

AALR

Special Issue: Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of Sept. 11

Volume 2, Issue 1.5: Fall 2011

A | L
A | R

The Asian American Literary Review

ISBN 978-0-9838646-9-1



9 780983 864691 >

FALL 2011 | \$12 U.S.

The Asian American Literary Review

Volume 2, Issue 1.5: Fall 2011

Special Issue:

Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary
of Sept. 11

Guest Editors:

Rajini Srikanth and Parag Khandhar

The Asian American Literary Review is a space for writers who consider the designation “Asian American” a fruitful starting point for artistic vision and community. In showcasing the work of established and emerging writers, the journal aims to incubate dialogues and, just as importantly, open those dialogues to regional, national, and international audiences of all constituencies. We select work that is, as Marianne Moore once put it, “an expression of our needs...[and] feeling, modified by the writer’s moral and technical insights.” AALR features fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, translations, comic art, interviews, and book reviews.

Masthead

Editors-in-Chief

Lawrence-Minh Bùi Davis
Gerald Maa

Assistant Editors

Douglas Ishii
Tyrone Nagai
Alicia Upano
Betsy Yuen

Founders

Lawrence-Minh Bùi Davis
Gerald Maa
Larry Shinagawa

Advisory Editors

Peter Bacho
Lan Cao
Tina Chang
Alexander Chee
Ru Freeman
Suji Kwock Kim
Timothy Liu
Kyoko Mori
David Mura
Ruth Ozeki
Andrew X. Pham
Srikanth Reddy
Vijay Seshadri
Arthur Sze
Eileen Tabios
Karen Tei Yamashita
Jeffrey Yang
C. Dale Young

Advisory Council

David Henry Hwang
Russell Leong
Don T. Nakanishi
Franklin Odo
Linda Trinh Vo
David K. Yoo
Helen Zia

Cover image: photograph by Unais Ibrahim, Khadijah's Caravan youth member.

DVD cover image: photograph by David Kong. DVD music by Chucky Kim.

As the grand prize winner of the One Chicago, One Nation online film competition, *1700% Project: Mistaken For Muslim* was first televised on Link TV in June 2010. The film is also published on Volume 1 of the *Women's Voices from the Muslim World* DVD Collection.

Excerpt from Suheir Hammad's "First Writing Since," from *Zaatar Diva* (2006), reprinted with permission by Cypher Books.

If you would like to reproduce any part of this issue, please attribute with the following line: "Originally published in *The Asian American Literary Review* Vol. 2 No. 1.5 (2011)."

Copyright © 2011, The Asian American Literary Review, Inc.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9838646-9-1

ISSN: 2153-1269

Layout by Deanna Pineda, Muse Advertising Design

Printed by Sheridan Press

DVD editing and production by Vaman Tyrone X

Web design by Ronald F. Barbagallo, Jr.

The Asian American Literary Review is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit literary arts organization. It was founded in July 2009 with the assistance of the University of Maryland's Asian American Studies Program.

Published twice yearly. Subscription rates:

Single issue, \$12 + \$4 shipping and handling

1 year subscription, \$20 + \$8 shipping and handling

2 year subscription, \$36 + \$16 shipping and handling

Canadian addresses add \$1.50/issue, other international \$7/issue

Institutional subscriptions, \$48/year.

Available for purchase on the website. Or send check made out to The Asian American Literary Review to:

The Asian American Literary Review, Inc.

PO BOX 34495

Washington, D.C. 20043

Visit the website at www.aalrmag.org

or find us on Facebook.

Contact us: editors@aalrmag.org

Submit: prose@aalrmag.org or poetry@aalrmag.org

See the submission guidelines online before submitting work.

Please support AALR by donating. Your tax-deductible donation will provide vital assistance, funding operating costs, future issues, our annual Symposia, and other exciting projects. Donations of any amount are welcome. Your gift as a Fellow (\$100), Sponsor (\$250), Patron (\$500), Benefactor (\$1000), or Member of the Editor's Circle (\$5,000+) will be recognized in the print journal and on the website. Donations can be made on the website or by check; please make checks out to "The Asian American Literary Review, Inc." and mail to the address listed above.

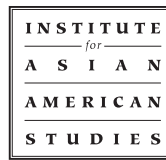
AALR is a proud member of The Council of Literary Magazines and Presses.

[clmp]

Special Issue Sponsors



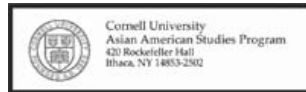
CHARLES B. WANG CENTER
Celebrating Asian & American Cultures



CAAS
Center for Asian American Studies



a/p/a
New York University



ASIAN AMERICAN
STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
aas.umn.edu

COLUMBIA | CSER
Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race



University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Asian & Asian American
Studies Certificate Program
www.umass.edu/asianamericanstudies



UIC Program in Asian
American Studies
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT CHICAGO
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES



UMass Boston Asian American Studies Program
Institute for Asian American Studies, UMass Boston
UConn Asian American Studies Institute
Charles B. Wang Asian American Center at SUNY Stony Brook
University of Maryland Asian American Studies Program
Asian/American Center, Queens College, CUNY
University of Texas Center for Asian American Studies
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice
Cornell University Asian American Studies Program
Columbia University Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Asian/Pacific/American Institute, New York University
University of Illinois at Chicago Asian American Studies
University of Michigan Arab American Studies
University of Hawai'i Department of Ethnic Studies
University of Minnesota Asian American Studies Program
The UCLA Asian American Studies Center
UC Santa Barbara Asian American Studies
UC Irvine Department of Asian American Studies
Binghamton University Department of Asian and Asian American Studies
UMass Amherst Asian American Studies Program
University of Illinois at Chicago Asian American Studies
Asian American Studies Program, Hunter College, CUNY

This issue is also made possible by the generous donations of

Anouska Cheddie

Dr. Vasudeva Iyer & Padma Iyer

Lisa Khandhar

Pramod & Vinnu Kudva

Reese Okyong Kwon

Kathleen Ley-Bruinsma

Priya Murthy

Luna Ranjit

Alex Saingchin & Celine Liu

Mike Scalise

Neha Singhal

Lac Su

Celestine Woo

Table of Contents

DVD: Ten Years Later: Asian American Performers Reflect on 9/11

Compiled with support by Giles Li and Sham-e-Ali Nayeem

writer | collaborator(s)

Pushkar Sharma | Ben Kolak

Bao Phi | Ash Hsie

Giles Li | Annie Han, David Kong, and Chucky Kim

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha | David Kong

Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai | Adriel Luis

Bushra Rehman

Chee Malabar | Tanuj Chopra

Anida Yoeu Ali | Masahiro Sugano

Amir Rabiya | Alexa (Lex) Hall

Introduction

1 Rajini Srikanth

Section 1: Witness and Grieving

9 Sonny Singh

testimony

13 Anouska Cheddie

testimony

17 Samina Najmi

Teaching as a Pakistani American Muslim Feminist

25 Unais Ibrahim, Shahara Ahmed, and Tauseef Kazi

testimony

28 Kazim Ali

September 14th

- 31** Varun Sriram
My Airport Story
- 36** Siddharth Shah
Terrorized Nervous Systems and Islamophobic Backlash: The
Case for Neurobiological and Psychosocial Countermeasures
- 43** Rishi Reddi
On Being South Asian Post 9/11
- 49** Forum | On 9/11 as “Rupture”
Mary Husain, Rakhshanda Saleem, Sunaina Maira, and
Veena Dubal
- 69** Sudha Acharya
testimony
- 74** Theresa Thanjan
testimony
- 78** Elizabeth OuYang
testimony
- 81** DJ Rekha
postcard & *testimony*
- 83** Anant Raut
I Guess You Had to Be There
- 92** Vijay Prashad
Dear Uncle Swami

Visuals

- 94** from Visible Collective

Section 2: New Formations, New Alignments

- 101** Adem Carroll
testimony

- 105** Tito Sinha and Chaumtoli Huq
Laying the Groundwork for-Post 9/11 Alliances:
Reflections Ten Years Later on Desis Organizing
2001
- 114** Zohra Saed
testimony
- 121** Pico Iyer
Ten Years On
- 124** Angie Chuang
Six Syllables: Searching for Home, and the Post-9/11 Metaphor,
in Kabul
- 130** Pawan Dhingra
Post-9/11 Vacancies: Race, Economics, and Indian American
Motel Owners
- 144** Forum | On the Desi America-Asian America Split and New
Alignments Between South Asian, Arab, Middle Eastern, and
Muslim Americans
Deepa Iyer, Gary Okihiro, Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, Sunita
S. Mukhi, Jennifer Hayashida, Abla Harara, Nadia Firozvi, and
Robert Ji-Song Ku
- 170** Tram Nguyen
On Suspects and Belonging: Post-9/11 America
- 174** Khin Mai Aung
testimony
- 183** Magid Shihade
On 9/11 and the War on “Terror”: Names, Numbers, and Events
- 192** Elora Chowdhury
Unsuspecting Connections: Reflections on Teaching
“Becoming South Asian” to Non-South Asians in Post-9/11
America
- 202** Vasudha Desikan
testimony
- 206** Saru Jayaraman
testimony

- 209** The Long View: An Interview
Subhash Kateel by Parag Khandhar

Visuals

- 228** Tomie Arai

Section 3: We Live in Echo

- 235** Dinu Ahmed and Moumita Zaman
A Dialogue on Khadijah's Caravan
- 247** Mazen Naous
Why Arab American Fiction Matters
- 256** Forum | On Literature Post 9/11
Amitava Kumar, Harold Jaffe, Anis Shivani, and Shailja Patel
- 288** Zohra Saed
testimony
- 294** Ronak Kapadia, Prerana Reddy, Naeem Mohaiemen, Vivek Bald,
Aimara Lin, Uzma Z. Rizvi, and Aziz Huq
Collectives in Post-2001 New York: A Conversation with
Visible Collective
- 319** Madhulika Khandelwal
testimony
- 325** Purvi Shah, Hossannah Asuncion, Tamiko Beyer, April Heck, R.A.
Villanueva, and Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai
A Public Art, A Re-membered Poetry, A Community
Constellation: A Dialogue on the Kundiman Project Together
We Are New York
- 332** Shahid Buttar and Dan S. Wang
testimony
- 340** Giles Li and Sham-e Ali Nayeem
On the DVD Ten Years Later: Asian American Performers
Reflect on 9/11

341 Sunu Chandy
testimony

Visuals

342 Khadijah's Caravan

Afterword

347 Parag Khandhar

Contributors' Notes

testimony

Sudha Acharya

On that bright September morning, they decided to let their seven-year-old son sleep rather than wake him to go to the train station to see her off. They had moved to New Jersey from India on an assignment for her, and it was ten days since they had found the apartment. She had cooked their favorite lemon rice for their lunch and packed some for herself. As she walked to the train station, she missed seeing her husband and son walking along with her and waving goodbye.

When disaster struck and the towers came down, Mr. A, the husband, knew nothing. They had not bought a television yet. The telephone had just been connected the previous evening but no one knew their number. It took a cousin who lived two hours away to drive over and tell them the dreadful news. But they kept hoping, as so many other families did, that she had somehow escaped and was missing.

Mrs. B was from Bangladesh. She and her husband had a beautiful little daughter and were expecting another baby on September 11th. Her husband worked on the 102nd floor of the World Trade Center. He switched his shift with a coworker to work that morning so that he could be with his wife later in the day when the baby was born. She gave birth to a baby boy a day later, and he was not there to welcome his new son. She too waited, thinking he was missing or injured and would join his family when he was found.

Such were the hopes and experiences of those we started working with when South Asian Council for Social Services (SACSS) began its 9/11 relief work. The organization had been created the previous year to empower underserved South Asians in New York. We had just launched a survey to assess the needs of the community. But 9/11 was so urgent and so immediate

that the organization had to respond right away. We could say that 9/11 defined our work and direction.

The families we started assisting after 9/11 were hardly the underserved we had expected to aid. Those who had perished with the towers were financial experts, Information Technology pundits, restaurant workers, young, old, and middle-aged men and women who left behind spouses, parents, siblings, and many young children. As a community, South Asians were “young” in the country—only 20 to 30 years old. We did not have organizations in place that could care for these families who were in shock.

As SACSS scrambled to set up a viable network of volunteers, counselors, and psychiatrists, the families themselves started referring other families to us. We sent out an email appeal and soon had a panel of eight mental health professionals who spoke various South Asian languages and had origins in different South Asian countries. We had individual therapy sessions for them and held group therapy sessions in Edison, New Jersey, and Queens, New York.

The needs of each family were different. But they all needed a friendly South Asian face or a voice at the other end of the telephone to talk to. I was especially touched that they warmed up to me because they were aware that I had known sudden loss.

I went with one young woman, Mrs. C, and her baby daughter when Mr. C’s wallet was found. For something so small that had been through such havoc, the leather wallet was surprisingly intact and his identification card, a little money and keys were intact too.

When the Medical Examiner’s office told Mrs. D that her husband’s body had been identified, devastated as she was, she wanted to do the right thing according to her religion. She arranged for cremation and invited other family members and friends to the temple for a religious service and a meal to follow. It was a shock to her to find out that the ‘body’ turned out to be an inch-long finger bone. She had to give up the idea of cremation but did go ahead with the religious service.

Mrs. E was very upset. She could not understand why her husband’s remains would not be released to her. I had to explain to her the local laws that preclude the authorities from releasing the remains to anyone except a

funeral home. There was a maze of formalities to be completed before she could fly with her beloved's remains to India and take care of the religious rites there.

We were working with two other organizations to ensure that three families that lost their visa status along with their loved one remained here legally. They all had small children and had dreamed of bringing them up in the United States. The long wait and uncertainty was too much for two families, and we bid them a tearful goodbye when they left for their countries of origin. The family that stayed back and faced the challenge did get a U-visa after a long and arduous struggle.

SACSS paid tribute to those who lost their lives on September 11th a year later in an event that was cosponsored by the Asia Society. The response to this memorial event was immediate, sincere, and warm. There were elected officials, representatives of South Asian Consulates, other notables, and a whole host of individuals. A mother who had lost her young daughter, a sister who had lost her elder brother, and a young wife who had lost her soulmate spoke and the whole auditorium was in tears.

At the event we released *Book of Memories*, a tribute to the South Asians and Indo-Caribbeans who were lost on September 11, 2001. The publication was funded through a grant from the Asian American Federation and contained thirty-eight profiles of those who perished that day. When Sree Sreenivasan of South Asian Journalists' Association (SAJA) sent out an email appeal on our behalf for volunteers to write the profiles, within twenty-four hours forty-four people contacted us. The write-ups captured the essential person with short quotes and a photograph and were finished in record time—within a week. There was such an outpouring of thoughtfulness and empathy from all who contributed.

In the years since 9/11, there have been times when the compensation for the victims' families was on everyone's mind. There was a lot of media coverage of how, to whom, and how much would be paid out. We saw, regrettably, the erosion of sympathy for those whose lives had been changed forever. Words such as "millions" were bandied about, though people who tried to guess how much it would be knew nothing. We could not understand

how they thought that money, even if substantial, could set everything right for the families! And not everyone received substantial compensation.

We worked on the 9/11 relief project for five years and watched as the children of the 9/11 families grew sober beyond their years. We had started with forty-six families which included Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indo-Caribbeans. By the time we officially wound up the project, we were still working closely with twenty families.

We have kept in occasional contact with them over the years and have watched their gradual progress closely.

One of the most rewarding outcomes of our involvement was the network of bereaved families that SACSS brought together in New Jersey. While attending the group therapy sessions, they formed a close bond and continued meeting by themselves. They are a strong support group for each other to this day. Some have changed their lines of work. A few have started new families. Some of the children are still under psychiatric care. Yet the families have all shown uncommon courage and grace in surviving the devastation and fulfilling their responsibilities with quiet dignity.

September 11th jolted all of us out of our comfortable existence and taught us many lessons. It revealed how unprepared all our communities were to respond to such a calamity. Especially for South Asians, a newer ethnic community, it was a tougher lesson. Though several family members of direct victims spoke and understood English, there were quite a few who did not. I remember arranging for a Bangladeshi counselor to see the spouse of a victim only to learn that even for the counselor it was difficult to communicate, as the client only spoke a dialect from rural Bangladesh.

During the latter part of 2001 and 2002, we attended several training sessions by the United Way and Red Cross on case management and counseling. We were told time and again not to bring ourselves in and not to get personal. But our experience showed that our community members responded only to warmth and friendliness. The clinical mode may work with other cases, but during such trauma, the personal touch seemed to work best. That has been our experience during these ten years with clients of other programs as well.

We South Asians, as a community, tend not to seek emotional support or counseling. The stigma attached to counseling goes deep and prevents families from obtaining the help that they desperately need. If we are to ensure the mental and emotional well-being of our community, we need to invest our time in an awareness campaign on the link between physical and emotional health. We need to ensure that we have a network of mental health professionals who understand the culture and speak South Asian languages.

SACSS entered the world of 9/11 relief work as a fledgling organization. The experience molded us into who we are today. As a preventive services agency, we counsel our clients on parenting. We assist them with healthcare access and teach them English. Through it all is a distinct thread of understanding of our community that has come to us mainly through our 9/11 work.

