



RASANEH KHABERIE



News from Naz London

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ADDRESSING DIVERSITY, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND EQUALITY ISSUES

NAZ FORGES AHEAD

NAZ SECURES FUNDING, BEATS UNCERTAINTY AND EMERGES STRONGER.

Once again Naz has beaten the tendency to exclude ethnic minorities from mainstream health provision. As Naz campaigned to highlight the need for special ethnic minority HIV/sexual health services, the government pledged continued support while new funders emerged to back the project.

The vital role of Naz has now been recognised by government at the highest level. Home Affairs Minister Paul Boateng, Europe Minister Keith Vaz and London Mayor Ken Livingstone have each expressed their support for the project. They were joined by Labour MPs Diane Abbot, Angela Eagle, Ann Keen, Piara Khabra, Oona King, David Lammy and Stephen Twigg.

Naz's vital role was recognised by Parliament last November, Health Minister Yvette Cooper who said: "The Naz Project plays a valuable role in providing the South Asian, Latin American, Irani, Turkish and Arab communities with education and advice on HIV/AIDS issues, and care, support and prevention services."

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LEAVING STATEMENT

BY KRISHNA MAHARAJ

After over four and half years of leading the Naz Project, I am moving on to work in the equally challenging field of international human rights. I will of course miss many of my colleagues in the sector, especially those who have consistently supported Naz over the years.

I leave Naz in a strong position to face the difficult challenges ahead. Funding is now secured for the coming year. Naz has also developed organisationally into one of the most efficient and effective agencies in the sector.

Leading a black HIV/AIDS agency must be one of the toughest jobs in the HIV sector. The trend towards mainstreaming means that one has to constantly struggle for survival, continuously fighting to ensure that black and minority ethnic communities are not excluded from HIV and sexual health services.

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HIV HIGH AMONG NEW TB PATIENTS

New tuberculosis patients should take HIV tests, say experts, finding high levels of HIV among migrants and others screened for TB.

High levels of HIV infection have been found among new tuberculosis patients and recent migrants at South London hospitals. The study, published in the Lancet*, found an average HIV prevalence of 11.4% among contacts of TB cases and recent arrivals in the UK. This is more than double previous estimates.

The authors conclude that patients with newly diagnosed TB should be encouraged

to take an HIV test. They warned that the true co-infection rate in South London may be as high as 17-20% if known HIV-positive individuals diagnosed with tuberculosis are taken into account.

Two hundred and two individuals with TB and contacts were tested for HIV. Of the 57 Africans and 97 Indians, 8 and 14 were found to be HIV-positive. At 14% and 12% these infection rates compare poorly with whites at 2%.

Overall, 4% of new arrivals screened for TB were HIV-positive. Among all patients, most HIV infections were detected in individuals

aged 16-34. Patients already known to be HIV-positive were excluded from the study.

The study was carried out by Dr Charlotte Rayner of St George's Hospital and colleagues at St Helier Hospital in Carshalton and Mayday Hospital in Croydon. These hospitals serve high concentrations of recent migrants to the UK.

*Bowen EF, Rayner CFJ et al. HIV seroprevalence by anonymous testing in patients with Mycobacterium tuberculosis and in tuberculosis contacts. The Lancet 356: 1488-1489, 2000.

PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONG SOUTH ASIAN GAY COMMUNITY

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LEAVING STATEMENT

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I would like to pay tribute to Mark Blake, my fellow Director at Blackliners, who has also moved on. Mark and I both started in our respective organisations around the same time and he like me has left Blackliners in a formidable position to face the future. I have no doubt that his successor, Patricia Blackwood, will continue to build on his successes and further strengthen the alliance between Naz and Blackliners in ensuring that our communities are not marginalised from prevention and care services.

I wish to thank our Board of Trustees, especially our Chairperson Manjeet Edwards for her wise counsel and support through four and a half difficult years. I also wish to thank our patrons, especially Keith Vaz, Claude Moraes, Lord Alf Dubs, George Alagiah, Dr Suman Fernando and the Asian Dub Foundation. They have lobbied for us at the highest level to ensure that some of the most vulnerable people from our communities are not abandoned by HIV policy makers.

I am pleased to note that the calibre of candidates who have applied for the post of Director is very high. I certainly hope that all the friends and allies of Naz will continue to support the new Director in the challenges ahead.

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Mission Statement

- To challenge the myths and prejudices that exist about our communities and within our communities.
- To campaign vigorously to ensure that our diverse communities are not excluded from HIV, AIDS and sexual health services due to culturally and linguistically inappropriate service provision.
- To educate and empower our communities to face up to the challenges of the AIDS pandemic and mobilise the strong family and support networks that exist, to care for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- To ensure that service users are at the heart of assessing need and play a central role at all levels within the Naz Project.

Aims & objectives

- To provide culturally and linguistically appropriate HIV, AIDS and sexual health prevention care and support services for the South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African communities in London.
- To enhance the quality of life for people from our communities affected by HIV and AIDS by promoting self help and

empowerment.

- To pioneer the development of culturally sensitive, linguistically appropriate needs-led high quality services.
- To promote greater understanding of the diversity that exists within our communities in terms of sexuality and sexual behaviour.
- To challenge racism, homophobia, sexism, communalism and religious intolerance and to promote an understanding and awareness of the negative impact of these issues on our communities.
- To educate the public in general, and our target communities in particular, of HIV and AIDS transmission, treatment and impact.
- To foster the development of a non-judgemental approach to those affected by HIV and AIDS.
- To respond quickly, imaginatively and effectively to the ever-changing local and international epidemiology, causes and consequences of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.
- To address where possible the needs of those communities comparable to our own but which are marginalised by other mainstream HIV and AIDS agencies.

NAZ FORGES AHEAD



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'Stronger than ever'

The project's outgoing director, Krishna Maharaj, has successfully steered Naz through funding pitfalls in the HIV/AIDS sector. Mr Maharaj confirmed to Rasaneh Khaberie that Naz is now well placed to face new challenges in the HIV/sexual health sector. "Naz is now stronger, more efficient, more professional than ever. It is also highly innovative," he added.

Naz chairwoman Manjeet Edwards was delighted with the result, but sad to lose Mr Maharaj. "We're very sad to lose a fantastic leader," she said. "He has risen to numerous challenges and always proved successful. Naz is now in a financially stable situation after his campaign to ensure funding. This, I must say, was no mean feat," she said.

How NAZ survived

The Naz survival strategy - including fundraising, campaigning, diversifying and change management efforts - has paid off handsomely. Firstly, Naz has raised money from the Asian community and received favourable responses from several charitable trusts, including the Baring and Peter Moores foundations. Other applications are now at advanced stages, including one to the National Lottery.

Secondly, health authorities have found a way to fund Naz at previous levels after the high profile campaign to highlight the exclusion of Naz from funding arrangements. Thirdly, diversifying has helped Naz to win a £30,000 contract from Islington council for teenage pregnancy work in schools (see arti-

cle). Finally, management change efforts have successfully promoted staff development to a stage where Naz is being recognised for the official 'investors in people' standard.

With Naz finances looking healthier, Mr Maharaj was emphasising a collective victory. "The key to our survival has been the overwhelming support we received from our communities and leaders within them. Their support forced members of parliament to lobby strongly on our behalf. We are grateful to them all. The greatest asset of Naz is its staff and volunteers," he said with some emotion.

Leader moves on

After four and a half years leading Naz, Mr Maharaj is leaving to develop a career in international human rights work. "For an organisation like Naz to remain at the cutting edge," he said, "it is important to have new blood, new ideas, new energy and fresh enthusiasm to lead it in the next stages of growth and success."

"We wish him well," said Ms Edwards. "Over the past four and a half years he has provided sound leadership, raised the profile of the organisation and earned the respect of the sector."

Looking back, Mr Maharaj said: "I took over the Naz project when it was on the brink of closure due to various problems - I'm pleased to say I have taken the organisation from a South Asian community-based voluntary organisation to a multiethnic professional agency. We now provide services of the high-

est quality. Another achievement has been to expand our community to include clients from the Horn of Africa and Latin America. Naz has also begun work at a European level with its EU-funded AIDS and mobility project."

NAZ's future

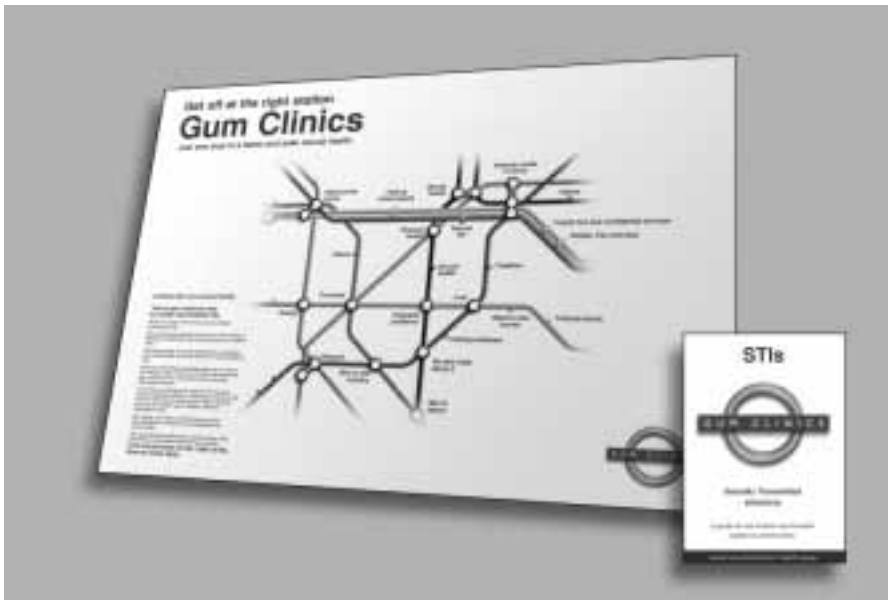
Looking ahead, Mr Maharaj said Naz must continue to win greater acceptance for gay men and women within the minority communities. "The key to the Naz ethos is to challenge and campaign against exclusion. This is the reason Naz was founded and should always be the core of our mission," he stressed.

To the next director, Mr Maharaj had this advice: "Continue to respond to needs of clients within our communities and carry services to them rather than make them fit into our services. And don't be faint-hearted when challenging racism and discrimination."

Welcome to Tahera

While a new director is being recruited, ethnic health expert Tahera Aanchawan will serve as interim director. She brings a wealth of experience and skills to Naz. Apart from managing and developing various projects and high-level policy work, Ms Aanchawan served as director of the SHARE project for six years. Based at the prestigious King's Fund, SHARE was the first national resource on health and race. Ms Aanchawan is also an experienced fund raiser with an excellent track record. Rasaneh Khaberie extends a warm welcome to Tahera.

GET OFF AT THE RIGHT STATION



If you know London's underground better than sexual health, NAZ has a new resource for you. 'Get off at the right station' gives all the facts about sexually transmitted infections ('STIs' in health language). It explains where to get help and how to protect yourself. It also lists common sexual infections and treatments. The leaflet is produced in Turkish, Kurdish and Somali.

The good news: "Most sexual infections can be treated easily and successfully," says the guide. Going for a check up "is nothing to be ashamed of," it adds, recognising that we might feel embarrassed. Sexual health is important to ourselves and to our partners, it says. Practising safer sex is still the best way to reduce risk of HIV and other infections.

Do you think you have a sexual disease? If yes, visit a Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinic. At a GUM, usually part of a hospital, you can get tested and treated. Their services are totally free and confidential. And GUM staff are specially trained professionals whose job is to cure you not judge you. So request a male or female worker, use an interpreter, give a false name - it's up to you.

The leaflet tells you all about: Bacterial Vaginitis, Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Genital Herpes, HIV, Pubic Lice, Scabies, Syphilis, Thrush, Trichomoniasis, Urethritis, Genital Warts and Hepatitis A/B/C. It also lists sexual health clinics in Hillingdon, Brent and Harrow, and across London. The major hospitals St Bartholomew's (020 7601 8601), St Mary's (020 7886 6619) and St Thomas' (020 7620 0903) have GUMs.

NAZ TRAINS BANGLADESHI EDUCATORS



Bangladeshi peer educators

A group of young Bangladeshis have become peer educators for their community. In the Naz training course, commissioned by Tower Hamlets authorities, the young Bangladeshis learn about HIV/AIDS and sexual health issues and prepare appropriate activities to get their message across. Each peer educator is expected to make about 5-10 contacts in their community raising sexual health issues.

NAZ TO HELP PUPILS IN NORTH LONDON

Naz will soon be helping pupils in North London, where teenage pregnancies are rising. Camden and Islington Health Authority has asked Naz to make special advisors available in secondary schools at lunch time sessions during this spring term. Naz advisors will provide support on emotional, sexual and general health. The advisors will come from different ethnic backgrounds and speak home languages.

Naz will need to appoint a coordinator to organise the project. The coordinator will work with the schools, identify the ethnic minorities, appoint and train advisors and design publicity. The advisors will be appointed with the local Health Promotion Department. Although they will get training, Naz expects the advisors to bring experience of youth work and counselling. (If you are interested, please contact Naz.)

This project was set up after official research found that secondary schools have an impor-

tant role in giving students information about contraceptives, sexual health and relationships. Government guidelines say some ethnic minority youth may have to rely on schools as their main - or only - source of sex education. Meanwhile the government is trying to halve teenage pregnancy rates nationwide, and Camden and Islington has found that its rates are higher than average. Islington education authorities are also trying to ensure ethnic minorities are not excluded.

To ensure this project meets Naz's high standards, it will be evaluated on an ongoing basis to monitor the schools' participation, ease of management and pupil take-up. Besides, Naz will be looking into the issues raised by ethnic minority students to inform future work in this area. Six weeks into the project, the main stakeholders will hold a meeting to determine progress and a final report will later be sent out to interested bodies.

HORN OF AFRICA PROJECT TACKLES HIV

While the Naz Horn of Africa Project has achieved some successes in 18 months, it needs more support to halt a rising infection rate in its communities.

HIV growing among Horn Africans

HIV infection rates are rising among Horn of Africa migrants in Britain. A growing number of Ethiopians and Somalis are visiting sexual health clinics, assumed to have contracted HIV through heterosexual sex before arriving in the country. Meanwhile long-running civil wars have prompted a large influx from these countries to Britain.

The Horn of Africa is at the epicentre of Africa's HIV epidemic. But unlike Uganda and other nations, the HIV infection level is growing sharply in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is most affected with 10% of the population estimated infected by HIV.

In Britain, there is little recognition of this. The recently-arrived Horn of Africa communities are ill-equipped to address health needs. Lacking resources, community groups are preoccupied with immigration, housing and welfare problems.

Naz initiates work

Through its Horn of Africa Project, Naz has started HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention work for the Horn of Africa community. Naz has worked in partnership with mainstream and community-based voluntary organisations.

Over 90 people attended a recent World AIDS Day event for the Ethiopian community. The Ethiopian Health association and other



Tawakal Somali Group

groups resolved to set up an Ethiopian HIV Consortium. Attended by Ethiopian religious leaders, the seminar also heard from young participants that sexual health information from parents and guardians was inadequate.

Meanwhile Naz and Somalis in Tower Hamlets have begun producing sexual health resources. Tawakal, a local Somali group, was commissioned by social services to develop HIV/AIDS leaflets and tapes with clear preventive messages. These resources were launched at a well-attended World AIDS Day event. It represents a major step for the Somali community in Tower Hamlets in tackling cultural taboos and religious stigmas associated with HIV and AIDS.

Major challenges ahead

Evidence suggests that Horn of Africa communities in Britain do not acknowledge the full risk of HIV and may be unaware that they are spreading the disease. Men are still not wearing condoms, and women are not able to object.

The HIV prevention message has reached a small portion of the Horn of Africa communities. But without sustained support from local health authorities and mainstream organisations, the HIV infection is likely to rise in parallel with home countries. Other African sexual health organisations have tried to include Horn of Africa communities in their remit, but appropriate cultural and linguistic services have not been developed.

NAZ STARTS WORK IN SCOTLAND

A national AIDS and mobility seminar held in Scotland March 18 was a great success, said Naz director Krishna Maharaj who helped organise the event. Over 20 key policy makers, community-based organisations and HIV workers developed a work plan to begin work with migrants and refugees in Scotland. Their aim is to provide care and support to this vulnerable and excluded group, many of them

dispersed to Scotland under a controversial government programme.

"I'm very pleased with the outcome of the seminar - we have set up a steering group to see that work is taken forward. I'm now sure that work with migrants will commence in Scotland. And I was impressed at the calibre, expertise and commitment of the participants," said Mr Maharaj. He added that he

was pleased to see another Naz initiative yielding results.

Growing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers are being dispersed to Scotland without adequate support services. Under its mission to challenge exclusion, Naz is committed to finding a way to help these ethnic communities.

A VISIT TO NAZ.ORG

Find out everything you need to know about the Naz project, its services and work at www.naz.org.uk. The site is clear, and easy to use with information easy to access. There is nothing over complicated or pretentious about it. Its colour combination - hot khaki, light blue and lilac against a white background - makes it easy on the eye. The language is easy to understand and the print is easy to read.

From the main page you can easily access nine pages. 'What is Naz?' tells you about the project, and links you to further pages

including the project's aims and objectives, a message from the director, trustees and patrons, partners and associates, and quotes about Naz, and its European project.

It also offers pages on Men's sexual health, Women's sexual health, Young people, NAZ Latina NAZ Brazil, Horn of Africa, Do you need support?, Training and consultancy and resources.



DOST PROVES FRIEND



A BIGGER KISS FOR WOMEN

BIRTHDAY MESSAGE



Happy birthday to Kiss, we're 2 years old. A Naz Project London social support group, Kiss has been queering it up for the South Asian and Middle Eastern lesbian massif at The Glass Bar for 2 years. With over a 140 members London wide the vulva network is expanding daily and Kiss is cooking on gas like never before.

The last Thursday of the month at The Glass bar has become the coolest chill out zone for Asian and Middle Eastern lesbian and bisexual women. They arrive in their hordes and take over the place. A friendly place to meet and make new friends Kiss has never been more popular.

On this auspicious occasion Kiss would like to say goodbye to our outgoing Kiss volunteer co-ordinator Neeraj Malhotra and welcome two brand new Kiss volunteer facilitators. Ms Uma & Ms Dipti Mojaria.

"I have been bowled over at the sheer numbers of women who have come and felt something very powerful from being at the Kiss Group. It has been amazing to watch the seventeen year olds just coming out get to know women in their thirties and forties comfortable and confident with their sexualities. It has been inspiring to see the twenty-somethings who have been out to themselves for a while find the courage to come out to their families. When women tell me that they are in shock because they can't believe that there are so many other women like them, I know Kiss provides a space that is invaluable. I'm sure the commitment of the women who come, and the richness of the atmosphere experienced will mean that Kiss continues to go from strength to strength."

Neeraj Malhotra (Kiss group co-ordinator)

NB: Club Kali will be throwing a slap up party for the Kiss grrrls on April 6th at the Dome, Tufnell Park. For more information call Parminder on 020 8741 1879



DLY TO USERS

The DOST group - a NAZ sub-project - is told to keep up the good work

Gay Asians and their friends have praised the special support services of Naz's DOST group. The DOST group, started in 1994, gives social support to gay, bisexual and men-who-have-sex-with-men from ethnic communities served by Naz. It is mostly used by South Asians, although men of Turkish, Middle Eastern and Arab origin have also attended meetings.

A survey last October concluded that DOST should continue offering an informal setting for like-minded men to meet for friendship and relationships. The survey was carried out at a meeting and social function held Tuesday 12 September 2000 at the Freedom Café, Wardour Street, London.

"Meeting other South Asian men gives the opportunity for individuals to boost self-confidence and it also helps emotionally," said one respondent, summing up the feelings of several others. "DOST enables people with similar experiences to discuss problems or issues that may affect them. It also provides a feeling of belonging and unification," said another.

DOST canvassed the views of its users and friends to see if it could improve its social support service amid shifts in the lesbian and gay scene since the advent of HIV/AIDS. It used questionnaires, group and one-to-one discussions to reach its findings.

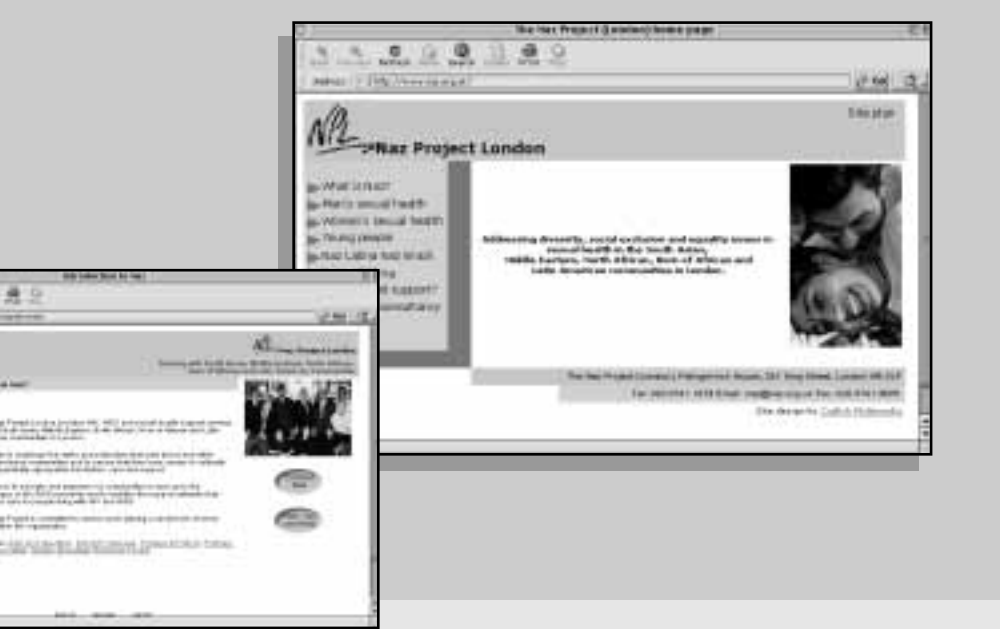
DOST should provide specialised advice, social support and a friendly atmosphere, the respondents said. "Professional advice especially information on safer sex and other

issues affecting Gay men," said one respondent when asked what he wanted from the group. Others said: "A safe meeting place which is open, friendly, and no prejudice;" "A comfortable place that generates friendship and not just one night stands," and "Friendliness, open-minded and no hate."

Thirty people attended the event, many of them non-DOST members. Sixteen completed questionnaires, eight of them said they were gay. All were South Asians. Most were between 16 and 25 years old. Although most respondents wanted DOST meetings to be structured, the respondents had different ideas about where and when the meetings should be held.

Many respondents also pledged active help to the group. Ten men said they would help develop a newsletter and another ten said they would help create a website. Others said they would help to give workshops, coordinate social events, recruit volunteers and peer educators, present radio programmes, develop resources and take part in Mardi Gras, Summer Rites and World AIDS Day.

DOST has worked on the problem of isolation and racism in the mainstream lesbian and gay community. Its members have also explored issues like sexuality, HIV/AIDS, sexual health, marriage, self-confidence and self-esteem. The group has celebrated various cultural, social and religious events and participated in a number of studies - including one to develop a culturally appropriate condom pack in various languages.



INDIAN LESBIANS FACE THE FURY

Writer and activist Ashwini Sukthankar chronicles a sexual revolution spurred by the furore over a controversial film depicting Indian lesbians in 1998. This article is printed with the kind permission of the New Internationalist www.newint.org, where it appeared in October 2000.

In a coffee shop in Mumbai I waited nervously to meet 'the community'. I had just moved back to the city after years abroad and begun the search for other lesbians. Already I had been warned by Sakshi that levels of trust were low. This was not only because of the need for confidentiality but also because women from The Outside, she told me tactfully, tended to take up so much space; tended 'to assume that their priorities are ours'. When the phone rang and the server asked for Sakshi, I was close enough to hear the voice on the other end, demanding: 'Well? Shall I come to meet her? Is she Us?'

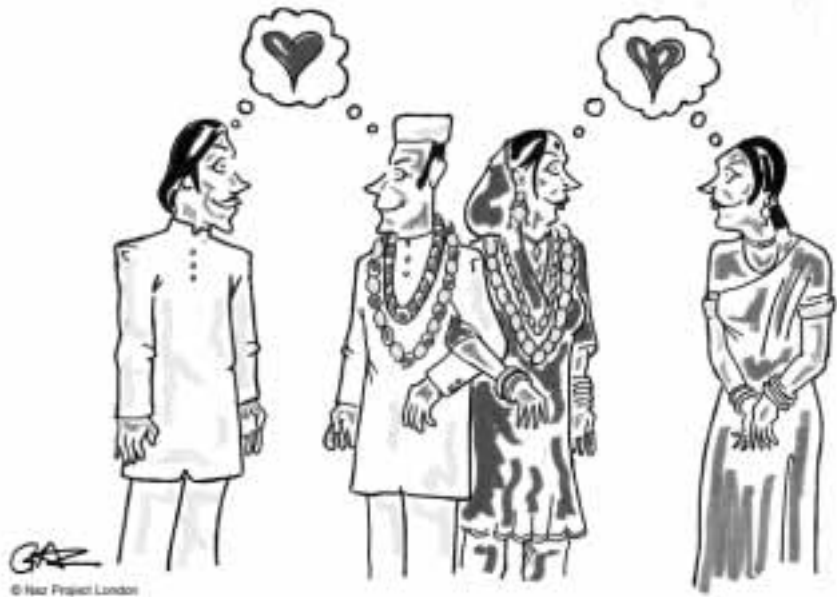
Us and Not-Us... these words took on a new valence for me after Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* came out in India, at the end of 1998, and was immediately attacked by the Hindu right for its depiction of lesbianism. *Fire*, a tale of two women married to two brothers, developing a relationship with each other in the congested streets of middle-class New Delhi, was not a film made for Indian audiences. The film had even less to offer Indian lesbians. In its portrayal of two married women falling painlessly in love, there was, as the lesbian writer VS pointed out, no attempt to take on the 'anarchic and threatening emotions that accompany sexual practices generally considered perverted, criminal and taboo'.

Nevertheless, lesbians watched with alarm as the attacks on the film gathered intensity. Even though the Censor Board had, to everyone's surprise, cleared the film without cuts, right-wing groups like the Shiv Sena and Rashtriya Seva Sangh were in no mood to

accept that verdict. On 1 December, Pramod Navalkar, Minister of Culture for Maharashtra and no stranger to controversy told newspapers that lesbianism was 'a pseudo-feminist trend from the West and no part of Indian womanhood'. The next day movie theatres in Mumbai that were screening *Fire* were attacked by mobs of men and women from the Shiv Sena. Ticket windows were smashed, hoardings were torn down, and audiences beaten up. The day after that theatres in Delhi were targeted.

that *Fire* should not have been attacked would do so only in the most general terms: it was as though lesbians were purely symbolic, unnamable markers of the director's right to creative freedom, of the audience's democratic rights to watch what it chose, or of the Shiv Sena mob's fascist intolerance.

So some lesbians in Delhi gathered on a tidal wave of despair, unable to believe that their years of discreet organising had culminated in such intense and unwelcome visibility. It



In the ensuing debate in the upper house of Parliament only detractors of the film could actually bring themselves to say the word 'lesbian'. 'Do we have lesbian culture in our families?' one MP demanded, defending the attacks. 'The Mahabharat and the Ramayana don't contain any lesbianism,' agreed another. On the other hand, the MPs insisting

was almost incredible that we should have come together at all for we were a dispersed, fragmented lot, rent by dissension over who 'we' were - a national lesbian conference had recently disintegrated over the issue of whether white women were welcome in a space designated Indian. Even more disturbingly, over the span of a very few years

HIV RISING IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

HIV/AIDS infection rates are rising in South-East Asia, according to latest official figures. The increase runs counter to global trends that show signs of the pandemic leveling off in other regions. Thailand may be an exception to the increase. The government there has made significant commitment and investments in a bid to

tackle the problem. And the infection rate appears to be stabilising in the country.

Monitoring remains a problem throughout the region. South East Asia is now thought to have some 5 million of the 34 million people living with HIV/AIDS globally. However the HIV/AIDS situation is known to vary widely by country, and by local area.

The World Health Organisation is urging countries in the region to intensify their monitoring of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STIs). Without dependable data for each community, national health planners will find it difficult to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS.

the community had divided itself neatly into lesbian archives, sexuality helplines, education and outreach groups. The informal networks we had fostered in our homes splintered gradually by ideology, particularly disagreement over funding.

But, in spite of our histories of disagreement, lesbians in Delhi joined forces in the wake of the attacks on Fire. We worked with desperate energy to plan a protest rally, scheduled to take place within 48 hours of the Shiv Sena's violence, and reached out to all our old allies from secular groups and from the women's movement. To our dismay we encountered that same unwillingness to name the issue a lesbian one - again, it seemed, our concerns were to be subsumed in favour of the 'bigger picture'. The word 'lesbian' was not to be used in the press release, one women's group insisted. Instead, we needed to highlight our support for the film's theme of 'the hypocrisy and tyranny of the patriarchal family'. After all, we could not possibly expect groups at large to champion a 'narrow' concern like lesbianism.

We gave in and the protest went ahead. Hundreds of people showed up outside Regal Cinema - the theatre that had been ransacked by the mobs - holding candles, chanting, raising placards. But for the first time ever in India, lesbians were visible among the other groups marking the specific nature of their anger. In the sea of placards about human rights, secularism, women's autonomy, freedom of speech, was a sign painted in the colours of the national flag: 'Indian and Lesbian'.

Who would have thought that staking that saucy claim to our share of national pride would result in such a furore? You are not Us, we were reminded at once, by a chorus of voices. The deputy editor of India Today expressed particular dismay that 'the militant gay movement, which has hitherto operated as website extensions of a disagreeable trend in the West, could now come out into the open and flaunt banners in Delhi suggesting that "lesbianism is part of our heritage"'. He went on to announce: 'Thievery, deceit, murder and other... [criminal] offences have a long history. That doesn't elevate them to the level of heritage.'

But that same searing moment of visibility and defiance threw together a small group of activists - a varied lot, from trade unionists to professional blood donors, men and women, heterosexual, homosexual and other. What we had in common was a sense that we should take the energy of the protest forward in the form of a campaign for lesbian rights. Why the emphasis on lesbian rights? 'To articulate the troubled connections of lesbians in and with the women's movement,' we declared in our mandate. 'To talk about the social suppression of women's sexuality in general, and to address the aspects of lesbians' lives that make this struggle distinct from the gay men's movement.'

The Campaign for Lesbian Rights was a revelation for me. For the first time, lesbian issues were occupying public space - we met in the Indian Coffee House in the centre of

Delhi, a hotbed of anti-establishment politics with a permanent Home Ministry spy, and we sipped six-rupee coffee and strategised aloud. We handed out thousands of leaflets on 'Myths and Realities about Lesbianism' in parts of Delhi that were commonly considered hostile to activists - industrial areas housing hundreds of factories, a Muslim university, outside the headquarters of Delhi Police. We attended public meetings organised by women's groups, human-rights groups, student groups. We wrote a street play, the familiar rhythms and gestures of that form inscribing the experiences of grassroots activists among us who had listened to women in villages all over rural North India talking about *sahelishte* - intimate bonds between women.

I relearned the lesson that a movement is accountable only to the people, and, to that end, that rejection is only the beginning of dialogue rather than the end. We fielded questions like 'What have lesbians done for society that we should support you?' and stood our ground and continued the conversation, our commitment spurred by the knowledge that, as a group opposed to external funding, our work depended on our ability to persuade fellow activists, fellow citizens, that they should contribute a rupee or two to our cause.

Progressive groups, who addressed all kinds of dispossession and oppression through the lens of human rights, would tell us that lesbian rights was no fit realm for them to enter because sexuality was about 'personal choice'. And so we walked a curious double line, saying: 'All choices involving consenting adults deserve respect, and in the face of compulsory heterosexuality, human rights means making that choice real', and 'Lesbianism is not necessarily a choice'. It's hard to describe what it meant to us, then, to receive a letter from the Human Rights Trust acknowledging our work as 'part and parcel of the broader human-rights movement'. It was the recognition that lesbians were part of a larger group of people, attacked and discriminated against in a panoply of ways, but with this in common - that we could give a name to the violations and to the rights we were seeking.

Most importantly, though, the Campaign reshaped what I thought of when I said 'we'. I have in front of me a citizens' report on the suicides of a lesbian couple in an Orissa village, brought out by AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan, one of the Campaign's constituent groups. Written by two heterosexual men, the report is titled, touchingly, For People Like Us.

Ashwini Sukthankar is a Mumbai-based writer and activist. Her book *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian writing from India* was published in 1999 by Penguin India (ISBN 014 028309 9).



MINORITIES POWER LONDON ECONOMY

Ethnic minorities are increasingly vital to London's economy with 25% of residents belonging to ethnic minority groups. Mainly younger non-white groups will make up a growing proportion of the capital's potential workforce.

Currently, ethnic minorities - mainly Indians - own one in five businesses in London. But ownership varies somewhat by location. In North West London, 32% of businesses are owned by ethnic minorities. In most other parts that figure is around 20%, except in East and South East London, where it is around 10%.

The study found that some 10% of White and Indian workers in London are unemployed, a figure that doubles for other Black groups. Ethnic minorities are also more likely to obtain jobs through informal methods than Whites. And although ethnic minority students are more likely to attend university, they are more likely to be unemployed.

Indian men now earn similar pay to White men. And Black women earn more than Black men or White women. But average rates of pay for Black men across Britain are 78% of those for White men, and rates for Pakistani/Bangladeshis are, on average, even lower.

MUSLIM AND GAY



Penalties for homosexuality are most extreme in Muslim countries. Feminist and rights activist Anissa Hélie looks at the current drive to control sexuality. This article is printed with the kind permission of the New Internationalist www.newint.org, where it appeared in October 2000.

Homosexuality is explicitly condemned in the criminal codes of at least 83 countries, according to Amnesty International. Twenty-six of these are Muslim countries. This means that the majority of Muslim countries, including supposedly 'liberal' ones like Tunisia as well as dictatorships like Sudan, outlaw same-sex relationships.

Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Mauritania, Sudan, Yemen and Chechnya carry the death

penalty for persons presumed guilty of homosexual acts, justifying it with the Shar'i'a or standard interpretation of Muslim jurisprudence. Though not always applied, the existence of the death penalty makes sexual minorities extremely vulnerable.

The state is not alone in practising repression. Communities and families have a part to play. Violence, harassment, persecution and extrajudicial or 'shame' killings are not uncommon. In Indonesia, for example, homosexuality is not illegal. But in 1998 'Muslim militia' launched an anti-gay campaign on the island of Mindanao during which gay Muslims were terrorised, beaten up and ordered to leave or be castrated. Jordan does not specifically outlaw homosexuality either. But that did not stop four Jordanians last year trying to kidnap their 23-year-old lesbian relative studying in the US, beating her and attempting to force her on to a plane bound for Jordan.

Sex and tradition

In spite of such obstacles and hostility, same-sex relationships do take place, even in the most repressive countries. Sometimes, the very segregation of the sexes allows for intimacy between people of the same gender without it being considered abnormal. As long as one keeps a low profile, such behaviour may generally go unchallenged. This is true for both sexes.

Culture is not, therefore, always against us and there are positive examples of same-sex relationships to be found in different Muslim cultures. Nor is invisibility necessarily required. For example, in some traditional travelling theatres and musical groups in Pakistan, the younger men who play female roles sometimes live as a couple with the group leader.

Conservative manipulation

For some people, homosexuality is 'unlawful' in Islam; for others, the Qur'an does not clearly condemn homosexual acts. The only actual reference to homosexuality in the

Qur'an can be found in the sections about Sodom and Gomorrah. While the harsh punishment inflicted on the people of Sodom and Gomorrah at the time of the prophet Lut is for some people a clear proof that Allah meant to eradicate homosexual practice, others argue that there is no specific punishment for homosexuality. The people of Sodom were punished for 'doing everything excessively' and for not respecting the rules of hospitality. They insist that it is not the Qur'an itself that brings condemnation of homosexuals but rather the homophobic culture prevailing in Muslim societies.

In the vanguard of repression are so-called 'religious fundamentalists'. But in the Women Living Under Muslim Laws Network (visit <http://wluml.org/ENGblurb.html>) to which I belong, we believe 'fundamentalists' are extreme-right political forces seeking to obtain or maintain political power through manipulation of religion and religious beliefs, as well as other ethnic, culturally-based identities. And the rise of 'fundamentalism' is a global phenomenon which affects not just Islam but all major religions.

There is also a strong connection between fundamentalist homophobic assaults and those directed against women who do not 'behave' - who may be unmarried or living alone. Extremist religious leaders and their followers target sexual minorities and women first. It is always through manipulation of religious, national or cultural identities that violence is legitimised. Both extremist religious leaders and state officials are likely to demonise sexual minorities, often as a means to distract from economic crisis or political controversy.

Joining forces

It is interesting to note that in past centuries Arabs attributed homosexual behaviour to the bad influence of Persians. Today, it's much the same story, though the characters may change - homosexuality is currently denounced as a 'Western disease'. Meanwhile fundamentalism has taken on a global dimension. Extremist religious leaders from various faiths are coming together to oppose sexual rights. By 'closing ranks', coalitions of Christians, Muslims and other fundamentalists affect the international agenda.

In Britain, a Muslim-Christian alliance was recently formed to oppose the repeal of Section 28 - a law which forbids the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools. At a conference in May 2000, religious spokesperson Dr Majid Katme stated that 'lesbianism is spreading like fire in society. We must vaccinate our children against this curse'. Sheikh Sharkhawy, a senior cleric at Regents Park mosque in central London, publicly advocates the execution of gay males and demands life imprisonment for lesbians.

At least as worrying is the support for fun-

GUATEMALAN TRANSVESTITES KILLED WITH IMPUNITY?

Two more transvestites (men who dress as women) have been murdered recently in Guatemala. Astrid La Fontaine was killed last May 20, and Beverly Lineth in July. But no one has yet been brought to justice for these crimes.

OASIS (Organizacion de Apoyo a una Sexualidad Integral frente al SIDA), a Guatemalan gay organisation, has documented 6 to 10 murders of transvestites each year between 1997 to 1999. All the killers remain unpunished.

The group, and other rights activists, have called for letters to the Guatemalan authorities demanding investigations into all the murders. If you support this, please write (in Spanish or English) and express your concern in polite terms to:

His excellency: Carlos Garcia Herrera
Procurador general de la nacion
Ministerio Público
8a. Av. 10-67, zona 1
Guatemala, 01001

damentalist politics by the so-called 'free West'. The hypocrisy of most political leaders knows no limit: their ever-changing definition of 'fundamentalism' allows them to turn against allies of yesterday with whom they should never have got involved in the first place (eg. Ayatollah Khomeini, Taleban). Second, it is obvious that economic and geo-strategic concerns always prevail. We can only regret that there are so few allies at the international level who are ready to compromise their interests in order to defend the rights of women and sexual minorities.

Strategies of resistance

Despite a threatening environment, sexual minorities are organising and becoming more visible in Muslim countries and communities. For example, much research is being carried out to interpret religious texts. The Qur'an is being re-examined by gay, or gay-friendly, theologians and believers in order to break the monopoly of male homophobic interpretation. Others are engaged in reclaiming homoerotic literature.

New solidarity associations are being set up (see below). These organisations are, for obvious security reasons, often located outside Muslim countries. Most of them, however, connect with individuals and groups within Muslim countries. The organisations seek to break the isolation faced by sexual minorities. In Muslim countries and communities, sexual minorities have only just begun speaking out. More people are rejecting the idea that violence against sexual diversity is 'divinely sanctioned'.

Activist, support and research groups

- Al-Fatiha (meaning 'the Opening' or 'the Beginning' in Arabic) has branches in the US, Canada and UK. Recently held its second international conference. Website: www.alfatiha.org
- Kelma Belgium specifically supports North African gays and lesbians. E-mail: kelmabelgique@hotmail.com
- Homan advocates for the rights of Iranian gays and lesbians; it has branches in Britain, US, Norway and Sweden and publishes a magazine in both Persian and English. Website: www.homan.cwc.net/
- The Yoesuf Foundation in the Netherlands aims at providing information related to Islam and homosexuality. E-mail: education@yoesuf.nl
- Karama, based in the US, brings together sexual minority Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Berbers, Persians and Turks. E-mail: Karama-request@MIT.EDU
- Assal (meaning 'honey') is an Arab lesbian support group in the US. E-mail: labwas@yahoo.com

NAZ, LATIN AMERICANS RECOGNISED



NAZ LATINA HAS DAY IN PARLIAMENT

Britain's Latin Americans and their concerns about HIV/AIDS received a high profile launch at the House of Commons in November. An unprecedented meeting on November 21 marked the first time parliament acknowledged the existence of a large Latin American community in Britain. The meeting in the Jubilee Room was attended by some 40 health workers, community leaders, civil servants, journalists and others concerned.

'The meeting was very successful,' said Naz director Krishna Maharaj, who chaired the meeting. 'The HIV/AIDS needs of Latin Americans in Britain have now been officially recognised. The meeting also got significant coverage in the Latin media, and the issue is now firmly in the public domain. We expect greater efforts from mainstream health providers to reach Latin Americans in the UK.'

Anxious about HIV/AIDS among Latin Americans, speakers from Naz Latina, Naz Brazil and the Latin American Association

asked Government to fund research into their needs. Neil Gerrard, chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on HIV/AIDS, heard from a range of speakers that Latin Americans were excluded from mainstream health provision and unrecognised by authorities because of gaps in official data.

'Every time we try to raise funds we go back to the same situation... Who are the Latin American community? How many are there? And as many of us have EC passports or are illegal, Latin Americans remain unquantified. Whenever we seek funds for needs assessment we end up not getting them for this reason.'

To crack this vicious circle of invisibility, Mr Maharaj urged authorities to include a category for Latin Americans to tick in censuses, health research and monitoring systems. All participants agreed research is needed soon into the needs of Latin Americans and into their HIV/AIDS and health needs in particular.



Naz Diary

Open Mornings

Naz London holds Open Mornings for workers from statutory, voluntary and community organisations who would like to know more about our services and resources. This is an ideal opportunity to meet staff and discuss ways in which Naz London can help your organisation.

Open Mornings are held on the last Thursday of each month from 10am - 12am.

Call us now on 020 8741 1879 to book a place.

Gay Men's Counselling Project

for Black and Asian gay and bisexual men

A free and confidential service by professional Black and Asian gay counsellors, organised by Blackliners with support from Naz.

For details please contact: Manjit Roprah on 020 8741 1879; or Anup Karia on 020 7738 7468.

KISS

Kiss Group is a group for lesbian and bisexual identified women from the South Asian and Middle Eastern communities. Whatever your age, whether you are married or single, or if you are confused about your sexuality and want to meet other lesbians and bisexual women for friendship and support in a safe women only space then call Parminder confidentially 020 8741 1879.

The Kiss group meets on the last Thursday of each month at the Glass Bar in Euston between 6:30 - 9:30pm (opposite Euston BR Station).

Check website: www.planetkiss.org.uk



Make Friends at DOST!

Naz London's social support group for South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African gay identified men and men who have sex with men. A safe, confidential and informal space to socialise and discuss issues around sexuality, safer sex, drug use, marriage and culture.

Meet at Mondo Bar, 12-13 Greek Street, Soho on first Wednesday of each month 7-9pm.

Call 020 8741 1879 for more information.

Dost Positive Support Group

For men who have sex with men

Dost Positive is a social support group for gay identified men and men who have sex with men from the South Asian, Middle Eastern and North African communities who are living with HIV and AIDS.

Access to a social worker is available between 2 and 4pm.

Lunch and refreshments are provided at low cost - a nutritionally balanced three course cooked meal, suitable for vegetarians, non-vegetarians and Muslims (halal).

Date: Last Thursday of every month

Time: 12.30 - 4.30pm.

Venue: Riverhouse Drop-in (please phone 020 8741 4772 for details).

Call Manjit or Suki 020 8741 1879, 9.30 am - 5.30pm, Mon-Fri.

'Raaf Ki Rani' (Queen of the Night)

Bringing to the South Asian Gay Population a hot and spicy Radio Programme.

Every Wednesday, from 1.00 to 2.00am on Spectrum Radio (558AM).

Tune in and enjoy the music, news, discussions, information and advice, lots of gossip, fun and frolics.

Naz Information and resource stalls

Held regularly at Club Kali, "an authentic mix of South Asian Spices with Bhangra and House, Hindi and Soul, Swing and Arabic flavours". The Naz stalls offer information, advice and resources on sexual health, HIV and AIDS.

Club Kali is held on the first and third Fridays of each month: 6th & 20th April and 4th & 18th May. 10pm - 3am.

Club Kali is held at The Dome nightclub, 1 Dartmouth Park Hill, London N19

Nearest tube: Tufnell Park (Northern Line)

Naz Latina Support Group

Two support groups for Latin Americans affected by HIV currently meet every month; the Grupo Auto Ajuda Pau Brazil (for Portuguese speakers) and Grupo Amigos (for Spanish speakers).

For further information contact the Naz Latina team on 020 8741 1879 or the London Lighthouse on Wednesday (Naz Latina) and Thursday (Naz Brazil) after 1pm on 020 7792 1200.

Naz Horn of Africa at Akairah

A Drop-In Centre for Caring and Sharing

Akairah is a River House Drop-in Support Service for people from the black communities living with HIV and AIDS. Naz Project at Akairah provides services which include:

- * Access to a social and health worker
- * Advice service on housing, welfare rights, health and new treatments
- * Support groups

You can also have access to Social Workers, Complementary and other therapies.

Lunch and refreshments are available at a reasonable low price. A nutritionally balanced cooked meal is available for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians (suitable for Muslims, i.e. halal).

The Horn of Africa drop-in worker will be at Akairah on the first Thursday of every month from 12:00 - 4:30pm.

For further information contact Bisrat (Mon, Tues, Wed) on 020 8741 1879 or Helen at River House on 020 8741 4772.

Events

Pride Lesbian and Gay March/ Parade: Saturday 30th June. For more information contact Naz on 020 8741 1879 or Sam Smith on 020 8788 3408 or visit the website www.londonmardigras.com.

Lesbian and Gay Film Festival: 28th March - 11th April 2001. Contact National Film Theatre, South Bank on 020 7928 3232.



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