

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXX, Number 22, 14 February 1996 – Club Zamana sponsors SALAG [ARTICLE]

Club Zamana sponsors SALAG

By ANURAG X. C. JAIN
Contributing Writer

Approximately 20 people attended a forum presented by two representatives from the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) in which participants and audience members discussed homosexuality and the South Asian community.

The forum, which was sponsored by Club Zamana, was held in Ferris Booth Hall (FBH) yesterday.

SALGA representatives Feraz Ahmed and Richard D'souza spoke about SALGA's objectives and the specific issues that distinguish South Asian gays and lesbians from the mainstream gay movement.

"There isn't discrimination from whites—there is simply a misunderstanding of our specific issues," D'souza said. "The gay community tends to be dominated by white 'muscle-boys' who tend to exoticize us instead of understand us."

SALGA is dedicated to the creation and development of a South Asian gay identity, sense of community and self-esteem, D'souza said.

In addition, SALGA creates links among the "lonely and persecuted" in the community, D'souza added.

SALGA's programs include an AIDS hotline geared towards South Asians from various languages and culture.

"Many people in the community don't speak English and have no way of getting any information," Ahmed said.

The organization also offers a

sexuality workshop and brochure to parents of South Asian Gays and Lesbians.

“Many parents reactions can be gruesome,” D’souza said, while Ahmed noted that homosexuality is punishable by death in Pakistan.

“In South Asia there isn’t even a word for gay,” said Ahmed. “They usually associate us with the Hijra.”

The Hijra are transgendered peoples in Pakistan who are persecuted and ostracized by the community.

“The more we mix, the better it is for all of us,” said D’souza.

Kavita Kumar, CC ’97, asked about the atmosphere for gay South Asians in the West versus in the East.

“I feel more comfortable in the U.S. It is easier to do things and express yourself,” Ahmed said. “It is easier to have sex in Pakistan, but there is no social identity.”

D’souza emphasized the supportive environment that surrounded his adolescence.

“Having had support groups and a community since I was 15 has helped me become stable and comfortable with who I am,” D’souza said.

Swati Khurana, CC ’97, thought the forum contained ideas important to Club Zamana members.

“It helped address issues for gay students at Columbia who can’t identify with the main stream movement,” Khurana said, adding that the manner in which people deal with “feminine and masculine constructs” must be further discussed.