

AN EDITORS' NOTE: EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The Editors



Education...the key to success. "You know, your dad came to America with just eight dollars and an engineering degree." It is a story that second-generation South Asian Americans know all too well. It may not be everyone's experience, but opens a window to a certain mindset. Whether doctors and engineers of the seventies or the IT workers of the nineties, the majority of South Asians have come to America thanks to their education, and as such, South Asian Americans have developed a strong interest in the American school system. At weekend dinner parties they discuss the best colleges for their children and concerns about affirmative action. Whether prying their way into the Ivy Leagues, running for school boards, or fighting for better coverage of South Asia in the curriculum, South Asians have taken on education as one of the first issues to become involved with in America.

But, like all South Asian American public affairs, South Asians are just beginning to find their voice in American education policy. There still exist a host of separate disagreements and disputes: How do South Asians relate to other minorities? Who legitimately can speak on behalf of South Asian communities? What epistemological framework should they use? Is development good for the post-colonial state? What is the role of gender in the culture of South Asian America? These sorts of questions keep scholarship in motion. The papers in this volume do not cover all of these questions and are not claiming to be comprehensive in the issues addressed. But they do provide a sampling of what it is like to be in a U.S. classroom, what it means to think about scholarship and to produce knowledge, and what it means to pursue the education of our children. The framework is vast and relatively open-ended. In this issue you will read about some of the most pressing aspects of the education debate, as well as unique perspectives from South Asian American educators. If Guest Editor Vijay Prashad's opening essay is a draft history of South Asian education in the U.S., this journal is the start of a conversation about the state of South Asian education and of South Asian educators in the teaching machine of the United States. May it enrich dinner party conversations as well as scholarship.

The Content:

To start this issue, scholar and renowned activist **Vijay Prashad** provides a history of how South Asia has been taught in the United States.

We have heard a lot about the troubles that Muslims and Sikhs have faced after 9/11. **Rita Verma** shines a light on the trying experiences of Sikh

children in the American public school system.

While the stereotype of South Asian Americans is the suburban kid who is good at math, **Alis Sandosharaj** tells of life growing up in a tough neighborhood and how it has affected her attitude towards education, speaking directly on the model minority issue. In addition to providing insight on an often ignored perspective, that of the working-class South Asian American, she comments on how the perception of Asian Americans in classrooms directly benefits individuals.

The Bengali Students Association at the University of Pennsylvania is actively reaching out to the Bengali community in West Philadelphia. **Ajay Nair** and **Rohini Khanna** report on the efforts of their program, raising similar themes to those raised by Sandosharajan.

With the re-election of President George W. Bush, his push for reform the U.S. public school system is likely to continue. In that vein, **Hannah Richman** and **Gabrielle Coppola** bring readers up to speed on two of the biggest reform areas in education over the past four years. Richman, who is director of a charter school, compares education in to U.S. to other countries and welcomes these innovative reforms. Coppola summarizes key provisions in the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

In an exclusive interview with Tariq Ramadan, **Naeem Mohaiemen** and **Ahmed Nassef** argue for greater academic independence regarding the teaching of Islam in America. Additionally, **Sarada Peri** contributes her second piece to *The Subcontinental*, this one on the rise of *madrassas*, or Islamic schools, in Pakistan. **Robin Sukhadia** conveys his personal experiences using music education to promote peace in India through Project Ahimsa.

Finally, **Amitava Kumar** offers an original poem, "So You Can't Understand Your Foreign T.A.?"

We have covered a lot of ground in this issue, from domestic education policy and identity politics to foreign aid. We hope you find it valuable. We look forward to your feedback through letter or emails:

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