

June 14, 2004

PROTEST THE FIRING OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN FOR WEARING NOSE STUDS

Starbucks fired Aisha Syed and Benita Singh, two women of South Asian origin who had worked for the company for some years at Richmond and Tinseltown, for refusing to remove their nose studs.

Starbucks says that its dress code allows only ear piercing and no other body piercing. It says that its policy is based on hygiene. It says that it does not want to offend its clients who might object to being served by people like Aisha and Benita.

Starbucks' argument is false and its dress code is unjustified in its discrimination. There is no hygienic reason to prohibit nose piercing, especially since ear piercing is allowed. There is no reason to assume that the wearing of nose studs is offensive to customers of coffee shops in Canada.

South Asian women have worn nose rings and studs for close to a thousand years. Traditionally, women all across South Asia have worn them as a sign of *saubhagya* or good fortune. Young women of South Asian origin living in the West usually don't have their nose pierced so as not to be more conspicuous in relation to the dominant culture. Many, however, wear nose studs to affirm their distinctive identity.

For South Asian diasporic women nose studs are not merely ornamental. They symbolize the wearer's identification with their culture. They state a cultural politics.

Starbucks' dress code accepts ear piercing because it is a "normal" part women's ornamentation in the West. It rejects other forms of body piercing because these are considered "subcultural." In prohibiting nose studs it degrades an important part of South Asian tradition to the status of a subculture in the West. This is cultural racism, an unjustified act of discrimination.

Protest this discrimination and affirm the acceptance of cultural diversity in Canada.

- Tell the manager or fill out a comment card at your local Starbucks
- Fill out a Starbucks online customer comment card at: www.Starbucks.com/customers/contact.asp
- Demand that Starbucks change its policy to conform to Canada's multicultural identity and that Starbucks apologize to the women they have fired.
- Sign our petition at: <http://www.PetitionOnLine.com/sansadbc/petition.html>

PRODUCED IN SOLIDARITY WITH AISHA SYED AND BENITA SINGH BY **SOUTH ASIAN NETWORK FOR SECULARISM AND DEMOCRACY (SANSAD)**, Suite 435, 205-329 North Road Coquitlam, BC, V3K 6Z8.