

CATAMARAN: SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN WRITING

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Review by Julie Rajan



In its 2003 debut issue, *Catamaran* introduces itself as a “vehicle to host and carry the creative talent” of second-generation South Asian American artists in the fields of fictive and non-fictive prose, poetry, playwrighting, and photography. Supported by an impressive editorial board comprised of leading contemporary South Asian American writers and academics, such as Rajini Srikanth, Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts and Co-Editor of *White Women in Racialized Spaces* (SUNY Press, 2002), Shona Ramaya, Professor of English at Trinity College and author of *Operation Monsoon* (Graywolf Press, 2003), and Tahira Naqvi, Adjunct Professor in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University and translator of noted female Muslim authors such as Kadhija Masthur and Ismat Chughtai, *Catamaran* is the first South Asian American literary journal to be published in print.

The journal presents a fair balance of writers, hailing from a range of geographical locations from within South Asia and America, as well as from varying ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. That holistic approach engenders a dynamic collection in which each piece reflects a unique, critical piece of the wide-ranging identity politics inherent in the label “South Asian American.” Whereas Neela Viswani’s short story, “Five Objects in Queens” details an unforeseen, inter-generational intimacy established between second-generation, Americanized grandchildren and their Indianized grandmother from Bombay, Saleem Peeradina’s poem “Mumbai in Thirteen Clocks” uncovers otherwise subtle motifs threading through the chaos of everyday life in Mumbai. Whether it is images of a South Asian family donning Western clothing and posed in front of a local India Sari Palace in “Afternoon in Jackson Heights,” or a young woman dressed in a *sabhaar*, dancing away in an American dance hall in “At Deepu’s 16th Birthday Party” feature photographer Jaishri Abichandani’s work captures the essence of cross-cultural signs. The current issue also features book and film

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reviews, as well as a tribute to noted Kashmiri poet, Agha Shahi Ali, through a collection of essays and poetry dedicated to his life and work.

Catamaran's impressive debut creates a fluid space through which otherwise widely differing South Asian American identity formulations can interact with one another to establish an underlying unity, a strong sense of community. And certainly, the journal engenders a forum in which newly emergent forms of communal identity can be initiated, shaped, and articulated as South Asians continue to explore their "place" in the United States.