

*South Asian Literary And Art Magazine*

*S.A.L.A.A.M.*



*Spring 2000*

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## *EDITORS' NOTE*

*Although putting this magazine together has been a challenging endeavor, we are excited to be part of the establishment of this new and important addition to the Tufts literary community. We feel incredibly lucky to have been welcomed by the university, and have been happy to receive contributions from a diverse group of people.*

*S.A.L.A.A.M. (South Asian Literary and Art Magazine) was created with the purpose of encouraging the growth of literature and art among those of South Asian descent, by offering an outlet for experimentation, learning, and recognition, while showcasing the talents of a people with connections to a subcontinent immensely rich in culture. The word "salaam" often invokes certain images, such as that of the popular greeting used by those practicing the religion of Islam, which is prominent in many regions throughout South Asia. However, "salaam" is, in fact, an Arabic word simply meaning peace.*

*This magazine was envisioned in the spirit of collaboration and with the hope of eventually featuring the work of students throughout the Boston area. We hope you enjoy this - the first of many issues to come.*

*~ Sarada and Swati*

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## *DEVOLUTION*

*Nani brings my mommy  
Back to her courtyard colony  
Childhood days of kinship, rikshas, and guava trees  
When little girls chased little boys on top of roofs  
And elderly women calmly walked to the bazaar in silk saris,  
And people's ashes sang their way down the River Ganges  
The spiritual voice having stolen their silence*

*Slick and slimy mud laden with dung and plagued by flies  
Squelches with the pressure of honks and the hooves of cows  
Tempos and wrinkled feet  
The sweltering heat melts the faces of the beggars  
Expressionless forever  
Naked shame sprays the brick wall  
Mustached men wink at schoolgirls  
A gated white house struggles to defend itself against the life surging past its driveway  
A tailor sells his being to the measurements demanded by Madam  
The cook is scolded for scalding  
A stray dog trudges through his colorless life  
Something is happening to the River  
As my mother brings me back to her backroads of Bihar.*

*~ Mita Prakash '01*



### *monologue on fatigue*

Truth be told, I would like to be the kind of person who always smiles, who laughs at the right times with just the right volume, the perfect depth. I would like to be the kind of person who has the answers and never knows she has them, so that people smile in understanding and awe when she issues them so nonchalantly, so innocently. I would like to be the kind of person who can have five papers, three exams, four books, and one week, and be perfectly complacent, still smiling and loving to all those around her, even nosy roommates and rude acquaintances. I would like to be able to never be irritable, to always think before I speak, to always put the right things in my body, to be without vice. Understand that we are all individuals? Some of us cannot help looking around, and what we see is the disgusting facade of perfection in those who can escape with acting as prescribed (no side effects, thank you)...who always get the grade, the smile, the love, the embrace of all others and of life itself. Listening to your banter is like catching the syrup overflowing off this small surface. Somebody kicked the burden over to me. And what am I to do? Laugh with me, I plead. Sometimes I surprise my own insides with my mediocrity, and just as it is celebrated by those that see me and hear me, it is held in deep and unfettering disdain by the only self that is supposed to be of consequence. I am not simply a character in her life, nor is she one in mine; but I never claimed that, I never looked so unfeelingly and thoughtlessly at her existence as if it were a cap on my water bottle. Never once. So don't stand there and tell me that I am being condescending, because if you don't understand what I am saying, then read a goddamn book. Open your eyes and understand that the world is not your coffee mug that you can look peculiarly at, that you can gently blow into, using your empty breath to push all unwanted heat and free radicals out of your cup, slowly, almost lovingly asking them to leave and never come back, then sipping gently all the flavour, all the things you so righteously believe were created for you, were mixed and brewed and sweetened just for you. That is not the world darling; that is a cheap cup of joe you bought at Store 24. We are not your amusement park and you are not my muse. Not that you are my dose of pain either. You just feel like that discomfort of wet jeans. Just cold nausea. And if you could understand that the world spins and people suffer even beyond the few you could help, then maybe you would have the insight and heart to open just one goddamn book and read what somebody else has to say about this never-ending joke. And then I would not have to check every single drip of fulfillment entering into my ever shrinking intellect that sadly keeps me going, and wonder if my allegedly esoteric allusions and thoughts that venture dangerously past Psychology 101 and Cosmopolitan are hurting your ever so delicate feelings. Because I am not supposed to be doing that...I am supposed to be a victim of your mercurial breath, am I not? Does it frighten you? What will happen if you close your mouth and put the coffee cup down? If you could see beyond the limited parameters of the ceramic, your heart would not look so big after all. It might look shamefully inadequate. And, indeed, the most clarifying and horrifying experience one can have is the slap of humanness and the big round globe that keeps spinning no matter how many exams you have, no matter how many smiles you flash, and no matter how many times you cry out that there is no justice. You may not care a morsel of what occurs past these gates you have built so carefully, so strongly around your desk. But then do not have the audacity to expect the fair Atlas to put his burden down for a moment so that he can gently explain to you the details of the past week at the very snap of your fingers that are compelled into motion when you realise that your next semester is threatened by some farmers in Indonesia who aren't buying your daddy's products this week. Why do I feel the need to say this? I am so tired and you are such an assignment that I can never ever complete, but in a grand display of perpetual futility, always keep on my list of things to do, penciled in my calendar, to reassure my flooded, overwhelmed, incomprehensible psyche that all is well, that I am doing my duty. The universe is asking to be restored to its silence. Is that so much to ask?

~ Sarada Peri '01

## *ADORATION*

*there's a cold grey itch  
sinking from my head to my lower back,  
catching my heart in the middle  
keeping it  
searching for rushing blood  
whispering,  
i want to be adored.*

*there's dust caught in my eyelash  
i blink it out  
and find it's a tear  
mixed with last night's black velvet kohl.  
i lick it  
salt tingles on tongue  
so it can understand itself  
and then stutter,  
i've got to be adored.*

*there's a melancholy melody floating into my ears  
wrapping itself  
around my body  
until i hear nothing else  
it releases its vapors  
into my gut,  
pulling me down  
into fetal position  
until i gasp,  
i've got to  
i want to  
i have to  
be adored.*

*~ Sabeena Rajpal '00*



*Untitled*

*Noreen Zaman '00*

## *IN ENGLAND*

*Here in the blank, gray dampness  
We are all black,  
As though our lives and struggles  
Are indistinguishable from the ever-impending dusk,  
Here in the country that claims curry  
as its favourite dish,  
We all share a similar red, yellow, brown flavour  
We are all identical: Indians, Pakistanis, Africans of all nations...  
Anyone with a drop of melanin is set apart -  
Together in one heap.*

*I met a woman.  
A black woman whose skin was lighter than mine.  
She was wearing a violet shalwar kamij  
and her eyes were blueish in the dim light.  
I asked her her name  
and let my hands travel along the sway of her back,  
She didn't shy from my embrace because,  
Although I can't marry her,  
We are the same.*

*Last night we went out.  
Our dark blood warm against the icy wind.  
She held my hand as we walked through the crowded streets  
past swarms of pale faces -  
No one turned to stare.  
No one noticed our differing shades...*

*Once inside the Palace (in Camden),  
We let the warmth settle into our flesh -  
Our eyes barely grazing the crowd.  
She drew close to me and I noticed  
that we were the only "coloured" people  
in a room full of colours.*

*And outside the night crept closer,  
Touching us with its blackness.*

*~ Natasha Marin '01*

## *TWO HANDS*

*The lines and roughness of your hands  
Envelope mine;  
Cradling them, crushing gently  
While they sweetly speak,  
Their silent language.*

*They echo my tracing thoughts,  
My fingertips dancing in your palm.  
Stratching...stroking.  
They search but cannot find -  
Find what?*

*Two hands become one  
Pressed tight never to part.  
Fingers slowly curl over  
And nestle  
In the dips between*

*Warmth and proximity evolve into pain  
Hot, pleasant pain.  
Two hands melting,  
Hurting, yearning  
for more. For it.*

*Electricity ripples through,  
Fingers stiffen, extend.  
They collapse into the other,  
Understanding.  
Close can never be close enough.*

*~ Joanne deVries '01*



*Untitled*

*Cecilia Philipose '02*

## UNTITLED

*Five years of anticipation  
bring me the first breath of dry, night air.  
The unmistakable scent of India - my des .  
The scent of culture, tradition, and faith  
laced with poverty, corruption, and injustice  
penetrates my being.*

*I become Indian, gleaming  
in the proud shadow of my poor immigrant father.  
I become his struggles and achievements.  
Through his tears I see the country he fled  
for his family, his children.*

*I come from a world of opportunity  
created by my father's sweat.  
Though my hair is silky and black,  
and the traditional music of garba and raas  
runs rampant in my blood and escapes in my walk,  
I become American.  
Perhaps it is my much too proper Gujarati tongue  
amongst the sweet Katyavadi of my family.*

*Within my uncle's compound in the city of Rajkot  
I stand peering over the walls at a child  
not more than a few hundred feet away.  
A tattered cloth, a faded red, hangs loosely  
accentuating her emaciated body.  
In her common almond eyes I see the lost childhood,  
which dances in my young cousin -  
now tugging at my leg.*

*Behind me, the cool white concrete  
rises high amidst the crimson heat.  
I return for a cold glass of fresh lemonade.  
The child moves with me.  
In her face, I see my own.  
I become the child.  
I become the bridge -  
between poverty and wealth,  
marginalization and power,  
love and greed.*

*I grasp the inevitable,  
the hyphenated title so often avoided.  
I become Indian-American,  
taking pride in the duty I inherit -  
the duty which carries the child with me  
over the undercurrent  
of custom, practice, and habit  
to traverse our bridge of change.*

*~ Swati Mehta '01*

*NOW*

*She came closer her strides a casual unconscious elegance  
Her eyes too innocent for their intent  
The white silk camisole glowing in the dim candlelight that flickered along the walls  
Silk falling against her contours  
A memory already made  
I stood not so much stunned but enraptured by the beauty of this woman  
Eyes cascading the eerie ethereal vision  
Hands removing the confining tie and suit jacket of a weary week  
Finger plucking off the highest button...only to stop...  
Seized by the thought of her unbuttoning the rest*

*Her breath warm against my lips  
As she stroked my cheeks with her fingertips  
Moments of silence in anticipation of the kiss  
Mentally already embracing her lips*

*Now...A forever, ever now...  
Peace...A confident treasured peace  
Knowledge...A knowledge of heart soul and body  
Pain...Fear...and there brethren shrink to nothing  
"Love" redefined from a word tainted by human fault*

*~ Michael Fraser '02*



## OUR BLESSED MOTHER

Catherine knelt on the velvet purple knee rest and bowed her head. She motioned me to do the same. She closed her eyes and moved her delicate pink mouth in prayer. I knelt. I watched her. I looked at the wood-paneled ceiling that sloped to an apex high above my head. Then I brought my chin level with the pew in front of me. There stood the smooth marble virgin, whose lashes rested on rounded cheeks, whose head tilted into her shoulder. She stood with silent strength and profound sadness. Catherine took my hand. She whispered, "Bow your head, Anita," without opening her eyes. I did.

Later, everyone formed a line at the front of the church to receive the sacrament, but I was not allowed to go. Several younger children were scattered here and there in other pews. They could not go either. They were too young and had not been baptized yet. I hunched into the bench and wished for my dark skin to dissolve into the mahogany upon which I sat.

After the service, Catherine and I crossed the street to the Country Club for lunch. John Michael was waiting in front. He wore small black-framed glasses and crisp khaki trousers. His hair was dark and extremely short, cut high above his ears and shaved at the nape. His collar was unbuttoned. Beads of sweat speckled his broad, patchy red forehead. He leaned against the white pillar on the front porch.

"What took so long? I'm starving."

"We couldn't find Benny," Catherine said and flipped her hair from her shoulders.

"So?"

Catherine punched John Michael in the stomach softly. "So."

We got to sit in the windowed part of the back of the club. I sat to the left of John Michael. He and Catherine shared a fruit tea, and they took turns passing the glass back and forth to each other. When they came, Benny sat by me, and Miz Peggy sat on the other side of Benny. Benny had thin blond curls on the top of his head. The afternoon sun shone on them and made them glow.

Benny was blowing bubbles into his Sprite with his straw. He blew too hard, and it splattered on my arm. Miz Peggy slapped Benny's arm.

"Sit still, Benjamin."

"Yes Mama," he said, but he kept blowing softly. He puckered his fat red lips on the straw and cupped his pudgy fingers around the glass. I giggled.

"John Michael, you can go swimming down the creek with James when he comes. The girls are going. Benny and I are going to see Granpa Foster this afternoon." Miz Peggy took a long drink of her tea and searched under the white tablecloth for her purse. Just then, Benny blew real hard into the Sprite, and it splashed over my arms and my lavender sundress and onto my face. I squealed.

Miz Peggy jerked her head up. Her dark wispy hair fluttered around her angular face and clung to her neck. She clapped the twenty-dollar bill she had found in her purse onto the table. "Benjamin Foster, that is enough." Then she took the glass from Benny, pulled him up out of the chair, and dragged him towards the front porch. Her long yellow dress swished behind her. It wrapped between Benny's legs as he stumbled after her. Catherine snorted and John Michael started hooting and slapping the table. He slapped it so hard that he knocked over Catherine's coke, and it tipped into her lap and all over her thin white cotton dress. She jumped out of the chair and it fell over too. The glass thudded onto the floor.

"John Michael, look what you did! Look what you did!" She hastily brushed her hand up and down the front of the dress. John Michael hooted and pointed at her.

"Aww baby," he laughed and laughed. Then we saw Ms. Peggy bringing Benny back in. John Michael scooted his chair out and grabbed Catherine's hand and my arm and said, "Come on!" He dragged us running out the back door behind him, laughing all the way.

"John Michael, stop stop! You stop now!" Catherine yelled at him.

"You're crazy, John Michael," I said.

He pulled us across the street behind the church to the graveyard in back. We stopped finally under the shade of an old maple tree on the far edge. John Michael was still laughing.

"I can't believe you did that! Mama's going to whip us!" Catherine said.

"She's your Mama," John Michael said. "She can't whip me. She can't whip Anita either, so I guess you're out of luck." He smiled broadly, showing all his crooked yellow teeth.

"You!" Catherine shoved him in the chest. He didn't budge. He just smiled at her.

"Come on Cathy." He grabbed her shoulders and kissed her mouth quickly. "Come on, Cathy Lou Lou Foster." Her name wasn't really Lou Lou, but John Michael called her that sometimes. She huffed at him.

I leaned against the trunk of the tree rubbing my arms. They were still sticky from the Sprite. John Michael had a way of getting to you, even if you didn't like him. When Catherine first started liking him, I couldn't stand him one bit. He called me "smarty pants" and looked over my shoulder during our math and history quizzes. I didn't want to let him, but I always did. He also called me "Pocahontas," even though that wasn't the kind of Indian I was and told him so. He said, "What difference does it make anyways?"

It would be different, I vowed, when we began high school in the fall.

"What are we going to do now?" Catherine whined and puffed out her bottom lip. She was pleased she had gotten a kiss out of John Michael.

"Wait for James, I suppose," John Michael said.

"Anita," Catherine looked at me deliberately, blocking John Michael from her vision as though he weren't there at all, "tell John Michael that James won't come here; he's coming to the house." I turned my head to John Michael and began to repeat it very slowly.

"I heard, I heard," he cut me off. Good. My heart was not in their quarrel, which wasn't even really a quarrel, just Catherine being very pouty and sorry for herself. John Michael stared at Catherine for awhile, deciding just how to treat her, and then he clutched my wrist.

"Anita," he said just as deliberately, "let's go to the creek."

"I don't -," I began softly, but he tugged me out of the shade and through the rows of graves without looking back. The sun roasted my shoulders. I put one hand on my head as I let John Michael pull me. The blackness of my hair soaked the heat. The pain of such warmth on my palm was comforting.

"Come back!" Catherine shrieked. "I get to say. You got me in trouble. I get to say!" I looked back. She held her fists tightly at her sides and leaned far forward as if she were being tugged by a rope rung round her neck.

"We can't just leave her."

"We can too," John Michael snickered. So we left Catherine fuming under the maple tree.

We crossed the church parking lot. By a large silver Cadillac, Father O'Brian was speaking to Dr. Reed, who lived next door to my family. John Michael let go of my wrist when he saw them and tried to walk past casually. Dr. Reed waved and called me over. His silver hair flickered in the white afternoon sun.

"Anita, good to see you," he said. He had a voice that sounded like it was coming from behind a closed door, low and mumbly.

"Hello, Dr. Reed."

"You tell your father those tomatoes in back look real good."

"I will, sir."

"Anita, you ought to come more often with the Fosters," said Father O'Brian. He was the new priest and I was surprised he knew me already, even though the Fosters are real close to every priest and I'm always with the Fosters. Father O'Brian was younger than the other priest I had seen the few times I had come to church with Catherine before. He had dark hair and dark eyes. He looked at me very simply and deeply.

"Anita's a gardener," Dr. Reed told Father O'Brian. I liked to help my father with his tomatoes. He was particular about the tomatoes. He liked them green or red, big or small, and we ate at least two or three in our house everyday.

John Michael was standing beside me and shifting from one foot to the other impatiently.

"That's wonderful," Father O'Brian said, smiling kindly. "Where are the two of you headed?"

"To the Fosters," John Michael said abruptly. "Let's go Anita." He tugged at my arm.

"All right then, bye now," said Father O'Brian.

"I expect to have some of those tomatoes soon," called Dr. Reed.

I waved at them as John Michael pushed my shoulders from behind.

We got out to the highway and walked single-file on the graveled side past the J&M without speaking. The late afternoon heat was nearly unbearable, and I began to yearn for the coolness of the creek water.

"She's the most stubborn thing I ever saw," John Michael said finally. He was walking in front of me, watching the ground. "When we get there, let's not even wait for James."

"She'll be upset."

"She's already."

"John Michael, why do you even like her?"

"I like -" He waved his arms up in the air and let them fall down, slapping the sides of his thighs. "- getting to swim in the creek, eating Ms. Peggy's summer squash, and having cigarettes with James out back at night." He said it all in one breath.

"What's that got to do with Catherine?"

"It just does, Pocahontas." I tried to step in the exact same spots John Michael walked in, but the glare of the sun on the white gravel made my eyes hurt, and after awhile I had to look up.

The creek is back behind the Foster's land. You can reach it easily from the trail by the buttercup patch on the left corner of the yard. When we got to the Fosters', the house was empty and there were no cars in the drive. Miz Peggy and

Benny must have already left, and James hadn't arrived yet. We walked through the backyard, pausing at the hose in back of the toolshed for a quick drink. We entered the woods. Its shade cooled us. The leaves and weeds brushed my arms and legs, and I scratched myself as I walked.

At the creek, I stripped to my petticoat and John Michael to his boxers. He was bony enough that you could see his rib cage. His stomach poofed out from being so thin. He folded his glasses into his trouser pocket, and his eyes were big and strange. He had little white indentations on the sides of his nose from where the sun did not reach the bridge. His body was covered with freckles.

I stood under a plush of oak. I stood on cool, dark earth. "I feel too old."

"You aren't ever too old, not when it's this hot," John Michael said. I hadn't realized I'd spoken out loud. I was feeling guilty about having left Catherine. I imagined her sitting alone under the tree. In my vision she bubbled with anger, first at John Michael and then at me for leaving her. Catherine had an unpredictable kind of anger. She could be calm about a thing. Or she could be cruel about it.

"Shouldn't we wait just a bit? She'll come any minute. We can make up by waiting."

"She'll do what she'll do, and we'll do what we'll do."

"Maybe I'll go back and get her."

"Don't you dare." He clasped my wrist and pulled me to the deep hole and stood me at the edge. "Jump in or I'll shove you." I hesitated. I looped my hair into a knot at my nape and peered at him. I folded my arms across my chest. "Fine," he said. He shoved me hard, so that when I went under I wasn't prepared. I swallowed a mouthful of the gritty cool water. I surfaced, coughing. John Michael laughed at me. Then he took a running start and leaped over my head into the water. It splashed my eyes. "You asked for it," he said, still laughing as he came up.

I rubbed my eyes. The water was cooler than I thought it would be. I shivered and felt my nipples contract. I became self-conscious and bent my knees into the soft earth underneath so that only the top of my head was visible for awhile.

We heard the truck pull into the drive even though we couldn't see it. John Michael put his finger to his lips. "James," he whispered.

"Yell to him we're here."

"He'll find us eventually."

I did not know what to say. I did not particularly care for James, who was around some during the summer. Mostly, he stayed with Mr. Foster in the city. James always talked about the real life of the city, where people care about learning and culture.

I didn't see anything different about here or there.

James was tall and big-boned. Though his build was completely opposite from Catherine's, they shared the same large, close-set blue eyes and dark, frizzy hair. They both had a dollop of a chin. They both had a way of raising the end of each sentence as they spoke, so that their voices rolled up and down and made you seasick. I did not want to see James, anyhow.

I lay flat on my belly on the soft earth at the bottom of the creek and held my breath. I squinched my eyes tightly and crossed my arms over my chest. I put my nose into the earth. I could hear the swishing sound of the water around me. Then John Michael kicked me. He pulled me up.

"Why can't you just leave me alone?"

"Come here." He was still whispering. He motioned me over to a shallower part of the creek, near the edge, where a large branch hung over into the water. I slunk along the bottom towards him.

Here, we were further down the creek, off the Fosters' property completely. Here, there was complete solitude, as if we had disappeared from earth.

John Michael knelt in front of me and raised me to my knees. He put his hands on my shoulders. He looked at me for awhile. I stared back, I did not know what he wanted, nor did I particularly care. The coolness of the water on my body made me tired. He put his palm on my cheek. With the other hand, he slipped off the shoulder of my petticoat. He did not look at me then. He looked at my shoulder as though it was an alien object. I did not understand. I could not speak.

"Pocahontas," he whispered. He cupped my waist and drew me to him. He put one hand on my breast and pinched it through the thin white material. I stared at him, stunned. John Michael clutched a lock of my hair at the side of my nape and tilted my head back. I bit my lip. My eyes burned. I gasped suddenly and choked on the sob. He brought his face into mine.

"You're a princess," he whispered. His breath was warm and sticky on my face. "You're my Indian princess."

"Stop it, John Michael," I spoke through clenched teeth. I saw his strange eyes through my gloppy tears.

"You're too smart, Pocahontas. What's it like to be so smart?" He squeezed me harder. "I want to feel what it's like to be so smart."

Suddenly, I felt a gush of anger rise and flood me. Un-paralyze me. I squirmed and elbowed him hard in the ribs. He released his grip, and I bit his arm hard until I tasted the copper taste of blood. I sloshed, half running, half swimming to the opposite shore where my dress lay. I struggled to put it on as I ran. I did not hear John Michael. I do not know if he remained.

As I ran across the Fosters' yard, dripping wet, without shoes, I ran right into James.

"Whoa, whoa!" He gripped my arm, but I shook free. "Where are you going?" I started to run towards the drive. "Well, where's John Michael or Catherine?" he called after me. I stopped and turned back and looked at James. He was wearing brown trousers and a peach button-down shirt. His stomach hung over his belt. He smirked at me.

"Fuck John Michael," I said. Then I walked from the Fosters' property, back onto the highway, back towards town.

The wet of the dress made me cold; the heat of the sun made me hot. I shivered. I ran again. My wet hair beat against my back. At the J&M Mr. Simpson was standing on the porch next to a large bag of feed. "Look at you go!" the fat, old man yelled to me. I kept running.

The church is at the edge of town. It's the first thing you pass as you're coming in. The lot was empty now. I stopped in front and looked at it, the thin white steeple piercing the blue sky, the brown rafters, the angular wings jutting out into the land. It seemed unnatural.

I crossed the sizzling parking lot. I saw Catherine in the distance, walking across the churchyard. One arm swung at her side. She bit the fingertips of the other.

I went into the church. Inside the air was frigid. I knelt in front of the smooth Mary. She was a blur of whiteness through my tears. She was still and calm. Detached. A sympathetic onlooker. A foreigner with downcast eyes.

*"Who are you?" I cried to her. "Why do you refuse to look at me?"*

*Then I froze. A calm washed over me. I rose. I walked out and did not look back. Catherine was sitting on the church steps outside. She was looking out at the empty black lot. I sat down beside her, thankful to be in the warmth again.*

*"Hi," she said, not looking at me. "Where you been? Swimming, I suppose." Her elbows rested on her knees, which were spread wide open. Her white cotton dress formed the triangle of a sail in the middle. She dropped her neck between and let her long brown curls fall to the step.*

*"Is John Michael still back there?" she asked, lifting her head and throwing back her hair. A few strands brushed my arm. I shivered.*

*"I don't know."*

*"You can't always listen to him, Anita. John Michael just wants to have control of a thing. You can't let him." I didn't say anything. "Anyways, I never do."*

*"No," I said.*

*"He thinks he can do anything 'cause he don't have any family, but that isn't the way it works. Mama says we gotta be kind to him. Fine and all. But every now and then I tell him no, just so he can know he can't have everything. We can't feel sorry for him, Anita. He won't ever learn then." She was looking at me earnestly then. I felt nothing inside, not anger, not pity, not sadness, not hope.*

*"Anita," Catherine said, "come on. We have to pray for him." She got up from the step and pulled me inside the church again. I gave in. I followed her. We knelt together in front of the virgin.*

*"Our Blessed Mother, please give John Michael the strength and knowledge to be a good person..." Catherine began.*

*I closed my eyes and thought of the tomatoes in the backyard and my father with his yellow straw hat that sat awkwardly on his bald brown head.*

*~ Preetha Mani '01*





*Untitled*

*Preetha Mani '01*

## *SUICIDE*

*Gently,  
I am taking my turn  
Pressing and squeezing and forcing  
As the richness of Aunt Jemima's maple syrup flows from the plastic bottle  
The goopiness of a glue gun  
Mingling with the warmth of fluffy pancakes  
On that eye-straining sunny Saturday  
That day Angela sat beside me  
English girl from Surrey.  
We talk of many things  
Me, Daddy, Abhu, Angela, and Mommy.  
My fixation is with England.  
"Mita's cousin brothers are English boys too."  
"Really. Oh. From England, yeah? And their names?" she questions me,  
Reluctance and faltering pronunciation  
Uncomfortable shifts on the green and black paisley cushions on the wooden bench  
I jumble the distinct but far from "normal" names into one -  
"Shanu and Sushant," was my reply  
And those benches were really so cleverly constructed onto the wall  
Tropicana Premium Orange Juice carton (not from Concentrate). No pulp. Thank God.  
That is where I lock my stare  
Cannot look at Daddy's eyes  
I think of the lone birch tree  
I think of Mable alone in the home behind us longing to caress her kittens on her porch  
I think of the injured fence and  
I make tender incisions  
Tender incisions into the pancake  
With my knife and with my fork  
But the pieces are always brought to my mouth gently  
At Chi-Chi's later there will be  
Clanging glasses, sipped margaritas,  
Tortillas and the rolling up of fajitas,  
Sucking in the aroma of onions and tomatoes  
garlic and parsley  
and tunes of flamenco soothing to us all.*



*We will so enjoyably dip chips into salsa, yet  
It is only then that my Father will speak,  
"Are you ashamed of their names?"  
He will shout  
"What? Are they dirt names?"  
Now. My eyes align with his.  
My shame.  
And the not completely chewed portion of the tortilla chip  
scrapes its way  
down my  
trachea.*

*~ Mita Prakash '01*



*All Eyez on Me*

*Sri Sridhar '01*

## *NARCOLEPSY*

*Buenos dias!  
And hark, there was light  
hitting at my face through the window.  
Did you sleep well?  
Did you have a bad dream?  
Why are you afraid to be alone?  
Are you lying?  
How long did it take to get where you are?  
How fast were you driving?  
Did you cross the boundaries?  
Are you guilty?  
So what if life is a bitch?  
What did you eat for lunch today?  
Was it good?  
Did you spit later?  
Are you feeling okay?  
Do you follow the God?  
Should I trust you?  
Why?  
Who are you?  
Am I fucking with your head?  
So what  
if you nearly killed me?  
Did I disappoint you?  
Have you taken your medicine yet?  
Are you listening?  
Who opened the door?  
Switch off the lights,  
I want to sleep -  
it's late.*

*~ Tooba Cheema '02*



*Untitled*

*Zoon Wangu '03*

*high art*

*You pulled yourself into me, speaking of 'sons and lovers' and 'gods  
and monsters'  
and I can only  
rhyme with thoughts, these pieces of people who should not leave,  
people who will not forget,  
people who cannot change.  
You have filled my enclave with heavy breaths of ancient and amorous  
tales, and still I remain  
empty, ignoring your ecstasy, consumed  
with my cries for justice and quiet. Just quiet.  
I am naked under your mind, your completely unconscious, piercing scrutiny,  
created out of my delusional self-image and  
your beautiful brown eyes, it's the way I stood  
that day, in the corner of exhausted madness and  
worship,  
knowing you'd shift past my face.*

*~ Sarada Peri '01*

*UNTITLED*

*My branches sag and leaves wilt.  
Eyes lingering,  
they fall as I watch  
one  
by  
one  
float and spiral slowly down  
kiss the grass  
but lie there lonely,  
never touching.  
Others say it doesn't hurt.  
What do they know?  
I lose it all and grow cold.*

*~ Joanne deVries '01*

*AVI*

*He is sick,  
His voice only comes at my beckon  
and even then it must struggle to be heard  
as if emerging from beneath a pile of rocks -  
each one covered with jagged edges that scrape his throat.  
Each word that tumbles onto his tongue gasping and exhausted  
is blue-tinted and sad,  
like someone about to give up..  
I feel like I'm the cause of his unhappiness and it kills me -  
Slowly pressing the air out of my lungs  
until I am limp and cold all over.  
It's strange because even in his weakness,  
I feel his hand kneading my heart -  
urging it to beat, urging me to live...to hope.*

*What does he want from me?  
I am not content to be a heartbeat in his palm -  
One of many I'm sure..  
I'd rather set up camp in his mind -  
Filling him with pleasant memories that come  
intermittently and unsolicited.*

*But, he is in his bed...  
and I am in mine -  
Too far away to know anything for sure.  
He says he'll try to see me.  
I suppose in the meantime I'll try to believe him,  
or forget that he ever  
existed.*

*~ Natasha Marin '01*

## UNTITLED

*I open my eyes - still there? Yep - there it is. There's the lump of brown daal and the other even bigger lump of green stuff next to it - they haven't moved. I hate how they're so close to each other - I hate it when Dad serves me - he knows how I don't like to mix. They're kind of leaning towards each other - like they're whispering. The green lump is more pointy - it's staring down at the daal. Maybe they're fighting: green against brown! Go brown! Go brown! Go brown...*

*"You can't leave the table until you're finished."*

*I wrap my legs like spaghetti in and around the legs of my chair, hooking my feet, locking my legs into place. And as I'm tucking my arms back behind me around the supports of the back of my chair, he says,*

*"And you will go into the garage if you don't finish."*

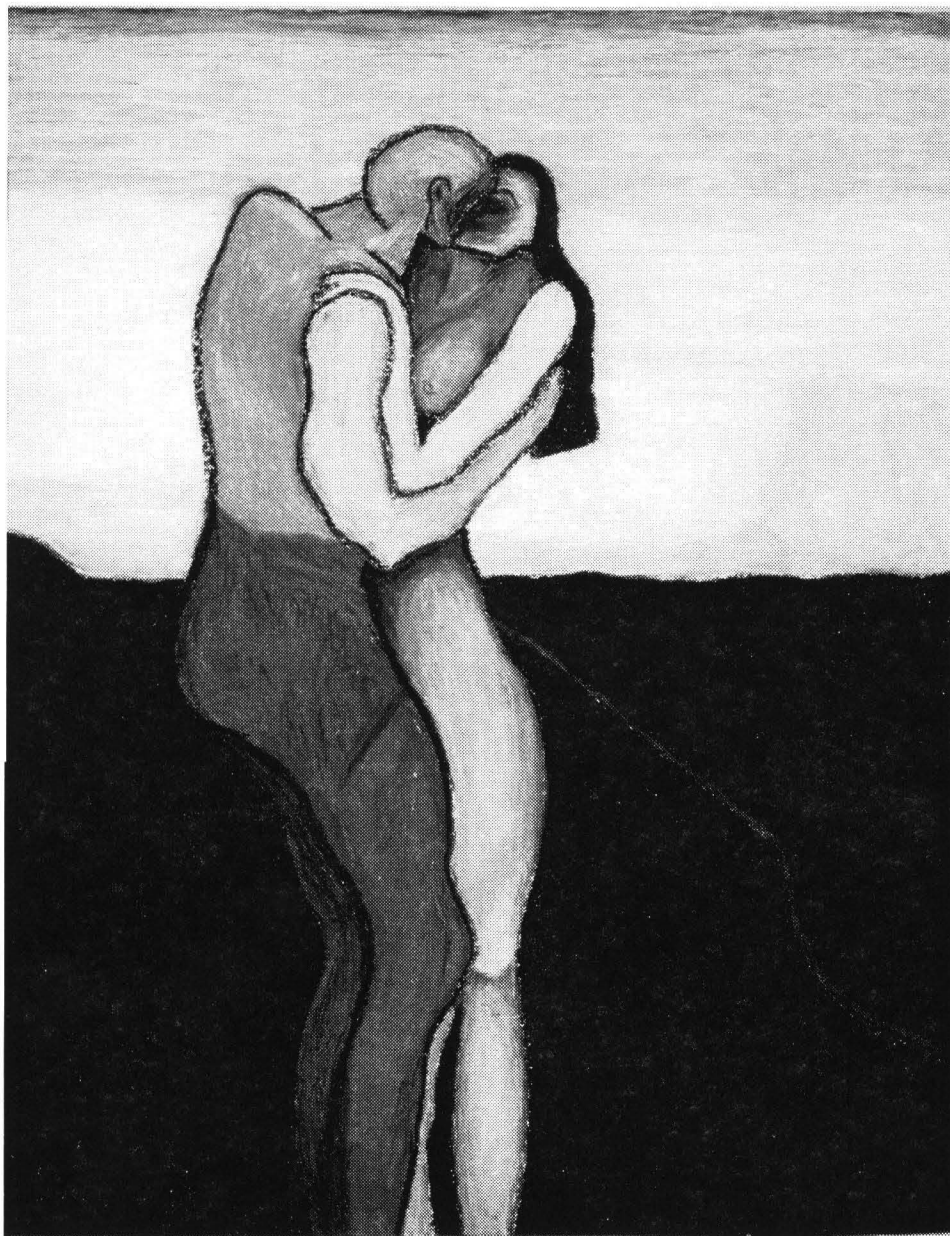
*I don't want to look at him. I'm mad - why does he have to be so mean? I can't swallow any more food - I'll throw up. I hate eating - why is it so important? Mahin's watching "The A-Team" in the living room, and I'm missing everything! I really can't finish - it's not possible.*

*My legs are hurting from being twisted - but I won't let go - he won't pick up the whole chair to put me in the garage. I won't go to the garage. I'll scream the whole way if I have to. It's so dark in there. And those birds on the back wall are painted so dark - like they're bats. The darkest corner with all those tools - oh! - that's the worst. There are just too many places to hide in there. I know what Mahin would do - he would just open up the garage door and go play basketball. I couldn't do that. I'd be more scared out there - it's getting dark, and I don't like all those passing cars.*

*"Achie buchie, you only have a couple more bites." Mom's eyes follow Dad moving out of the kitchen. "Just take two more bites and you can go," she says in a lowered voice. I unhook my right arm and look at her. I knew she would finish it for me. She's not looking back at me. She's busy with the dishes. "Ami, look." I tear off a tiny piece of naan and poke at the daal and pop it into my mouth and quickly put another in - this time with a scrape of saag.*

*She sighs, "Okay, go quickly." I barely hear her last word, and my feet hardly feel like they're touching the floor - I'm already in the bathroom spitting the mush in my mouth into a tissue and carefully placing it underneath the other garbage in the bin. God, I don't know what's louder - my heart or the crinkling of the plastic bag in the bin. Alright - breathe.*

*~ Nadia Samadani '01*



*Untitled (by Fritz Scholder)*

*Swati Mehta '01*

*FOR IT, i wrote...*

*That Love beyond the realm of reason  
Intoxicates like breaths of air.  
- Watching her move like water  
Down a slight hill -  
I sit in close (but distant) proximity,  
Seen but not noticed.  
Love that does occupy all,  
Eyes shut and Love is still awake  
In dreams,  
Where souls meet and waltz, sing and kiss.  
Eyelids open in the morn,  
And with this a new sense of self.  
Love that cannot be attained in the present  
For it is part of the Forbidden.  
Its perpetual impossibility  
Only embellishes Its appeal  
And enhances the desire  
For It against wanting, silent tongues.  
Time may prove to be a fiend or friend:  
None can see this Love's unveiling,  
A prophesy based upon a wish-filled hope.  
Chaste arms that open a chest to reveal  
Half of a heart haplessly humming tranquil beats.  
Earnest want that will not be granted;  
Now Love seems more impossible as  
Ol' Time constantly claws, creeps, clutches and crawls.  
Abounding tears that caused catastrophes,  
Even though shed out of sight -  
Fell as zealous, intimate rain upon the face of the desired  
Only to be wiped away unconsciously  
With unsure movements of palms  
(They felt as though they belong).  
How can that which is right be wrong?  
Will Love be too late?  
Or can destiny deny fate?*

*Unfair rules are they,  
By which this love does parlay.  
"To Time (to be Lost) and seconds of years past,  
Unwrap the rusty tin can that is my drinking glass.  
Pour tepid champagne tears and let's toast,  
To a nebulous, bitter-sweet triumph (at most).."*

*~ Alwin A.D. Jones '02*



*YOU*

*Your sound is colorful  
Injecting me with emotion  
Swirling around my head  
Infecting my thoughts  
As I've never decided more  
Always felt just enough  
To propel me this way  
But no, you appear  
Lightly embrace my essence  
Gently caress the soul within me  
Transform and enlighten  
Only inches from my heart  
The light is seen  
Brightness that exudes  
Unbearably inviting  
Dangerously tempting  
But no, you won't be deterred  
Racing towards me  
With a drive like no other  
So I welcome it  
And happiness escapes me  
A blissful heaven  
And you join me  
And we move forward and I know  
It's me  
And  
You.*

*~ Reshma Bhame '02*



*Untitled*

*Geetha Pai '00*

### SOULMATES?

*His hands are rough,  
tanned from the desert sun,  
imperfect nails wrought with hangnails and chips.  
His left hand hangs listlessly by his side,  
while his right one draws a burning cigarette  
towards his mouth, his sunken cheeks, his mouth  
accepting the offering of his hand,  
releasing it into rings.*

*The smoke rises and dances in the air,  
snakes moving to the tempting music  
of the turbaned man,  
in the village where my grandmother lives,  
the village full of  
diseased dogs and  
an incorporeal odor of cow dung and  
the burden of history and  
the inexplicable.*

*I ask him, "How does it feel to control something  
as ethereal as that?"  
His hard face rises slowly,  
eyes cold, two jade stones, paler than ever  
staring blankly at me,  
as he replies, "I'm going inside now."*

*~ Sabeena Rajpal '00*



*Untitled*

*Noreen Zaman '00*

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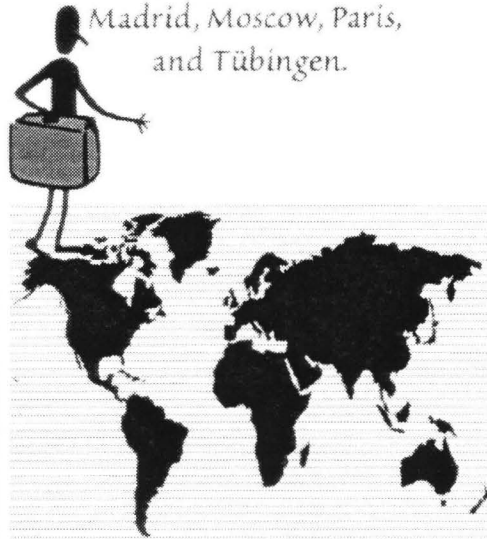
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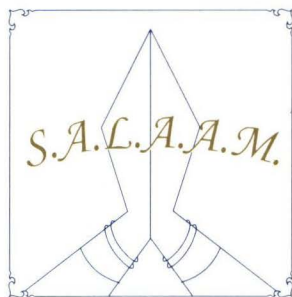


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