaited my hair into two ribbon loops. The practice continued even though we were on another continent.

"But no one in school puts oil in their hair," I would argue.

"That's because they don't have such thick black hair like yours," she would reply. "Don't you want it to grow longer and more beautiful?"

Loner? It was quickly approaching my ass; pretty soon I'd be able to sit on it. Although there was a healthy mix of ethnicities at P.S 122, I was the only Indian kid going there at the time. No one else's mother wore a *sari* to pick them up from school.

Wasn't she listening to me? I wanted hair with springy waves. I wanted Dippity-Do curls and bangs, and that cropped, tousled look. Anything but straight, black, boring hair.

My mother finally succumbed to my miserable whining and cut my hair into a shoulder-length *That Girl* flip. Unfortunately, this only fueled my pining to meet Hollywood's narrow definition of beauty. The truth was, there was no going back until the demon seed planted by the Breck Girl played itself out in my beating heart.

As I stood posed with a hammer and chisel, ready to crack the dark brown stone and unearth the more beautiful American me sculpted in glowing white marble, my mother stood vehemently in the way. I couldn't fully comprehend why her ideals of beauty didn't match up with society's. At the time, I felt her insistence that I keep my hair long and avoid the sun ridiculous—more absurd than my fantasies of waking up white and blonde.

Still, somewhere beyond our many battles over hair, a new seed was planted. I was able to grasp by eschewing my heritage, I would not be losing something precious, by giving it away. And what was that something— that *it*? That was the question.

So, I started growing my hair again.

The fourth grade was one of my most pleasant school years, mostly because of my teacher Mrs. Rodvien. She was a wonderfully alert and caring woman who nurtured her students' strengths. She picked up on my writing interest and enticed me to include a poem with each of my reports. No one else had to write a poem about Spain or the Middle Ages, but I did so anyway. I was rewarded with a glimpse beyond the physical into the intriguing beauty that lay within me.

Perhaps that precious experience gave me strength to face the times ahead— the changes that menstruation would bring by the fifth grade. Along with this rite of passage arrived hormonal imbalances and a disinterest that shifted my priorities from playing basketball with the boys to gawking at them from the sidelines. I stepped back and looked into the mirror, wondering what the hell was going on with my body.

Actually, I was excited about getting my period and growing breasts, because it proved that there was nothing wrong with me—that everything was going according to plan. Or so I thought. But then my true hair problems began. No, not with the hair on my head, though my mother still insisted on parting it down the middle and tightly plaiting it into two braids. The problem was the hair growing— with more ferocity every day— all over my fifth grade body. It wasn't so much the sprouting of pubic and underarm hair that concerned me. It was all the *other* hairs rearing their ugly heads— between my eyebrows, above my upper lip, around my jawline, down my neck, around my breasts, down my front to my navel, over my arms and knuckles, right down my legs to my toes. I didn't recall ever seeing a woman shaving her face and "taking it all off" on that Noxema commercial. None of the other girls at school appeared to be walking carpets.

It wasn't before a bully picked up on my insecurities and dubbed me an inhabitant of the Planet of the Apes. When I complained to my mother and sister, they said not to worry about it and to concentrate on getting good grades.

"Did you know that when you were born, your head was already covered with hair?" my mother said proudly. "It's perfectly natural. Your hair shows up more because it's black that all."

"So, what you're telling me is this some kind of birth defect?" I asked with terror.

"No, Nana, you have good genes," she said with a laugh.

TO APU WITH LOVE

That didn't help. Neither did Marcia bonking her nose with a football or Jan's hatred of her freckles; Tabitha's spells or Jean-nie's magic; not even Mr. Softie bomb pops.

So what if my mother, a doctor, was telling me I was healthy? The rest of the world was telling me otherwise. I had to take action.

While doing my homework in front of the Sony Trinitron (my father had traded in the black-and-white Zenith), I took my cue from a Nair commercial. Happily singing, "Who wears short shorts," I slathered the stinky goop on my arms. When my skin started burning I panicked and quickly washed it clean. After toweling off, I gaped in horror at my arms, which were all patchy. I grabbed a Bic razor and shaved the skin.

My peace, however, was short-lived.

In the lunch line the next day, Susan screamed after brushing past me. "Eww! What happened to your arms— they're prickly!"

Everyone turned and stared. I wanted to crawl under the table. I wanted to grab that blond cheerleader ponytail, wrap it twice around her neck and yank. I wanted to choke the last drop of sky from her heavily-lined eyes. But I didn't say or do anything. For the next few weeks, I just wore a hooded zip-up sweatshirt to school.

Despite my mother's prediction, my arm hair grew in much thinner than before. I was thankful for that, but was still quite disconcerted about my facial hair. I couldn't very well cover it up. Would it ever stop growing? Would it vanish one day was mysteriously as it had appeared?

I became distracted from my hair problems when my parents announced we were moving to Long Island. I left the warmer, melting-pot ambience of Astoria and was thrust into the cold homogeneity of green lawns and swimming pools. My parents were on their way to fulfilling the American Dream, and who was I to question it?

So I bucked up. I tried to ignore that people's jaws dropped when I walked into the lunch room, the darkest kid in my junior high school, they told me I talked funny, that all eyes were on me.

Hanging up my street-smart, blue-and-gold Pumas, I tried to get excited about the latest Sassoon and Jordache jeans. I tried to fit in but how could I with all that hair? I was wearing it down now, pinned up at the side with Goody barrettes. The long locks, fanning out behind me served to draw some attention away from my facial hair, but I still wasn't happy.

This time, I turned to my college bound sister and Jolene Bleach. Naturally, the bleached facial hair provided an interesting contrast against my chestnut skin. My new vanishing act was particularly noticeable when the sun hit my face during a game of field hockey.

"Hey you got blond hair on your face. It's so weird!"

"Big deal," I responded coolly, stalling for an ample retort. "What would you know about it? I got a cousin with blue eyes."

I guess some of the girls and boys and my junior high honestly believed that Indians had jet-black hair on their heads and golden hair on their faces, and some of us even had blue eyes. More stupid questions and more stupid answers were to follow.

And so began the re-education of my fellow students.

I should have been happy to get them off my back, but my explanations only suffered to buy me time. Through high school, I focused most of my energy on SAT's rather than dating, but I silently floundered to make sense of those much sought after adjectives: beautiful, gorgeous, sexy, hot.

New York University and the death of my father dumped me into the abyss of an identity crisis. Soon, I was attempting to eradicate societal norms and expectations by cutting my long tresses into a short buzz and donning asexual clothing.

Enraged by all the lies I had been radiated with since I stepped on American soil, I spurned fashion, nutrition, television and medication, transportation and mechanization. I delved into an underground world of the non-glamorous, the non-plastic and that hyper-reality New York City is known for.

As I moved past the anger and on to resolution, I toyed with formulas inspired by college Zen courses: Education + Faith + Truth = Beauty. I committed myself to my writing and it propelled me into a deeper search for the purpose of my existence. I realized that with the wink of an eye, we could render ourselves blind or restore our vision. It was as easy as clicking off the television— not just the ones in our living rooms, but the ones droning in our heads. The '70s had brought us Nair; the '80s, electrolysis; and the '90s the “miracles” of laser technology. The one constant has been droning from television and print advertising— and eventually our own heads— a droning that us feel thirsty, hungry, and in dire need of looking like “the Other,” whatever or whomever that might be. So we continue to shave, bleach and dye our way toward an ideal.

At a local hangout, a female bartender wears a baseball cap etched in glitter with the words “Sexy M.F.” Why not sexy M.F.A.? I muse. My chuckle is cut short when I spy the glint of something on her forehead. It's a sparkling *bottu* perched on her Third Eye. The same symbol of Hindu Faith that propels bigoted groups like the Dot-Busters to commit hate crimes against Indians? The same that made me cringe whenever people started and pointed at my mother in a mall? It's hard to believe that the sacred *bottu* is flaunted by goddess wannabes these days. Wearing crucifixes was popularized by rock musician, and now it's Hinduism's turn, I suppose. Sipping a club soda, I consider if it's a positive or negative thing that the yarmulke hasn't been honored so.

With 1997 marking India's fifteenth year of independent from Britain, I have to wonder if all the hype further exoticized Indians or if it pulled us from obscurity and pinned us under a small cultural limelight? After all, it was also the year that Mother Theresa's funeral was televised; the year that Arundhati Roy, the author of the Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, was lionized in the media; the year that Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* put a spin on Indian domesticity; and the year that the ancient art of *mehendi* was translated explosively into temporary tattoos for the fashionably enlightened and the culturally fashioned. Is America caught in the full-blown phase of extoticizing Indian people, or is it in the next phase of re-extoticizing them? And if so when will the deconstruction of this stupidity begin?

On the same Sony Trinitron from my Astoria days, I watch Apu (the only regular cast member of Indian origin on prime-time sitcom) have an arranged marriage in Springfield on *The Simpsons* and Seinfeld's Elaine (wrapped in a sari and sporting a pierced nose and jasmine flowers in her hair) attend a love marriage in India. Over the next week, the episodes pop up in conversations with people and I laugh.

These days, I meet people who tell me how much they love my skin and hair, and which, by the way, is once again long. “You have such a nice complexion,” they say. “Aren't you glad you don't have to lie out on the beach? You're so lucky. I'm sooo jealous.”

My partner, like most people I've met in my past-college world, doesn't find the hair covering my body out of the ordinary. I suppose this has every bit to do with the fact that I don't either anymore.

Instead, he compared three white hairs streaking the black around my temples to comets in a night sky.

“Do you see them?” he asks.

“I see constellations on your shoulder,” I reply, stroking my index finger across his freckles and moles.

“Oh, I have old Jew skin,” he mumbles.

“I love your skin,” I say.

“Here they are,” he says, as he touches my forehead. “Beautiful.”

“Yes,” I say as I kiss his shoulder.

By: Bhargavi Mandava

Essay was taken from Body Outlaws: Re-writing the rules of Beauty and Body Image

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Apr 1—Tax Return information session (10:30am– 12:00 pm)

Apr 8—Staff meeting

Apr 15– Job Orientation information session (10:30am– 12:00 pm)

Apr 22– Information session on Tenant's rights (10:30am– 12:00 pm)

Apr 24– Executive Council Meeting at 6 00 PM

Apr 25– Boishaki- Potluck (12:00 pm –2:00pm)

Apr 29– Job opportunity at Sun Life company (10:30am– 12:00 pm)

1 Avr— Session d'information sur la déclaration de revenus du Québec (10h30—12h)

8 Avr—la réunion du personnel

15 Avr— Session d'orientation d'emploi (10h30—12h)

22 Avr— Session d'orientation sur le droits du locataire (10h30—12h)

24 Avr- Réunion du conseil administratif à 18h00

25 Avr—Potluck!

29 Avr- Possibilités d'emploi à Sun Life (10:30am– 12:00 pm)

April 2014

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