

# rungh

A South Asian Quarterly



**the temptation issue**

art culture music film

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Ameen Gill

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Kaizad Gustad

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Cover photos: carmen schmid

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Model: hem behl



## the temptation issue

# editorial.

Sherazad Jamal and Zool Suleman started **rungh** in 1992 with the mandate to promote dialogue, document events, and challenge definitions within the South Asian Arts and Literature community. Seven years, four volumes, and several hectic deadlines later, the **rungh** founders have decided to move on to other pursuits. Although the pen has now changed, we believe that the philosophy of **rungh** should remain the same.

We are the new editors of **rungh**. Although we operate as a collective, we are also five individuals with different personalities. Through our unique experiences we have created a fresh vision for the magazine. In the end, we came out with an issue that has glued in it a little strip of all of us – the Temptation Issue.

One of the first decisions we made when we decided to take on this project was to update **rungh's** face to make it as visually stimulating as possible. You'll notice the masthead has changed, as has the look and feel of the magazine's interior. **rungh's** new look is a reflection of the tone we would like to set for the future of **rungh**— bold, thought provoking and fun.

We chose the theme of Temptation because after acting on our own urge to rejuvenate **rungh** we thought it only natural to learn about this business of Temptation.

Temptation means different things to different people. Sex, drugs and money immediately come to mind, but what about religion and bubble gum? In this issue we have collected together different viewpoints on Temptation, expressed through art, poetry, fiction, essays and conversation. We hope to stir your imagination and maybe prompt you to re-examine your personal definition of Temptation.

Our upcoming issues will explore the themes of Journeys, Satire, and Motion.. In addition to articles based on a central theme, in each issue we will also include features on film, music, art and literature – anything going on in the arts community that happens to catch our (or your) eye. We welcome all submissions, regardless of artistic medium

## The Editorial Team

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*P.S. Don't forget to check out our new web site ([www.rungh.org](http://www.rungh.org)).*

Coming next issue: Journey's. A look at Journey's of all sorts – spiritual, philosophical, and physical. We welcome submissions.

We would like to thank the following people for their assistance, inspiration and continued support:

*Zool Suleman, Sherazad Jamal, David Laulainen, Fatima Jaffer, Canada Council, B.C. Arts Council, our contributors, Mom and Dad Gill, Haps.*

# rungh is...

**rungh** is an interdisciplinary magazine committed to the exploration of traditional and contemporary South Asian cultural production and its contexts. It is a project of the Rungh Cultural Society, an incorporated, non-profit society.

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# Cracking the Earth

by Rehan Ansari

...do you have to live in India to be insightful about India?

**T**oronto-based Deepa Mehta emigrated to Canada in 1973 and made her first film, *Sam and Me*, in 1990. She directed *Camilla* (starring Jessica Tandy and Bridget Fonda) in 1992. After her stint in Hollywood she returned to Toronto and Delhi to make *Fire* in 1996, a film about the transgressive relationship between two sisters-in-law in a middle-class Delhi household (starring Shabana Azmi). *Fire* received much critical acclaim and was the first of her trilogy *Fire*, *Earth* and *Water*. There were problems with the censor board in India but finally *Fire* had its theatrical release there this summer. The fact that *Fire* had finally been released in India and *Earth* was premiering at the Toronto Film Festival had Deepa Mehta brimming with confidence on opening night. Toronto, in all its diversity, seemed to be there. As well, stars such as Vinod Khanna and M.F Hussain were out to fete her.

**Rehan:** There were six films at the Toronto film festival that had South Asian, but mostly Indian, talent as engines. Is this a promising sign?

**Deepa:** I would not say "promising." Next year there may not be six films with South Asian content and talent. But it is inspiring. Speaking from a personal point of view I see the evolution of hybrid filmmaking. There are films being made that are not Bombay and not from the west; and I mean that in all aspects of film. In terms of talent, production design, how the director deals with actors and characters, I have a sensibility that

is no longer one that comes out of Indian cinema.

**Rehan:** What does that sensibility allow you to do?

**Deepa:** I can be uninhibited about subject. Whether it is about choices for women [*Fire*] or Partition [*Earth*] I did not have to think about repercussions as I would have in India. Nor did I have to wonder about the censor board. That being said the Indian censor board has passed *Earth* without a single cut. So you never know.

November 5<sup>th</sup> the film will be released in India. I wish it were being released in Pakistan simultaneously.

**Rehan:** How did you come across Partition as a subject?

**Deepa:** I have always thought about it. I grew up in Amritsar and my father went to Government College Lahore. So I grew up with the disillusionment of Partition. Sectarian war, as a subject, fascinates me. So when I came across Bapsi Sidhwa's book, where a Partition story is told from the point of view of a child, I loved it.

**Rehan:** Who did you imagine were the audience of the film? It is a melodrama. And a love story starring Aamir Khan. Will it cross over to the West?

**Deepa:** I did not think of an audience when I made the film. It is a personal enterprise. The film has very little English in it. I decided that the film be mostly in Urdu, Punjabi and Gujrati because I could not imagine the characters speaking English.

Nobody knows Aamir Khan outside the region. Who has seen *Ghulam* in the West? But I want everybody to see the film. Most people in the West have seen *Gandhi* and have no clue about Partition and the other side of Independence.

I think calling the film melodrama is a put down.

**Rehan:** I was referring to your idea of hybrid filmmaking. *Earth* has a love story, songs, and Aamir Khan but at the same time the film leaves you with an unresolved crisis unlike conventional melodrama.

Did you think of Lahore as a location?

**Deepa:** I wanted to shoot the entire film in Lahore. We applied for permission at the Ministry of Information but did not hear from them... simply did not hear from them. This was last August and I had to start shooting by January.

**Rehan:** Naseeruddin Shah, in Toronto for the film festival, said expatriate filmmakers and writers lack an intimacy with the Indian subject.

**Deepa:** I have spent half my life in India. I grew up in Delhi. But do you have to live in India to be insightful about India? A lot of people talk about this issue of being in or out. It may have to do with insecurity.

**Rehan:** What is your next project?

**Deepa:** *Water*. I am putting my passion of *Fire* and *Earth* to rest. It is set in the 1920s in Banaras. I am writing the screenplay myself.

*Rehan Ansari is a writer who divides his time between Toronto, Lahore and Delhi and is a FISAA Fellow (Fellowship in South Asian Alternatives) with CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) in Delhi.*

# Earth Under Fire

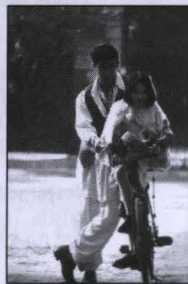
A review by Jasmyrn Singh

**E**arth, the second of Deepa Mehta's trilogy, *Fire, Earth, Water*, will undoubtedly intensify her reputation as a provocative and insightful filmmaker. Adapted from Bapsi Sidhwa's semi-autobiographical work, *Cracking the Earth*, *Earth* examines the societal upheaval and mass violence that marked India's independence and subsequent partition.

Set in Lahore, the film's importance is derived from examining the impact of partition amongst various Indian castes and religions. Until *Earth*, cinema set during partition, such as *Jewel in the Crown* and *Gandhi*, has been presented through the "Ivory Merchant lens", concentrating on British colonists and politically influential Indians. *Earth*, however, presents Partition from the point of view of a young Parsi girl, her upper class family, her lower class Hindu nanny, her Muslim suitors, and her religiously diverse circle of friends. Mehta fuses political themes with personal experiences, producing a work that is epic in scope but also intimate and moving.

*Earth* explores the personal turmoil and tragedy resulting from Partition. The plot charts the dissolution of loyalty, friendship, and humanity among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims that ensues after ethnic and religious balkanization. As Nehru brings India into the post-colonial era with his *Tryst of Destiny* speech, a train arrives carrying chopped corpses of Muslims killed while fleeing Northern India.

While documenting the particulars of partition, *Earth* successfully examines partition in an effort to understand the terror, irrationality, and lunacy that emerge from political decisions that encourage and rely upon sectarian nationalism. Such



patterns of events, for example, are present today: from the disintegration of Yugoslavia to strife in Northern Ireland.

Supplementing the script, *Earth's* visual representation of the intense emotions of the time is excellent. Mehta produces frames vibrant and rich in colour and details. Subtle and elegant cinematography and A.R. Rahman's stirring score complement the entire production. Mehta succeeds in terrifying viewers by recreating the epidemic fear, harrowing violence, and chaos of partition.

The success of the film also stems from the strong performance of the ensemble cast. The film features Indian film star Aamir Khan (*Ghulam, Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke*), Nandita Das (*Fire*) and noteworthy newcomers Rahul Khanna and Maia Sethna (who portrays the small girl who narrates the film).

Das, is stunning in *Earth* as the centre of a love triangle that ends in tragedy. The female lead displays an independence and originality characteristic of heroines in Mehta's films.

*Earth* treats the subject of partition in a just and balanced manner as no group is condemned or glorified. The film will likely generate controversy within segments of the South Asian community, reflective of the divisions created by Partition but it also provokes long over due dialogue on the subject.

After the screening of *Earth* at Toronto's Film Festival, the filmmaker acknowledged that the first two films of her trilogy reflect her belief and experience that "matters do not resolve themselves".

*As Nehru brings India into the post-colonial era with his Tryst of Destiny speech, a train arrives carrying chopped corpses of Muslims killed while fleeing Northern India.*

# Tell That Charlie

**The so-called New Wave Cinema of the 70's was not art. It was not a movement. It was a group of people.**

**"Naseer!"** The man yelled from two feet away from us. "Who would have thought I would run into you walking up Yonge St!" This was a South Asian man who stopped Naseeruddin Shah and myself as we walked up to catch a film at the Toronto Film Festival. "I have seen your films and they have been so important to me."

Before we ran into this man I imagined writing for a Toronto newspaper and introducing Naseeruddin Shah as India's Dustin Hoffman, or the thinking person's Indian actor. I felt the insanity of meeting him in a city where nobody knew him, and living in another city (Lahore) where nobody can meet him (and, more importantly, see him perform on stage: he played Gandhi in *Mahatma Versus Gandhi* which has just completed runs in Mumbai and Delhi). Naseer signed the man's package and eased my panic.

Naseeruddin Shah's roles in Shyam Benegal films made him an icon of the Indian "New Wave Cinema" of the 70's. For me, a kid growing up in Karachi, he gave images that were memorable because they did not adhere to formula. But these films were not popular: your local videowallah still refers to them as "art films."

But, Naseeruddin Shah's portrayal of Urdu poet Ghalib in *Mirza Ghalib* (a Doordarshan mini-series) helped him cross over into the popular imagination. Pakistanis between Karachi and Mississauga, Ontario whose videowallahs keep only the Bollywood potboilers handy have been turned on to Naseer's work.

Naseeruddin Shah was at the Toronto Film Festival which was premiering two South Asian films. I had a chance to talk to him about *Such A Long Journey* and *Bombay Boys* in the context of international productions which have Indian talent as engines, questions of audience, expatriate writing, political art,



mumbai cinema

by Rehan Ansari

*Pakistani cinema and the film he wants to make on Gandhi.*

*He expresses the same kind of anger, disillusionment, humor, frustration and compassion we expect from his onscreen performances. It seemed a strain on his voice to talk. And he neither smiled nor nodded. None of the usual gestures gave him away. I would sharpen a witticism, wait for an opening and only then would I get a smile out of this oyster. One more thing: his speech retains quirky English vernacular from the 60's. Like my father he can say: "Tell that Charlie to bugger off."*

**Rehan:** What did you think of Deepa Mehta's *Earth*?

Naseeruddin: Did not like it. Is there no other subject for these filmmakers? Is there nothing they can show from contemporary India? I know Partition is the most important subject, but the way *Earth* and *Train to Pakistan* treat it, it does not move me at all. 3 pages of [Saadat Hasan] Manto tells you what you want to know.

**Rehan:** *Earth* is melodrama. It is the use of the Indian formula film genre to tell the story of Partition. What I like is that *Earth* kept within that formula.

**Naseeruddin:** *Earth* is also the Hollywood formula. The sex scene was more important than the scenes of partition violence.

*Cinema cannot serve a didactic purpose. It cannot change the world. Cinema is not art either. I think an artist as a filmmaker comes along once a century. The best cinema can do is give images of the contemporary.*

**Rehan:** What about the Indian cinema you were part of in the 70s?

**Naseeruddin:** The so-called New Wave Cinema of the 70's was not art.

It was not a movement. It was a group of people. These filmmakers wanted anything but a formula film. So a lot of films were applauded that did not have merit. And they all lost money. So that now if you want to make a film off the beaten track you will have a hard time because of the memory producers have of those films.

These days Mani Ratnam [director of *Roja* and *Bombay*] does well with finding the balance between the art and the commercial.

**Rehan:** You want to make a film yourself now, based on the play *Mahatma vs. Gandhi*. For a person who claims to not be interested in politics this is a hell of a subject. To put together a film you will have to pursue the project zealously.

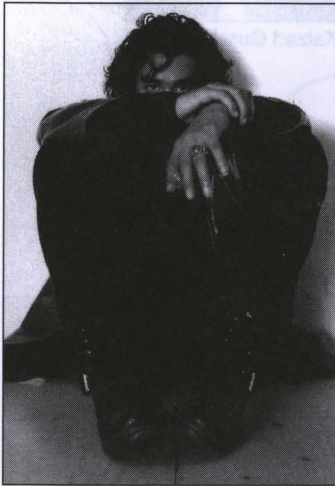
**Naseeruddin:** *cracks a smile* I am interested in Gandhi the private person. Obviously his public life affected his private but I am interested in Gandhi the father. This is an area about which little is known. And it is not talked about. The play is about a father and a son, and I am interested in it because I had a difficult relationship with my father.

**Rehan:** What do you think of this international South Asian, but mostly Indian, cinema making you are watching in Toronto? Indian novels are being made into films by Indians, or in collaboration with Indian talent. Will there be opportunities for roles, and storytelling of the kind you prefer?

**Naseeruddin:** These writers and filmmakers are expatriates. They lack an intimacy. In the film *Such A Long Journey*, though the story is based around 1971, I feel there is such a distance from the Bangladesh War. I still felt 27 years away from it.



# ie to Bugger Off



naveen andrews

**Rehan:** Give me another example of this lack of intimacy.

**Naseeruddin:** For example in *Bombay Boys* the Naveen Andrews character should have become a Bollywood star, and we should have seen what happens after that. But these expat filmmakers are not familiar with the industry, have not grown up with that... they would not know...

**Rehan:** So what would you have done if you were making that film?

**Naseeruddin:** There are these 3 expatriates who come to Bombay in search of something. One of them finds out that he is a mediocre musician, another finds his brother. The third stars in a film, which is a hit, but leaves the film world at the end of the movie. I think he should have been shown to have found stardom.

What happens to people who have talent, or no creative urge at all, when they become stars in Bombay? They actually believe people love them.

Mr. [Amitabh] Bachan to this day doesn't understand why his films are failing. How can a superstar lose out on the love of the people? It does not even occur to him that he may be giving sub-standard product. Govinda the character is Govinda the person offscreen. But you have to be from the industry to know this.

**Rehan:** Perhaps these expatriate filmmakers, as you call them, are figuring out their audience.

**Naseeruddin:** You don't hear of writers and painters worrying about their audience. There are very few writers writing in India. These people you hear of are all outside.

**Rehan:** What about cinema in Bengal or in the South?



mumbai film poster

**Naseeruddin:** Telegu cinema is very big. They have big budgets and innovate on the formula. But it is impossible for me to act in the languages of the south. I tried. I had to repeat numerals for dialogue: *ikees bees chabees STAEESI, ikees...* And then be dubbed over.

**Rehan:** What about playwrights?

**Naseeruddin:** We do theatre in Bombay in Gujarati and Marathi and Hindi. But it is mostly Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter and Brecht. I wish we did plays written by Indians but there are, say, three Indian plays written in the last 50 years. It is difficult.

The censors are terrible. You can't show corrupt officials. The kind of satire I saw in the Pakistani show *Fifty/Fifty* of the late 70's would be impossible in India.

**Rehan:** Have you seen Pakistani films?

**Naseeruddin:** Yes, some from the 70's. Nadeem was a good actor. What are Pakistani films like these days?

**Rehan:** Formula films reign. Though the pace of Urdu film production has picked up over the last couple of years. Which means less rape and violence. The formula in Pakistan was the *Maula Jat* formula. It sired hundreds of Punjabi clones. They crowded out everything.

**Naseeruddin:** Yes, the formula film. It's the *Sholay* syndrome. What happened to Nadeem?

**Rehan:** He was part of it. Judging from cinema hoardings I remember from the mid-80s he tried his hand at playing the angry middle-aged man. He lives in Lahore.

**Mr. [Amitabh] Bachan to this day doesn't understand why his films are failing**

**It's the *Sholay* syndrome**



# just doing his job

**Jasmyrn:** You are a published writer, screenwriter, and filmmaker, what do you feel are the different advantages offered by these mediums?

**Kaizad:** Writing to be published offers greater creative freedom and flights of fancy. The writer is not tied down by constraints as the screenwriter or the filmmaker is. And since the tools the writer employs are simply pen and paper, it is at once a challenging and dynamic form of expression. The conflict that leads to exploring and creating impressions happens within. And the only thing the writer faces is the blank page - not 100 cast and crew members awaiting further instructions.

Screenwriting is an exciting visual art form that lends itself to all sorts of constraints ranging from the financial and the practical to the technical and the market oriented. Filmmaking is an amalgamation of all arts. It is the most compulsive medium of expression. And hence can be best used to address themes and issues.

**Jasmyrn:** Recently the Indian press has listed you as one of "Mumbai's most influential men." Do you identify with this ranking?

**Kaizad:** No. I'm simply a filmmaker trying to do my job as honestly as I can.

**Jasmyrn:** What role do you see Diaspora South Asians playing in how the Western Hemisphere views the subcontinent?

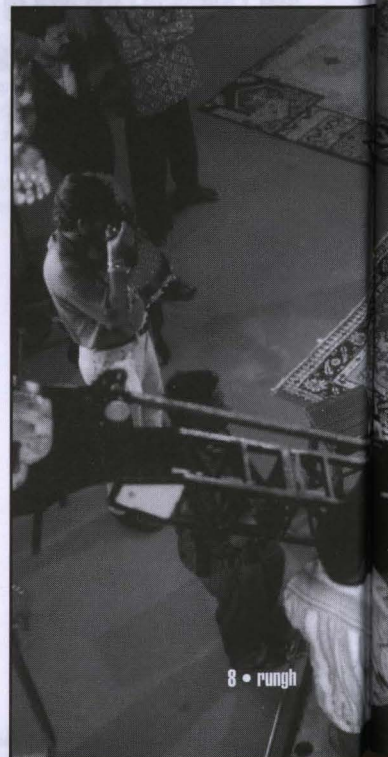
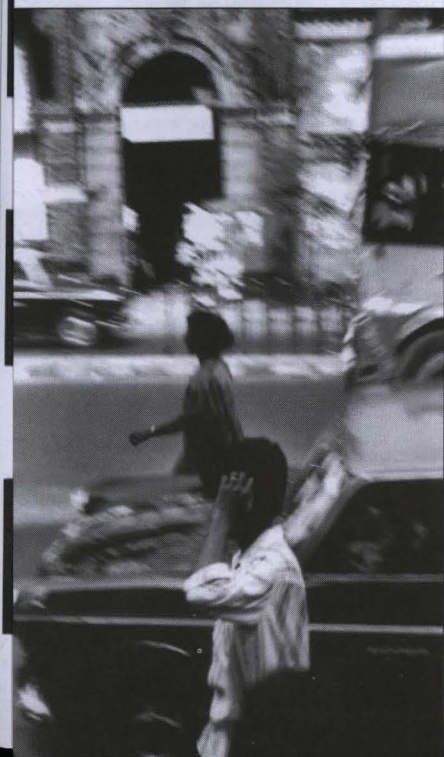
**Kaizad:** Too long a question for me. I don't like words like Diaspora or NRI [Non-Resident Indian]. They seem limiting, and I have always refused to be limited by a label.

**Jasmyrn:** Bombay Boys takes on the task of presenting to screen a modern day India that Western cinema has ignored. What other filmmakers do you feel are presenting the diverse realities of India today?



Kaizad Gustad

**After viewing Bombay Boys, Jasmyrn Singh tracked down Kaizad Gustad via email to get insight into the director's motives for writing and directing a modern day Indian tale.**



# THE FLIRTATION

**Kaizad:** No others that I know of... except there is a small trickle of new filmmakers who are trying to bust some myths - Nagesh Kukunoor and Dev Benegal among them.

**Jasmyrn:** Your film challenge Indian censors by addressing controversial and hostile issues such as homosexuality. How do you feel the Indian film industry is addressing the diversity of experiences and realities of Indian society?

**Kaizad:** Bombay Boys does not challenge the Indian censors. It offers stimulation to broaden horizons. The censor board has shown exemplary maturity in clearing Deepa Mehta's Fire without a single cut\*. And the film is playing to packed houses.

The flip side of the coin is that these films catch the sexually undernourished Indian audiences off guard and hence are not received in the context they should. Perhaps a regular dose of the so-called "controversial" and "hostile" fare should douse the initial excitement of the audience and make them ready for a mature viewing. Bombay Boys is a step in this direction.

Films like Daayra and Darmiyaan have, with limited success, tried to address such issues in the past.

**Jasmyrn:** Does being identified as a South Asian filmmaker concern you due to the expectations that you will only, and should only, focus upon making films about your ethnic affiliations?

**Kaizad:** I do not consider myself a South Asian filmmaker... never have. I am an international filmmaker and will continue to explore themes that are relevant to me and to a personal identity. That doesn't necessarily limit itself to a South Asian identity - its time that Indian filmmakers broke out of these constraining limitations defined by birthplace and not by talent.

**\*Editor's note: Bombay Boys was released in India on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998 but not before 20 cuts (audio and video) had been made to the film by the Indian censor board. Here are some of the more humorous cuts:**

- All shots of a lizard killed by Mastana (Naseeruddin Shah) have been cut.
- In a sequence where Kirshna Sahni (Naveen Andrews) visits a theatre to watch a Hindi film, the song-and-dance sequence on screen has been censored. "Raju Babu", the film from where the sequence was taken, was

cleared by the censor board a few years ago.

- The work chutiya has been censored in one place, while Chutiyaapanti has been okayed. Further, Chutiyaapanti has been censored from the film's trailer.

*Jasmyrn Singh is a writer that resides in Toronto and Vancouver*



**Bombay Boys is an ambitious first film that showcases the promising talents of director Kaizad Gustad.**

Gustad, who trained at NYU School of Film, uses his writing and directorial debut to create an entertaining romp that captures the bizarre realities of one

gay Parsi landlord, articulates a central question posed by the film: "Why is India a cheap shrink for the world's lunatics?" The film also parodies and pays homage to Bombay's most glamorous and famous industry, Bollywood.



# Bombay or Bust

by Jasmyan Singh

of the world's most exciting and chaotic centres, Bombay.

*Bombay Boys* examines the perceptions and expectations of India held by expatriates and the perceptions of Indians themselves towards *desi* foreigners. The film revolves around the fast paced, comical mis-adventures of three young, handsome South Asian men from London, New York and Melbourne. Taking a cue from typical Bollywood cinema, the three men, unexpectedly forge a friendship which provides the premise for hijinks, personal revelation, and subtle sarcasm.

Naveen Andrews (*The English Patient*, *Kama Sutra*), plays Krishan, an American Hindu and recent graduate of NYU acting school, who comes to India to audition for the famous Bollywood film industry. Rahul Bose (*English August*) is Ricardo, the Australian of Goan decent, in search of his long lost brother. Alexander Gifford plays Xeres, a Londoner seeking musical inspiration and sexual identity.

*Bombay Boys* helps to fill a void in South Asian cinema. The film explores the often overlooked themes of homosexuality in India, the "Western modernisation" of urban India, and the role of expatriate Indians in glamorising India. Gustad astutely observes the Bombay annoyance and animosity toward the 'desi foreigner.'

The film particularly satires the Western perception of India as a spiritual sanctuary. Roshan Seth, who plays the

**"Why is India a cheap shrink for the world's lunatics?"**

Two Bollywood heavyweights are amongst the films cast.

Naseeruddin Shah portrays the central villain and evil mobster/filmmaker Don Mastana, in an hysterical, over-the-top manner. Tara Deshpande plays the street smart, enticing heroine who is the love interest of both Mastana and Ricardo. The plot line loosely incorporates elements of Bollywood films - forbidden love, villainy, melodrama, and, ultimately, a romantic conclusion.

Gustad's script is abundant with hysterical parody of Bollywood, ranging from a lesson in the fundamentals of vulgar dance choreography, to the *ad-hoc* selection of directors for films.

*Bombay Boys* has the typical flaw of a first film: it is over ambitious in scope. Gustad attempts to incorporate wry parody, a typical mainstream love story, and heady commentary regarding the *émigré* experience in one film. As a consequence, *Bombay Boys* suffers from gun-shy editing, which makes the film cluttered and too long. The script constantly alternates from amusing satire to melodrama, particularly mid-scene. These transitions often lack fluidity and the film becomes a collection of smart, stylish moments that do not always meld with the theatrical and sensationalistic plot. *Bombay Boys*, for the most part, is a promising debut, establishing Gustad as a filmmaker to note and follow in the coming years

# THE FLIRTATION

BY NINA TRYGGVASON

short fiction

**M**y mouth went dry. Not the thick saliva kind of dry that a cold glass of water would cut through, but the full mouth and throat kind of dry that makes you think your tongue will crack at any moment.

I didn't mind it really, until my knees began to shake. I knew I was a goner then because there you were, smiling at me.

I closed my eyes, trying to resist, pleading that you would be gone when I opened them.

*Please just understand that I am weak.*

I opened one eye, just a tiny bit, but you were still there with that dazzling smile. And those blue eyes that I could lose my soul in. For just a heartbeat I thought you winked at me, but then I knew I was being foolish.

Still, I had to get closer. Just be near you even if you couldn't be mine. Maybe we could just pretend for a moment.

Maybe.

I was close enough to touch you then. I swallowed to keep my heart from escaping through my throat. I drank you in with my eyes, not trusting myself to actually touch you. My scalp was hot and tingly, never a good sign. I ran my dry tongue over my lips, I swallowed hard again and tried to get some relief for my aching throat.

My awareness of others around us was dimming. Frantically I looked around for a familiar, friendly face to pull me back from this brink, but your presence was too much, and my eyes were pulled back to you.

Your smile once warm seemed like it was mocking me now.

I try to smile, but the tingling in my scalp has spread to my whole flesh, and my clothes seem coarse and rough. I feel a thin sweat break out on my brow and between my shoulder blades. I feel feverish, and I can tell by the warmth in my cheeks that I am flushed.



*You always do that to me.*

*Do you even know the strength of your power, how you can command my attention from across a room?*

After glancing around to make sure we're not being noticed, I summoned all my courage, and I touched your hand.

---

**I DRANK YOU  
IN WITH MY  
EYES, NOT  
TRUSTING  
MYSELF TO  
ACTUALLY  
TOUCH YOU.**

---

*Your smile never wavers.*

*I didn't realise how your eyes would be even more blue this close to you. I mean, I knew they were blue, everyone knows that they're blue...but I'm babbling now.*

Panicking, I step away. I can't be seen here, doing this, here with you. I move across the room.

I try to forget that you are just standing there, smiling at me. But I sneak a look back. I know and you know, that I have come here to see you, to be near you and to pretend that you are mine.

And you are driving me wild with desire to have you, to have you in my home, to be with me always.

Another woman walks past me with a too familiar look in her eyes. My heart flutters as I watch her make a beeline for you. Her hips move easily and I can see the bulge of her wallet in her back pocket. I can't stand to lose you.

I approach the clerk and say hurriedly, "I'd like to buy the Xena Warrior Princess life-size cardboard cut out."

I slip the clerk my visa card and smile, victorious.

*Nina Tryggvason is a Canadian lesbian of Icelandic-Ukrainian decent. She is an unproduced screen writer who has published articles in Xtra! West, Angles and Girlfriends magazine.*

# wild

by Natasha Singh



"Ma what's wrong?"

"Nothing, beti."

Ma was leaning her head against the side car window staring out. I hated it when she was like this. It always felt like she wasn't really here with me. In the car. Sitting. Papa was inside sleeping and Ma said that since I was making too much noise, we needed to get out of the house. But Ma didn't know how to drive. Other people walked and walked. But Dadi Ma always said it was indecent for a young woman to walk around without her husband.

But Ma used to say that Dadi Ma was too stuck in the past. Ma had brought the tape recorder that Uncle Doctor had given us last year. It had four fat batteries that fit neatly in the back. We were listening to Hindi songs and sometimes Ma sang along, but that night she was quiet. With us we had the gray blanket that Dadi Ma had brought back with her from India. It was itchy but Ma said if I didn't cover myself I would catch a cold.

"Ma, where are we going to go today?"

Ma was silent for a long time. And then she looked at me and smiled. "Okay, today we are going to the House of Chat for dinner. You be the waiter. My name is going to be, um, Sonu. She wiped her face with her paloo and ran a hand over the top of her head and down her braid in one long sweep.

"Do I look all right?" she asked, moving her face closer toward the rearview mirror.

"Yes, you look beautiful, Sonu."

Sonu smiled and leaned back into the seat, smiling.

"What will you order, Madame?" I asked.

"I'll have one hundred gol guppa and pani, and maybe two bowls of chutney on the side."

"Green chutney, Madame?"

"Of course." Sonu made her cheeks full like a chipmunk and I laughed.

"When you eat two gol guppa this is what happens, waiter," said Sonu matter of factly.

"Here you go, that will be one billion rupees," I said.

"What! Impossible! You are trying to cheat me, I think." Sonu sat up in her seat and looked mad. She began to wiggle her finger at me and then she folded her hands across her chest and scowled.

"Not me Madame, I would never cheat you."

Sonu sighed and began to dig into her purse (and this was my favorite part.) "Will you accept these life savers as payment? They will truly save your life."

"Well, I have to ask my boss."

"No. No. This is your only chance. Otherwise you'll miss out."

Sonu held out the candy and I said, "Perhaps I will take the red one." She handed me the red lifesaver and pulled out the green one for herself. Green was her favorite but I didn't think it tasted as good as the red. It was lucky we had different

tastes. We sucked on them for a while, the sound of lifesavers hitting teeth loud in the quiet of the night.

"Where is House of Chat exactly?"

Sonu took a deep breath. She looked at me and smiled.

"House of Chat is on Gopishwar Road in Delhi. It is where my Uncle used to take us kids to eat when we visited him. It was the best chat house in all of UP. They had the roundest gol guppa and the best pani. Not too sweet, not too spicy. Just perfect. And Reena, you should have seen the inside of the chat house. Like a palace! Not like here of course, but still, the latest songs would be playing, and a little monkey lived there too. I think he got all the left-overs. His stomach was so big ..."

"I'm the waiter, remember."

"Stop making such a face, Reena."

Ma laughed and reached out to touch my cheek, the hardness of her fingertips gently loving my skin.

"Let's go there, again, then." I said.

Ma smiled and put her hands on the steering wheel. "Chulo! Chulo!"

*We are on our way to Gopishwar road, faster and faster we go ... Ma tell me, where were you really going when your hands clutched that steering wheel, holding on holding on almost as though somehow, somehow, we were magically going to get there? Did you really believe that back then, Ma? Did you believe it as much as I did?*

"Yes."

I hated it when Ma said yes to everything I said when I knew that really, she wasn't listening. "Ma," I said again, "I'm cold."

Ma looked at me as though I had suddenly appeared inside the car and I wanted to laugh at the O of her mouth. Sometimes when Papa snuck up on her to scare her, she looked the same way, and then everyone laughed. Even Dadi Ma. Ma

reached over to the tape recorder and switched it off. The music died when she looked at her watch. "I'm sorry, beti, we can go in now. Come."

"Who put all this foolishness into your head about wanting to go here and there? Do you want to be like those loose angrezi women here? Chee!" Dadi Ma was looking at Ma out of the corner of her eye as she sat at the kitchen table. It was morning, and the sun was coming in through the window. When Dadi Ma sat in the sun, it made her hair look a soft yellow against the whiteness of her paloo, which covered her head. Ma was preparing chai for herself and Dadi Ma. She had cut up ginger to boil in the water. Then she had added spices so that the kitchen had filled with the smell of cardamom and cloves. Ma was staring into the water, allowing the steam to make little imprints of wetness on her skin. "My son married you so you could be a good wife and mother." Dadi Ma sniffed and shook her head.

"Ammaji, please. I won't be gone that long. Only a few hours a week. I can work with kids. The school said I could help out a little, maybe as a teacher's aide. Please Ammaji..." Ma stopped and wiped her face with her paloo. "I just need to get out of the house, sometimes." Ma said this last part quietly and then moved away from where the water was boiling to open the cupboard.

"Out of the house! For what! You go out shopping. You go out on walks with me and Reena. What else can you want? Already, I am spoiling you! You think I was allowed to go anywhere at all? No. I stayed inside at all times. All times!" Dadi Ma paused and then said, "Don't think I haven't seen you leave the house without your head covered." Ma stood still, so still, her hands outstretched in the air as she reached for

Ma was staring  
into the water,  
allowing the steam  
to make little  
imprints of  
wetness on her  
skin.

two cups. Frozen. Dadi Ma hissed, "I am a good mother-in-law. It is my duty to keep my eye on you."

"Ammaji, it is warm outside, that is why I don't cover my head."

"Warm. Hah! You think India isn't warm? All women must cover their heads! You want to be naked in front of all these men?"

Ma pulled her arms back down from where they were reaching in the air, and taking her paloo, very carefully, she covered her head.

"Reena!"

"Ma?" It was black outside, and slowly I got up. Ma wanted to take me out again. I looked over at Papa who was fast asleep. His dentures were out, and his mouth was sunken in, his one eye forever open. When Papa slept, he scared me. He looked like a skeleton I had seen on TV once. I moved out of bed slowly, while Ma stood by the doorway. I could see her bangles, golden, glittering as the night light threw shadows across her. In her hand she held a

just you wait, they will steal all the prasaad! And see that school beside it? That is where I used to teach before I got married to your Papa, and was brought to live here."

"Ma ..."

"Did I ever tell you about how you got your name, Reena? When I first started teaching, my favorite student - her name was Reena. I thought it was so beautiful that I promised myself that when I had a daughter, that is what I would name her. But I really had to fight with Dadi Ma because she wanted to name you something else." Ma shook her head and said softly, "Her and your Papa, too much the same. The same. Your Papa is too close to your Dadi Ma, Reena. One day when she goes, it will cause him much, much pain. I am too afraid to even think of it."

"Where will Dadi Ma go?"

Ma looked at me and she opened her mouth and then closed it. "Just away." And then she quickly said, "Did you know that your Papa lived with Dadi Ma until he was forty three years old?"

I shook my head. I knew that Papa was old compared to other people's fathers.

Seven times."

"But why did you go away then?"

Ma played with the pendant on her necklace, which always sat neatly inside the space between her breasts. She brought it out and looked at it for a moment. And then she let it drop again. "I never wanted to marry, Reena." Ma was quiet for a moment and then she said, "I used to run away."

I was impressed. "You used to run away?"

Ma laughed. "Every time I would hear that there was a man coming to see me, I would run away from the house. I would go and hide at your Auntie Lila's house."

"Really?" I was now Ma's biggest fan. I could picture her with a satchel on her back just like Bugs Bunny when he went on an adventure. "Then what?"

"Then nothing! I would come back home. Nobody would speak to me. They all said I was ruining my life."

"But then how did Papa find you?"

"Well ... I was tricked." Ma smiled but the smile did not reach her eyes and we both snuggled deeper under the blanket. *Ma, you made it sound like such an*

## I never wanted to get married, you know. I was happy teaching. I was a good teacher, Reena.

blanket and a pillow. Before I reached the door she had already turned, moving noiselessly across the living room floor. When Ma wanted to be very quiet, she could even stop her bangles from singing. We walked past the living room, past Dadi Ma's closed door and out into the night. It was cool outside, and Ma turned to me and put her finger against her lips. *Not yet.* She opened the car door and with a quick glance at the front of the house, she hurried me inside after her.

"Where are we going now?" I whispered after we had climbed in.

"I'm driving you to your Auntie Lila's house," Ma said, as she covered us both with the itchy gray blanket.

"But she lives so far away."

"That's okay, hang on!"

*And away we went.*

"See that temple, Reena? That is where your grandfather and I used to go to pray. All those monkeys on the side wall,

Soon, he said, his hair would go all white! "How come Papa is so old, Ma?"

"Well, no one wanted to marry your Papa, Reena, because people are cruel." Ma reached over and covered my feet with the corner of the blanket. "It is because he had only one eye. He was very ashamed of that, you know. That is why we must never mention it around him. It makes him very sad."

"If Papa had only one eye, then how did he find you?"

"Me?" Ma laughed. "I never wanted to get married, you know. I was happy teaching. I was a good teacher, Reena."

"You were a teacher?" I tried to imagine Ma in front of a room full of kids, a blackboard covered with her writing. But I could not. *Ma, a teacher?!*

"I was very good, you know. I was everyone's favorite teacher. You know that seven times I won the favorite teacher award.

*adventure.* "You see, your Papa came with Dadi Ma to our house one day. I thought they were just old friends of your grandfather. Well at least, that is what my brother told me. So I stayed at home to greet them and after they had left, my Uncle and my brother told me that Papa was the man I was going to marry."

"Why didn't you run away again?"

"Where could I go? Your Auntie Lila couldn't support me. She was going to be married herself. Besides, my brother or Uncle would have found me and ... where could I have gone, Reena?" *I don't know, Ma. Where could you have gone? Where?*

"But now you have me and Papa, right?" Ma looked at me for a long time but said nothing. *Ma, if you were running away again, would you take me with you?*



"Come, Reena, your Auntie Lila is waiting for us ..." Ma placed both hands on the steering wheel and leaned back. She closed her eyes so tight - but not tight enough because I saw one lone tear slip out and travel down her cheek. I reached out but it fell into the blanket, vanishing before I could catch it.

"Nonsense!" Dadi Ma was staring out the window, muttering to herself as Ma leaned over the stove, flipping rotis on the tava.

Ma said, without looking up, "I think it is a good idea. I am only mentioning driving lessons because Reena will be needing to go to school, things will need to be picked up." Dadi Ma turned around and pursed her lips together, much like Papa did when he was troubled or angry. This was the most I had ever heard Ma talk back to Dadi Ma.

"Besides, Ammaji. I am so tired. You know I have so much work to do. I must clean the house, look after my own child, look after the yard. I am so tired of ..."

"You are tired of what?" Dadi Ma

kulcha for dinner. "Who is going to say anything? We don't know anyone here. You had help from family, from friends, from servants, I have no one here. No one." *You have me, Ma. You have me.* Ma's eyes began to tear but Dadi Ma didn't say anything. And just when Ma was about to open her mouth again, Dadi Ma said through tight lips, "Wait for your husband to come home. We will see."

*Ma, the night that you asked Papa if you could drive, you thought you had me. You thought you did. Ma, I don't know if I sensed the wild then, I don't know if that's what made me do it. Forgive me.*

Dadi Ma was shaking her head from side to side. And Papa was looking thoughtful. "What kind of a wife have you married?" Dadi Ma shouted. And then to Ma, "What kind of woman drives? It is indecent! Do you see me driving? Did your own Ma drive? Chee, chee, shame on you!" Dadi Ma smoothed out her sari and got up from the chair she had been sitting on. Papa had not even had a chance to take off his work

mother driving. She wants you to stay with her. Enough of this kind of talk. Bas Bas. You have caused enough trouble for one night."

And now Ma is leaving the house. Without me. She is taking chances. Ma. I can not sleep through the night anymore and Dadi Ma says, a keera has infected my brain. Ma, each night I see you in my dreams and I hear you say, "Okay, my dear last stop." You kick me out of the car, back up and drive over me again and again and Ma, all I can see is the trail of colors in your paloo as you leave me. Your mouth is laughing and you are out of breath. Ma.

"Where is she, Reena?"

"I don't know Dadi Ma." Dadi Ma and Papa had finished eating their food. Ma had just slipped out the kitchen door. Again.

"This is crazy," Dadi Ma was saying. "What kind of a woman is she? She is beginning to act as bad as Sita. One of my sons marries a tramp, and now my other son has also married a bad woman. She acts like she has loose morals! Too much

## So why do you want to act like a man, like some crazy angrezi woman and begin driving lessons? What will people say?"

looked at Ma sharply and I wonder what caused the features of her face to sharpen, the tone of her voice to shift.

"Nothing. All I am saying is that it is getting hard to manage ..."

"Enough!" Dadi Ma was holding up her hand as she came into the kitchen. "No more car business. You just want to cause trouble in this house. I will tell you something," Dadi Ma said as she pushed Ma out of the way, and began to flip the rotis herself. "I had even more to do than you do when I was your age. And I managed all by myself. You are simply doing your duty. That is all. So why do you want to act like a man, like some crazy angrezi woman and begin driving lessons? What will people say?"

"But Ammaji ..." Ma took out the knife from the kitchen drawer and began to chop onions. Cut cut cutting. Taking small handfuls between the tips of her fingers, she filled the dough with it so we could eat onion

boots. Papa had just gotten home from work. And the moment he had come through the front door, Dadi Ma had dragged him into the living room to ask his opinion. His face looked tired, but he was looking at Ma with the strangest expression in his eyes.

Ma said again to Papa, "Ji, it would be so much of a help to me. This way I could go anywhere I want. Anywhere." *Anywhere.*

And before Papa could say anything, I started to scream. "No, no, no, don't let her take lessons, no, no, don't let her! Say no! Papa, say no!"

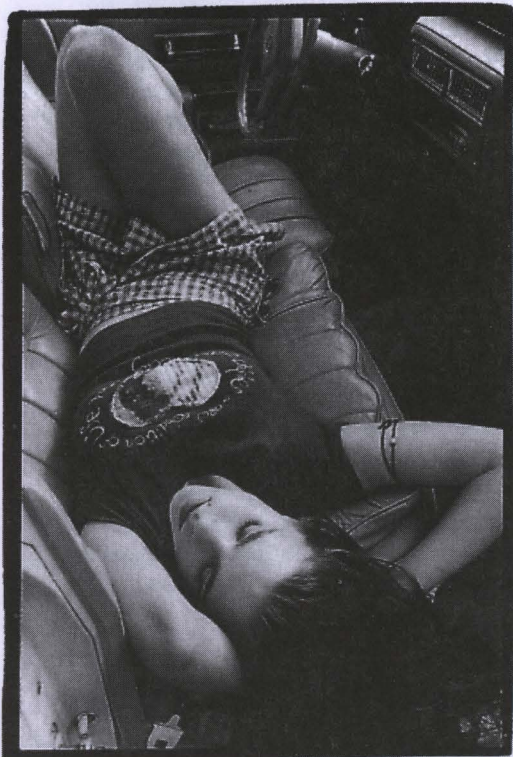
*When Ma will tell me this years from now, she will say that I screamed and screamed until I had no voice left. That Dadi Ma was so distraught, that Papa called Uncle Doctor in Edmonton because he was worried I would harm my throat. Ma will say, "I don't know what got into you back then, Reena. I just don't know." Don't you, Ma?*

Well that decides it then, Papa said afterwards. "Your own beti doesn't want her

like the angrezi women here! She just runs out when no one is looking. Humph!"

"She can't have gone far," Papa said. He looked at the picture of Kali Ma above the kitchen table and shook his head. The picture of Kali Ma had belonged to Ma's father. She said it was so old, it was ageless. The frame was silver and black and inside, behind the glass was Kali herself, black and red and looming. She looked down at Papa, but Papa had already turned to face Dadi Ma. "Jasper is a small town. It is safe here, Amma."

"Safe?" Dadi Ma shouted. "How many murders do you read about everyday in that paper of yours? How many rapes? And you tell me your wife is safe? Even your brother takes better care of his wife than you do!" Dadi Ma stood up and went to the window. She rubbed her shoulders with the palm of her wrinkled brown hand and turned her back to us. The dishes were left on the table. For Ma, when she came home.



She thinks that she can just go off anywhere, anytime, she wants. She acts like she is not even a mother. I married a woman who doesn't even know how to be a decent mother.

Papa didn't say anything. He rubbed his hands over his face and closed his eyes. To me, he said, "Come." Papa took the car keys and pushed open the front door. "Are you coming or not?"

"Yes, Papa." I got up from where I had been sitting at the kitchen table and moved to put on my boots. When I opened the front door, I could see that he was getting into the driver's seat of the car. I ran outside. The sky was getting darker and the mountains were turning into shadows as I headed towards the car. Behind me I could see Dadi Ma still staring out the window and I was scared for Ma. "Get in the front," Papa said gruffly. He started the car and slammed his side door shut. We were off, looking for Ma, looking for Ma. We moved slowly down our street. It was quiet and the street was desolate and lonely. I could see people through their windows, hunched over their dining room tables, in front of the television. In Jasper no one bothered to close their curtains or lock their doors. Except us. Papa had bought three locks for our front door. Our landlady, Auntie Robbins had laughed, and said we had nothing of value to take. After she had left, Papa had called her a *sali koothi*. And Dadi Ma had smirked. Papa looked at me and said, quietly, "Where do you think you think she is, Reena?"

I think she may have driven somewhere, Papa, to Gopishwar road. To Delhi. She is eating in the chat house. She is at Auntie Lila's house, she is a teacher again, she is praying in a temple with Poopaji, she is ... "I don't know, Papa."

Papa circled each block, past the park and past the grocery store. Around and around we went. Ma, Ma, Ma where are you? "Your mother is a crazy woman, sometimes, Reena." Papa had circled the park now three times. His one hand was clutching the steering wheel, the other was touching his face. Lightly. Again and again.

I glared at Papa. Ma was not crazy. You are the crazy one, Papa. "She thinks that she can just go off anywhere, anytime, she wants. She acts like she is not even a mother. I married a woman who doesn't even know how to be a decent mother." Papa laughed and his laugh scared me. He gripped the steering wheel with both hands and shook his head. "Why did her family say yes to me, then?" I wanted to tell Papa about how Ma had been happy before, about how Ma had won the teaching award seven times. Papa, seven times.

"Papa?"

"That woman needs to be taught a lesson." Papa looked over at me, staring deep into my eyes. I clutched the door handle, getting ready to jump out - jump out because his one eye was scaring me. "Wild animal, she is behaving like a wild animal. And don't you ever be like her, Reena. Ever."

It was darker now, and the lamps in Jasper had been turned on. Ma was still nowhere in sight, and I wanted to laugh and cry and laugh more than I cried and I wanted to tell Papa he would never find her. *Because she was gone.*

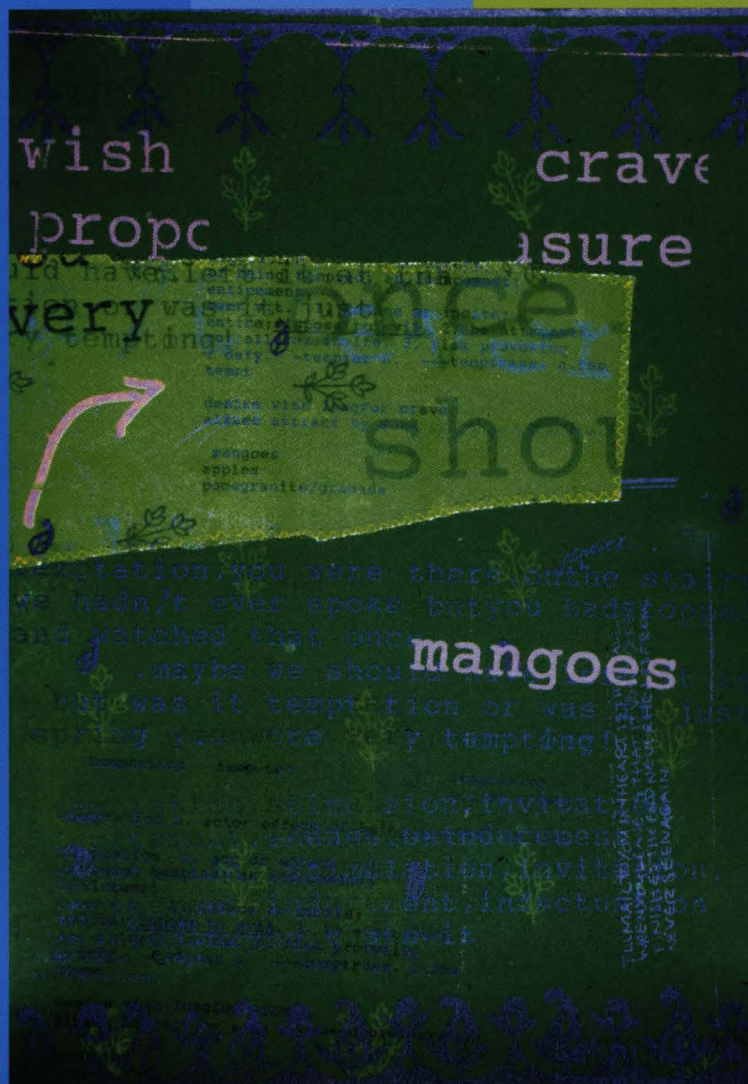
"Okay, I give up," Papa snapped. "Maybe she is inside shopping. Maybe she is already home." We circled back towards Turret street where Dadi Ma would be waiting. There was a quiet between us, and Papa said after a while, "You know, some days I just can't stand coming home." He lifted his hand off the wheel and rubbed his chin. Even in that moment, I could see his knuckles tense. We were in front of the house and Papa turned off the engine. We sat in the dark of the night, inside the car. We were both quiet, and for a moment I was reminded of Ma and myself, quiet in the car. Hiding. "Papa?"

But Papa was already opening the door and then slamming it shut. I opened the door on my side, and watched as he walked briskly into the house. His boots thump thumping on the front steps, and across the porch. The lights were on inside and I could hear Dadi Ma shouting as Papa opened the door. For a moment I wanted to close the door of the car and stay inside. With Ma. I knew she was in here. Hiding behind me on the floor of the car. Underneath the gray blanket. I knew, because I saw her through the side-view mirror, when we were driving. I knew because I was holding my breath and so was she. I knew because I had looked into her eyes and saw that Papa was right. A wild animal was hiding behind her eyes. And I was too scared to see it.

*Natasha Singh currently teaches creative writing and Asian-American literature at Rutgers University. Her work has previously appeared in Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America, Global City Review and she was a finalist for both the Glimmer Train Award and the Writers Union of Canada's short prose competition. She resides in New York where she is at work finishing her first novel.*

# Desire, Wish, Crave

The Artwork of Ameen Gill



Ameen Gill took on Rungh's challenge and created a series of lithographs inspired by temptation.

Ameen Gill  
*Desire, Wish, Crave*

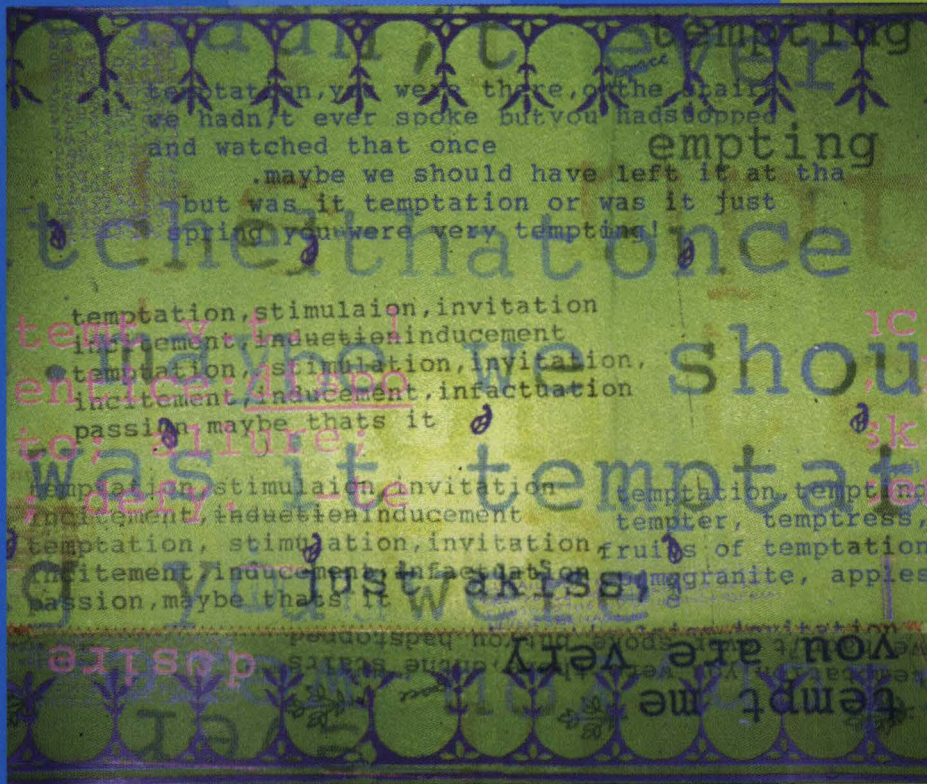


Ameen Gill  
*Dispose to Evil*

tempting  
other glass  
spoke  
just a kiss,  
tempt v.  
entice  
to; all  
defy  
and be tempted  
that was it

id iwnaave  
ther kiiss  
you annd  
-tempter n.  
you were  
sist  
glasssoof  
and be ten

Ameen Gill  
*Tempter*



Ameen Gill  
*You Were Very Tempting*

Ameen Gill lives in Vancouver and is currently working on a series of hand made artist's books recording her family's history. She is also a member of the Malaspina Printmakers Society.

# The Curve

by Zara Suleman



Zara Suleman is an advocate, activist, researcher and writer in Vancouver. Her work has been published in SAMAR, DIVA, Canadian Women's Studies Journal and in two anthologies; Aurat Durbar and The Journal Project.

smooth and silky the line draws  
close to your body then far away  
inside lines hugging turns  
that feel so warm  
against my  
hands

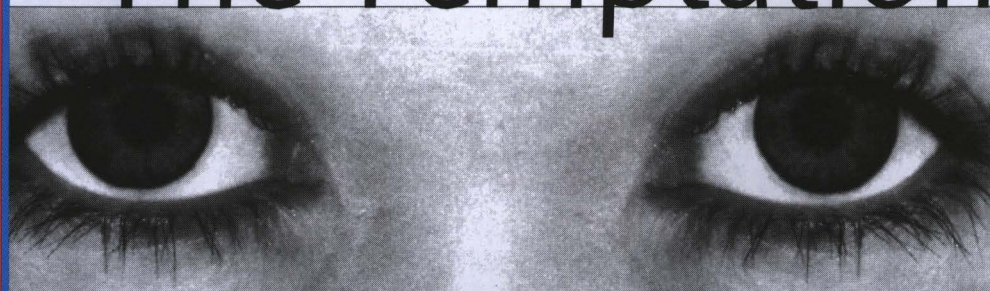
the sloping sensual circular  
motions of my tongue along  
your flesh, tasting your  
skin inhaling your  
sweet seductive  
smell through  
my body

my fingertips leaving  
prints into your tissue  
layers wanting to connect  
with your body as one, hands  
melting into your waist and hips  
heat from a fire, from your fire  
pull me in, look up,  
we meet  
eye to eye

the curve, the line of your  
fleshy flesh pulling over your  
body, from under your arms to  
your tummy, the curve runs  
its course, guiding my hands  
all over then aligning to the  
curve, holding tightly and softly  
kissing, licking, teasing the curve  
wanting to please  
every curve, wanting to conform  
to every curve,  
wanting every curve  
of yours next to  
mine.

# The Temptation of Mishal

By E.M. Chakkappan



Mishal was on her way to the kind of easy, protected-by-the-flock, public high school experience that most kids, Indian or otherwise, have little chance of achieving.

For the last month I have been talking to my sister's friend Mishal about her decision to wear a traditional Muslim hijab. Though I first met Mishal a number of years ago, her story has remained with me.

Like my parents, Mishal's parents immigrated to the United States from India. Mishal and I went to the same suburban Chicago high school— she started in 1990, after I graduated. Unlike me, Mishal was born and brought up in the States, and completed most of her elementary, and high school education with the same group of American kids. I, on the other hand, was born in India and moved back and forth between the two countries throughout my schooling.

The constant migration between the two countries caused the most confusion in my life when I completed tenth standard in a Catholic all-girls' boarding school in Kerala, and moved back to Chicago. As much as I treasured my memories of India and missed my old cronies and our sheltered daydreaming, I resented the visible markings of my time in India—my speech, my manners, my confidence. I sincerely wished I could be one of those Indian girls who seemed to fit in, or rather float in, on her wing-like hairsprayed locks, as an adamantly a-cultural American among other Americans.

That's why I was intrigued by my sister's accounts of Mishal. Here was someone who could have floated through, someone whose parents did not put overwhelming strictures on her behaviour. Mishal was on her way to the kind of easy, protected-by-the-flock, public high school experience that most kids, Indian or otherwise, have little chance of achieving. Yet she chose to 'risk it all'.

When Mishal was 13 years old, under no compulsion from her family, and living in a predominantly white, middle-income school district, she decided to adopt the dress of the hijab. What could have tempted her?

The first time we talked was on a Sunday afternoon. Over the telephone, Mishal's voice rang with energy and clarity as she spoke about the choices she had made. Through our conversation, Mishal revealed not one, but two vying temptations that influenced her decision.

First, and most readily, she insists that what she feels is a desire to perceive the world through the binoculars of her faith. "It helps me focus in on what I'm supposed to be focusing in on," she says firmly. Some people have enough inner strength to keep themselves focused, some people don't need a reminder. I do. Without it, I'd be floating." When I asked her exactly what this focus should be on, she responds



in more general terms, "Believing in a purpose in life and making a contribution that sincerely improves at least one other person's life with the skills that God has given me." The hijab serves as an external reminder of her decision to perceive. Mishal wants to see.

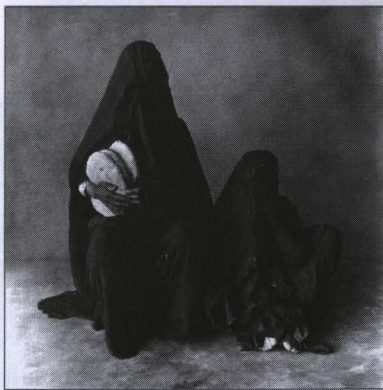
But, did she know this when she was 13? "No — Initially it was a very spontaneous decision." Mishal remembers those days in junior high, "I was clueless when I started junior high. I looked like a boy and I rode a dirt bike." But the other girls seemed to have discovered femininity overnight, they had important new hairstyles, and were slinging the long, leather straps of purses over their shoulders. " 'Purses, what did they need purses for' — I wondered. All I carried around was my pencil." By the end of that school year Mishal too, was waking up half an hour earlier to curl her bangs and, yes, she too had a purse — she needed it for the hairspray.

By the following autumn, Mishal arrived at school with her hair covered. Mishal had given in to her temptation to see. In so doing, she revealed her second temptation—the desire not to be seen.

It was Mishal's father who insisted she go to a week-long Islamic camp in Wisconsin the summer before she made her decision. Mishal had not wanted to go. Organised by young adults, it was a place for kids who shared the same religious background to come together and participate in structured activities, some based around religious education, others not. In Mishal's words, "It was the first time I was exposed to Muslim people my age and was able to develop friendships." She realised that balancing one culture within the confines of her house, with another one outside, was taking its toll. She states allusively, "There was a void in the back of my head."

About a month after she returned home, she read an article in the Chicago Tribune about a group of Muslim girls in Paris who were prohibited to wear the hijab in their private school. Though they obeyed the school's uniform rules in every way, they were disallowed to follow their own religious beliefs. "They were the same age as me, it was kind

Though they obeyed the school's uniform rules in every way, they were disallowed to follow their own religious beliefs. "They were the same age as me, it was kind of a kicker."



Irving Penn

of a kicker." Mishal's mid-western accent, which flattens her words is strong, "I thought, 'I'm in a country where I am allowed to express myself'."

Mishal chose to wear a hijab. Her choice marked her desire to be perceived by the world for who she is rather than how she appears, "A dress code exists for men and women in Islam so that you will be respected for your beliefs and ideas, not for the shape of your body." She speaks of modesty and the need to "cover your body in loose, non-transparent clothing." Her words remind me of the Quranic passage, "Prophet, enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the true believers to draw their veils close around them. That is more proper, so that they may be *recognized* [my italics] and not molested."

"It was hard when I first started, really hard," she states. "Eighth grade boys were constantly teasing me about this thing on my head. One guy would walk past me in the hallway, and threaten to pull it off. They called me 'towel head'. The girls didn't say anything to my face, but behind my back.... A lot of people stopped associating with me. Particular friendships ended. I didn't feel invited anymore—that hurt, but, a test like this makes you realise who'll stick by you. I didn't think I had changed overnight."

In an Islamic cultural context, the hijab covers the body. It is not seen— it blends into the surroundings. In most Islamic countries, drawing the hijab over the body is almost a compulsory act for women if they are to partake in the public sphere without drawing confrontation. These women are unseen, whereas Mishal, living outside an Islamic state and completely integrated into American life, is not. Mishal is seen.

If Mishal's hijab is a response to America, is it an American response? It does not fit into its usual Islamic dialogue (the hijab has its own unique history—one that is strongly tied to the struggles of Muslim women trying to overcome domination and oppression.). When I question Mishal about this image and the inequality of women in places like Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia, she calls these practices of Islam 'manipulative'. This is not her world, and this is not the meaning she sees in her hijab. She does



Irving Penn

not perceive women's rights and Islam to be contrary to one another, "I like to think I'm getting the best of both worlds," she states in reference to how she views her faith and personal rights.

There is something very American about the notion that you can get to the root of an idea in another place — that you can resurrect a philosophy after you wash away its residue of misuse. "I don't want to become a victim to conformity and convenience," Mishal says in a definitive tone. From the Puritans to slave-trading, Confederates to cultists in Waco, Texas, this belief in the individual's right to personal choice has time and again been expressed in American history. The rights of the individual form the bedrock of American society, and they have been defended to the point where individual liberty, at times, even spills into self-indulgence. In Mishal's case, she is not re-expressing a societal identity, she is creating her own process of faith.

It is Mishal's hijab that is the basis of her individuality. And as such, her tone is resolute when I ask her if she ever regrets her decision, "I never let myself think about taking it off. If I did, I would feel like a failure. Wearing the hijab has been one of the greatest challenges of my life. I have invested a lot of time and pain into it. I respect myself more with it on. I like the image."

From image to image ... but has Mishal trapped herself? Mishal wants to see, but she does not want to be seen. Mishal's hijab provides her with an external reminder of her decision to see, and by Islamic tradition it hides her image. But, by wanting to see beyond her immediate American reality of self-expression, has Mishal also revealed herself as seeing through that very lens, ("I am in a country where I can express myself"). She wants to detract attention from her image, but she has actually created a very powerful image.

Of course, when her classmates grew used to her image, and realised that Mishal's paranormal capacity for challenge had only momentarily removed her from their sphere of comprehension, the furore settled down. She found different avenues for social interaction. Making time to get together with the girls she met in her mosque, with whom she felt she had more in common, enriched her high school years. Instead of going to parties, and paying homage to the prevailing high school status quo dominated by cheerleaders and jocks, she chose to associate with people who had also been challenged to perceive.

When I started talking to Mishal, I sought to understand her gesture in the context of the larger worlds of Islam and America. I sought to find the balance between a spiritual temperance and a social proclivity toward indulgence—tensions I feel every day as an Indian immigrant brought up in the Syrian Catholic faith. What I found instead was a self-defining moment: a little youthful rebellion, a little social consciousness, a little confusion, a little prophecy—all raised during a summer when you're 13, and inspired, and don't know what you're capable of, until you vow to find out.

A self-defining moment, the core of any good story, can come at any time in a person's life. Unfortunately, most people tend to spit out that hard seed of originality, rather than accepting it and letting it take root within us.

Perhaps the most tempting temptation is the discovery of your individuality, whether in the way you see, or in the way you are seen. I might be able to grade Mishal's gesture harshly for its success at attaining freedom from her surroundings, but I cannot deny its timing. It's a good story.

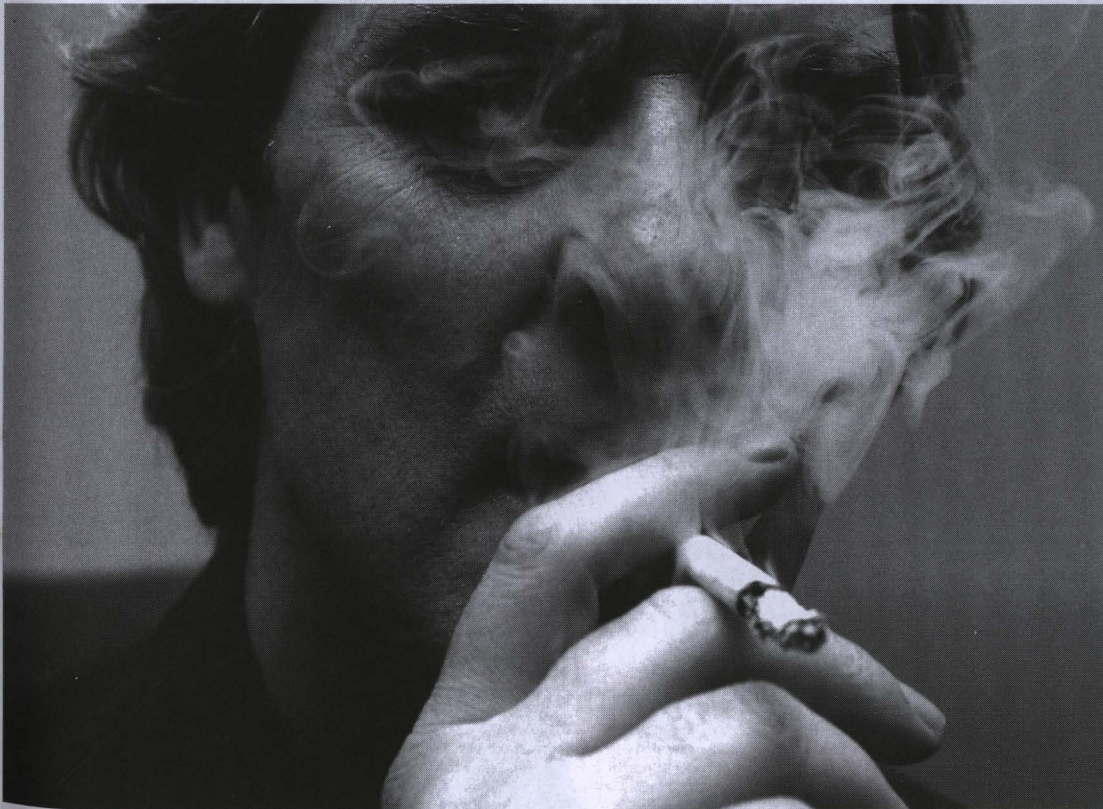
*Editors note: Although the story is based on fact, the names have been changed.*

*Elizabeth Mary Chakkapan is currently completing her MFA in creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College in New York.*

# WITH LOVE ~ MARY JANE...

BY SEEMA MALKA BUKSH

My name you ask, first tell me yours-  
 Not that it matters once we close the doors.  
 Why so tense? What's the hurry?  
 Let me free you from all your worries...  
 Now relax and unwind-  
 Feel my thoughts within your mind...  
 Now we are one, we may do as we please-  
 As ice we may melt, as fire we may freeze...  
 On this pathway, I will see to all your needs-  
 Your thirst I will quench, your hunger I will feed...  
 Now close the doors and dim the lights,  
 Let the haze of smoke fill the night...  
 Now breathe in slow, slow and deep-  
 What you're feeling now is warmth of my heat...  
 Now close your eyes and tell me what you see,  
 Do you now see life as a fantasy?  
 Now relax and try once more-  
 This time breathe deeper – deeper than before...  
 We may do this for as long as you like-  
 From the break of dawn 'til the dead of night...  
 Before long for these feelings – these pleasures you  
 will crave- And to satisfy your urge – you will have  
 become my slave... Then I will do with you whatever  
 I want-Be it to tease, toy with, torment or taunt...  
 For now you've given me ultimate control-  
 Command of your body, your mind, your soul...  
 Then, like a fool, you will try to escape-  
 Only to see me waiting at the gate...  
 With tears in your eyes, you will ask me again-  
 Begging me to tell you – tell you my name...  
 Only then will I tell you, as I wipe away the pain-  
 Whispering to each teardrop, With Love – Mary Jane...



Seema Malka Buksh is a  
 Vancouver based certified  
 art therapist.



interview

During the press tour

for his new novel

Cinnamon Gardens,

author Shyam

Selvadurai sat down

for dinner with

Michael Johal. While

consuming vats of

orange juice and god

knows what else,

Michael and Shyam

talk about their bouts

with temptation.

funny boys

# sex & sushi

**MICHAEL:** Part of the reason temptation interests me is that the mischievous part of Michael is fascinated by temptation. Why are we so obsessed with temptation?

**SHYAM:** I think it's the forbidden. I think human desire is at its best when it's not satiated. You need to have that "other thing". If you "have it all" then life is dull. It's a search for the next thing. I suppose growing up in Sri Lanka, for example, you become very conscious of that.

When I was a child it was a very socialist state and we didn't have something like chewing gum. When you got it you treasured it - you ate it a stick at a time. That experience of completely loving that, and luxuriating in that piece of chewing gum in your mouth is completely lost in a society where you can "have it all". I suppose for me - I like to be a bit stingy with myself and hold off.

**MICHAEL:** Are you usually tempted? You say you like to be stingy.

**SHYAM:** Certain things, yes. For other things temptation doesn't even exist. It depends what it is. I'm always tempted to buy that hard cover book. That's one thing I'm always tempted to do. Now, I think I can afford to buy the book but I don't. I'll hold it off as a treat to myself.

**MICHAEL:** Let me ask you at this point - What is the most significant historical, mythological, literary story or parable that refers to temptation for you?

**SHYAM:** The Adam and Eve story is the first one that comes to mind.

**MICHAEL:** The temptation by the serpent and Eve with the apple... did you grow up with this story?

**SHYAM:** I'm Catholic by religion, so yes I definitely did grow up with this story.

**MICHAEL:** Did you have the same relationship with Catholicism in so far as it relates to notions of temptation as well as the rest of the common characteristics people paint around sin and guilt and so forth... these big scary concepts. Did you grow up in the same way?

**SHYAM:** Temptation? Not really. I didn't grow up in the same way people here do. It took me a while to figure out why cowering Catholics were so angry with the Catholic church here. Because in some ways the same thing didn't exist for us. Partly because religious leaders here aren't regarded in the same way as they are in Sri Lanka. I think that comes from the older tradition of Hinduism where the priests are there to perform a function, not as spiritual leaders. If you really want spiritual leadership you would go to an elder, or that sadhu sitting underneath the tree. You don't really go to the priests for that. (laugh). Priests are regarded sort of as technicians. They're there to do their job - to administer sacraments.

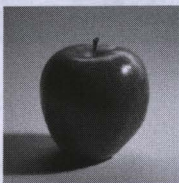
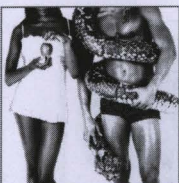
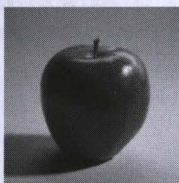
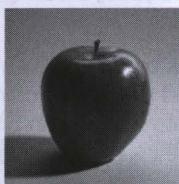
There's almost disrespect for them. My mother is very Catholic in many ways, but I remember one time I said, "I think I'll be a priest when I grow up", and she said "Why do you want to do that you'll lead such an unhappy life".

I mean, here's a very strong Catholic telling her son not to become a priest because it's such an unhappy life. She said I would end up being bitter and all these things. So I think I didn't grow up with the same ideas of sin and temptation that Western Catholics do.

**MICHAEL:** What else in history or mythology, or literature strikes you as relevant to temptation?

**SHYAM:** I don't know. I'm trying to think...um...

**MICHAEL:** There's one huge one playing out right now in the United States of



America with the president isn't there?

**SHYAM:** Oh yes!

**MICHAEL:** The infatuation again, this odd relationship that society has with these notions of temptation is now being played out in all its gory details.

**SHYAM:** I think there's an aspect of temptation that bothers me which is just that everybody thinks that we don't actually choose it. I think Clinton knew exactly what was going on and I think Hillary Clinton actually knew what was going on. I don't think it's just a question of you're sitting in your office and the next thing you know you're getting a blow job. I really don't think that's possible.

**MICHAEL:** So, engaging in activities driven by temptation is never accidental?

**SHYAM:** I don't think so, but I think that pose is accidental, and I think it allows you not to take moral responsibility on some level.

*"The snake was in the garden and I was just walking in the garden - I didn't go looking for the serpent - so the serpent made me do it."*

I think it's a very dangerous thought. (laugh). Temptation itself is a way of avoiding responsibility.

**MICHAEL:** What about the thought that as long as you're not harming anyone or yourself why not lead a life that gives into temptation every time at every opportunity? The pursuit of living life to the fullest.

**SHYAM:** As I said, there is something to be said for holding back as well. I think then when you do get something, you appreciate it more. But certainly I do not think you should hold back if you're not hurting anyone or yourself for that matter.

Here's a good example - I've been dreaming of eating smoked salmon and sushi in British Columbia, and I am going to have it! There is not much that's going to stop me from having that here.

**MICHAEL:** (laughing) And here we are...

We have this dichotomous, this contradictory relationship. We want it and we fear it and I'm here to figure out if you, as a writer, have ever represented this in any of your characters in either of your two best

known books.

Talk about that.

**SHYAM:** In *Cinnamon Gardens*, one of the two main characters - Balendran is actually gay, but married. And into his life returns his old lover from London - so I mean he is tempted by his old lover. There is a fine example of someone who kind of goes through completely unaware and not accepting what is obvious to the reader, which is that he is falling into temptation.

**MICHAEL:** What's the moral challenge there and how is it resolved?

**SHYAM:** Do you want me to give away the plot? (laughter)

**MICHAEL:** It's always interesting to hear it from the author's perspective.

**SHYAM:** Well, I think that he comes to understand very quickly, about half way through the novel, that the choices that he has made are his own choices, that they are not merely temptations. They're actually his choices and he has to accept the responsibility on that.

**MICHAEL:** This has recurred now two or three times since we have been talking. You're talking about the whole notion of taking responsibility. Um... is this a central theme that's concerning you?

**SHYAM:** Mmm... somewhat.

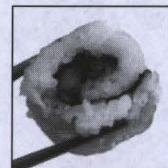
**MICHAEL:** We do seem to live in times where everybody's looking for a way to abdicate responsibility.

**SHYAM:** I come from a culture where duty is a burden. There's too much of duty in Sri Lanka. I come here and there's no duty at all. So you come from one extreme to the other. But perhaps if you strike a balance you can bring the old and also incorporate the new individualism - which I think has some really good aspects.

I think you're doing fine if you can do both - you can balance it all. That's it - you have to learn to balance!

I suppose the reason that I mention duty so much in the context of Western society is because it is lacking. If we were having this conversation in Sri Lanka, I'd be mentioning individualism much more because that's what I think is lacking there.

**MICHAEL:** The notion of responsibility and duty in the cultures of the Indian sub-continent is one that I am very familiar with. Raised of an Indian background in England... obligation, responsibility, familial duty... all of it counterbalances with what really was a whole bunch of temptations. Wearing decadent western clothes, sex in my mid-teens, going out all night, drugs, films in which ideas are represented and depicted in ways that are heretical... so I think I understand what you're saying with respect to the interplay of the two.



I have yet to resolve it. Have you?

**SHYAM:** What's to resolve? I mean, I'm a gay man, so I've already abdicated my familial responsibility by coming out -familial in the sense of continuing the generations. But at the same time I'm committed to my family and committed to my relationship in a very responsible fashion. And that's it.

I don't see what else the problem is. I mean occasionally I might give way one way or the other. I may think "oh what the hell, I'll give this up to go to auntie so and so", it's a conscious thing for me. But I do think it's easier to abdicate as a man than if you are woman in the South Asian community. I think for my sisters it's much harder. They are the people who have to remember the birthdays, the christenings, and the marriages. I'm not quite expected to remember that. I don't know how they deal with it.

**MICHAEL:** It's funny how you talk about expectations of you and expectations of your sisters. In many societies it's frequently considered that men are the ones who have to continually fight and resist temptation because it's men who are led by the nose by their irrational passions or temptations. Is there a relationship between temptation and gender?

**SHYAM:** Perhaps a constructed one, yes. Men never really grow up. A woman learns very early in life, particularly in the South Asian culture, the notion of responsibility. I think it's incarnated in a woman.

Men are pretty free to do what they want. Men are encouraged not to grow

What's to resolve?  
I mean, I'm a gay man,  
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up and with not growing up comes the possibility of temptation and wanting to "have it all". You have to realise you can't "have it all", and that's a hard thing to realise.

*Enter waiter.*

Is that orange juice?

**WAITER:** Well, yes it is!

**SHYAM:** Oh I'd love a glass!

*Exit waiter.*

I think it's a big thing for men. Especially sexual temptation. It's a real issue for men because of the automatic slowing down of desire and nothing prepares us for that. It's just a terrible thing!

There constantly becomes this need to prove yourself and there's nothing in our culture or any other culture that prepares us for the slowing down of desire.

**MICHAEL:** Isn't there an irony as well when we are still raging and full of or driven by desire well then, temptation abounds. When we slow down - well then there's the temptation to prove

ourselves.

**SHYAM:** See I think temptation slows down. I don't think that when you're 21 temptation is a big thing. You're just raging - you can "have it all".

You can have as much sex as you want and do whatever you want. I think there is no sense of responsibility. Now, I think at my age there is a sense of responsibility. You're in a relationship and you have to deal with that. It's not the same as it was before and that's when temptation occurs. I think far more men fall into temptation in their 30's and 40's and upwards than men in their 20's. Young men don't even need to think about it. They just up and go.

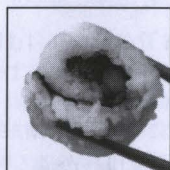
**MICHAEL:** It's interesting... you've essentially made an argument for the notion of temptation as being something that is being as much as something that derives from being a complex set of notions and thought in the individual, as a discreet and objective definition that stands by itself all the time.

**SHYAM:** Come again... you lost me there.

**MICHAEL:** Essentially we might do things at particular times in our life that we don't call temptation. We do the same things at another stage and we are now calling it temptation.

**SHYAM:** Yes, I think because they become forbidden. Towards the element of temptation there must be the element of the forbidden.

I think in your 20's, if we talk about it purely as sex, nothing is forbidden. But once you get married or you're in a relationship, and you have a child, and a house, then I think things start slowing down and that's when the problems start.



Shyam Selvadurai's latest temptation **Cinnamon Gardens**, published by McLennad & Stewart, is available at a book store near you.



*I can't imagine if I was tempted, I think I would have a breakdown or something.*

**MICHAEL:** Isn't the allure of the forbidden one of the most compelling in the human condition? Is that not one of the strongest urges and pulls that we can experience?

**SHYAM:** I can't say it's true for me. I'm a writer so my life is constantly stimulated by the creative urge. I sometimes wonder what would happen if I was not a writer - if I was working at IBM or a bank, a regular 9 to 5 job. That stimulation that you need in life is over provided by writing. I don't really need it any more.

At the end of my writing day I just want to put my legs up, cuddle up to my partner and watch TV. So temptation would be a bloody burden to me. I can't imagine if I was tempted, I think I would have a breakdown or something.

**MICHAEL:** You just expressed a remarkable level of serenity in your life.

**SHYAM:** Not when I'm writing or reading reviews. I'm far from serene. If I was serene I might be tempted. I'm not serene. My relationship might be serene, but certainly not my working life. We need some sort of stimulation in our lives as human beings.

**MICHAEL:** That's interesting that you make the relationship between serenity and temptation being that you were more tempted if you were more serene. When I recognise myself in periods of less serenity I think I'm more susceptible to temptation - I'm flapping around looking for things to self satisfy.

**SHYAM:** But in moments of uncertainty isn't the thing that's causing the crisis more likely to obsess you than anything else?

**MICHAEL:** There's a great irony that exists right there. The more you flap around and grab at things the less you're actually bringing about serenity.

**SHYAM:** That's interesting. See, for me when I am agitated I'm extremely not tempted. I find that whatever it is that is agitating me obsesses me so much that I can't concentrate on anything else. Let's say I get a terrible review - I'm more obsessed with the terrible review than going out and getting laid or eating chocolate mousse cake. It just makes me feel like, "what is wrong here?" And then when things in my life become serene the opposite happens.

**MICHAEL:** Where are those human infallibilities in you that cause you to go

out and drink a bottle or go out and get laid if you get a shitty review.

**SHYAM:** Where are they? I don't know.

**MICHAEL:** That's remarkably composed and disciplined.

**SHYAM:** Maybe I'll have a big mid-life crisis at forty-five and wear bell-bottoms or something like that. I don't know to be honest.

I think I've had great turbulence in my early life growing up in Sri Lanka both because of the act of immigration, and of what happened in Sri Lanka, and coming out, and all that. And those years of turbulence have led me to value the serenity in my life. It's just not an issue for me right now.

**MICHAEL:** That's good.

**SHYAM:** I suppose it is yes.

**MICHAEL:** What's the future of temptation as it relates to other characters that you have brewing? Are there moral dilemmas around temptation that the characters are going to play out? Do we get sneak previews?

**SHYAM:** The next novel? No *(laugh)* I'm not saying anything on that subject.

**MICHAEL:** *(laugh)* We're gonna have to wait and find out right?

**SHYAM:** That's right.

**MICHAEL:** How long are we gonna have to wait... give us a timeline?

**SHYAM:** I try for every four years, but I don't know at this point. You're asking at the wrong time. I'm pretty exhausted right now. I feel like I want years off before I even think of writing another book.

**MICHAEL:** After having this conversation with you, I'm looking forward to reading the next novel to see if at any point in it I can pick up any thin strands or what we have talked about.

**SHYAM:** Thank you. I'd be interested to see what you say because there's always the temptation to relate a work of fiction to the writer's life. Since temptation plays such a huge part in this next novel, I'd be very curious to know how you view it.

**MICHAEL:** That's a marvellous note to leave it at. Thank you so much for bringing that to a very tidy conclusion.

**SHYAM:** Oh, thank you!



by Jarnail Gill

Talvin Singh  
OK  
(Island/Omni)

Technically, *OK* is Talvin Singh's solo debut, but it doesn't feel like one. Everyone knows who he is, yet few outside the British electronic music scene have actually heard his music until now. Strange, considering the number of people who have slapped the tired old "future of music" tag on him.

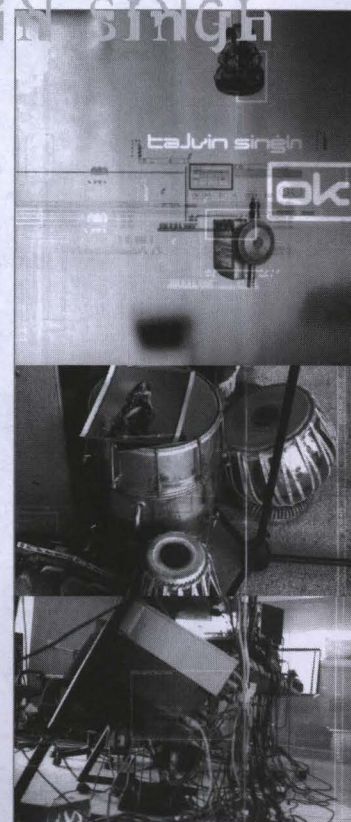
With such lofty expectations, *OK* is bound to disappoint on initial listening – it's one of those records that needs time to grow on you. *OK* will not hit you over the head with a sledgehammer, it will take a more subtle approach. It will pretend it is background music. It will work its way into your subconscious. It will overtake your thoughts and the next thing you know you'll think its strange that more music on the radio doesn't feature the Madras Philharmonic Orchestra, breakbeats and modular flute all on one track.

What makes *OK* work is that it sounds so vast. Fusion of musical style is always a difficult task especially when "experimentation" of this sort often ends up sounding contrived. Rather than overwhelming the listener by trying to incorporate everything possible into his mix, Talvin Singh picks and chooses.

"Traveller" is an epic track, starting off with waves of synth, intensifying until the electronic beats and tabla kick in. Suddenly things go quiet as a sitar drones peacefully in the background. Just when you think the track is over, the Madras Philharmonic Orchestra starts in. Other tracks such as "Mombastic", "Eclipse", "Light", and "Soni" also have the same expansive feel, sounding eerily similar to a Bollywood film score.

Drum n' bass influences are all over *OK*, but do not overwhelm it. Similarly, Talvin Singh's tablas are featured throughout without dominating tracks. On tracks that feature vocals, such as the title track, Talvin Singh manages to utilize them in such a way that the vocals do not become the focus but rather another instrument for Talvin Singh to fiddle with. *OK*'s success as an album is due to the fact Talvin Singh has the uncanny ability to fuse disparate sounds together without drowning them in the typical clichés of Asian pop music.

*OK* is not something that can be pigeonholed. Talvin Singh borrows from everywhere – east, west, north south. As a result *OK* cannot be easily identified with a particular musical genre and some listeners may therefore be turned off by the fact there are no reference points for this sort of music. For Talvin Singh's sake, let's hope people can keep an open mind and see beyond the rebel Asian tabla master with wacky haircut image.



## ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION

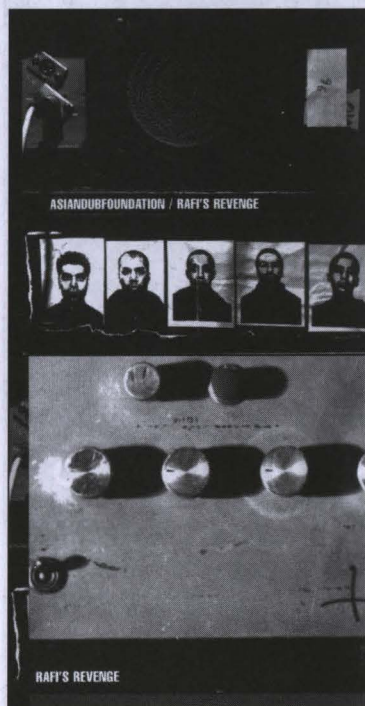
Asian Dub Foundation  
*Rafi's Revenge*  
(London Records)

Having graduated from ultra-militant indie Nation Records and signed to a major label, one might think politically charged reggae-punk hip hoppers Asian Dub Foundation would be tempted to tone down their politics in favour of something more palatable to timid music buying drones. The heavy use of Indian samples and raw sounds in their previous album, *Fact and Fiction*, have for the most part given way to heavy guitar riffing and slicker production. *Rafi's Revenge* sounds cleaner and more like a conventional rock album, but underneath it all ADF remains as socially and culturally aware as ever.

Like former Nation label mates Fundamental, ADF do not just write songs, they take up causes. "Free Satpal Ram" is a distortion laced anthem designed to raise awareness about Satpal Ram – a man who was imprisoned in England after killing another man in self defense during a racially motivated attack. Tracks such as "Assassin", "Naxalite", "Black White" and "Operation Eagle Lie" play on the theme of British Imperialism, racism and police brutality.

Although socially aware, ADF's goal has always been to create music, not to simply present political statements with backing tracks as an after thought. ADF capture the feel of a caffeine rush perfectly on "Naxalite" and "Buzzin'". On "Free Satpal Ram" and "Hypocrite" they show they can create guitar riffs every bit as memorable as any rock band. Getting back their roots, "Culture Move" is a heavy dub/jungle workout reminiscent of the Lee Perry/Mad Professor collaboration *Super Ape Inna Jungle*.

*Rafi's Revenge* is far from perfect - "Black and White" is just down right annoying after repeated listens, and "Hypocrite" sounds like formula reggae. But these shortcomings are more than balanced by the energy, enthusiasm and spirit ADF continue to display on their recorded works.





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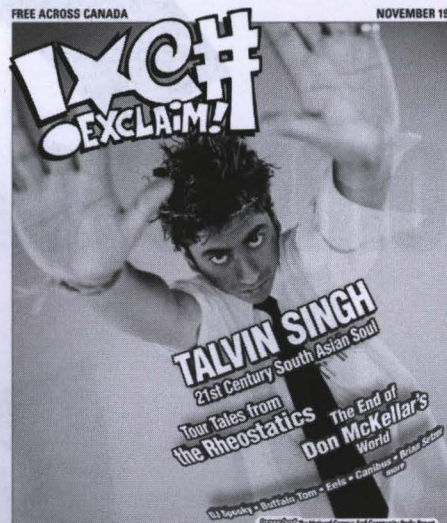
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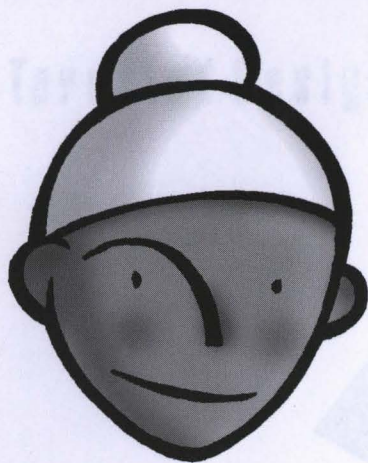
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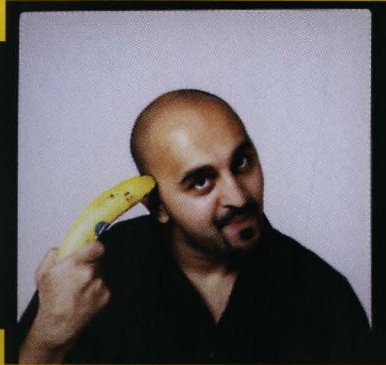
# ***Journeys***

**My works are more than just  
an expression of my heritage.  
They are threads between my  
journey and yours.**

**Paul Pahal, *artist***

"Paul Pahal - Untitled", featured in the next issue of **rungh...Journeys**

**outtakes...**



**...12 bananas later**





**runggh**

