

In Montreal on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka [Mohawk] territory



## Le Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques

*A message from the editor(s)*

For the last two years I have had the opportunity to edit the SAWCC bulletin every month. I started my journey at SAWCC without much knowledge of activism or feminism and the bulletin was a great way to learn. Shuffling through the news, and editing articles has helped me gain a good understanding of the struggles of coloured women in this society.

I now leave with the knowledge that I have. I hope to return to SAWCC soon, work on the bulletin and learn even more! Thanks for keeping up with my growth and the bulletin over these two years :)

Adithi Sundarakrishnan

### A Day at the South Asian Women's Community Center

A few weeks ago I was asked by Michelle Smith, a Métis educator and filmmaker, to attend an event in Montréal at the South Asian Woman's Community Center (SAWCC) on Rue Rachel East. The organization is dedicated to the empowerment of women of South Asian descent against numerous forms of discrimination including but not limited to: sexual orientation, class, caste, color, religion, nationality and age. The organization is also involved in the process of developing programs aimed towards providing opportunities for these women within Canadian and Quebecois society.

SAWCC also recognizes the land they reside on as Kanien'kehá:ka territory, and as such, they had organized an event to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oka crisis. Smith and I had gone over potential courses of action and subjects to bring up weeks in advance, and had been set on playing a segment of the film "Kanesatake: 270 years of Resistance", then discussing how the lingering effects of the Oka crisis have impacted Kahnawake.

However, the overall intent of the event was not only to develop and raise awareness of Onkwehón:we (First Nations) issues and representation, but also to reflect on our commonalities as victims and adversaries of western colonialism and to develop a base of solidarity between migrants and indigenous people. Therefore, the inclusion of our presentation would be to provide our own personal narratives concerning this event, and the myriad issues that effect Onkwehón:we today.

The event was to begin at 9:30 in the morning and run into the early afternoon. I first established that I hadn't lived through 1990 and would be working with the first-hand accounts of my relatives and my own brief commentary related to the film. For the most part, I managed to explain a number of events in the film that due to our time constraints did not have time to be addressed, such as the ambiguous circumstances surrounding the death of Sûreté du Québec officer Marcel Lemay and the cultural role of clan mothers.

continued...

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### Qu'en pensez-vous?

#### What do you think?

- 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:
- [sawccbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:sawccbulletin@gmail.com)
- Écrivez - nous à
- [sawccbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:sawccbulletin@gmail.com)

## CENTRE UPDATE



### Centre Hours/heure d'ouverture

**Monday & Thursday/lundi & jeudi 9am—9pm**  
**Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday/mardi, mercredi & vendredi— 9am-5pm**

The Centre is wheelchair accessible  
 Le centre est accessible aux fauteuils roulants.

### Volunteers

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

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We were also fortunate to listen to Shehla Arif discuss her perception, as well as her time spent working as a collective of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, who later said that, “I wasn’t expecting that people didn’t know so much about the Indigenous experiences. What I learned today was that people knew way less than I thought that they knew, and it just seems very important to me that that information should reach (them)”. She also noted that “there is a strong desire for solidarity, but you can’t do that until you know what the problem is.”

Afterwards, we discussed these topics and exchanged our own experiences, as well as those of our relatives. Some expressed their pleasure at having learned more about Onkwehón:we peoples. “I’m always aware of injustices with First Nations people from radio and all kinds of documentaries. I feel very sensitized to the issues, but I am so glad that I could listen to them in person.” Said Sajida Imam. When asked what she had come away with from this experience, SAWCC’s youth representative Farha Najah Hussain said “I took away a lot of inspiration and power that comes through the sharing of stories and of truths.”

**Kahawihson Horne**  
*The Eastern Door*

## Moving & powerful historic moment — SAWCC and Indigenous Solidarity

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Resistance and Struggles of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) against the colonial violence of the town of Oka and the occupation of Kanehsatake by provincial and federal forces, SAWCC was honoured to listen to Kahawihson Autumn Horne and Michelle Smith speak about the ongoing impacts of this occupation, as well as the violence of colonialism and genocide against Indigenous peoples and their land. Part of the documentary, "Kanehsatake, 270 years of Resistance" was also shown as part of the presentation.

The morning continued with a brief presentation by Shehla Arif from Missing Justice who discussed Indigenous solidarity as a settler with South Asian migrant

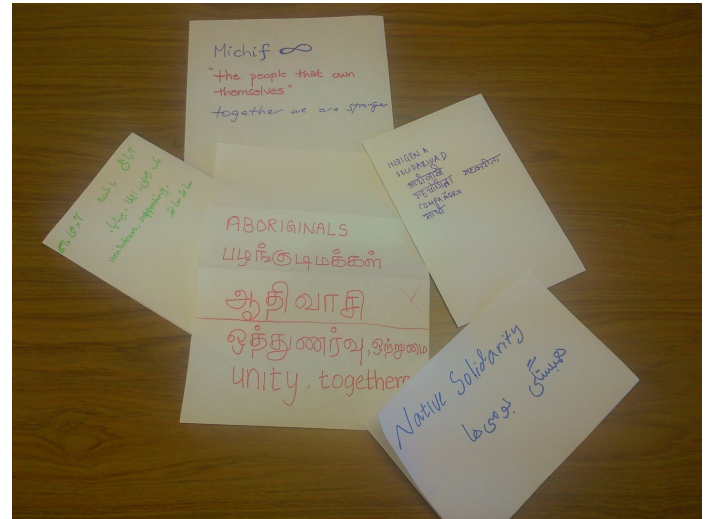
origins. Shehla shared how she was particularly inspired by the courageous struggle of Bridget Tolley to demand justice for her mother Gladys Tolley who was killed when she was hit by a Sûreté du Québec du Québec cruiser.

This was followed by a go-around in which other participants' shared reactions and thoughts concerning next steps for SAWCC and Indigenous solidarity. Some of these points are written below:

- gratitude to and appreciation for Kahawihson Autumn Horne and Michelle Smith;

- continuing to listen and having conversations. It was expressed that more and more conversations and spaces like this one should happen. More time should be allotted to such discussions;
- understanding Indigenous Nations as distinct Nations (vs "aboriginal citizens" of the colonial government);
- acknowledging the feelings of bitterness and anger of/as Indigenous peoples
- acknowledging the genocide of Indigenous peoples as genocide, not solely as "cultural genocide";
- working towards reconciliation;
- consistently discussing the reality of settler-colonialism within our respective communities as migrant-settlers;
- keeping stories alive, repeating them across generations;
- acknowledging Indigenous stories, and making links between Indigenous struggles here and in the subcontinent, as well as in the global south in general;
- finding commonalities (while acknowledging differences), and shared stories around colonialism;
- as immigrant-settlers, we have a responsibility to respond to white-settlers when they say, "You are lucky to be here", and highlight that we live on occupied Indigenous territories;
- engaging in intergenerational dialogues with respect to Indigenous solidarity;
- making links between Indigenous solidarity and migrant solidarity as a way to counter the colonial nation-state (and in countering "divide and conquer" tactics);
- developing and raising awareness; internalising anti-colonialism and Indigenous solidarity;
- discussing the reality of colonialism on this land within SAWCC (including newcomers to the Centre);
- acknowledging the courage of Indigenous Women, including those whose struggles are often invisibilized but are very real.

(Some writings by discussion participants when asked to write words that convey "Indigenous/ Native" and "Solidarity" in languages they speak/feel most comfortable in)



The following statement was agreed upon by those present as a means to express SAWCC's solidarity with Indigenous peoples and as way to maintain accountability as settlers on this land:

*"This SAWCC (South Asian Women's Community Centre) gathering on the 20th of June, 2015 acknowledges that we live on unceded Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) territory. We recognize the huge injustices, violence, and pain that Indigenous peoples (acknowledging the diverse and various ways Indigenous Nations identify) of this land have suffered and continue to suffer as a consequence of ongoing settler-colonialism. We pledge our support and solidarity with Indigenous peoples on this land in defense of their lives, their lands, and their struggles to live in dignity, and justice. In particular, we are in solidarity with Indigenous Women. We commit to act in solidarity in tangible ways."*



SAWCC members with Kahawihson Autumn Horne (back row, sixth from right) and Michelle Smith (back row, third from right)



## ***Quebec & Federal governments' words and deeds ideological — smack of disingenuousness; contribute to racism and Islamophobia***

In June the Liberal government of Quebec tabled two pieces of legislation — Bill-62, their take on the PQ's "Charter of Values" and Bill-59, ostensibly to crack down on Islamic extremism. Bill-62 requires that government services be offered and used (so affecting government employees and users of government services) with faces uncovered. Bill-59 addresses several things including so-called 'honour crimes' and authorizes social workers to seek court protection orders if they deem that the health and safety of an individual is in danger. There will also be funds to stem the tide of so-called 'radicalization' of Muslim youth.

At SAWCC in December 2013 we published a detailed analysis and critique of the PQ's proposed "Charter of Values" and while the Liberals had been very critical at that time, to all extents and purposes they have now actually done the same thing — women are made economically vulnerable, racist attacks get legitimized and Islamophobia increases. If anything, this type of measure actually fuels so-called 'radicalization'. We have also put out a statement critical of governments' obsession with so-called 'honour crimes' and 'forced marriages', not because we condone any such things, but because official stances are ideological, superficial, racist, disingenuous and anti-feminist. Our contention, and that of many groups and organizations, including the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, is that we have enough laws in place to deal with violence against women and with child abuse. Most importantly research demonstrates that additional laws do not bring security. What is most needed is public education and support services, such as those that we offer at SAWCC.

Interestingly enough, the Quebec government, while tabling Bills 59 and 62, cut two programs that help newcomers get accustomed to Quebec, citing decreased demand for them! We on the front lines know different.

At the federal level we find the same hypocrisy — legislation tabled against so-called 'barbarous cultural practices' on the one hand, and cuts to departments such as Status of Women Canada on the other!

### **It's official – second class citizenship goes into effect**

**On Friday 29th May, part of Bill C-24 went into effect, officially creating a two-tier citizenship system.** As a result of this new law, dual citizens and people who have immigrated to Canada can have their citizenship taken away while other Canadians cannot. The government's press release last week tried to justify this discriminatory law by raising the threat of "jihadi terrorism," but Bill C-24 could easily be used against non-terrorists—for example, a journalist who is convicted of a "terrorism offence" in another country for reporting on human rights violations by the government.

Under this law, the only Canadians who can never lose their citizenship are those born in Canada who do not have another nationality (and are not eligible to apply for another nationality). No matter what crimes they may be accused of, these first-class citizens can never have their citizenship taken away. On the other hand, **Canadians with another nationality (and those who are eligible to obtain another nationality) now have second-class status, even if they were born in Canada: under Bill C-24, their citizenship can be stripped.**

Currently, citizenship can be taken away mainly on the basis of crimes that are considered threats to Canada's national security, like terrorism or espionage, or demonstrations of disloyalty to Canada, like treason. But legal experts warn that the list of offences that could lead to the removal of citizenship might be expanded in the future. Additionally, Bill C-24 punishes criminal activity with exile – a practice abandoned hundreds of years ago that has no place in today's democracy.

The government has created an infographic to explain the new citizenship stripping process. There's one change that really stands out for us in this diagram: the absence of a judge in the new system. The government seems to think that removing the judge improves the process, but we would argue that this makes the process unfair and likely unconstitutional.

**Dividing people into different classes that receive different treatment under the law is unfair and un-Canadian.** Bill C-24 has turned millions of Canadians into second-class citizens with reduced rights—and as a result, has reduced the value of Canadian citizenship.

**We encourage you to share this petition <https://www.change.org/p/hon-chris-alexander-pc-mp-canadian-government-stop-bill-c-24-don-t-turn-millions-of-us-into-second-class-canadian-citizens> with your friends and family and to let them know about these important changes to the very foundations of citizenship in Canada. Let's say no to second-class citizenship!**

When Bill C-24 was passed last year, we announced our intention to challenge this law in the courts, along with our ally the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers. Now that these provisions are in force, we are moving ahead. The BCCLA remains committed to challenging this new law. **Be sure to sign up to our list (at [www.bccla.org](http://www.bccla.org)) to receive updates on our progress with this court challenge.**

## Sandra Moran, Helena Wong at SAWCC

On 10<sup>th</sup> June 2015, SAWCC hosted a get-together meeting (5 à 7) organized by the 8<sup>th</sup> March Committee (of which SAWCC is a member) and the International Women's Alliance (IWA) in collaboration with the World March of Women (Marche mondiale) about women's rights and social justice. The honoured guests were Sandra Moran of Guatemala, and Helena Wong of USA (New York). Attending were members of these organizations, the Quebec Women's Federation and Pinay. Both Sandra and Helen were in Montreal to attend a conference hosted by the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education.



From right: Sandra Moran, Carmen Diaz and Helena Wong. (photo: Leah Woolner)



**Sandra Moran**  
(photo: Marie Boti)

**Sandra Moran** is a feminist and human rights activist and has worked in the Guatemalan women's movement for over 25 years, 14 of which she spent in exile in Canada. Sandra returned to Guatemala in 1994 to participate in the formation of the Women's Sector, and to participate in the Civil Society Assembly at the negotiations for the peace accords to end the 36-year war in Guatemala. Sandra remains an active member of the Women's Sector, and is also a performance artist and cultural advocate. She is a spokesperson for the *Marche Mondiale des femmes* in Guatemala.

Sandra Moran is a recognized activist for human rights, and has worked with the Guatemala women's and feminist movement. She is one of founding members of the Women's Sector, an alliance of 33 women's organizations and the founder of the first Guatemalan lesbian collective. Sandra began by telling us how fundamental the situation is in Guatemala and the significance of their victories. As she said, "We won the right to have rights!" She also said that in their analysis and understanding, patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism are intertwined and in their struggles they confront these three together.

**"We won  
the right  
to have  
rights!"**

She explained about women's organization in Guatemala and how they work. The Women's Sector is a network composed of women's organizations, as well as other civil society organizations promoting women's rights, whose principles, values and other political actions explicitly integrate the elimination of discrimination, oppression, subordination of women. The Women's Sector formed in 1994 during the process of drafting the Peace Accord. By 1996, it had gained recognition as a National Network made up of many types of organizations- social, exclusively women's or organizations, as well as individual woman -from rural and urban areas and diverse ethnic backgrounds. Sandra said how they are currently focused on gender-based violence and how violence against women and children is normalized.

**"...patriarchy,  
colonialism and  
capitalism are  
intertwined"**

Areas that the Women's Sector focuses on are ethnic and gender discrimination, discrimination based on sexual orientation, violence and impunity, lack of access to justice, exploitation, marginalization, exclusion and

social injustice. As they say, "United in this effort, we are: All women; Mayan, Xinka, Garifuna, Mestiza, rural and urban, poor and middle-class, young and adult, lesbian and heterosexual." The strategies they adopt are creations of women's political consciousness, organization of women and feminist movement as a social force, dialogue with other social and political actors, mobilization, public action and policy proposals. The programs they have are: Organization and Leadership Training; Women's Economic Development; End Violence Against Women: Struggle Against Impunity and Access to Justice.

**Helena Wong** is a National Organizer of Grassroots Global Justice, has organized low-income Asian immigrant and refugee communities in New York for nearly twenty years around gentrification, community development and land use, and police violence. Helena has served on the national steering committee of the Right to the City alliance. She has led delegations to China, meeting with organizers who do work around land rights, migrant workers, environmental protection, and queer visibility. Helena is queer, Asian, and a proud lifelong New Yorker. Her organization is a key representative of the *Marche mondiale* in the United States. For more info visit: <http://www.ghrc-usa.org>



Group photo at reception for Sandra Moran & Helena Wong (photo: Leah Woolner)

## CERAS and SAWCC remember DAYA VARMA

**On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June in Montreal, CERAS (South Asia Centre) and SAWCC (South Asian Women's Community Centre) held a joint memorial meeting for Daya Varma. Daya was one of the founders of CERAS, and an ardent-supporter and life-time associate member of SAWCC.**

The memorial began with recitation in Braj of several Kabir dohas, which aptly reflected Daya's concerns and perspectives. After each doha, an English translation was read out:

*This world is a strange place where people pray to stones.  
But nobody prays to the mill-stone that produces the flour that they eat.*

*When talent and capability are recognised and appreciated, they flower and flourish.*

*When it is not, they lie dormant and become worthless.*

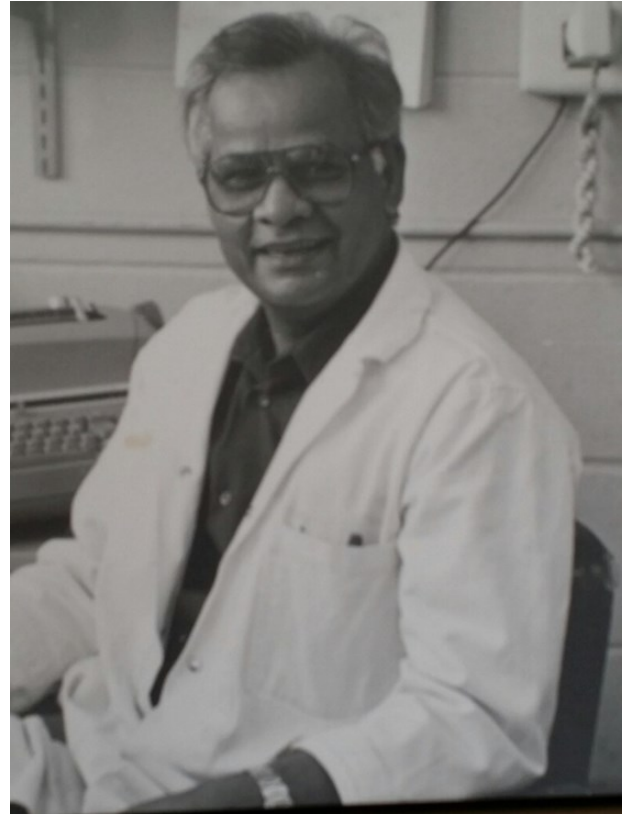
*Slowly, slowly my friend, things happen at their own pace.  
A gardener may water a plant as much as she likes, but it is only when the appropriate season comes that it bears fruit.*

*A learned person is like a winnowing fan -  
Separating the wheat from the chaff, the useful from the useless,  
the worthwhile from the worthless.*

The meeting was attended by members of CERAS and SAWCC, family members of Daya – his wife Shree, his son Rahul and daughter-in-law Dipti -- long-time and relatively more recent political comrades and associates and others who had come to know of Daya and wanted to be part of the gathering, pay their respects and learn a little more about this very remarkable man and human being.

Those who spoke, shared personal memories as well as talked about Daya's pivotal role in building and sustaining organizations, his grasp of politics and his vision. Shree shared some of Daya's personal writings that he had penned to let his grandchildren know something of his past and his ideas. Dipti shared and commented on some aspects of the remarkable father-in-law—daughter-in-law relationship they shared. People of Pakistani and indigenous origins in South Asia shared how they had numerous discussions with Daya relating to South Asia as well as specific issues such as indigenous rights. We heard of Daya's involvement in the formation and support of the British Columbia Farmworker's Union, till today, a pioneering labour institution in Canada. We heard of Daya's views and involvement with the Indian left and his assessment that a unified movement was the way forward. We heard of the pre-CERAS formation, Canadians for a Secular India (CSI), at the time of the destruction of the Babri mosque; a packed public meeting, with Praful Bidwai as main speaker was held. Daya's role in the founding and development of CERAS was remembered, and his participation in peace initiatives between India and Pakistan, spearheaded by grassroots organizing by people, not governments. His unwavering support of SAWCC, based on his understanding of patriarchy and its manifestations was spoken about.

After formal remembrances as a part of the memorial were over, tea and refreshments were served and everyone broke into smaller groups to talk to one another, remember and to continue sharing stories and memories of Daya.



It was a warm and moving memorial. People were glad to have come together to remember and honour their remarkable friend, comrade and mentor, Daya Varma.

Copies of Daya's two books were on sale -- *Reason and Medicine — art and science of healing from antiquity to modern times* (Three Essays Collective, 2013) and *Medicine, Healthcare and the Raj --The Unacknowledged Legacy* (Three Essays Collective, 2015)

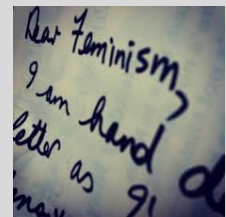
### Write a Love Letter to Feminism

Is feminism your summer love?

Or is your relationship with feminism long standing? We would like to know! Why not express your love for feminism? Profess your feelings with poetry or write a letter directed to feminism and what

it has done for you. Submissions will be welcome anytime— there is no deadline. Your work could be included in the upcoming bulletins.

Send to sawccbulletin@gmail.com





## South Asian Youth (SAY) / Jeunes sud-asiatiques (Jsa)

This summer, SAY welcomed a new youth program co-coordinator, **Harleen**.

Below is a brief message from her:

*What an exciting opportunity to be on such a wonderful team of strong, determined, and powerful women! I am truly looking forward to my new role as the youth program co-coordinator.*

*Youth work has always been my passion. From my work at a youth drop-in centre in Mississauga, to working with adolescents in Pointe St-Charles, I have appreciated every moment of working with such inspiring and hard-working groups of young people. The first time I delivered a program for a girls group, I fell in love with the work. I learned that our young women are capable of unlimited positive impact, and I grow by witnessing their courage.*

*To work at this centre that shares my feminist and anti-oppressive approach feels like a gift to me, and I hope to learn more and contribute to your struggle to end women oppression and create transformative change! Let us stride on, my rebel women!*

*-harleen bhogal*

### SAY INVITE!!

Hi! Everyone,

Some of you may be aware of the herstory of the The South Asian Youth (SAY) collective. We began as a working group in 2011, working alongside youth from a neighbourhood in Montreal to fight and organize against street harassment. Over the years, we have transitioned and the collective has manifested in a variety of ways, taking on a variety of projects. The collective has been on hiatus for quite some time and we are now hoping to reawaken collective meetings and initiatives.

As of this moment, the collective consists of Harleen and Naila. We are the two paid SAY program co-coordinators at the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC). I suppose you can't call us much of a collective haha, so please join us for an intro meeting where we can get to know new people and gauge whether or not there is interest in hangouts or collective organizing over the coming months.

**Our first hangout will be at the SAWCC, 1035 Rachel est 3rd floor (front) on Friday August 21st from 5:00 - 6:00pm. We will have smiles and snacks!**

If you are interested in checking it out, but this time slot does not work for you, please let us know via email ([sawccyouth@gmail.com](mailto:sawccyouth@gmail.com)) and we can chat.

### EC MEETINGS

*SAWCC Executive Council* meetings are held once a month and all members are invited and encouraged to attend. You get to learn in a more hands-on way what we do and you get to add your voice and opinion and participate in decision-making. We arrive at 6pm and bring some food to share. For the first half hour we eat, chat and read documents for the meeting. The meeting proper begins at 6:30pm. We try to end our meetings by 8:30pm. However if you need to leave before then, it's not a problem.

**August EC meeting, Monday 31st August, 6pm, SAWCC, 1035 Rachel est, 3rd floor**

*(I had heard with horror of the the gang rape of Suzette Jordan, in early 2012 in Kolkata. Being my city, I was particularly affected. Due to laws concerning rape in India, the victim's name is not revealed, and Suzette came to be known as "the Park Street rape victim". However, within a few months, Suzette came out in a public declaration, "my name is Suzette Jordan". I got to meet Suzette in 2013 and again in January this year. A few months later, I was shocked and saddened to learn of her sudden death of meningoencephalitis. Friends and activists in Kolkata and elsewhere (e.g. below) were struck by Suzette's honesty, strength and refusal to become a victim. I share this piece by Gautam Bhan, because I wanted to convey SAWCCers, the spirit Suzette had, the significance of her position and understanding of the issues involved. Dolores Chew)*

## MY NAME IS SUZETTE JORDAN

Gautam Bhan\*

*(Economic & Political Weekly 28 March 2015, 50:13)*

***She did not allow the sexual attack on her to define her and cocoon her in victimhood. Rather, Suzette Jordan was a brave woman whose adamant fight for justice has done so much to restore the dignity of survivors of sexual assault. A personal tribute.***

Our panel was a queer one in all the wonderful senses of that word. At trainings with lower court judges on sexual violence laws in the Saket District courts in Delhi, the five of us would find ourselves next to each other every few months. On a dais surrounded by that distinctly *sarkari* flower arrangement, first sat Suzette, a survivor of a brutal rape in a moving car in Park Street in Kolkata. Then in line: a survivor of an acid attack; a representative of a sex workers union; a well-known hijra activist and I, speaking as a gay man.

We were usually on the third day, right after lunch, when we would face nearly a hundred slightly sleepy judges from the region. They had been updated on new sexual violence laws, gone through a case exercise on how to apply them, been given a CD, a folder, the requisite handouts. The boxes were ticked. Technically, they were up to date. Ours was a different job: to animate, if such a thing is possible, a sense of empathy in the judges, to shift even slightly the way they thought of the rainbow of dubious morality that we represented.

### Justice in Dignity

Justice, especially in cases of sexual difference or sexual violence, is rarely as much about revenge or punishment as about dignity. Queer lives seek dignity. In our own eyes first where the unwritten laws are the harshest and we are our own judges, and then in others. All of us on that panel were queer for the judges. We belied the norms of good sexual behaviour. We were all marked in some way or the other by our distance from the norm. We told our stories as political biographies embodying this distance, acknowledging it, naming it, risking being trapped by it.

The first time we spoke, one after the other, we could hear ourselves

echoing one sentiment: judgments come later, punishments came later. First, there was every second of our interactions with our innermost selves, our families, our friends, the law, the police, the court-room, the judge. It was there we were tried and hanged long before the gavel struck. It was there we demanded not just justice but dignity. Above all, Suzette used to say, we want you to look us in the eye. She would fume: "maybe they'll see something of themselves."

Much has been written about Suzette Jordan since her death last week. She waived her right to anonymity. She returned to Park Street. She took on Mamata Banerjee.\*\* She fought to reach the ultimate definition of being a survivor: to be unaltered, to remain herself, to remain ordinary when the world demanded she not be so that the rules of sexual violence would not be undone. She refused, as so many have written in odes to her, to play the victim. Let us make no mistake: she paid a price for this –legally, in the public gaze, in the vicious comments that appear even now below her obituaries, in holding onto her own sense of self. Her daughter wrote a wonderful tribute to a woman with 21 tattoos and yet more scars.

I remember her tattoos, sitting beside her at the judges' table, as she spoke about the interrogations she was put through, the remarks of judges and court officers, the fear at seeing the army of defendants and lawyers standing next to her in the courtroom as she stood alone, the memory of being stripped for a medical examination in a room with large windows and no curtains that looked directly into the building across the street. I watched her pause, her lunchtime laughter quietened, as she remembered and retold her story, looking straight at her audience: "it is not just what you do, it is how you do it. Justice begins when I complain, not when I win my case."

The best tribute to her seems to wonder in her wake: is she part of a different register of voice at least among an admittedly particular section of urban women who face sexual violence or live non-normative lives? In the accusations that have come more recently against a sitting Supreme Court judge, a well-known news editor, and now a head of an organisation that received the Nobel, there seems to be a palpable difference.

The seeds of this were perhaps visible at the protests that filled Delhi that December. [Reference to gang rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey, Dec. 2012. Ed.] Beyond the clamour for punishment, hanging and vengeance were a different set of voices and bodies. Women – young and old – who refused the trade-off between freedom and safety, who refused shame and judgment as they spoke about their everyday struggles against sexual violence and for sexual freedom, who fought to keep sexuality and sexual violence ordinary and not just about tales of spectacular violence and rape. These voices are less fearful, less concealed, less altered. Their narratives have shifted and fewer traces of victimhood remain. These are voices that believe, in their own hearts, that they have the right to have rights, that they need not offer their dignity to have a hope to achieve justice.

After the gang rape of a young journalist in Shakti Mills in Mumbai, the survivor said something much like Suzette often would, that was extraordinary in how ordinary it should be. She said she did not struggle after a point against her attackers because she thought it





(Photo: <http://amritaspeaks.com>)

Would better her chances of emerging alive. Life over honour. A simple, obvious calculus undone in a patriarchy where the two are rarely equal in our own minds, let alone in the minds of those who seek to impose honour repeatedly, violently on the bodies of women, even when purportedly speaking in their defence.

When Suzette waived her right to anonymity in 2013, she took further this chorus of women in returning the quest for justice in a broken system to its core demand of dignity, not vengeance. To remember her then is to continue to refuse the reduction of addressing sexual violence to adequate and appropriate punishment. It is why, she told me, she came back to the judges trainings again and again: to bring dignity to the process, not the outcome;

The end will either take care of itself, or it will matter less. I care about how I get there. Every time I tell the story it breaks me, every time I tell the story it helps me put myself back together again.

Suzette did not want heroism. She wanted solidarity. She fought to create structures that would make it ordinary for women who suffered violence to speak without fear of judgement, with tattoos and scars intact. She wanted to make heroism ordinary. It is in the stories of women that continue to fight and the ones that will come and take us further still that her legacy lies. A legacy not just for survivors of rape but for anyone who was sought to find and hold onto themselves, to their dignity, to the lives and sexualities they want to dream, inhabit and live.

#### **‘A Mad, Free Woman’**

She used to call herself a “mad, free woman,” laughing as she said it. I remember most of all the sense of freedom in her madness. I drew so

much from it without even realising until I sat to write these words. It was everything that I had imagined queer politics to be – all of us, together, laughing at the norms that judged us as we weakened them, broke them, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

At the Saket District Courts and in many other district courts in Delhi today, survivors of sexual violence have a special courtroom. It has no proscenium – the judges sit at the same level as the woman, on sofas instead of officious, regal thrones. The accused and their lawyers sit behind a one-way glass screen, their numbers no longer intimidating, unable to see the survivor. Entrances and exits are separate, safer. In this courtroom, Suzette would never have to see her alleged rapists, not have to stand and retell her story in front of their mocking gaze. She would always smile when the judges were told about this new courtroom. Here, she should say, perhaps things will be different. It is in our hands no to prove her right.

\*Gautam Bhan \* ([gautam.bhan@gmail.com](mailto:gautam.bhan@gmail.com)) is a gay rights activist and a researcher on urban affairs

[\*\*Chief Minister of West Bengal who intervened and transferred the police officer who was making good headway in apprehending Suzette’s rapists, in a move that was purely politically motivated. Banerjee was known to use muscle power to intimidate opponents. (Ed.)]

## ***In SUPPORT of DEEPAN***



(photo: ottawacitizen.com)

***On Monday 13 July, SAWCC participated in a solidarity action with Deepan Budlakoti, the young, Canadian-born Ottawa man who is being subjected to double punishment by the Canadian government who stripped him of his citizenship and would like to deport him to India, but the Indian government says that he is not an Indian. (We have written about Deepan's case in earlier.)***

***On 13 July, Deepan was in Montreal to attend an Immigration and Refugee Board hearing [all Ottawa residents must now come to Montreal for this] to get the very onerous conditions of his release from immigration detention [prison] reduced.***

### **SAWCC spoke in support of Deepan**

"We are here this morning from the SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CENTRE to join Deepan in his demand for justice. We have been working in Montreal for the past 34 years for South Asian women and their families. In the course of our work we have become all too-familiar with racist and arbitrary immigration and refugee policies. We have also become familiar with the immense discretionary powers wielded by the state and its agents. We have seen the confluence of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism at work. But we have also become familiar with the sense of justice of hundreds of Canadians who have opened doors to welcome newcomers; populations fleeing persecution – political, gender; fleeing economically untenable conditions. And it is to these Canadians that we appeal for justice for Deepan.

Deepan's situation needs to be unmasked for what it is – arbitrariness and racism. And this is nothing new. Last year, South Asians along with many other Canadians marked the 100 year anniversary of the Komagata Maru, that shameful history of racist exclusion by Canada that blatantly targeted non-whites, in this case mostly farmers from Punjab in India, coming to Canada. At that time, Canada and India were part of the British Empire and all British subjects were free to travel anywhere in the empire.

This year we are marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the occupation of Kahnésétake by forces of the state – Quebec and Canada, the latest in a long history of violence, oppression and genocide against the indigenous people of this land. And in that connection,

this morning we of the South Asian Women's Community Centre also acknowledge that we stand on unceded territory of the Kanienkehake or Mohawk.

The Canadian government's totally unjustified and illegal treatment of Deepan Budlakoti needs to be seen in this light and in the long trajectory of the history of exclusion, extermination and removal of people and populations that are seen as non-desirable for reasons of race or economics. Or else keeping people here in very precarious situations, where they feel so vulnerable that they will be grateful and not want to challenge the inequality they face in working conditions, inequality in wages and the absence of basic rights.

We are living in times when all governments are crying austerity as a prologue to economic cutbacks. But these cutbacks always hurt the most vulnerable. The very rich have their millions and billions tucked away in safe tax havens, or in trusts that are not taxed or in 'expenses' for which they can claim tax benefits. It is populations that are already marginalized or who are just making it, that are most adversely affected.

The attacks on immigrants and refugees has really escalated in recent years, and it has become most vicious in recent years, during the tenure of Stephen Harper. In all areas we have seen policies of slash and burn. And when it comes to minority populations the bully-boy tactics are most in evidence.

Today we are here to join Deepan in his demand for what is rightfully his. He is a Canadian citizen. He was born here and lived here all his life. And no amount of manipulations by the government can de-legitimize his natural-born right to citizenship status. Even the most recent Bill C-54 which makes it very easy to strip naturalized citizens of their citizenship does not apply to Deepan.

Today we are here to join Deepan in his demand for what is rightfully his and to further demand that the onerous and illegitimate conditions of his release from immigration prison be scrapped.

Today we are here to join Deepan in his demand for justice and to call attention to the reality that the conditions which the Canadian state has forced him to live under contravene all human rights charters and codes. The right to work, the right to healthcare, the right to freedom. No narrow-based bureaucratic manipulation of facts or very literalistic legal interpretations can cover the glaring injustice with which he is being treated and with which he has been forced to live for the past 5 years. For a government which is so quick to tar all and sundry with the 'terror' brush, it is they who are terrorizing this young man.

Today we are here to join Deepan in his demand for justice and his birthright, and we urge all justice-loving and fair-minded people to join us in supporting him. Let us raise our voices together:

NO to double punishment!  
NO deportations!  
NO detentions!  
JUSTICE for Deepan!"

***Four days later the IRB issued its ruling, and "Justice for Deepan" issued the following release:***

## **Board Sides with Ottawa-born Deepan Budlakoti in Detention Decision**

17 July 2015, Montreal --- In a ruling issued at 9am this morning, Immigration and Refugee Board member François Milo found in favour of Deepan Budlakoti. Rejecting the government position that Budlakoti's conditions should remain unchanged, Milo found that Budlakoti in fact poses a low flight risk because his case is so high profile. The Board member eased several of Budlakoti's conditions, including the requirement to keep the peace and the frequency of signing in with the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA).

However, Milo stopped short of removing the conditions entirely. Budlakoti remains under a bond and will still have to sign in every six months, notify CBSA of changes of address a week prior to moving, inform CBSA of any charges within 48 hours, and otherwise fully cooperate with CBSA. The conditions also specify that Budlakoti cannot work without a work permit.

"It is a small step in the right direction," said Budlakoti. "But, I was hoping to get all my conditions removed. These conditions are imposed in violation of my Charter rights. I will be looking into further legal options."

Budlakoti's legal counsel Macdonald Scott commented, "Mr. Milo clearly recognized his legal obligation to diminish the conditions of release with the passage of time. However, he did not recognize his obligation to strike the conditions, despite the clear Federal Court ruling in Jaballah that conditions of release must be diminished with time, with the eventual goal of striking them completely."

Budlakoti and Scott were in Montreal on Monday to argue the case. During the hearing, they made it clear that, as a citizen of Canada, Ottawa-born Budlakoti should never have been subject to immigration conditions in the first place. Presenting evidence that Budlakoti's freedom and health were negatively affected, they urged Milo to remove the conditions, especially in light of the fact that Mr. Budlakoti had always scrupulously respected his conditions and over a year had passed since his last detention review hearing.

Dozens of Montrealers, many representing non-governmental organizations and unions, rallied in front of the IRB on Monday and then stayed for the hearing to show their support for Mr. Budlakoti.

Born in Canada, Mr. Budlakoti is under a deportation order to India, his parents' country of birth, where he has never lived and does not have citizenship. Mr. Budlakoti spent almost four months in immigration detention and was released in April 2013 on bail under extremely strict conditions that were eased - but not removed entirely - in 2014. Because India does not recognize him as a citizen and is refusing to issue the documents necessary for his deportation, Mr. Budlakoti remains in limbo indefinitely.



**Centre Communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques**

South Asian Women's Community Centre  
1035, rue Rachel est, 3ième étage.  
Montréal, QC H2J 2J5

Phone: 514-528-8812  
Fax: 514-528-0896  
E-mail: sawcc@bellnet.ca

34 years of sisterhood, strength, struggle and success 1981-2015

[www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca](http://www.sawcc-ccfsa.ca)

August 1 — Annual Picnic

August 11— Financial assistance programs to support individuals & families with low income in their efforts for social and professional integration — He Karo & Jia Hao of Sun Life

August 14—end Summer Camp—variety performance (1pm)

August 18 — Samia El-Botmeh on BDS. (Vegetarian lunch served.) (12 noon)

August 21—South Asian Youth (SAY) Collective—hang-out (5-6pm)

August 25— staff meeting (9am); arts & crafts (10:30am)

August 28 — Potluck lunch & session on, ACEM, "Loans for the recognition and upgrading of skills acquired abroad" by Indu Krishnamurthy (12 noon)

August 31— SAWCC Executive Council meeting (6pm)

1 août — pique-nique annuel

11 août— Programmes d' aide financière pour soutenir les individus et les familles à faible revenu dans leurs efforts d'intégration sociale et professionnelle— He Karo & Jia Hao de Sun Life

14 août—fin camp d'été - programme de variété (13:00)

14 août—Samia El-Botmeh sur BDS. (Repas végétarien servi) (12:00h)

21 août— South Asian Youth (SAY) Collective — hang-out (17:00-18:00 h)

25 août - la réunion du personnel (9:30am); arts et Métiers (10:30h)

25 août —Dîner causerie & session sur , ACEM , " Prêts pour la reconnaissance et la valorisation des compétences acquises à l'étranger" par Indu Krishnamurthy

31 août — Réunion du Conseil exécutif de CCFSa (18:00h)

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

August 2015						1 Picnic
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 Financial assistance programs—info session	12	13	14 End of Summer Camp — campers variety performance 1pm	15
16	17	18 Samia el-Botmeh 12 noon-veg lunch served	19	20	21 SAY hang-out	22
23	24	25 Staff meeting 9am	26	27	28 Potluck Lunch 12 noon + info Loans for the recognition... ..	29
30	31 EC meeting 6pm	Notes:				