

AN EDITOR'S NOTE: LOOKING BEYOND MICHIGAN

Nirav S. Desai



The second generation of South Asian Americans is coming of age. With it, the number of them applying for college and graduate studies is increasing. As such, the two cases recently presented before the U.S. Supreme Court involving the admissions policies at the University of Michigan should be of particular interest to this community. The decision will be instrumental in shaping the future of race relations in this country, and, rather than settling the issue of collective rights vs. individual rights, it is only likely to expand the debate. India is a nation that has been coming to grips with this very issue since the 1920s. The future of affirmative action in higher education and of race relations, in general, is entering a new phase. Looking at international examples will surely help America come to grips with race. And including immigrant and minority voices in the debate is essential to enacting sustainable and responsible policy in a post-Michigan America.

Content:

Roger Clegg and **Neal Kumar Katyal** lay out the foundation of the affirmative action debate. Clegg, who co-authored a friend-of-the-court brief for the Center for Equal Opportunity in the Michigan cases, is a respected opponent of the consideration of race in higher-education admissions policies. His article presents a perspective supporting Gratz and Grutter, the two young ladies who objected to Michigan's undergraduate and law school admissions policies, respectively, in the two cases before the Supreme Court, *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*. The piece by Katyal, Professor of Law at Georgetown University, draws on the amicus brief he filed on behalf of the deans of private law schools in the *Grutter* case. He provides a vivid defense of affirmative action programs as in the nation's more selective universities. These two authors provide influential and opposing perspectives on the two affirmative action cases brought before the nation's highest court to provide readers with a more rounded perspective of the debate.

NIRAV S. DESAI is the Executive Director of the Subcontinental Institute and Editor-in-Chief of *The Subcontinental*.

Annetta Secharran, Executive Director of South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!), works closely with working-class South Asian American youths in the New York area. These students are often ignored in the debate over racial preference in college admissions. Secharran helps isolate how affirmative action affects these students and South Asian Americans in general. An informal survey of South Asian Americans conducted by the Subcontinental Institute found that although most South Asian Americans support affirmative action in college admissions, they may be unaware of how this community is adversely affected by current policies. Secharran helps address the concerns of the South Asian American community, whose members are often seen as model minorities and which is used to demonstrate how affirmative action is no longer needed.

Clark D. Cunningham, Professor of Law & Ethics at Georgia State University, helps look beyond *Gratz* and *Grutter*. For this, Cunningham looks to an Indian corollary to American affirmative action programs. Like America, India has an extremely diverse demography. Every major religion has deep roots in the subcontinent, from the time that St. Thomas brought Christianity to the Malabar Coast, to the Turk and Moghul invasions which brought Islam to the subcontinent, to the recent exile of Tibetan Buddhists to Himachal Pradesh in Northern India. Additionally, the Indian society has also been addressing its own social hierarchies and the continued existence of "untouchability" (despite its official abolishment in 1950) and tribal citizens through the Mandal Commission. To discuss the implications of affirmative action measures implemented in India, of course, can be to discuss the amount of progress India has made to provide equal opportunity to its citizens despite the immense diversity of its populace. What can not be questioned, however, is that India has been addressing the issue of affirmative action for longer than America has. Cunningham argues that "the United States now seems to be stuck at a point comparable to that of India before the Mandal Commission began its work" in 1979 (p. 51). He further argues that the Commission has addressed and resolved many of the problems that the United States currently faces regarding admissions policies. Indian Americans, many of whom have experienced the policies of the Mandal Commission first hand, can be instrumental in determining what lessons can be learned from India as America moves beyond the Supreme Court's decisions on *Gratz* and *Grutter*.

In addition to this section on affirmative action, this issue of *The Subcontinental* also includes articles by Mira Kamdar, Udayan Chattopadhyay, and a community report by Ashish Kumar Sen.

Mira Kamdar, Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute, also serves on the Editorial Board of the *World Policy Journal* and writes extensively on the South Asian American community. In her featured article, Kamdar investigates the political leanings of the South Asian American community. The South Asian American community which was once solidly Democratic, Kamdar argues, appears to be moving to the right.

Udayan Chattopadhyay, a native of London who now resides in New Jersey, has been active in the community on both sides of the Atlantic. As a follow up to many of the issues discussed in Volume 1:1 of *The Subcontinental*, Chattopadhyay discusses the prospects of uniting the Indian global diaspora and the role that diasporic members in the developed world could play in such an effort.

Finally, **Ashish Kumar Sen**, frequent contributor to *Outlook* magazine and *The Asian Age*, has spent nearly the last decade covering South Asian Americans, whether in business or politics. In this report, Sen comments on the developments the South Asian community has made in engaging the American political system.

For comments, concerns, and feedback, please send letter to:

The Subcontinental
3105 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20010
info@subcontinental.org