

ASIAN AMERICAN VOICES

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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS
 Asian American Voices
 No. 4, 2022

This issue of *Asian American Voices* marks the journal's fourth year of publication. Within the following pages, we highlight the diversity of Asian American Pacific Islander heritages at LaGuardia Community College and beyond. Students of Asian origin comprise the second largest group at LaGuardia, and *Asian American Voices* aims to celebrate and create a space to engage the concerns of these students and their communities, particularly in New York City. Moreover, we also recognize Asian American Studies as an interdisciplinary academic field and welcome submissions from LaGuardia students of all ethnic backgrounds. Through the journal's mission and practices, we uphold and promote the college's mission to build an inclusive community.

The art, recipe, critical essays, and reflections are linked to locations such as Bangladesh, China, India, Philippines, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, and Asian diasporic communities in South Africa, U.S. and England. They explore themes such as diaspora, dual and complex identities, oppression of Rohingya Muslims, literature, religion, suffering, food culture, and more. The cover image, by LaGuardia student Abigail Guzman speaks to our ongoing struggle, resistance, and need for connection in this third year of the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that the image conveys sentiments of healing, community, and care.

This issue also features a special section on the *Connecting Threads: Fashioning Identity in a Global World*, a virtual exhibition resulting from a partnership between LaGuardia Community College and Bard Graduate Center. Two honors courses, Professor Filip Stabrowski's Fall 2020 Cultural Anthropology class and Professor Liena Vayzman's Spring 2021 Urban Study: Art and Society class, selected and studied objects of clothing and fashion to which they felt connected. A virtual exhibit was also curated. In the Connected Threads section, we are publishing unedited students' work to respect students' own presentation of their research and to preserve their voice.

We begin with a profile of Dr. Payal Doctor, Professor of Philosophy, to recognize her commitment to students and her leadership as current mentor and former Contact Advisor of the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Honor Society, and former Chair of the Humanities Department and the Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Committee. We express deep gratitude to professors Lili Chin, Alice Rosenblitt-Lacey, Meghan Fox, Filip Stabrowski, and Liena Vayzman for encouraging their students to submit their work. Students have worked hard to produce the pieces published and instructors and faculty editors have worked closely with students to revise them. We recognize and acknowledge the difficulties in this process as we are still dealing with the stress and conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic including issues with health and the economy, returning back to in-person classes, and juggling the complexities of mixed modalities (hybrid and online classes), as well as the effects of global war. We hope you enjoy reading and viewing these pieces created by our talented LaGuardia students!

Sincerely,

The Editors

Long Island City, New York
 May, 2022

Contents

1	Recognizing AAPI Campus Leader: Dr. Payal Doctor	1
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Part I Project

2	Connecting Threads: Fashioning Identity in a Global World	5
---	---	---

Part II Reflective & Critical Essays

3	Meditation: The Ancient Hindu Ritual <i>Indrani Bhattacharjee</i>	15
4	Confronting Oppression in the Poetry of Langston Hughes and Staceyann Chin <i>Peter Saverino</i>	18
5	Will and Desire: Suffering in Buddhism and Augustinian Christianity <i>Phone Myint Maung (Huzaiyah Islam-Khan)</i>	22
6	Double Consciousness of the South Asian Diaspora <i>Nyla Ward</i>	28
7	Writing Home: How Literature of the South Asian Diaspora Rescripts Belonging <i>Will Ruehle</i>	31

8	Rice and Me <i>ChunTat Lau</i>	34
9	The Legacy of Colonialism in Indian Caribbean Writing: <i>Coolie Woman</i> and <i>Doubles with Slight Pepper</i> <i>Jack Daly</i>	36
10	Covid-19 as an Opportunity in Life <i>Tasqui E. Guayasamin</i>	38

Part III Art and Photos

11	Pandemic & Mind at the Crossroads <i>Abigail Guzman</i>	43
12	Self-portrait <i>Lhakpa Doma</i>	45

Part IV Recipe

13	Gajar Ka Halwa <i>Ritika Talwar</i>	49
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Part V Authors

14	Authors' Bios	53
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1.

Recognizing AAPI Campus Leader: Dr. Payal Doctor

Payal Doctor

Payal Doctor's dedication and commitment to the students has truly inspired so many of us at LaGuardia Community College. We hope that this acknowledgment of her achievements, tenacity, and endurance - her hard work amazes all who witness it - shows how much we need her to lead us towards a future where all students have the chance to pursue studies outside of vocational boundaries, and needed disciplines such as Asian American studies are centered at CUNY.

Originally from Kansas, Dr. Doctor moved on and studied Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Northern Colorado. She earned her M.A. in Philosophy from San Francisco State University and her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Liverpool, UK.

Dr. Doctor has been at LaGuardia as a Professor of Philosophy since 2010, teaching philosophy courses such as Eastern Philosophy and Religion. Her research and writing connects real life interests with scholarly analysis: roller derby and the philosophy of sport, Star Wars and religion and mythology. In the classroom, her pedagogical approach challenges students to similarly create meaningful connections when considering their future endeavors.

In 2011, Dr. Doctor began working in one of the roles where she has forever changed LaGuardia Community College making it and the lives of its students better - serving as the Alpha Theta Phi chapter's primary faculty advisor. Phi Theta Kappa has honored her work with awards such as the International Paragon Award for New Advisors, and the prestigious Mosal Award¹ that allowed her to continue research in classical Indian philosophy and religion.

Asian American Voices Editors

¹ See: <https://www.ptk.org/2019/01/31/what-will-you-discover-with-a-mosal-or-marshall-award/>

REFLECTIONS FROM STUDENTS:

Dr. Doctor is a woman of integrity, compassion, and confidence. I met her in 2016 during the Phi Theta Kappa Induction Ceremony. I officially introduced myself to her during the Alpha Theta Phi General Meeting, which changed my life forever. Dr. Doctor has inspired me to be the leader I am today. Her guidance gave me the confidence to see myself as a leader. She imparted her wisdom and gave me the space to discover myself during my time as Co-coordinator and VP of Recruitment and Retention for the Alpha Theta Phi Chapter.

Dr. Doctor continues to be a role model in my life. She taught me the importance of organization and having integrity in my work. I will forever be grateful for her and honor our friendship.

Soleil Griffin

Former Alpha Theta Phi Officer and Alumni Chapter Officer

Dr. Doctor has been one of the best mentors throughout my undergraduate journey and beyond. I first met Dr. Doctor while applying to attend a Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) regional conference. As a new member, I wasn't immediately qualified to attend the conference. However, Dr. Doctor saw my sincere interest and gave me the opportunity to complete the needed criteria, giving me a chance to experience the PTK community. Ever since, she has been one of my biggest supporters, guiding me through all ups and downs. During my last semester at LaGuardia, I was involved in multiple extracurricular activities, while taking a full course load of science classes. At this time, I was the co-president of PTK and Dr. Doctor was our fearless advisor. During one of our check-ins, Dr. Doctor noticed how overwhelmed I was and advised me that what matters is quality over quantity and it is best to aim to do my best on a select few activities rather than not doing well in any one of them. Her advice helped me succeed in LaGuardia and to this day as well.

During PTK officer meetings, whenever we seek guidance and support from Dr. Doctor, her answer was always yes, no matter how hard the task was, she will find a way to go above and beyond to support our goals.

I am grateful to Dr. Doctor for the many letters of recommendation she submitted on behalf of me, and for cheering me through every step of my academic journey to becoming a medical student. Although Dr. Doctor is not an advisor of the current PTK chapter, I am fortunate to work with her again as a part of the PTK alumni association, where she continues to be a role model for many students. Dr. Doctor has greatly influenced the lives of many students she mentored and I am blessed to remain one of her mentees to this day.

Chethana Gallage Dona

Former Alpha Theta Phi Officer and Alumni

Part I

Project

2.

Connecting Threads: Fashioning Identity in a Global World

Like all material culture, items of clothing and fashion have “social lives” –biographies containing the unique stories that have produced these objects. Clothing and fashion connect people across space and time, physically and symbolically. The curatorial process that created this exhibition resulted from a collaboration between two courses at CUNY LaGuardia Community College and Bard Graduate Center over the course of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Connecting Threads continues in 2021-22, with over 100 students participating in creating the exhibits over 3 years.

In the Fall semesters of 2019 and 2020, Professor Filip Stabrowski’s Cultural Anthropology students from LaGuardia selected and studied objects of clothing and fashion to which they felt in some way connected. The artifacts they chose span the globe from Bangladesh and Tibet to Colombia and the U.S. The students’ papers, included in this exhibition, attempted to go behind the label and beyond the fabric, exploring in greater depth the social relationships required to produce, consume, dispose of, and reuse these objects. After the clothing items were safely stored and photographed at the LaGuardia & Wagner Archives, a new group of students in Professor Liena Vayzman’s Spring 2020 and 2021 HUN 192 Urban Study: Art and Society courses guided the presentation of these objects to the public by writing the object descriptions and participating in the design of the exhibition.

The objects on display in Connecting Threads: Fashioning Identity in a Global World (<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/connectingthreads/>) are thus also—and at the same time—manifestations of social connections of a different sort. Drawing inspiration from the research papers, personal letters, and photographs of the objects’ owners, LaGuardia students offer their own interpretations (and representations) of these powerful objects. The two groups of students have never met in person, yet they are also connected through the exhibition objects.

We are pleased to showcase examples of LaGuardia students’ material culture objects from Asia in *Asian American Voices* to continue connecting the community through this collaborative effort.

Filip Stabrowski & Liena Vayzman
Faculty Mentors, Connecting Threads: Fashioning Identity in a Global World

Sikh kara bracelet, Punjab, India

<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/project/kara>



About: The kara is a bracelet made of steel used in Sikhism, a monotheistic religion originating in the Punjab region of India. The Kara is supposed to protect the person who wears it and symbolizes a permanent bonding to the Sikh community. Originally the Kara was used by the warriors that protected the Sikhism culture, they used it during combat to guard the arm when fighting arms with swords.

It is a tradition to give a kara to every newborn. Once the person starts to use it, they must keep it clean and cannot take it off unless there are extreme circumstances. It is a belief that using the Kara on the left arm brings good luck, and some people also use a Kara in each arm. The Kara is one of the 5 K's in Sikhism. The first K in Sikhism is a kesh that is uncut hair. The second K is kara, which reminds the Sikh of one god without beginning or end. The third K in Sikhism is a kanga, a comb that helps them keep their hair straight. The fourth K is a kirpan, a sword used to defend their faith, the poor and helpless. The fifth and final K is the kachera, baggy shorts that Sikh men used to wear into battle. The Kara can also be found in other religions like Hinduism, Hinduism is the largest religion in India and the usage of the Kara is also a tradition for some of the believers that are not related to Sikhism.

Sarush Arora

Origin: India

Approximate date: c. 2000

Materials: Steel

Collection of: Sarush Arora



Daura Suruwal: Nepali national dress

<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/project/dura-suruwal>



About: Daura Suruwal is Nepali traditional dress for men, which Kalpana Adhikari got as a gift from her parents for her son when he was 6 months old on his rice feeding ceremony. This two-piece garment is made of cotton and silk with a complicated design surface, all made by hand. The 3 color combination makes this object unique: red, blue and yellow. The embroidery gives this object a gorgeous look. Nepali citizens wear this clothing to their formal occasions. The owner of this garment has a personal connection with this item because she is living in the USA and this piece of art reminds her of her culture and heritage. The Daura is a variant of the kurta and is the upper garment. The Suruwal is the trousers. Typically, this dress is called “Labeda Suruwal”. The design of the Daura is identified with Buddhist religious beliefs through eight tanas (strings) on it. Four are tied around the upper chest near the shoulder and four are around the near waist. Its pattern and construction are similar to that of a churidar pajama, the waist tapering down toward the ankles. Daura has five plates or Kallis signifying pancha Buddha or pancha Ratna and the bottom piece has one tana or tie like a belt of the pants. Daura Suruwal has a long history; however, there are no exact facts about the date regarding the original creation of this garment. It was expensive dress in the past – only royal family could afford it – although nowadays in Nepal almost everyone can buy this type of clothing and wear it. There are many mass-produced clothes in a mall, but still Nepali people like to wear this to respect their heritage. Moreover, many Nepali people who live outside of Nepal wear this during their cultural festivals.

Sabir Ahamed

Origin: Nepal

Approximate date: 2020

Materials: Silk

Collection of: Kalpana Adhikari



Tibetan Chupa

<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/project/chupa>



About: The chupa is a traditional robe used by the Tibetan people. Designed to protect Tibetan nomadic tribes from the extreme cold climate of the Tibetan plateau, the chupa was originally made with Yak and Sheep skin. When China took rule over Tibet in the 1950s, thousands of Tibetans fled to India. The chupa was adapted to the warmer weather of India, and this version is made with a much lighter cotton and silk. Once worn as an everyday garment, a chupa is now mostly worn by Tibetans for special events as a way to represent their rich culture. Wrapped around the waist with a long sash, the long sleeves hang past the hands, and can be worn with one arm exposed. The front of the robe above the sash is used as a large pocket to store anything from money, personal items, food, and even infants. Today, the chupa ranges in style from the extremely ornate to solid, neutral colors. The chupa is worn with cowboy hats and boots in the summer, and fur hats in the winter. This particular chupa was gifted to LaGuardia Community College student Tenzin Gaden by her father, and holds sentimental meaning to her. According to Tenzin, this garment “had special place in my heart because it represents my culture just by it and I got this from my father who I admire the most on the world.”

Scottie Norton

Origin: Tibet

Approximate date: Early 21st Century

Materials: Cotton, Silk

Collection of: Tenzin Gaden



Japanese kimono<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/project/kimono>

About: The kimono is a very important cultural item for Hayate Hosenji, a Japanese-American, to connect to his Japanese heritage. Growing up with a fashion designer mother, he would always see kimonos around the house as she worked on her fashion brand. Kimonos are derived from a garment called the kosode, a T-shaped short sleeve robe, which was worn by Japanese people in the Nara period (AD 710-794). The garment evolved into the kimono during the Edo period (1603-1868) when women began using more decorative patterns with longer body and sleeve length.

While formal kimonos are almost always made of silk, in modern times they are made in a variety of fabrics such as cotton and polyester to be easier to maintain. Women's kimono patterns typically consist of bright colors and intricate designs, while men's kimono are much simpler and have darker subdued colors. Kimono can also be worn with other garment pieces such as the hakama or the haori. Hakama are pleated divided pants or an undivided skirt resembling a wide pair of pants, worn over the obi. Haori are a mid-length overcoat structured similarly to the kimono, typically worn by men, but can be worn by women as well.

Kristen Chan

Origin: Japan

Approximate date: c. 2000

Materials: Silk

Collection of: Hayate Hosenji



Kurta

<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/project/kurta>



About: This item of clothing is called a Kurta. I bought this Kurta to wear at a Hindu wedding in Guyana. This object is meaningful to me because it is part of my partner's West Indian/ Guyanese culture. I have not worn this object since the wedding, but I can wear it when my partner's side of the family has a religious function called a Jhandi (also called a Puja). My kurta serves as a reminder to an incredible experience I had. It was my first time going to a country in South America, and the first-time meeting many of my partner's family members. It is also a representation of a culture that I have melded into my own.

Christopher Sorrentini

Origin: Guyana

Approximate date: N/A

Materials: N/A

Collection of: Christopher Sorrentini



Ring from China<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/connectingthreads/ring/>

About: This ring was given to me by a family friend named Dragon during my trip to Guangzhou, China during the summer of 2017. It is a reminder of my time living in a completely different environment and culture. The size eleven platinum men's ring is about a quarter-inch thick with six rivet-like designs etched into its base. The word LOVE is engraved along the ring's side. The "O" holds a line in the center to imitate the rivet design common in Cartier's "Love Collection" jewelry. Cartier is a French brand in the luxury fashion industry. Like luxury brands such as Balenciaga or Louis Vuitton, Cartier goods are remade and sold as counterfeits in public markets within provinces like GuangDong. In GuangZhou, I witnessed how these open markets function. These markets have adapted to economic conditions and have become so enlarged that they take up entire malls for selling counterfeits. These markets use an app to promote clothing by taking pictures of their goods and posting them online with an asking price. When Dragon gave this ring to me, I was not aware of the value of an actual Cartier ring—\$3,650.00—until I later looked it up online. Dragon had a box with dozens of other designer rings from Louis Vuitton to Bulgari in different sizes. This gave me the impression that the rings he sold may not be legitimate. However, to me, this does not take away the ring's value. In fact, the monetary price holds no importance in comparison to the memories attached to it. This ring is linked to a point in my life where I was able to witness everyday life and the sights of a different culture. The knowledge acquired from that period in time is what makes this ring so important to me.

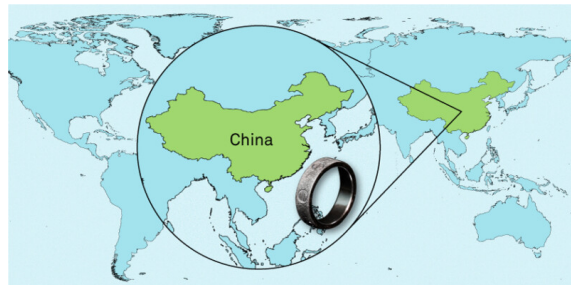
Jean-Pierre Hernandez

Origin: China

Approximate date: 2017

Materials: Unknown metal

Collection of: Jean-Pierre Hernandez



Moon Necklace from Guam

<https://bgcxlguardia.bgcdml.net/connectingthreads/sinahi/>



About: The New Moon necklace, or sinahi, is an object that has held a great amount of significance to the Chamorro (*Chamoru*) people for over a thousand years. The Chamorro people are an indigenous tribe of Guam (*Guåhån* in the Chamoru language) still active today between the Pacific Islands of Guam and the Mariana Islands in Micronesia. Sinahi necklaces are traditionally carved from a large Hima clam shell, beads made of cone sea snails, and a carved fit clasp from a local Guahan tree. Today, sinahi are made of different materials such as abalone shells, cow bones, clay, and ancient stones. Unfortunately, the true meaning of the sinahi has been lost through the years as a result of Guam's history of colonization. But, the Chamorro people still wear it with pride today in order to reconnect with their past and their tribal roots. What is known is that the sinahi necklace was only worn by those of great leadership in the tribe, based on their accomplishments. The size of the clam shell was not important because the true significance of the sinahi was ultimately imbued with its wearer's personality, accomplishments, and karma. The name "sinahi" comes from the Chamorro belief in the strength of the moonlight. When it was a new moon and no light was present, those who had earned the sinahi would be seen as having the strength of the moonlight.

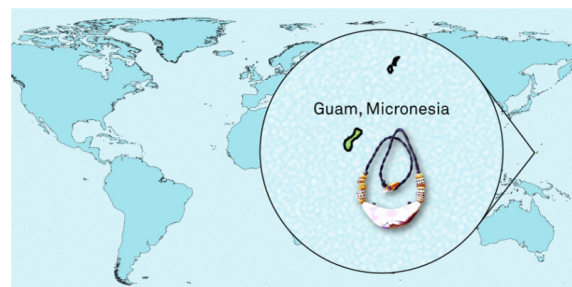
Amal Khalil

Origin: Guam, Micronesia

Approximate date: 20th Century

Materials: Shell

Collection of: Edward Molina



Part II

Reflective & Critical Essays

3.

Meditation: The Ancient Hindu Ritual

Indrani Bhattacharjee

Rituals can be as personal as family dinners and as social as going to music concerts with friends every Christmas. Believe it or not, all humans are surrounded by many rituals. There are some rituals we practice everyday; some we occasionally do. Every ritual has a small but meaningful message behind it and is part of living a healthy and happy life. Rituals are beneficial to practice, because they help us exclude negative emotions like stress, anxiety and bring our awareness to a healthy lifestyle.

Even though rituals can have different meanings for each individual, it keeps all humans connected to the one community that brings back the history of their ancestors. Honavar gives an example of one study that shows “chanting the Sanskrit syllable ‘om’ deactivates the limbic system, softening the edge of fear, anxiety, and depression”(2). Based on Honarvar’s point of view, a continuous action, such as chanting, becomes a ritual. Chanting om is a repetitive action, if practiced regularly becomes a ritual. However, the limbic system has to do with emotions and how we react to them. Humans are full of strong negative and intense emotions that harm us physically and mentally. They must be controlled for a healthy living and rituals come in help to do so. Many rituals from different dimensions of the world have connections with each other. Honavar mentioned chanting “om” as a ritual, which is considered as a common mantra chanted during meditation. The syllable om comes from the ancient Hindu script of sanskrit so does dhyana (meditation). They both refer to a healthy habit, along with remembering the supernatural power. As Bodhinatha Veylanswami states, “The purpose of hatha yoga today again is the same-to keep the physical body, emotional body, astral body and mental body harmonious, healthy and happy so that awareness can soar within to the heights of divine realization” (4). Meditation and certain poses are part of the larger system called hatha yoga. Meditation is an old ritual that brings self awareness. Physically, emotionally and in every other way, it helps human beings to take care of themselves and builds a concentrated mind.

I definitely agree with what Honarvar mentioned, “rituals reduce anxiety, improve performance and confidence, and even work on people who don’t believe in them, research shows. Additionally, rituals benefit our physical well-being and immune system” (2). Lately, much research has been done to study how rituals help us in different situations. Humans often leave no space for relaxing but they have more than enough space for stress, anxiety, depression and countless negative emotions. If we consider these issues as case studies, then rituals can be seen as a prevention cure, for all the negativity drives humans crazy. Meditation would be a perfect example of such a ritual. According to Veylanswami, “ you are experiencing the totality of the moment, you are not aware of the past, nor are you aware of the future or anything within the externalities of the mind...You are able to have a

continuity of intuitive findings within it and gain much knowledge from within yourself” (Veylanswami 7). At the end of the day, we all are humans; we don’t have control over the result of any actions we take. We all go through ups and downs. When we don’t find motivation to get out of it, that is when meditation comes in to help. It gives us at least a single reason to plan for a better future. It has been studied that, if stuck to, meditation will walk you through the obstacles. From forgetting the past to finding the lesson out of it, from hating yourself to self awareness, all can be discovered by practicing meditation.

There are many types of meditation that are practiced. Om chanting meditation is one of the most well known among all. Researchers have studied how the human brain reacts differently during meditation. I looked at a study, where they studied EEG results being affected by om meditation. Author Harne and Hiwale stated, “significant increase in theta power was found after meditation when averaged across all brain regions... However, the theta power showed higher theta amplitude after condition at all regions in comparison to the before condition of meditation” (1). According to their analysis, Om meditation has a positive after effect on the theta power, as found in the EEG reports. Theta power is basically waves inside the brain and the frequency of it is measured by the EEG exam. Theta waves are known to have connections with relaxation, creativity. This takes place in higher frequencies when our brain tends to focus on one thing. Focus is where regular practice of meditation can bring noticeable improvements. Om meditation brings our focus to one particular thing leaving external thoughts behind. The increasing frequency of theta can result in overcoming stress, anxiety and also to create a storehouse that can hold on to all the emotions. The ancient Hindu ritual of meditation has such great influence on our brain, that it can fulfill the requirements of a healthy life. According to Andrew Newberg, the Associate Director of Research at the Marcus Institute of Integrative Health, rituals lower cortisol, which in turn lowers heart rate and blood pressure and increases immune system function” (Honarvar 2). This shows a medical benefit and perspective on how rituals essentially help in maintaining a healthy living. People are busy enough with their work to often forget to take care of themselves. In such a case, practicing a ritual can be beneficial for social life and health. Their mind gets some time to relax and as a result they get better heart rate and normal blood pressure, normal blood pressure and a stronger immune system.

As Harne and Hiwale note “Meditation, being one of the aspects of yoga, can be defined as willfully and purposefully regulating one’s own attention either for relaxation, exploring oneself or personal growth” (1). We humans know so little about ourselves. Some people don’t get to explore and others just overlook it. Exercising different rituals, do help us to understand ourselves better. I agree with Honarvar and the other authors who explained how different rituals lead us to a healthy life. Eventually, it becomes the reason behind a movement of happiness in our busy life. Happiness plays an essential role in a healthy lifestyle.

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4.

Confronting Oppression in the Poetry of Langston Hughes and Staceyann Chin

Peter Saverino

Editor's Note: Trigger warning: This article briefly addresses the issue of sexual assault.

Oppression is something that is faced not only in this country, but around the world. It is a muse for many poets who attempt to acknowledge its existence, to point out where it is seen, and to lash out against it. African American writer Langston Hughes and Jamaican American writer Staceyann Chin, who is of Chinese and Black ancestry, go about confronting oppression in different ways. While Hughes's "I, Too" and Chin's "Crossfire" both address oppression, "I, Too" does so as an allegory to the civil rights movement using light imagery in short, tight lines and stanzas, while "Crossfire" tells some of the truths of oppression using dark imagery and is a more open poetic form, with long run-on lines.

Putting these two texts in conversation and including this essay in the *Asian American Voices* journal challenges fixed ideas about culture and expands definitions about Asian American identity as Chin's Asian heritage is linked to Chinese migration to the Caribbean. In addition, comparing these two authors promotes a sense of Afro-Asian solidarity and shared resistance against oppression.

"I, Too" deals in allegory to relay the message that the oppression against African Americans is seen and will soon be done away with, whereas "Crossfire" uses truth as a cudgel to knock your eyes open to the oppression of women in society and the complexities of intersectional identities including her own Asian ancestry. In "I, Too" the speaker says, "I, too, sing America / I am the darker brother. / They send me to eat in the kitchen / When company comes" (Hughes, 1-4). Here the speaker is saying that African Americans are also part of the American family, but they are hidden, the way slaves were kept out of sight from guests, to keep them from participating in democracy. In "Feminist or a Womanist" the speaker comes right out and says:

Everyone will think she asked for it
 Dressed as she was she must have wanted
 It]
 The words will knock about in her head
 Horny bitch
 Slut-harlot-tease
 Loose woman. (Chin, lines 27-35)

Here the speaker is using the brutal truth of a woman raped being blamed for it. How people, even some of her friends, will start to call her names behind her back, which she will hear and remember. And how she will have to confront these small passive-aggressive attacks every day. Whether through allegory or stark reality, both Hughes and Chin are addressing the oppression they are witnessing.

The imagery in “Crossfire” with its reference to rape and beatings, is a darker road traveled than that of “I, Too” with its laughter and talk of beauty. The speaker in Chin’s “Crossfire” chides those who blame a woman who has been raped for not contacting the police right away:

Primarily
 I am concerned about young women
 Who are raped on college campuses
 In cars
 After poetry readings like this one
 In bars
 Bruised lip and broken heart
 You will forgive her if she does not come
 Forward with the truth immediately (Chin, 18-26)

She is using the imagery of a raped woman, beaten with a bloody lip and a tattered sense of trust, with a double entendre of forgiving her for not coming and for not coming forward to tell her story. The speaker in Hughes’s “I, Too”, lightheartedly warns the listener:

Nobody’ll dare
 Say to me
 “Eat in the kitchen,”
 Then.

Besides
 They’ll see how beautiful I am
 And be ashamed — (Hughes, 11-17)

The speaker is using imagery here to say once African Americans are politically strong, they will have a seat at the table and have a say in how the country is run. He’s inferring that America will see the beauty and value in their culture and finally be ashamed at how they treated African Americans. When the speaker states, “They’ll see how beautiful I am” (16), you can almost see the wry smile on his face, with his roguish personality coming through. Although the imagery is different, they both are issuing warnings. Chin warns not to judge while Hughes warns “We are coming”.

“I, Too” uses short tight lines like a surgical strike, each line hammering home the idea that equality is coming, while the long lines of “Crossfire” is more like a sustained bombing campaign, bludgeoning you until you realize that women, the LGBTQ+ community and people of different races and nationalities are the same as you and have the same fears, hopes and anger as you. When she says, “Asia is not one big race / and there is no such country as the Islands / and no-I am not from there” (44-47) you can feel her anger and frustration at the stereotypes and assumptions made by people when they hear where she is from or project readings on her body. Both of her cultural

backgrounds get grouped together into a conglomeration of the surrounding nations. Her Chinese heritage to some just gets put into a big stew pot with Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese, and her Jamaican background is grouped together with the Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti; despite each nation having a distinct cultural heritage. Moreover, the history and existence of Asian groups in the Caribbean and their engagements with other racial and ethnic groups are largely invisible in the American context.

Each line in “I, Too” is blunt, but telling. Every time you read the poem, more is revealed, like when the speaker says:

I am the darker brother.
 They send to eat in the kitchen
 When company comes,
 But I laugh,
 And eat well,
 And grow strong. (Hughes, lines 2-7)

Hughes’s use of allegory allows him to use 25 words to convey the ideas: that they are different because they are black, they are hidden because they are black, they are being denied the “American Dream” because they are black. But, they grow strong, eating well of the knowledge they have fed themselves and laugh knowing their day is coming.

Chin again in “Crossfire” challenges the judgements about her background when she writes:

Most people are surprised my father is
 Chinese-like
 There’s some preconditioned
 look for the half-Chinese lesbian poet
 Who used to be Catholic but now believes
 In dreams (Chin, lines 54-59)

and earlier on, when addressing her sexuality, the lines flow on, taking a bit more time to tell the truth without a shade:

This business of sexual dykes and dykery
 I tell her
 Is often messy with social tensions as
 They are
 You never quite know what you’re getting
 -some girls can only be straight at night
 -hardcore butches be wearing dresses
 Between nine and six during the day
 Sometimes she is really a he trapped
 By the limitations of our imaginations (Chin, lines 8-17)

The speaker uses 59 words over 10 lines to convey her ideas of sexuality and acceptance and sacrifice. She needs more words because she isn't inferring what she means, for fear it gets lost. The complexities and complications of sexuality are too precarious to leave to inference. It must be told truthfully and honestly so no mistake is made. Society's limitations on sexuality is only hampered by its lack of imagination, by not being able to imagine that people don't check all the boxes all the time and, sometimes, they don't check any of them. Hughes's conciseness and Chin's elaborations don't mean that one gets across a thought better than the other, it just means they have different things to say, and they have different ways of saying it.

Hughes and Chin know and have faced oppression throughout their lives. Whether because of the color of their skin and racial backgrounds, their gender or their sexuality, they have each borne witness to verbal and physical abuses and felt the need to shine a light on that oppression. They both use many tools to expose the oppression visible in daily life. Chin's use of long, confrontational verses along with dark, painfully real imagery in "Crossfire" is just the other side of the coin to Hughes's use of concise, almost playful, verses alongside light allegorical imagery in "I, Too" in addressing oppression.

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5.

Will and Desire: Suffering in Buddhism and Augustinian Christianity

Phone Myint Maung (Huzaiyah Islam-Khan)

Editor's Note: Trigger warning: This piece discusses the topic of violence in relation to suffering.

In the August of 2017, the Burmese military committed genocide against the ethnic Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State, located on the western coast of Myanmar (Burma). Having grown up in Burma and being part-Rohingya myself, this event shook me deeply. It made me question how humans could be capable of such evil and eventually led me to believe that all evil and suffering are caused by humans themselves. However, this notion was challenged with the occurrence of the COVID 19 pandemic, which claimed the lives of millions globally and caused an immense amount of suffering. It has, for better or for worse - changed how we as a society interact with each other. It made me reassess my stance on the existence and causes of suffering. *If humans are not the sole cause of suffering, as illustrated by the pandemic, what causes suffering? Are there multiple causes of suffering? Why do we suffer?* All these questions, together with many others, led me to the investigation presented in this paper.

It does not come to me by surprise that I am not the first person to pose and be troubled by the existence of evil and suffering. It is, in fact, a recurring theme throughout human history in our constant struggle against this phenomenon. It changes and affects us deeply, both on an individual and a societal level. It is part of our very existence that we have never really understood and have constantly grappled with, so much so that every major world religion directly addresses this phenomenon.

For instance, in Buddhism, the Buddha taught suffering as arising from human desire. While in the Christian tradition, Saint Augustine believed it to be a direct result of human free will. In both cases, the respective sages sought to answer the existence of suffering and evil and the best way to grapple with it. Interestingly enough, both of them also link this phenomenon directly to us humans, whether it is our ability to have a desire, or will freely - or both! Based on this view, I argue in this essay that both Buddhism and Christianity (at least as espoused by St. Augustine) link evil to us humans; and as a consequence of our actions. I argue this by analyzing the doctrines presented by these two religions in their understanding of suffering and, based on these doctrines, the best way to come to terms with it. In conducting this analysis, I pay special attention to how these two faith traditions understand suffering differently; and how this affects the way they deal with it.

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, I present the Buddhist and Augustinian response to the existence of evil. In doing so, I explain how the law of *karma* and the existence of free will in the two respective traditions affect their conception of suffering; and how it helps them justify its existence. Then in the second section, I provide the limitations of both of these responses. In doing so, I discuss how the presupposition of free will does not logically operate within the *karmic* conception of existence and the moral implications of subscribing to it. I also highlight how St. Augustine's Free Will theodicy could not sufficiently warrant the existence of evil in light of the existence of a benevolent God. Finally, I conclude the essay by reflecting on how these respective responses may help its followers but overall not be able to address the existence of suffering in its entirety.

Conceptions of Suffering

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do we suffer? Why does evil exist? These questions have perplexed humanity since the dawn of time, and people from all walks of life pose them. This ranges from a simple illiterate old man to the greatest philosopher in history. It is one of those questions and phenomena we as humans collectively experience and confront. And perhaps this is one of the primary roles of religion; to answer our most profound questions about the most troubling parts of our existence and guide us in making sense of it. For this very reason, both the Buddha and St. Augustine answered this question in light of their respective context and their metaphysical worldview. Buddhism is built on the premise of escaping suffering. For Buddhists, suffering (also known as *dukkha* in Pali) is part of the fabric of reality. The Buddha taught that existence is marked by three characteristics (also known as the doctrine of *the Three Marks of Existence*): impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-selfhood (*anatta*).¹ According to this doctrine, everything is bound to perish as they are impermanent, and we - the agent - do not exist, to begin with. We only *think* we exist, and this *thinking*, or false belief, is the prime cause of our suffering. To think something exists only to realize it does not (or rather, that it will not last) is why we suffer and do not realize peace. The Buddha, based on this metaphysical view, espouses his central teaching, enshrined as the doctrine of *the Four Noble Truths*:²

- [1] Human existence is intrinsically characterized by dukkha [suffering].
- [2] Dukkha arises because of appetitive cravings and desires (negative and positive).
- [3] There can be a cessation of dukkha, known as Nirvana [state of sublime bliss].
- [4] Nirvana is achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

So by realizing these Four Noble Truths and practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, one should be able to both make sense of and escape suffering. And this is the crux of the Buddhist view of reality and suffering. However, to fully appreciate this view, one has to take into account Buddhist metaphysics and cosmology. Buddhism shares its metaphysical worldview with those of other Dharmic faiths, that of *Samsara* and *Karma*. *Samsara*, also known as the wheel of existence, is “a suffering-laden cycle of life, death, and rebirth, without beginning or end,” to which all entities from the celestial gods to tiny insects are subjected to.³ According to the Buddha, this system is driven by the law of *karma*, or the law of moral causation, in which one's deeds (*karma*) determine one's existence

¹ Dhammapada 277-9

² Sue Hamilton, *Indian Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2009), 48.

³ Jeff Wilson, “Saṃsāra and Rebirth,” *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195393521-0141>.

and experience in the cycle of *samsara*. In effect, “one reaps the good and the bad consequences of one’s actions, either in this life or in another.”⁴ So, in Buddhism, all your current experiences (both positive and negative) are determined by your past deeds; and the way to end suffering is to end all experiences. This is done by detaching oneself from desires and so liberating oneself from the cycle of *samsara* and achieving *Nirvana* - the state of sublime bliss through the realization of non-existence.⁵

The Buddhist view presents a worldview and a perspective of suffering and evil without an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent God. Belief in such a God, prevalent within the Abrahamic traditions, brings another depth of complexity to the question of the ontological existence of suffering and evil. For this, we turn to Augustinian Christianity, a philosophical and theological framework that is based on the thought of Augustine of Hippo (more simply known as St. Augustine).⁶ He was a bishop, theologian, and philosopher and is one of the most influential Christian thinkers in history. For him and many other Christians, the question being posed is: *How could an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent entity allow evil and suffering to exist?* This problem is known as the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion. A response provided in answer to this question is known as a theodicy.

In his *City of God*, St. Augustine presents his well-known *Free Will Theodicy*. According to this theodicy, evil and suffering are a by-product of freedom, a necessary component of a moral universe. St. Augustine argues that in choosing not to abide by the commandments of God, mankind brought moral and natural evil into the universe and so are responsible for the suffering that they experience. It should be noted that evil, according to St. Augustine, “is not a thing or entity; it is a metaphysical deprivation, or lack, of the good.”⁷ This defense easily accounts for the existence of moral evil, or the “evil (or suffering) which results from a moral agent misusing his or her free will,” but how does it account for natural evil?⁸ Natural evil, on the other hand, is an “evil which results from natural phenomena and is not brought about by the free will of a moral agent.”⁹ So, for St. Augustine, natural evil (like the COVID 19 pandemic) is a form of punishment from the divine for the moral evil caused by men. So in effect, suffering in both its moral and natural form is attributed to the deeds of men’s free will. However, St. Augustine concludes that in the end, God will rectify evil when he judges the world and brings about ultimate justice and goodness.

Evaluation of Buddhist and Augustinian Conceptions of Suffering

In the responses to evil presented above, one is situated in the non-theistic Dharmic faith and the other within the Abrahamic tradition. However, both of these views take free will as a given, and in both cases, it is the root cause of why we suffer. In the Buddhist tradition, the agent’s free will is the cause of their *karma*, and consequently, this binds them to *samsara* and results in their perpetual suffering. Similarly, in the Augustinian tradition, men’s free will is the cause of moral and natural evil, the latter resulting from divine punishment for the former. In both of these traditions, free will and humans themselves are the very cause of both the ontological existence of suffering (as in the Augustinian tradition) and the experience of suffering. However, there are some implications in the linkage of free will to evil in both traditions that have not been absolved sufficiently.

⁴ Chad Meister, “Philosophy of Religion,” Internet encyclopedia of philosophy, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://iep.utm.edu/>

⁵ See note 2 above

⁶ “Augustinianism,” Encyclopedia.com (Encyclopedia.com, December 14, 2021), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/augustinianism>.

⁷ Chad Meister, *Introducing Philosophy of Religion* (London, UK: Routledge, 2010), 140.

⁸ Meister, 129.

⁹ See note 8 above.

In the Buddhist tradition, free will is presupposed. This explains the existence of *karma* and why we suffer. However, in closely analyzing the law of *karma* and the cycle of *samsara*, there are serious issues to be resolved. The first problem is that within the law of *karma*, the victim is culpable for the suffering they experience. In this sense, a child who is killed is killed because they deserved it. This is seriously disconcerting to affirm morally, especially when it could be used as a part of victim-blaming. The second issue with presupposing freedom within the law of *karma* is that freedom does not logically seem to operate within the framework. Chad Meister, a professor of philosophy and theology, points to this problem and gives an example. In the example presented below, although originally proposed by Meister, I have taken the liberty to change the details to cater to the sensibility of the public audience.

Consider the example of a short-tempered man who constantly murders another person who causes him to be angry. Suppose he has done so before, and has thus far not been caught. And on one occasion, he got into a fight with another man that made him angry. If he decides to kill the man and does so, then on the karmic account the man who was killed was not completely innocent after all; he is paying the price for his former evil actions. In that case, the murderer is not truly free to act as he does, for he is simply following mechanistically the effects of karmic justice. He is merely the instrumental means for meting out the justice requisite for this victim's previous moral failings. If, however, the victim does not deserve such moral recompense, then karmic justice will ensure that he does not receive it. In that case, the murderer will be unable to engage in the attack.¹⁰

So by the logic of this example, the murder was always meant to kill the victim. Similarly, the victim, too, was *meant* to be killed due to his past deeds. And so, neither the murderer nor the victim was ever really free. In essence, this is deterministic, so it seems inconsistent with the law of *karma*. Hence, if this thought was applied to understand the genocide of the Rohingya, the perpetrators are not free to do otherwise, and the victims deserved what was inflicted on them. As raised in the previous point, this is morally very disconcerting to affirm.

Another major issue within the Buddhist tradition has to do with the ontological existence of suffering and, in extension, *samsara*. What is the reason that causes entities to exist within the cycle of *samsara*, to begin with, since their existence within *samsara* is what causes them to suffer? According to the law of *karma*, entities that do not exist cannot generate karma, so in effect, they cannot be born and so will not suffer. So what caused these entities (including us humans) to exist in the first place, especially because Buddhism does not believe in a creator God? In responding to this question, the Buddha insisted that the beginning of *samsara* is, in fact, unthinkable and so beyond intellectual explanations. He says, "O bhikkhus [monks], this cycle of continuity (*samsara*) is without a visible end, and the first beginning of beings wandering and running round, enveloped in ignorance (*avijja*) and bound down by the fetters of thirst (desire, *tanha*) is not to be perceived."¹¹ And on another occasion, he states, "The first beginning of ignorance (*avijja*) is not to be perceived in such a way as to postulate that there was no ignorance beyond a certain point."¹² Hence, there is no intellectual or philosophical answer to the existence of *samsara* and, extension, suffering since it is beyond the ability of the intellect to understand, and hence, this issue is left unexplained.

On the other hand, *the Free Will theodicy* of St. Augustine faces no similar objection of this kind, for it does not presuppose free will and explains it as a necessary component of a moral universe as created by God. However, this raises a serious theological question as to God's omnipotence. If

¹⁰ Based on Chad Meister, "Philosophy of Religion"

¹¹ Rāhula Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught (Revised Edition)* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1974), 27.

¹² See note 11 above.

God is indeed all-powerful, why can't he create a moral universe that contains humans who, by nature, would always choose to do good? This remains a serious theological issue to be addressed. Another problem concerns the issue of natural evil. According to St. Augustine, natural evil is a result of divine punishment for the moral evil men commit. However, this belief can hardly be justified considering natural evil has caused many innocent people to be killed. An innocent child who died due to COVID surely couldn't have done anything so evil that God would punish them by killing them in such a horrible manner! This remains a serious theological problem to be resolved.

Conclusion

My argument in this paper should provide ample reasons as to the fact that despite Buddhism and Christianity being located in two different traditions, both of them, in their understanding of suffering and evil, attribute it to the actions of humans to will freely. In doing so, they justify the reason as to why we suffer and how we could confront it. I believe that people of faith in these two respective religions will find meaning in their respective understandings, and this will bring them some peace to the suffering and loss they face in their personal lives, as such caused by COVID 19. However, this is not without its challenges. As I have pointed out, both entail serious logical and theological implications within their own respective framework. Although these understandings might be helpful on some level, they are not overall sufficient to address the existence of evil and suffering in its entirety.

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6.

Double Consciousness of the South Asian Diaspora

Nyla Ward

Bill Ashcroft in his essay “Diaspora” defines the term as “the scattering throughout the world from one geographic location to another” (425). Communities navigate through differences and similarities between homeland and host land, or yearning and belonging to carve new identities for themselves in a new place. In my essay, I will focus on how double consciousness reinforces the multiple modalities and composite nature of South Asian diaspora identities through the intersections of race, gender and sexuality.

The complexities of a diasporic society initiates the “splitting” of a cultural identity leading to a double consciousness. The term double consciousness, originally coined by W.E.B Dubois, is the theory of “twoness” that a subordinated group faces in the eyes of colonized society. This experience can relate to race, gender and sexuality as well as the internal conflict of seeing oneself through the eyes of others (in this case through the eyes of majoritarian society) and can be alienating. “It’s a peculiar sensation,” Dubois writes, “this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others...one feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts” (Dubois, *Strivings of the Negro People*). The “twoness” that Dubois is referring to is a common experience for subjects of the diaspora, particularly those who belong to two cultural identities, as in the case of Sri Lankan-Canadian novelist, Shyam Selvadurai. The recurring thread within diasporic themed short stories of viewing oneself through the eyes of a majoritarian society triggers questions of dual identity and internal conflict.

As a Sri Lankan-Canadian writer, Shyam Selvadurai answers the commonly asked question, “What kind of writer do you consider yourself to be? Are you a Canadian writer or a Sri Lankan writer?” (Selvadurai 1). Though this question can be diminishing to someone with multiple cultural identities, Selvadurai resounds that his “creativity comes not from “Sri Lankan” or “Canadian,” but precisely from the space in between (Selvadurai 1). Both cultural identities mesh into the unique experience that fuels Selvadurai’s work and the aspects of both of his cultures are appreciated. Diasporic subjects like Selvadurai that experience this “twoness” are often burdened with exclusion, like Dubois, to be viewed as the racial “other.” Selvadurai’s identity was not questioned when living in Sri Lanka with a Tamil father and a Sinhalese mother. It wasn’t until the family left Sri Lanka due to violent conflict of ethnic nationalism and relocated to Canada that his identity was shaken. The questions of “Am I Canadian enough? Am I Sri Lankan enough? What is the essence of being Sri Lankan?” caused him to reflect on the role of his South Asian identity in shaping his literary works .

Indian American writer Radhika Sila Chari, in her short story “Different Small Towns,” focuses on the starkly different perspectives of an Indian woman and her former white classmate. From the first paragraph, we learn that Chari does not share her classmates’ nostalgic view of their time in school together. Chari reflects on the time when a seemingly innocent game of tag left her feeling alienated and excluded due to her visible otherness. She writes, “The White kids had planned that I would replace the class geek in the game ‘the girls chase the boys’ but when she saw me, she didn’t worry...She had worn glasses since she was four, but apparently I had the worst handicap” (Chari 326). The experiences that Chari recalls parallel what it means to have double consciousness, as her experiences as a brown girl in an American school can be compared to Selvadurai’s experience as a Sri Lankan living in Canada. Chari viewing herself through the eyes of the majoritarian society leads her to question herself in a way similar to that of Selvadurai; “What is the essence of being an American? What is the essence of being Indian?”

South African novelist Farida Karodia in her short story “Crossmatch” further reinforces the above conflict initiated through displacement and migration. In the short story, protagonist Sushi Makanji, born to a traditional Indian family in post apartheid South Africa, meets a potential husband in an arranged marriage pairing. Her suitor, Dilip Vasant, a chemical engineer who teaches at Stanford University, also comes from a traditional Indian family. Both characters are against the idea of arranged marriage for their own reasons. Dilip’s disinterest lies in the fact that he is in a relationship in the United States with a man and does not have the desire to marry. Sushi’s disinterest lies in the fact that she is also in a relationship, an arrangement her traditional Indian mother would never approve of. Like Sushi, Dilip is not interested in getting married and also mentions to her that he is already in a relationship back in the United States. For the first time out of the formalities of their meeting, Sushi sees Dilip as someone like her who lives their own life outside of the traditional values. After Dilip leaves with his family, Sushi speculates that he is gay and tells her sister Indira, mentioning that she “has a lot of gay friends in London” (Karodia 154). Indira is shocked by this revelation because for her it is absurd to be gay and a Hindu at the same time. I argue that Indira’s perspectives complicate Dilip’s struggles with his identity as Dilip has to view his “impossible” identity through the eyes of the prejudices of an Indian society whenever he returns to visit his family in the town of Lenasia, South Africa.

We recognize the same pattern of “twoness” in the short story “Becoming Agents of Our Identity” by Indian-American writer Zainab Ali. She speaks about her parents’ choice to leave their homeland of India, “breaking their confinement, promising—hoping— and all the while trying to keep their religion, their heritage, their contact to family and friends behind” (Ali 239) all in hopes of finding new identities as Indian Americans. As Ali grows up and goes to school, she struggles to navigate her Indian identity in an all American school. She speaks of a time when her class was sharing what they would eat on a typical day for breakfast. Most of the answers were traditional American breakfast but Ali believed that “no one would understand what [she] had for breakfast; it was so...Indian” (Ali 238). It’s then that she makes the choice to say that she had spaghetti for breakfast as an attempt to avoid feeling alienated. In another situation, Ali’s class would rise for the national anthem but Ali would choose to sit down, rationalizing that as a Muslim she wasn’t American enough to pay respect to the flag. Proud of her choice to remain true to her Indian identity, she tells her mother about her choice to sit out for the anthem. Her young daughter’s revelation shocks her mother who assures her that she “could be devoted to the country without her citizenship infringing on her religious life” (Ali 240). She writes, “this is the first of many incidents in which I have felt like I am sitting on the border of two cultures and religions. The position invariably forces me into feelings of disjunction because I must choose between two cultural practices” (Ali 238). These short stories reveal that the adoption of a dual identity to fit into a majoritarian society could be taxing for the diaspora subject.

To be a part of the diaspora is to understand that even though one belongs to a specific community that is different from one's racial identity, there is another aspect of one's identity that reveals displacement and dislocation. This is clear in such pieces by Chari and Karodia, where the characters experience this phenomena of dual identity; an internal conflict to be either true to one's homeland or become a part of the host land. However, we see with Selvadurai that it is the in-betweenness of the two identities of belonging to host and homeland that a new identity emerges and flourishes. One can belong to both their host land while also remaining true to their home land. Within this sense of cultural identity, there has to be acknowledgement of the differences within the culture, such as sexual identity, gender and class. As Selvadurai states, "this sense of cultural identity stresses not just who one was in the past, but who one might be in the process of becoming" (Selvadurai 5).

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7.

Writing Home: How Literature of the South Asian Diaspora Rescripts Belonging

Will Ruehle

In acknowledgment of the expansive and diverse ways in which diasporic identities reinvent themselves, this essay uses the theoretical lenses of understanding diaspora through the works of Indo-British writer Salman Rushdie and Sri Lankan-Canadian writer Shyam Selvadurai to analyze South Asian short stories from diverse locales and regions. My work will focus on the short stories written by Indo-South African writer Farida Karodia, Pakistani-British writer Hanif Kureishi, and Indo-American writer Zainab Ali, who, respectively, portray descendants from the South Asian diaspora's three major historical waves: the first wave in the mid-1800s, a second in the mid-1900s, and a third in contemporary postcolonial times.

Diasporic consciousness asserts that people whose experiences span distant environments can use the cultural dissonance they weather to form more meaningfully complex worldviews. Ultimately, understanding of diasporic consciousness is essential to fuller realization of the self, the other, and the relationships we share; this transformative understanding is refined and expanded through similarly transformative language. Diasporic consciousness initiates a tension between being and becoming as individuals are compelled to navigate across cultures and geographical spaces. By crafting richly dynamic investigations of personal and communal identities, and by springing them on a public prone to insufficient and nationalist cultural labels, diasporic writers articulate and broadcast inclusive narratives that contribute to the formation of their own embodied and perceived identities, as well as those of their diasporic peers. For example, in "Crossmatch," Farida Karodia models diasporic consciousness primarily through protagonist Sushila Makanji, who from the very first paragraph is characterized with a markedly cosmopolitan patchwork of subtle allusions; 'Sushi' sits on the step of her parents' house in Lenasia, South Africa, a liminal space far from her current home of London, where she prepares to audition for *Love Under the Banyan Tree*, a play she describes with the French phrase *tour de force* and whose titular reference to Indian flora hints at romanticized 'roots' (Karodia 129). Sushila's apparent preference for the nickname Sushi also suggests the character's ability to retain her base culture while creatively redefining herself. Karodia then establishes Sushi as a sought-after actor—someone who can successfully embody a growing number of roles—because just as Sushi professionally diversifies her repertoire of theatrical portrayals, she's also learning to navigate and combine traditionally discrete social positions: Indian bachelorette and English sweetheart, consistently cast actor and undercaste South African, feminine youth and uncompromising progressive. While Sushi's boldly urban frankness, stubbornly Western dress, and scandalously eclectic tastes disconcert her more culturally insulated mother, "paradoxically these unsettling traits were what made her such a desirable actress" and a paragon of diasporic adaptability (Karodia 130).

Hanif Kureishi's "We're Not Jews" is replete with intentionally ambiguous diasporic language that depicts the tensions and confusion that might beset a British family that works to embrace its Pakistani heritage. Throughout the story, Azhar and his mother Yvonne undertake an allegorical and perilous journey—aboard a bus full of abusive white peers; into a literal thicket of nearly inaccessible resources; through powerful memories of wartime, career failures, and close family bonding—navigating along the way their layered identities and corresponding roles in society. Kureishi begins in media res with characters scrambling in transit so that the reader can endure some of the same abrupt recontextualization familiar to diasporic peoples. Similarly deliberately disorienting are Kureishi's limited third person narration, delay of identifying details like names and ethnicities, vague references to "the war" and "cities [the family] could never pick up" on their radio... But rather than leaving us "whirling in incomprehension" like young Azhar, Kureishi balances these cryptic constructions with more stark literary devices that offer a clearer picture of how the flexibility of diasporic consciousness chafes against the rigid prescriptiveness of a given social environment (268-272).

Another character who "...[falls] apart, walking two different directions" is Zainab Ali in her autobiographical "Becoming Agents Of Our Identity," a nonfiction collage of impactful childhood memories and bold adult self-determinations (240-241). Ali's mode of playfully guiding her reader and herself toward harsh truths exemplifies diasporic discourse's tendency to fold youthfully imaginative language in with grave traumas and earnest self determinations which "actively [inscribe]" the writer's identity (Ashcroft, et al. 425). Ali's seemingly childish misunderstanding of her elementary school's pledge of allegiance as a transgression against Islam is actually the beginnings of her mature recognition that propaganda often pervades United States educational institutions—and that language can enact identity. When she unconvincingly claims white American consumer habits by humorously mistaking spaghetti for a breakfast staple, Ali sets a memorable if inexperienced precedent for controlling her own narrative. Now, Ali molds not only her words, but even her punctuation to scrutinize and reshape reception of her Indian-American family's "[hyphenation] over the Pacific Ocean" (Ali 237). Back in Madras, Ali effusively strings her father's disposition together by describing his "open-mouthed, all-teeth-showing-and-back-arched laugh..."; later, in the wake of verbal assault state-side, she laments how her father, herself, and their peers are collectively smeared by Western media as "*Shit-ites*," "oil-rich," and "Muslims-who-should-never-have-been-in-this-country-in-the-first-place" (Ali 237-240). The hyphens that xenophobes use to crudely slur together pejoratives are the same tools Ali successfully refashions to "re-member" herself, recombining and reclaiming her multidimensional identity (241).

Karodia, Kureishi, and Ali each convey the estrangements and enlightenments of diasporic consciousness by engineering—and equipping their characters with—language that interweaves ambiguities with strong convictions. Central figures are displaced from their cultural homes and are met with social and institutional pressures to assimilate in their host environments. In order to navigate and embrace disparate cultures, each character must develop a complex version of self identity through use of the same abstract language their authors employ in articulating the plasticity of identity in a largely essentialist public discourse. Like Rushdie, these diasporic writers and their central characters forge styles that are both expansive and fragmentary in order to communicate identities that are "at once plural and partial" (Rushdie 15). Ali reconfigures her story and its formatting to welcome her reader into "that marvelous open space represented by the hyphen" (Selvadurai 4). Kureishi structures Azhar and Yvonne's symbolic sojourn to wind among obscure memories juxtaposed with vividly present dangers in demonstration of their agile resilience. Karodia invites us to join Sushila as she scouts suitable roles from a foregone home richly laden with culturally loaded interactions and artifacts.

These stories can affect personal and social transformation because, as Rushdie asserts, “description is itself a political act” (13). Nuanced discourse can bridge embattled perspectives, and diasporic consciousness is the reservoir of intercultural experience and language from which displaced people can muster the awareness and agency necessary to thrive as transplants into exclusionary environments. Diasporic consciousness can guide individuals and entire societies as they envision and engender a “sense of cultural identity that is eclectic and diverse, [...] that is transforming itself” (Selvadurai 5). Essential to developing and disseminating the invaluable social asset of diasporic consciousness is diasporic language, which paradoxically clarifies the experience of cultural dissonance through rhetorical encryptions like symbolism and connotation. Rushdie, Selvadurai, Karodia, Kureishi, and Ali all masterfully apply these rhetorical tools toward redefining their narrative of displacement. However, the diverse nature of diasporic experiences assures us their stories are far from objective or comprehensive accounts of the South Asian diaspora, let alone diasporic movements at large. Still, the ways these writers map language over the breathtaking and ineffable terrain of displacement offers a reliable legend of symbols for all of us to interpret the character of our cultural landscape.

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8.

Rice and Me

ChunTat Lau

If you ever wandered around Chinatown on the weekends and looked through the window into a Chinese restaurant (noodle and wonton shops are exceptionals), there is a high chance of seeing a person, or probably groups of families, eating some soft, yet grainy white substance. Yes, it is the representative of Asian food: rice.



For cooking rice, in the quickest and convenient way, all you need is a rice cooker and some water. First, rinse the rice twice, then pour water into the rice cooker until it's risen to the first joint of your index finger. Wait for the rice cooker to cook things up automatically. When the rice cooker finishes, you will notice a faint fragrant popcorn smell from the steam, which enhances the aromatic smell. That's the indication that your rice is ready. Finally, scoop out the rice, add it with some other meat or vegetables you prefer to savor the taste, and there you have a healthy and basic meal! The best thing about rice is that it can act as a base for all sorts of other dishes like the way spaghetti acts as a base for tomato sauce and meatballs.

White rice is the most common type of rice among Chinese households. It resembles a fluffy snowflake. It seems to be somewhat plain, yet soft. In a few seconds, the rice will dissolve in your mouth, and emit a sweet, cotton candy-like flavor that brings back childhood memories.

Rice stuck with me for years during my ups and downs. When I was having tantrums and conflicts with my father, rice was there, filling my stomach and witnessing everything (not really, it was in my stomach). When I was hanging out with my buddies in secondary school, rice was there, listening to us.

Rice was plain, yet necessary, slowly becoming an essential part of my life; a food that brought me comfort through warmth, fulfillment, taste, and familiarity.

The last time I spoke to my dad in person before moving to New York was during dinner, in a place I remember as home. As a family, we were eating rice alongside other dishes on the table. I vaguely remember that I asked my father, "Why are you only eating white rice?" He told me an old Chinese saying, "The smell of rice is the smell of home." It was a pretty good family dinner. That was three years ago.

During the weekend, I still go to Chinatown, looking forward to eating local Chinese dishes in one of the restaurants there. The taste is there, but not its smell.

9.

The Legacy of Colonialism in Indian Caribbean Writing: *Coolie Woman* and *Doubles with Slight Pepper*

Jack Daly

Contemporary Indian Caribbean (Indo-Caribbean) U.S. based artists continue to explore the impact of British colonialism and Indian indentureship on Indo-Caribbean culture and people. Gautra Bahadur's book *Coolie Woman* (2013) and Ian Harnarine's film *Doubles with Slight Pepper* (2021) portray the effects of colonialism on Indo-Caribbeans, but in different historical moments and geographic locations within the Caribbean region. *Coolie Woman* depicts the documented abuse suffered by women in the 1800s while on ships in transit from India to the Caribbean (British Guiana), as well as their experiences on the plantations after arriving. Ian Harnarine's film *Doubles with Slight Pepper* explores the long term implications that colonialism continues to have on contemporary lives of the Caribbean, particularly Trinidadian working class communities. These texts are essential to better understand the influence of colonialism in this region. These are narratives either written about, particularly in the case of *Coolie Woman*, or told from the perspectives of individuals who are powerless. The women on the boat in Bahadur's memoir and the young man in the film struggling to support his mother as head of the household are both trapped; whether that be literally in the case of some of the women in Bahadur's text, or socially in the work of Harnarine. When these texts are read side-by-side we can clearly establish that despite colonialism's perceived end, the limitations put on people's lives as a result of it are as real today as they were 150 years ago. Despite the fact that the working class descendants of abused laborers in the Caribbean no longer suffer the same level of mistreatment, they remain the victims of a colonized mindset in that a lack of opportunities in education and employment has forced them to accept limitations on their future.

Bahadur's *Coolie Woman* recounts real stories of the rampant dehumanization of Indian indentured servants that took place during the 1800s. From the moment they set foot on the boats bound for a land unknown to them across the sea, they ceased to be people in the eyes of their overseers. The sexual abuse of women by authority figures on these ships became common practice. While there were little to no consequences for those in power, the lives of the women victimized would never again be the same. For example, Ramjharee was one of the many who suffered through this experience having been molested by the surgeon during her voyage. When speaking out about this experience she said, "I was not a prostitute in India" (Bahadur 59). Her response suggests that she might have been blamed for her abuse and painted as a prostitute by authorities to condone the abuse she suffered and/or discredit her claims.

While the women aboard these ships were forced to endure physical abuse and rape, they were not the only ones victimized by empowered figures. In some cases women gave birth on the ships, but due to their own lack of nourishment and healthy living conditions the children were sometimes born undeveloped. In one instance a surgeon declared after a brief inspection of a newborn that the child

would not live. The procedure from this point onward establishes just how little these lives meant to the empowered: “At 8 p.m, the baby, named Rohilla after the ship, gave a short, last gasp. His body was thrown overboard the same day. No cause of death was ever given, because the surgeon neither recorded the boy’s birth nor his death in his books” (Bahadur 64). Rohilla’s name was never meant to be recorded; it’s by chance that we can even discuss her short life. This is because the birth of Indian indentured laborers was equally as insignificant as their deaths for those in power. The act of throwing an infant into the sea to drown was in their eyes not even worth documenting. The degradation of the Indian laborers was consistent regardless of age or gender; they were viewed as being closer to animals than people. This treatment continued long beyond the initial voyage to the Caribbean; while the social progress made since has gradually decreased the physical abuse, a colonized mindset remains even generations later.

In Harnarine’s *Doubles with Slight Pepper* we can observe the colonized mentality in a modern context. The cycle of poverty and inopportunity has continued from generation to generation from the time of colonization to the present. We meet Dhani as he sells doubles–curried channa (garbanzo beans) sandwiched in two pieces of fried dough– on the street, suggesting that better jobs available must be few and far between. The film opens and closes with the same words almost exactly; Dhani says, “I come from a long line of poor and stupid coolies. They work under the blazing hot sun for donkey years, making English man rich rich. They make children that do the same thing. That’s me” (Harnarine). Dhani says this after watching his father lay dying in a hospital bed; despite his efforts, Dhani cannot save him. His father emigrated to Canada with dreams of opening his own restaurant only to return home broke and humiliated, looked on with mixed anger and pity by the son who he was trying to give a better life to. This is the tragedy of Dhani’s character; he sees his father’s failures and knows that he is likely doomed to the same fate. He recognizes the cycle of poverty he’s trapped in but the acknowledgement of that won’t set him free from it. His father tried to break out but has failed, lost the love of his family, and wasted his life. After seeing this, what would give Dhani reason to believe things would work out any differently for him, and so why even try? He says he sees himself as just another poor and stupid coolie in a long line of others because that is the self-deprecating mindset that an endless cycle of poverty and inopportunity promotes. This shows that the shockwaves of colonialism can still define lives even in the modern world.

Bahadur’s *Coolie Woman* and Harnarine’s *Doubles with Slight Pepper* explore colonialism’s effect on the Caribbean at different points in time. While it’s undeniable that progress has been made, a colonized mindset remains even generations later due to the absence of opportunities in education and employment. Colonialism put chains around those who migrated to work in the Caribbean by never allowing them to move about their perceived station. These chains continue to hold some people back several generations later; these chains are just harder to see.

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10.

Covid-19 as an Opportunity in Life

Tasqui E. Guayasamin

Most of us have been severely affected by a pandemic that has caused damage throughout the world. We have all been affected in many ways. Although I was also impacted, my health deteriorated, and I had to stop working. My life changed and it was because of Covid-19.

Until the beginning of the year 2020, my life was different from the one I have today. Although what I do is enriching in alternative medicine and medicinal Biomagnetism, I worked long hours. My work required long and sacrificed trips. I had almost no rest and I could not have moments with my family. My last trip was in January 2020 to Mexico City. I had the opportunity to talk with a friend who is a Medical Doctor and he warned me about what was about to happen. It was exceedingly difficult for me to understand the magnitude of a pandemic that would end the lives of thousands of people in the world.

I began to feel symptoms of Covid in February, without knowing what it was that I had. Lots of body pain, sweating. My digestive system was not working well. In the small apartment where I live with my spouse, a family arrived that needed a place to stay. And they were there throughout the pandemic. The days were endless. Moments of meditation helped me to analyze what my life was like. I realized that I spent a lot of time working and had no time for my family or for my preparation as a student. In those moments I realized that it was necessary to make priorities; the number one priority was my health, the second priority was my family, and the third priority was my education.

They were days of meditation and prayer. Months passed without being able to go out until June 2020. Suddenly I wrote to LaGuardia Community College to help me apply and obtain my High School Equivalency Diploma. What came to me was the opportunity I had been waiting for many years that LaGuardia Community College gave me. I studied tirelessly and was able to get my diploma. Now I feel proud to be part of the student group that is heading towards being a professional who can be part of strengthening our community.

Time has passed and today I am in the middle of my career. My major is Healthcare Management. I feel a lot of inner peace, I am grateful for this fantastic opportunity, and I am giving my best to be able to obtain the best grades possible. I am proud to be an immigrant because despite having had so many difficulties, I have had opportunities such as studying and preparing at a college that is known as the most diverse in the world and that makes me feel even more proud because I am able to meet people and cultures from all over the world.

Coming from different countries has made us united in many ways, one of them is to enrich ourselves with our cultures, learn from us, our art, our literature, our languages, our typical food, and many other characteristics that make us a strength in our communities.

Part III

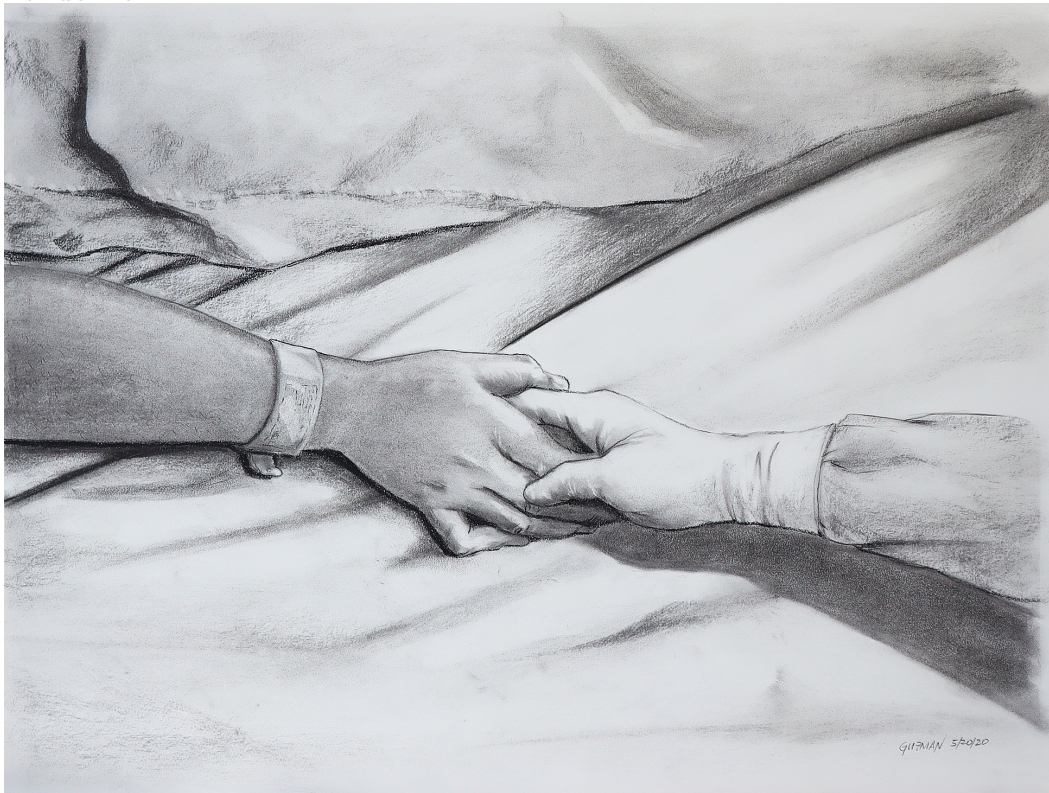
Art and Photos

11.

Pandemic & Mind at the Crossroads

Abigail Guzman

Pandemic



Charcoal on sketch pad 18"x24"

The artwork was made for my Life Drawing class, where I combined anatomy studies and composition. The theme is about the feelings I felt during the rise of the pandemic in 2020. I used my hands as a reference to create the piece, using a mirror and a camera phone. I wanted to capture a gesture; so I used vine charcoal and charcoal pencils to create a black and white illustration. To me, black and white illustrations interpret my thoughts and emotions on paper better than color because the simplicity does not revert the eye from the main narrative or theme. My goal was to highlight a genuine gesture from a nurse's touch to a Covid patient. I have relatives and friends who are nurses who sacrificed their time and risked their lives to save others. This drawing is my appreciation and gratitude for them.

Mind at the Crossroads



Graphite pencils on bond paper 18" x 24"

The artwork was a personal sketch that was later used to complete an assignment for a drawing class. I used a variety of graphite pencils to render shadows with shading and hatching techniques. The drawing depicts how an individual's mind is at a point of decision. The arrows point directions toward someone's past, present, and future. While I was drawing the project, I had the "college student" in mind (including myself). The decision could positively or negatively affect the present or the future; or one can do nothing and get stuck in the past. The reason why the background is dark is because we never know what the outcome will be. It is a mystery.

12.

Self-portrait

Lhakpa Doma

Self-portrait



This is a self portrait that represents my religion, my ambition, and my personal nature. In the picture the flower and the wheel that has replaced the head is a linoleum print. I love nature and love being around it, and that is the reason why I have made the background full of flowers with leaves. I drew pictures of flowers and leaves from a greeting card that one of my friends had sent me. In the portrait, I have glued a silhouette of a nurse to show my commitment and my future. In the place of my head I have printed a wheel, which is also called the wheel of Dharma which represents Buddha's teaching. This wheel particularly has eight spokes which represent the eight noble paths that Buddha showed us to take in order to achieve enlightenment. The eight spokes represent the 1) right view, 2) right intention, 3) right speech, 4) right action, 5) right livelihood, 6) right effort, 7) right concentration and 8) right mindfulness. I grew up listening to my grandmother's stories. She always used to teach us about Buddha's teaching and Buddha's stories which have a great impact on me; so I thought instead of showing my physical body why not show what I always believe in and how I feel inside. I

have painted the wheel blue because my favourite color is blue. I have cut white papers in the shape of a bird and glued them together to represent peace. I want peace and happiness to fly everywhere and especially in a time like this when the world is facing a pandemic. The colors I chose here are blue, red, yellow, green and white, which according to Buddhism, represent the five elements which are fundamental for human beings and nature.

Part IV

Recipe

13.

Gajar Ka Halwa

Ritika Talwar

Gajar Ka Halwa

Gajar ka Halwa is one of the most common desserts made in Indian households. It is cooked on simple occasions. Gajar ka Halwa translates to 'Carrot Pudding' in English. Carrots are native to the country of Afghanistan and were first brought to India by the Dutch. They were initially grown in the northern region and through various experiments of cooking, the recipe of Gajar ka Halwa, also known as 'Gajrela' was invented. The desert is delicious and is often prepared on celebratory occasions during the winter season including various Indian festivals, such as Diwali - the festival of lights and the New Year's Eve.

To cook Gajrela, the ingredients you need can be easily accessible in your kitchen. It approximately takes around 45-60 mins to make. I am sharing my mother's recipe here.



Ingredients: (6 to 8 bowls serving size)

- ¼ cup Ghee (clarified butter)
- 2 cup of Cream
- 1 cup of Sugar
- ¾ cups of Milk Powder
- A pinch of Cardamom Powder
- 1 cup of Dry Nuts
- 5-8 Carrots (Red Carrots Preferably), this will allow for 10-12 cups of serving.

Directions:

1. Start off by rinsing the carrots thoroughly and using a hand grater to grate the carrots.
2. On the side, get a pan on the stove and melt one tablespoon of ghee and toss the almonds, nuts and raisins. Let them golden for a while. Once done, set them aside.
3. Now get another pan; a heavy-bottom pan. This will allow the halwa to be cooked and the ghee to heat up. Add the grated carrots to the pan and switch the heat to medium-high heat. Sauté the carrots for a minute or two and add cream to the pan. Keep mixing everything until it is all blended well together. Now set the heat to medium and let the carrots cook.
4. To get the best tasting gajrela, you have to keep stirring. Keep stirring until the carrots absorb every last bit of the cream. Do this for 10-12 minutes.
5. Once you see the carrots are soft, add sugar and cardamom powder to the mix till it's all well blended.
6. Continue to cook the halwa over medium heat until the moisture has evaporated and ghee starts to ooze out from around the corners for 10-15 mins.
7. Once all the liquid evaporated, stir in the milk powder and mix it till it is blended completely.
8. Lastly, add 2 tablespoons of ghee and cook for another 2 minutes.
9. Now, take it off the flame and garnish with the toasted nuts while it's warm and enjoy your Gajar ka halwa!

Part V

Authors

14.

Authors' Bios

Indrani Bhattacharjee

Indrani Bhattacharjee is a student at LaGuardia Community College's International High School. She was born and raised in Bangladesh. In 2016, she and her parents moved to the United States. She aims to get her Bachelor's degree in Biology and hopes to pursue medicine in the future. She has always been interested in learning new languages and collecting books. She is trilingual and can communicate in Bangla, English, and Hindi. Her long-term goal will always be to remain faithful to her roots, to be as helpful as she wished, and to keep her passion for learning alive.

Jack Daly

Jack Daly is a 24 year old Creative Writing Student originally from the Bronx. In addition to his studies at LaGuardia, in his free time he enjoys playing soccer, rugby, and writing fiction. He likes LaGuardia Community College because he feels that it creates an environment in which students develop close relationships to each other as well as their professors; you're seen as an individual rather than just another face in the crowd. He plans to continue his studies in all facets of Writing at a four year college this coming fall, and his goal is to work as a Journalist once he has completed his degree.

Lhakpa Doma

Lhakpa Doma is a student at LaGuardia who is studying Nursing. Doma has always wanted to serve society, and used to do volunteer work back home in Nepal. So after coming to the United States, Doma resumed school and decided to be a nurse to pursue a passion of helping people in need.

Chethana Gallage Dona

Born and raised in Sri Lanka, Chethana has also lived in South Korea and India, before coming to the U.S. in 2015 for her higher education. She pursued an A.S. in Biology at LaGuardia Community College and graduated in Fall 2018. Here, she served as the co-President of the Alpha Theta Phi Chapter. She was also a part of America Needs You, President's Society, ASAP peer mentors and CRSP scholars' program. In Spring 2020, she received her B.A. in Biology from Hunter College. Upon graduation, Chethana worked as a research technician at the Hospital for Special Surgery, studying therapeutics for different skeletal dysplasia through several animal and clinical studies. Currently, she is completing her M.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies in Biological and Physical sciences at Touro College of Osteopathic medicine, hoping to enter the Doctor of Osteopathy Program in Fall 2022. Chethana currently serves as the Co-Vice President of the Alpha Theta Phi Alumni Association and is passionate about mentoring students pursuing the pre-med pathway.

Soleil Griffin

Soleil Griffin graduated from LaGuardia Community College in 2017 where she served as VP of Retention and Recruitment and Co-coordinator for the HIA project for the Alpha Theta Phi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. Ms. Griffin later obtained a Bachelor's degree from Baruch College in 2020. She currently works as the Director of Operations for the New York State Assembly. She is the Founder and President of Inspiring Change Within the Youth Inc., which provides yoga workshops to students ages 13-17 in Queens Village. Ms. Griffin serves as President of the newly formed Alpha Theta Phi Alumni Association.

Tasqui E. Guayasamin

Tasqui Guayasamin is a student at LaGuardia Community College currently majoring in Healthcare Management. He was born in Quito, Ecuador. He aims to help improve the health of the immigrant community with the Medicinal Biomagnetism system. He is fluent in Spanish and English. Tasqui enjoys service related work and looks forward to using his organizational skills to protect the environment.

Abigail Guzman

Abigail Guzman is a first generation immigrant from the Southern Philippines. Prior to living in New York City, her family worked in coastal areas in Ecuador. Her exposure to nature and wildlife reflects in most of the themes in her artwork. She is majoring in Fine Arts aiming to become an illustrator to produce books to promote environmental awareness.

ChunTat Lau

ChunTat Lau is a Chinese American who studied mainly in Hong Kong for 14 years during his childhood. Currently a civil engineering major in LaGuardia Community College, he is looking forward to graduating. He is a food enthusiast and enjoys drawing, cooking, and doing comedic impressions (i.e. Kermit the frog).

Phone Myint Maung (Huzaifah Islam-Khan)

Phone Myint Maung (Huzaifah Islam-Khan) belongs to a persecuted Rohingya ethnic minority in Burma. He recently moved to the United States to pursue his education and is currently majoring in Philosophy at LaGuardia Community College. He works as a Teaching Assistant at the Islamic Seminary of America and aspires to become an academic within the respective disciplines of Philosophy and Islamic Studies. His research interests include theology, historiography, metaphysics, law, epistemology, and ethics.

Allison Ospina

Allison Ospina is an Early College Initiative (ECI) student in her second year at LaGuardia Community College pursuing an A.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering. She serves as Vice President of Service for the Alpha Theta Phi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. She was born and raised in New York City but is from a Colombian household. She is also involved in the LaGuardia CUNY Explorers program, a program that teaches middle and high school students about higher education. Allison's dream career is to become a math teacher, or an educator in the field of STEM because of her strong passion for math and science. During her free time, Allison loves playing video games with her younger brother and seeks opportunities that allow her to learn from others.

Will Ruehle

Will Ruehle is a language educator, intersectional activist, and interdisciplinary artist. His education includes courses at the Virginia School of the Arts, Northwestern, Brown, and LaGuardia Community

College. Will taught briefly in Kenya and Colombia before settling in New York City, where he led adolescent programs in theater, music, comedy, and film. Currently tutoring Spanish and learning Tagalog, Will begins an education Master's at NYU this summer.

Peter Saverino

Peter Saverino is a student at LaGuardia Community College studying Travel, Tourism & Hospitality Management. Peter was born in New Jersey to a mother from Toronto, Canada and a father from Brooklyn. Peter served four years in the Navy, but longed to return to his city, New York. He started bartending in 1996 and has been in the service industry ever since. He has been bartending and managing a bar in the East Village for 21 years and decided it was time for a change.

Ritika Talwar

Ritika is an immigrant who was born and raised in the state of Punjab, India. Since she was little, she looked up to her uncle who worked on building complex structures around the city so Ritika chose to major in civil engineering. Ritika plans to continue her education by going to a four-year school to complete her degree in engineering and become a civil engineer. She loves to spend time with her family and listen to old stories with her grandparents who help her keep connected to her culture.

Nyla Ward

Nyla Ward is a New York native who studies English Literature at LaGuardia Community College. Born to parents who migrated from the West Indies, Nyla has grown up honoring her West Indian and her Afro American heritage which inspires her work as a writer. In her downtime, Nyla enjoys writing short stories, hanging out with friends and relaxing with her cat Rigby. In the future, Nyla plans to pursue her M.A. in English Literature at Columbia University.

