

Dec 1982 Vol.4 No.4 \$1.50

THE ASIANADIAN

AN ASIAN CANADIAN MAGAZINE



- glimpses of muslims in canada
- learning english
- marcos' u. s. visit
- a political fiasco

**Is the ASIANADIAN
Losing Its Appeal?**

Let's

Talk

Dollars

And

Sense...

turn to page 25

Contents

Dec 1982 Vol.4 No.4

THIS IS YOUR LAST ISSUE

Please RENEW your
subscription

Features

Departments

A MATTER OF DETAIL
M.G. Vassanji

3

EDITORIAL

2

LEARNING ENGLISH
Gina Wong

7

FACE TO FACE
with Ravinder Kaur

12

DIVIDED WE STAND
V. Padmanabhan

9

INTERNATIONAL FORUM
Marcos' U.S. Visit - A Political Fiasco

18

**GLIMPSES OF MUSLIMS
IN CANADA**
Sudha Thakkar Khandwani
Abdullah Khandwani

14

BOOK REVIEWS
A Separate Sky
Paper Doors

21

COMMUNITY NEWS

27

The Asianadian is an Asian Canadian Magazine published quarterly by the Asianadian Resource Workshop, P.O. Box 1256, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2P4, Canada. Copy (c) 1982 by the Asianadian Resource Workshop. All rights reserved. Contents may not be reprinted without prior written permission.

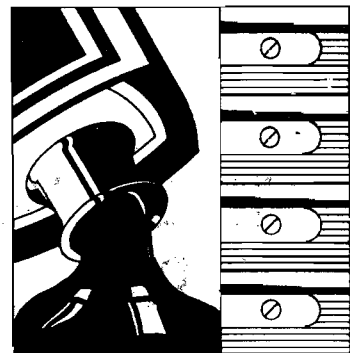
ISSN #0705-8861. Second Class
Mail Registration Number 4438,
Toronto, Canada. The Workshop is

a registered, non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible. Printing is by Weller Publishing.

Production this issue: Editors: Richard Fung, Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta. Graphics: Meena Dhar. Kathy Adachi, Dora Nipp, Diane Yip, Danny Lee, Satish Dhar, and Prabha Khosla.

The opinions expressed in this issue are not necessarily those of the Collective.

Editorial



For those of us who have been involved in community politics, it is not difficult to note two phenomena: (1) the fragmentation of progressive forces; and (2) the uneven levels of consciousness among activists.

By these we mean that some people in community organizing often lose sight of the larger purpose of justice, equality, and freedom because of personality conflict, tactical disagreement, and rhetorical trivia. Furthermore, activists who fight for racial equality may be anti-labour, and those who fight for sexual equality may be anti-immigrant and racist.

In this context, the recent conference organized by the Council of National Ethnocultural Organizations, the Ontario Federation of Labour, and the Canadian Labour Congress must be seen as a small step forward in addressing the problem.

The conference provided an opportunity for union people and ethnic groups to discuss issues of common concerns in the area of racism.

Labour unions could, in many ways, assist in building a society of racial equality. They should begin by actively recruiting visible minorities the

executive level. They should organize workers in jobs where many visible minorities cluster. They should advocate for mandatory affirmative action programs, and they should stop provincial government cutbacks in language training. They should remove discriminatory clauses in collective agreements. In other words, they should do a lot more than what they are doing now.

On the other hand, visible minorities should also involve in union activities so as to strengthen the labour movement. Minority groups should begin to educate their members about labour rights and human rights as well as the benefits of being active in labour unions. Minorities should also do a lot of outreach work, and liaise closely with unions.

To be more concrete, what can YOU do? You, as individuals, can talk with your union locals and convince them to do outreach work in racial/ethnic communities. You, too, can contact your racial ethnic organizations and urge them to educate their members with respect to their labour rights and human rights. Tell them that you would like to do volunteer work for them if they have anti-racism and pro-labour programs or activities.

ASIANADIAN AIMS

- 1) To find new dignity and pride in being Asian in Canada.
- 2) To promote an understanding between Asian Canadians and other Canadians.
- 3) To speak out against those conditions, individuals and institutions perpetuating racism in Canada.
- 4) To stand up against the distort-

- ions of our history in Canada, stereotypes, economic exploitations, and the general tendency towards injustice and inequality practised on minority groups.
- 5) To provide a forum for Asian Canadian writers, artists, musicians, etc.
- 6) To promote unity by bridging the gap between Asians with roots in Canada and recent immigrants.

A MATTER OF DETAIL

M.G.Vassanji

Nurdin Fazal knew his problem. It was not something he had always had; nor was it an affliction (for such he viewed it) picked up there and just brought here to Canada where it had worsened. His problem had crept up on him gradually in his new country and taken him quite unawares. He realized suddenly one day that what he caught himself doing he would not approve of in others. It went against the very grain of the qualities he had always been taught to cherish and the ideals that lay at the core of the respectability he claimed for himself. Consequently, this newly discovered predicament sometimes succeeded in completely upsetting him, filling him with consternation against himself and frustration at his situation. Which he then believed to be the product of this new culture and not the result of his presence in it. As if anyone immersed in it was immediately set upon by this new germ and had to suffer the consequences thereafter. He would declaim the West and talk of the moral purity of the East. How the porno culture had to be firmly resisted by the righteous who just happened to be poor. He would get carried away with the idea that his coming to Canada was only a stepping stone toward permanent settlement in Pakistan.

Not that he thought about sex

He was born in Africa, of Indian parentage. He had been, he still considered himself to be, a respectable man; a father of three daughters, two of them happily married and the third

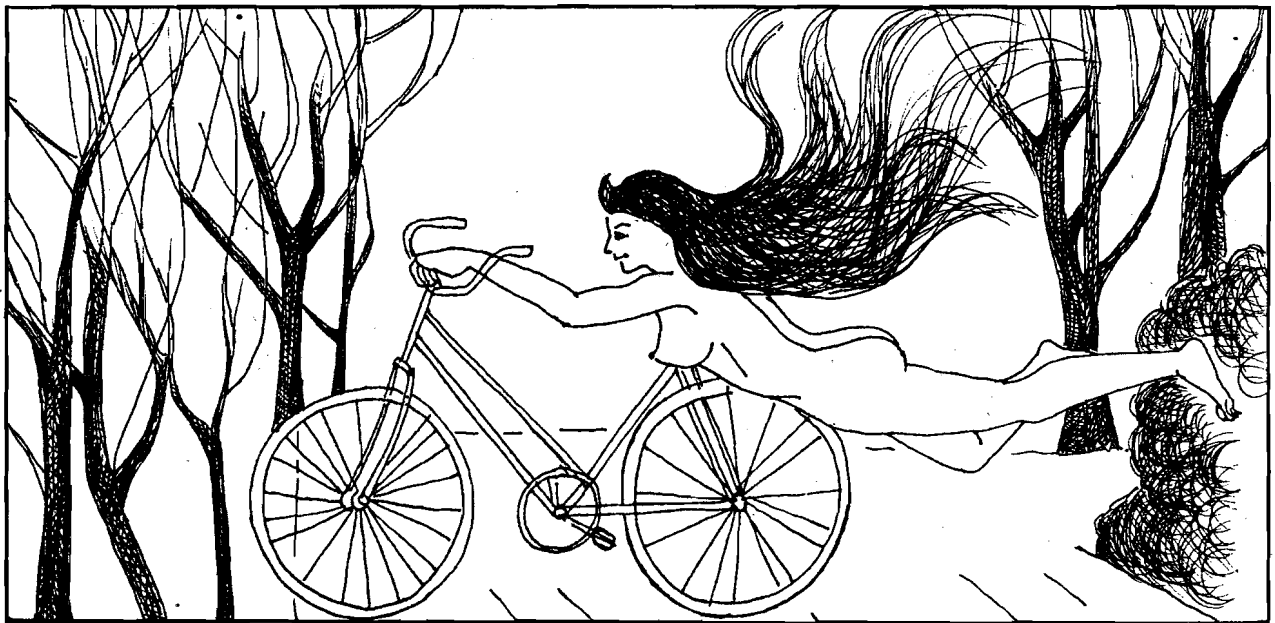
one still in her teens. He was a man of about fifty. Back there (or home, as he still sometimes, inadvertantly, referred to it) he would have been considered well past middle age -- his own mother had died in her fifties. But he considered himself still young. By just stepped onto the soil here, he had increased his life span, statistically speaking, by at least twenty years.



Nurdin Fazal's problem was this. About a year after coming to Canada -- a year in which he suffered through his first winter, walked miles and passed through numerous queues before at last landing a job -- he became fully aware of his sexuality. He could not recall any other time in his life, except for a few years in his youth, when the subject was so much on his mind. Not that he thought about sex all the time; on the contrary: he tried as much as possible not to think about it at all. The subject lingered

so much at the surface of his mind: the slightest hint, the slightest provocation, and he had to use all the strength he could muster to dam up the flood of images that threatened to fill his mind. But not always successfully. He had become aware of *woman*. Not the female personality he saw manifest in his wife and daughters; but the physiological female resplendently displayed, as it seemed to him everywhere in the streets of Toronto. He would catch himself staring after women; or consciously trying to avert his eyes from their chests, having mentally noted first the extent of the support there. In the summer the sight of women in tight shorts sometimes reduced him to a state of complete disorientation; when he saw one on a bicycle, for example, casually pedalling away in a park amidst the luxuriant greenery in the heat of the summer sun, his heart would pound, blood rushed into his head, he felt he would practically burst. In a state of irritation he would feel a knot tightening under his belt. At such times he would mutter to himself, "To have come here at this age!" At other times he would tell himself, "The things they show in movies! In the open. Quite in the open, by God! What must be going on behind closed doors!"

It bothered him, this condition he found himself in. For he considered himself a religious man. If not pious, at least observing. He believed in moral righteousness. And in those moments of anguish, when he would reflect upon his predicament, he would liken himself to a dog panting at the sight of a bitch, an animal in a state of pure intuition. He remembered the story of a holy man who had passed a life free of blemish but was reborn as a dog for desiring a woman at his deathbed. Lines from sermons he had heard in the past would thus resurface in his memory, religious admonitions came to haunt him. Anger and lust -- the proverbial two cardinal sins -- he had been taught to shun. Anger was not a problem with him. He was a small man, somewhat round in the middle, dark, bald, and prone to being made the butt of jokes by bigger men. But he was good natured, and you would rarely see him in rage. He liked to please. When he first came to Canada he would be all too willing, like a true gentleman, to give up his bus seat to a woman, even when the woman was at an inconvenient distance from him. And when she did not understand him, or pretended not to, or did not even desire to look at him, he would return sheepishly to his seat. If anything



his problem had always been this certain haplessness in his life. To which he now added lust.

He recalled his adolescence.

He recalled his adolescence and the years of his puberty. But then, it was all jokes and swear-words -- talk and fantasy. He recalled the excitement with which he and his friends would crowd around the pictures of nude girls in imported girlie magazines; how the magazines would pass from desk to desk in class, to be gazed at, admired, as the geography master went on and on about physical features of the earth; how, at home and in the presence of his family, he would look with outward equanimity but inner turmoil at the pictures of the beauty queens of the local Gymkhana Club. In his days these beauty queens had always been European and white. Eros had come to him at an early age bearing pictures of white girls in various stages of undress.

But all that was a long time ago. He did not remember having been physically attracted to his wife in the last fifteen years or so, since after the birth of their youngest child. Though admittedly, she was not an attractive woman by any stretch of the imagination. She was a stubby woman who was somewhat prettier in her younger days; but the stability of marriage and the ordeals of child-bearing had killed what little looks she had had.

So he had assumed all these years that this side of his needs was well looked after; he would have no problems here. There were other things to life after all. And the sight of girls younger and prettier than his wife had not excited him in the least, nor filled

him with any regrets. Now, after more than ten years of near celibacy, he felt once more the desires of his youth. He worked as an orderly at a hospital. It was a job he had found with much difficulty, after months of searching for the right job, then any job that was not completely menial. He really had no qualifications when he came. All his adult life he had worked as an agent for a wholesale distributor, finding customers for the firm, wooing them away from the competition, and collecting payment from them, supposedly at the end of each month, but in reality well into the next. He would go from shop to shop with samples and take orders. In the evenings a stationwagon would come and deliver them. When he came to Toronto the only good interview he had had was at a large department store, which had an opening for a shoe salesman. It had not worked out. And so this job, which was tiring on the feet somewhat, but not altogether different in this respect from his previous job.

He had never been so close to a white woman before.

One morning he came out of the store pushing a trolley full of linen. He walked past the stairs and came to the elevators, and saw a young woman sitting on the floor, against a wall. Her head was in her hands, and she appeared to be crying. Immediately he left the trolley and went up to her. "Can I help you, Madam?" he asked with concern. "Can I help you?" She didn't look up. Then he tried to raise her shoulders and her head, so as to look at her better. "Madam, can I get you something?" His heart was now beating fast, he had never been this close to a white woman before. He could smell her makeup. He looked around. Then his right hand slowly moved down, to her breast, and he gave a

gentle squeeze. At first nothing happened. His hand moved away. Then all of a sudden she gave a jerk, looked up, and cried out, "Rape! He's trying to rape me!"

Nurdin was completely flustered. He got up from her and started moving away. He thought she was joking, or at least he hoped she was. "Heh, heh --" he began. But she was serious. She started throwing names at him and shouting. He took the elevator and went up with the trolley, still trying to laugh. "Heh, heh, heh..."

He felt nervous.

"So you like white skin, hey?"

At lunchtime everyone seemed to stare at him as he came into the cafeteria. A couple of hours later the police came to question him. He stuck to his guns. "I went to her and I put my hands on her shoulders. Like this. 'Madam, can I help you?' I asked her. Tell me, is there anything wrong in that. I have a daughter her age, I have a grandson..." And he sobbed. He was terrified. Perhaps in his terror he even believed his own story. There was only a detail missing from it. The whole structure of respectability he had constructed around him in his private life -- embracing his family, his friends, his relatives -- threatened to crumble. He dared not imagine in what light they would view him after this; or how his small community, in which his respectability lay imbedded, which conferred upon him his status in life, might regard him. Later on in the afternoon, as he came down to his locker to change, the girl's boyfriend, a large, black orderly at the hospital, roughed him up. "So you like white skin, hey?... You like white skin, hey?... White skin, hey?... You find your own, hear?" The next morning he was booked for indecent assault.

The lawyer hired by his family heard his story, the same one he had given the police. But with great precision coming from the experience of years of dealing with people, he laid his finger squarely on the truth. "Kaka's hand must have slipped somewhere -- hopefully not too far," he pronounced in his privacy.

In court he demonstrated the unreliability of the girl's testimony. She took drugs. Her boyfriend used to beat her up and was regularly unfaithful to her. Was she in her right mind that morning? Wasn't she on medication then? Why was she sitting there on the floor beside the elevators -- did that action bespeak a person in a normal frame of mind? Had she had a fight with her boyfriend?...Nurdin was acquitted of the charge. But, as the lawyer said, it was all touch and go. It all depended on how the judge viewed the girl's testimony. A question of credibility. As it was, she didn't have much to speak for her.

The incident was hardly mentioned but the verdict was - many times.

That weekend his family and friends held a get-together in their home to celebrate the event, with food, card games and a home movie. The hearing had been a great ordeal for the family. Fortunately it had not received much publicity and, with the verdict, there was little chance that it would. The incident was hardly mentioned that evening, but the verdict was, many times. Nurdin did not know what each one in the gathering there thought of the whole affair. Only, at one point, as the men sat down to eat, one of his friends gave him a sly look and, with a wink, growled out, "Nurdin -- you son of a gun!"

M.G. Vassanji is the editor of
The Toronto South Asian Review

LEARNING ENGLISH

Gina Wong



There are six women in the room. Some of them are Vietnamese and some are Chinese. Everybody is talking at once. There is a lot of laughter and giggles. They are all here to learn English. Vilma is their volunteer teacher. She is a young Jamaican girl who is studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), specializing in teaching English as a second language. The English class, organized by the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, is held every Wednesday and is free of charge.

The class is held at Mrs. Fung's house. She is one of the students in the class. It is on Broadview Avenue in Toronto's Riverdale district. The bright lights and the street cars of Chinatown East are not far away. Everytime the streetcar goes by the house, it shudders nervously. The living room in which the class is assembled is

dimly lit and windowless. The furniture is secondhand and worn out. The linoleum tiles are curling up and the walls are stained and in desperate need of a coat of paint. In other words, it looks like the typical home of a "new Canadian".

The class moves into the kitchen and everybody sits around the kitchen table. It is a cosy room although everything seems to need repair. Many women in the class have come directly from work. They keep their coats on because the house is quite chilly. The women's ages range from 25 to 55. They are a lively and talkative group and seem to have much to tell to each other. They speak different dialects of Chinese.

This is where Gina comes in. She is a young community worker from the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre. She speaks Chinese. It was she who got

the class going through her outreach work in the community. But she found that her would-be students were quite choosy. They were quite frank in telling her that they preferred to learn English from someone who was not Chinese. They wanted to make sure they learnt the right Canadian accent. At first Gina was afraid they may not want a Jamaican to teach them either. But they took to Vilma immediately. So now Gina drops in once in a while to help out in those tricky moments when a translator might be needed.

The women in the English class are recent refugees from Vietnam. One is from Mainland China and another from Hong Kong. Some of them are still waiting for their family members to arrive. One woman left Vietnam with two of her four children in a boat to Thailand. Now that she is in Canada, she has sponsored her husband and two children. Each one has survived an arduous and traumatic journey. For some the ordeal is still not over.

All the women work in garment factories.

All of the women work in the garment factories as sewing machine operators, button makers, etc. Although they have been in Canada one or two years, none of them speaks any English. Most of them did not work before they came to Canada. They generally stayed at home and looked after the children or helped in a family business. "Housewife" says one woman in her fifty's, describing her life at home and everybody burst out laughing.

There is a discussion on why the women are learning English. Everybody is eager to talk about this subject and the general comment is "You have to speak to work, you *have* to say a few things." One woman explains that she is not learning the language and she wants to

change her job. In fact, she feels that she is too old to acquire any new skills. She cannot hope to master the language at this stage of her life. "It takes a lot to learn how to read and write even if you do learn to speak. Even then you can only hope to get a slightly better job. The hope... is there but it seems quite unrealizable." Another says that knowing the language, even a few words, helps to make friends. Right now, they are restricted to just, "Hello, how are you?" At this comment, all the women in the class laugh heartily. Only one woman says that learning English would help her to change her job. She does not want to stay in her job, as button maker, forever. She may not necessarily get a better job but at least she may have the possibility of leaving the factory. For instance, some jobs are quite easy and require no training, such as waitressing and counterhelp. "But without English you have no chance," says one woman.

Vilma calls the class to order. She pulls out a large portfolio and places it on the table. She addresses the woman next to her, "Hello, how are you?" and waits for a reply. There is a short silence and then the giggles and chatter start again as someone starts to prompt. Then Vilma replies to her own question, "I am fine, thank you, and you?" She does this over and over again with each of the women. Pretty soon they get the hang of it. Now they have to go around the table and ask each other. The next thing Vilma teaches them is how to ask a question. "Excuse me, where is....?" Then she pulls out a chart with pictures of fruits and vegetables and the women take turns saying the names of the pictures. At first the words sound unfamiliar, heavily laden with accent but slowly with repetition, they become recognizable. These women repeat saying: "Apple", "Orange", "The apple is red", "My skirt is red" and so on.

cont'd on page 25

