



Joyti Chand: Taking Time To Heal

At the South Asian Network (SAN) we work with youth and older South Asian people to engage them in dialogues on racism, violence within the family, and immigration. We look at how policies on these issues impact the community. The question is, how do we do that so that the community feels a sense of entitlement and ownership?

A lot of it also has to do with storytelling. Policy is often seen like this artificial thing out there, something you hear about on TV. But if you hear a personal story, it's easier to make connections to your own life. If you gather a group of people who have their own stories to share, they may challenge each other's existing assumptions and understand how their issues are related. Popular education is not just about developing a formal curriculum, but more about opening the space for sharing stories. It's a place to have people share and talk about their experiences, our vision for ourselves and our communities, and policies we need.

We know one leader doesn't have all the answers in the movement. In popular education, the traditional foundation of teacher and student is put aside. Instead, we learn from each other's stories. We then reflect on our own experiences as a community, do our own analysis, and move forward together. This process ensures that we are critical, and develop plans together, so that people are not excluded or marginalized, or a small group of people is making the decisions.

At SAN we provide a space for immigrants to talk

about the experiences back home, and connect them to how they experience repression here. About three years ago, we took a step back because there were issues that we needed to talk about—homophobia and sexism. SAN is already open to bringing out the issues, but we realized we needed to do more. We needed to build in resources to identify and address some of the key issues of the queer community. We got together some folks from Satrang, a queer South Asian group, and others from the community who cared about building a space for queer South Asian folk and allies.

We spoke individually with all staff and board members about their comfort level with queer issues and whether SAN should move forward on addressing these concerns in our work. First, we conducted three trainings and dialogues to provide a space for people to talk about how they grew up, messages around gender, immigration rights, and all the different things that impact us around sexual orientation.

Popular education is a long term process. Just challenging one policy often distracts us from the work of doing community education or creating forums for the community. It happens in my work—we focus on responding to hate crimes, employment and housing discrimination, workers' rights—and that's important work. But popular education methodologies urge us to take the time we need to share, heal, and move forward together. ■

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