

“ SISTER OUTSIDERS” –
THE REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE
IN SELECTED WRITINGS
BY SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN

DEVARAKSHANAM GOVINDEN

2000

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by

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dedicated to

my grandmother ASSEERWADHUM MANIKKAM

my mother DEVAVARUM JACK

and for

my daughters MARYLLA GRACE and DELPHINE DOMINIQUE

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CHAPTER 1

EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERARY CRITICISM: THE WRITINGS OF INDIAN WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

"Will the Commission be sensitive to the word 'truth'? If its interest in truth is linked only to amnesty and compensation, then it will have chosen not truth but justice. If it sees truth as the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense." (Krog 1998:16)

Introduction: A Time of Memory

In 1997 the then South African Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, referred to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa's reconstruction and development period as an attempt at "healing the wounds of history" (in Nixon 1996:74). As with the TRC there has been much need among many South Africans since the transition to a democratic society to recount the suppressed histories of the past. One of the ways of re-writing history has been through the recalling of personal experiences of the apartheid era, in the quest to create an alternative national identity that transcends the separate 'nationalisms' that existed in the past. Rob Nixon has pointed out that "the 1990's have witnessed an upsurge of South African memoirs and autobiographies as writers have begun mining the hitherto under-explored past with increasing vigour" (Nixon 1996:74).

Nixon has argued that "a refusal of amnesia" is as important as some of the more material changes that have taken place in the reconstruction of the new society:

Many writers feel that post-apartheid literature plays an invaluable role by preventing, through restless exploration, the closure of history's channels. If the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has institutionalised the *rhetoric of witness* as a step towards healing, the new literature of autobiographical witness promises a more lasting *refusal of amnesia*. To revisit history can be a regenerative endeavour; it need not entail being stuck in the acrimony of the past. The lifting of censorship, the unbanning of outlawed political parties, amnesty for political prisoners, the exiles' return, and Mandela's electoral victory have collectively led to a new liberty in which to engage history in more candid, textured, and impassioned terms. The result has been not just a return to the past but a return in a more personal way. (Nixon 1996:77, my emphases)

J U Jacobs, writing earlier, in the watershed year of 1994, also sees the changes in the literary environment as a reflection of the changing political climate in South Africa: Since 1991 South Africa has begun to recover from the censorship and banning under the Nationalist Government of the previous forty years; only

now can this history freely be written and freely read. The country is at present engaged in a process of self-narration - a national recollection of those blanked-out areas of its identity. The current proliferation of South African life stories may be seen as part of the autobiographical impulse of an entire nation finally bringing its past into proper perspective. (Jacobs 1994:878)

In recent times South African Indian women have been part of this large company of South African writers engaging in a "refusal of amnesia" by dealing with the apartheid past in a "personal way". They have been among those undertaking the process of "self-narration" that foregrounds some of those "blanked-out areas" of South Africa's identity as a nation. Among these Indian women writers are Jayapraga Reddy, Agnes Sam, Farida Karodia, Zuleikha Mayat, Fayiza Khan, Dr Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer. In previous decades the writings of Ansuyah Singh and Muthal Naidoo constituted significant literary milestones. While some of these Indian writers receive attention, others are barely recognised as part of the larger body of South African writers. Historically, matters of race, ethnicity, and identity under an increasingly intransigent and repressive white regime assumed particular importance in South Africa (see Jolly 1996:371), and these are all dealt with in different ways in these writings by Indian women. The writings are not only significant in signalling local discursive issues; their significance may be gauged by the resonance they have with post-colonial writings in general, where pervasive concerns are those of colonial and neo-colonial domination (and in South Africa, rampant racial oppression), dispossession and cultural fragmentation, finding and defining 'home', crises of identity, and living with differences.

Although many of these issues are dealt with in writings by Indian women in South Africa these writings have largely gone unnoticed in South African literary anthologising and criticism. They have not been properly recognised locally or internationally as part of the collective critique of South African culture and politics. In this period of on-going change it is necessary to incorporate these marginal voices in a more determined way into this critical discourse. A distinctly "gynocritical" approach, against a male-dominated and male-defined literary endeavour in recent decades, has brought to the foreground writings of women in South Africa. With some effort, one may discover that Indian women's writings in South Africa also provide a useful lens with which to read and re-read the important issues of our time. As with those of other black women writers in South Africa who were largely excluded and 'othered', autobiographical, fictional and discursive writing produced by Indian women in South Africa constitutes a way of "talking back" (Smith, Sidonie 1993:20), and it demands to be recognised as such.

The political significance of an excavatory project of this kind should not be underestimated. Florence Stratton, looking at exclusionary practices in African literature, argues that excluding women's writing has serious consequences in all walks of life: "The critical practice of excluding women's literary expression from African literature is in Frederic

Jameson's terms 'a socially symbolic act'. It reproduces in symbolic form, and therefore reinforces, institutional forms of exclusion that operate to marginalise women in society" (Stratton 1994:176). Accordingly, Stratton argues that the attempt to write women back into the literary tradition is also an attempt to write women back into every other sphere of social life (176).

The influence of colonialism and of apartheid is fundamental in the exclusion of black women writers in general. Margaret Higonnet states that a "discourse of centres and margins, of course, can be used to discredit or trivialise literatures on stylistic, generic, or historic grounds", with Western and European literature seen as the centre, and African and Asian literature viewed as marginal (Higonnet 1994:200). Indian women's writings in South Africa have obviously been smothered in the larger politics of marginality that has attended the production and reception of literary texts historically, to the extent that the marginalisation has gone unnoticed even in corrective archaeological work. The idea of a 'core' and 'periphery' operates in a national context as well as globally.

Women's writing is not the only corpus that has suffered the fate of being seen as 'non-mainstream'. Higonnet points out that in the traditional delineation of high art versus low art, based on the binarism of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, not only women's literature but ethnic literature, especially that written in minority cultures, has also had to suffer marginalisation (198). In the light of this observation, it is arguable that Indian women's writings in South Africa have suffered marginalisation not only because of gender discrimination, but also due to the fact that they have been seen as part of a minority culture.

In this study as a whole my purpose is both excavatory and discursive. I draw attention to a neglected corpus of writing in South African literary criticism. I foreground the writings of South African Indian women in a comprehensive overview of some of the most important works that have emerged so far. In exploring this field I simultaneously engage in a critical discussion of issues of identity and difference in relation to these writings, and interrogate the very notion of 'South African Indian women'. In this introductory chapter I consider exclusionary practices in South African literary anthologising and criticism in relation to South African Indian women's writings, and provide the broad scope of the study. Underpinning this study, and linking the two processes - gynocritical and discursive - is a critical appreciation of the modes of representing identity and difference that an exploration of Indian women's writing might yield. Through genres such as autobiography, autobiographical fiction, poetry, fiction, short stories, drama, essays and discursive writings, I explore how social meanings and personal experiences are articulated, and how the writers, portraying aspects of South African social and cultural history for the past one hundred and forty years, contribute to the enrichment and expansion of South African literary and cultural studies.

Exclusion of Indian Women's Writings in South African Literary Criticism

Some of the recent critical discussions and surveys of South African literatures proceed as if writing by South African Indian women simply does not exist. The exclusion of Indian women's writings in South Africa must be seen as a dimension of the larger exclusion of women's writings, white and black, from South African literature in general. Such exclusion is the result, among other things, of the cultural politics of gender and of race in English literature - a literature which served as the foundations for the development of South African literature.

The marginalisation of Indian women writers in South African literary historiography and criticism may have been caused by several factors. Given the separation of racial groups historically, and the dominance of male writers, the literary achievements of Indian women have not been widely known by local Western audiences. Since these efforts have been relegated to the margins of South African society, anthologists, publishers and researchers have been inclined to gloss over them. Even 'fringe' activities in the arts have been those of Western alternative forms rather than those from different cultural traditions.

I believe, too, that the institutionalisation of English Studies in South Africa has also affected the reading and reception of texts by Indian women. 'Tradition' is so easily naturalised that we tend to forget that it has been created. Rory Ryan has stated that "hegemonic discursive practice represses, marginalises and recuperates all rival practices in order to present itself as crucial; its existence is a sign of limitation and closure masquerading as freedom, invigoration and necessity" (Ryan 1990:2). For Indian women writers in South Africa, I would argue that this marginalisation resulted in a cycle of neglect: it has been detrimental, among other things, to the development of a more vigorous culture of writing and publishing, and to a fuller appreciation of the works that have already been produced.

When one is engaged in excavatory work of women's writing, and black women's writings in particular, one must be crucially aware of the internal processes of hierarchization and the way in which a literary hierarchy tends to be patterned on the social hierarchy (see Davies, Carol Boyce 1986:2). While the latter is criticised by liberal white male critics, complicity in the former tends to be overlooked. Carol Boyce Davies' arguments are directly pertinent to the discussion of the exclusion in South Africa of writings by Indian women, which have very likely been seen as a minority within a minority. She draws attention to the notion of "major" literature and "minor" literatures, and the fact that "minor literature" is equated with "minorities". This is what seems to have happened to Indian women's writings in the South African literary tradition. With Boyce Davies we should ask, what defines and constitutes a major literature? What makes a literature or writer minor or major? As she points out, such a discussion is central to the "transformation of curricula as it identifies issues of marginalisation and the subordination of a variety of un-

der-represented literatures and voices" (4).

The extent of, and possible reasons for, the exclusion of writings by Indian women might be more fully appreciated if one took a historical perspective and tried to understand the direction a local tradition of writing in English took, a tradition that emerged from the mainstream metropolitan one. A historical survey may, of course, be used to 'prove' all sorts of things. I concede that presenting a literary history is a process of historical reconstruction in itself, and agree with David Bunn that a more critical approach would take into consideration questions of genealogy, genre and political consciousness, and the way in which they constitute either internal and external determinations (Bunn 1996:33).

I present here a broad sweep of literary and critical publications in this century simply to trace a general pattern of exclusion of Indian women's writings. I believe that excavatory study revolving around this theme would show the ideological trajectory of literary studies in South Africa that resulted in such a pattern of exclusion. I consider literary production and its reception in tandem as complementary activities in the development of a literary tradition, and cross the decades looking at patterns of emphasis and inclusion in the different genres. My modest exercise should be seen in the context of a wider call for such activity. Critics intermittently have been iterating the need for a general study of this nature to expose literary studies to itself. There is definitely a need for historical anthologies of South African criticism (see Driver 1996) in order to develop a more critical approach to the inclusions and exclusions of the past. Stephen Gray, for example, has argued that an examination of past anthologies would help one to trace the historical construction of South African poetry (see Klopper 1990:268-269). He calls for greater independence of writing from criticism so that there would be more self-conscious criticism: "that Southern African English literature has not created a significant accompanying critical machine other than that sustained by its own authors is symptomatic of the peculiar lack of self-awareness of the literature itself" (Gray 1979:9). And Ryan, in a scathing attack on "literary-intellectual behaviour in South Africa", has argued that "there is pitifully little research being undertaken into the sociology of knowledge in literary studies in South Africa" (Ryan 1990:11).

Throughout the twentieth century excavation of writings and the re-ordering of the literary landscape has been a major critical activity, but my point is that it has been selective. The present study may be seen as following this tradition by identifying and addressing a lacuna: a considerable corpus of published (and unpublished) writing by Indian women that has been overlooked by literary anthropologists, critics, and historians - a corpus that is generally not seen as part of or relevant to South African cultural history, literature and historical discourse. Each decade had its own critical priorities and imperatives and, as we shall see, Indian women's writings hardly featured among them.

In the early decades of the twentieth century there was an attempt in South Africa to

construct an indigenous English literary tradition, separate from that of the British. But 'indigenous' did not really include black writers as much as it did white writers of English descent, writing of South African experiences. The reasons why white women writers such as Olive Schreiner and Pauline Smith were readily incorporated into the South African literary landscape must be seen in this light. It is only in recent times that critical feminist readings of their work have developed and they have been claimed as part of a women's tradition of writing in South Africa, with the work of Dorothy Driver and Cherry Clayton, among others, significant in this field.

The early English anthologists, if we take one example, found it difficult, in their attempts to find roots in African soil, to free themselves completely from Eurocentric literary influences. F C Slater's *The Centenary Book of South African Verse* (1925) is an early example of drawing attention to an emerging indigenous tradition in this way. Slater, whose revised anthology, *The New Centenary Book of South African Verse* was published in 1945, was among those trying to break from the colonial hold, but Romantic and Victorian influences made him construct "a pre-industrial, arcadian South Africa" in his collection (Klopper 1990:275). Gray points out that no oral black poets, even in translation, appear in this anthology (Gray 1979:170). Roy Campbell is another classic example of the attempt to establish a tradition of South African poetry. With William Plomer, Campbell edited in 1926 a literary journal called *Voorslag* ("The Whiplash"), to encourage the development of a distinctive South African Anglophone literary culture. However, Campbell has been seen by a critic such as Chapman as drawing on "a British-South African Imperial tradition of African exotica" that has its origins, for example, in the novels of Rider Haggard (in Klopper 1990:281). In the immediate post-war period, Roy MacNab's co-edited *South African Poetry - A New Anthology* (1948) was the first to feature a black poet, H I E Dhlomo. MacNab also edited *Towards the Sun* (1950) and *Poets in South Africa* (1958). These local critics, with their landmark anthologies (see Lockett 1991:26), promoted writers selectively to serve as defining examples of South African literary history. In developing this separatist trajectory, these early poets and critics tended to ignore completely or relegate to the margins the writings that existed in other communities in South Africa.

This state of affairs was to persist for decades in spite of the emergence of a tradition of black protest literature, of which *Drum* magazine in the 50's may be seen as the forerunner. There was still the hankering after the metropolitan centre of English Studies in the work of Roy MacNab and Guy Butler who dominated the 50's and 60's. Guy Butler's main cause was the inclusion of South African literature in university syllabuses, but this was still directed to white writers. Butler's *A Book of South African Verse* (1959) worked towards a 'canon' of established poets. In his work, *The Republic and the Arts*, published in 1964, he still saw whites and blacks in broad, stereotypical ways. However the creative activity at this time was showing another trajectory, as poets such as Sydney Clouts, Ruth

Miller and Douglas Livingstone, who were coming into their own, were more interested in forging a peculiarly African style in their writing than Butler was. Their chief responsibility and objective was to secure the freedom of the writer from the censorship laws that characterised the period. Es'kia Mphahlele, as a black writer, in his important work, *The African Image* (1962), was also calling for Southern African English writing to be seen in the larger context of African literature and experience (Gray 1979:10-11), in spite of the metropolitan pull that Butler and others succumbed to.

The 60's, referred to as the "silent decade" by Michael Chapman, was a time when a spate of black writing was banned and many well-known writers went into exile (Chapman 1996:246). Chapman points out that it was for this reason that *Drum* magazine was particularly necessary, as it continued with valiant "acts of recovery and reassessment" of black writing. Contributing to this "silence" was the vigorous implementation of the apartheid laws and its categorisings, which served to create marginal literatures, and diminish their value in the process. There is no doubt that Indian women's writings suffered as a result. For example, in 1960 Ansuyah Singh published her novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*. This was a historic literary event, as it was the first time that a black woman had published a novel, but the book remained largely unknown outside the Indian community. It must also be remembered that there were few publishing outlets in this period; Singh used an obscure publisher called Purfleet for the publication of her novel. One of the lone efforts at literary publishing for black writing emerged in the late 60's, when the literary magazine *The Classic*, initiated by Nat Nakasa and Barney Simon, encouraged writing by blacks; but initiatives such as these were difficult to sustain.

Following in the footsteps of Campbell and Plomer, Jack Cope and Uys Krige compiled *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* (1968) which contained English poems, and translations of poems in Afrikaans and African languages (e.g. Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu). The compilers praised Campbell and Plomer, who in their opinion, had "started a totally new direction in South African English verse [with] their fierce criticism and rejection of established values" (Cope and Krige 1968:20). In their collection Cope and Krige included lesser-known English and Afrikaner women poets such as Phyllis Haring, Anne Welsh, Jill King, Sheila Cussons, and Olga Kirsch (together with the better-known Elizabeth Eybers, Ingrid Jonker and Ruth Miller). They did note in their introduction that "men and women of all races write verse in English", and included Indians in this category (21), but did not include any verse by Indian writers, male or female.

As 'indigenous' writing was re-defined, especially in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and the Soweto uprising, which had a significant impact on the development of literature in South Africa, there was a more determined critical effort to include black voices in the literary tradition. A spate of literary histories and critical writing mainly against apartheid emerged, and it was promoted largely by the English-speaking academy. Christopher

Heywood, who edited *Aspects of South African Literature* (1976), urged the compilation of a complete history, one that filled the gaps and cut through all boundaries. By the end of the 70's Stephen Gray's *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* in 1979, based on his PhD thesis, *The Critical Co-Ordinates of South African Literature* (1977) was published. This marked an important event as Gray, looking particularly at fiction, criticised the trajectory of English writing that maintained a liberal tradition in South African literary studies (Gray 1979:152). Although Sarah Christie, Geoff Hutchings and Don Maclennan, in their critical work, *Perspectives on South African Fiction* (1980), were to criticise Gray for neglecting to see that South African fiction extended beyond realist fiction - they felt that he distorted the tradition and neglected to include writers such as Gordimer and JM Coetzee - they do acknowledge that Gray had rightly drawn attention to survey-criticism that tends to confuse bibliographical description with the genealogy of a literature.

Christie, Hutchings and Maclennan also exhorted all to move away from the tunnel vision of liberalism. They expanded the critical discourses around English literature to include romance, pastoralism, realism and fabulation, traversing the literary landscape from Rider Haggard to J M Coetzee. Their work was a milestone at the time as it included "fabulists" such as Sheila Fugard and J M Coetzee, but also "pastoralists" such as Sol Plaatje, and "realists" such as Es'kia Mphahlele. It was a significant step that these black writers were now being admitted into the 'great tradition' of South African writing, although such inclusions were generally cautious.

The 80's saw the period of indigenisation become more clearly defined as local black writers were more pointedly represented in anthologies. Kelwyn Sole, Isabel Hofmeyr, Stephen Gray, Tim Couzens, Mike Kirkwood and Michael Chapman himself contributed significantly to this development (Chapman 1996:419). Hofmeyr and Kirkwood, for example, foregrounded the influence of Marxism in the critique of literary studies. They were highly critical of colonial as well as liberal ideology in the study of literature, and introduced a more clearly defined class-based analysis (Klopper 1990:258). They also responded readily to the alternative publishing ventures such as *Drum* magazine and *Staffrider*. These critics were fighting another kind of exclusion, that based on race, class and ideology. With the decade enduring two States of Emergency their work had a particular significance on the socio-political front.

There was a self-conscious attempt at this time to see the literary establishment become less elitist, to recover forgotten indigenous texts, and to encourage the enterprises of new local literary publishers. Revisionist historiography turned to detailed, local work, with spaces being opened up to small voices, even though some rather "dubious colonials" were resurrected in the process (see Chapman 1996:418, 419). But attention was generally directed to black male writers, rather than to black women writers. Priority was given to race and apartheid and the marginalisation of black men. Ingrid de Kok points out that the

"battle over authority, and over the 'authentic' representations of the terms of South African life...characterised literary discussions during the apartheid decades" (de Kok 1996:6). And it is clear that men were seen as providing these representations rather than women. In important anthologies of this time, such as *The Return of the Amasi Bird* (1982), *Voices from Within* (1982) and the *Staffrider Tenth Anniversary* collection (1988) women's voices, black and white, were distinctly absent or minimal (see Lockett 1991:73).

In the various attempts to include black writers - Indian, African, and Coloured - in anthologies and critical commentaries, Indian male writers, rather than their female counterparts, became the perennial favourites, and their own published collections seemed to add to their stature. Well-known among male Indian poets was Shabbir Banoobhai, whose collections of poems, *Echoes of My Other Self* (1980) and *Shadows of a Sun-darkened Land* (1984) both received acclaim. Essop Patel was another writer who appeared frequently in anthologies of poetry. He produced collections of his poetry, *They Came at Dawn* (1980), *Fragments in the Sun* (1985) and *The Bullet and the Bronze Lady* (1987), and was seen as an influential voice.

Exclusionary practices in respect of Indian women's writings were probably dictated by perceptions of political relevance. Indian women's writings would not have been seen as being political. Through his depictions of Fordsburg and Vrededorp of the pre-Sharpeville era in *The Hajji and Other Stories* (Shava 1989:154,155), in the tradition of 'Soweto' writing, Ahmed Essop was considered an important writer in the 80's in the context of Black writing and his short stories frequently reproduced. Andre Brink's and J M Coetzee's anthology of short stories, *A Land Apart - A South African Reader*, includes Essop's short story "Dolly" (Brink and Coetzee 1986). In *The Vita Anthology of new South African Short Fiction*, edited by Marcia Leveson (1988), Essop's short story, "Love" is selected, together with Deena Padayachee's "A New Woman in Town" and Farouk Asvat's "Forgiveness". Farouk Asvat drew from Black Consciousness for his collection of poems, *A Celebration of Flames* (1987). Achmat Dangor who wrote a short novel, *Waiting for Leila* (1981), and published a collection of poems, *Bulldozer* (1983), was also seen as a politically 'engaged' black writer. Dangor's later novel, *Z Town Trilogy* (1990), and a collection of poems entitled *Private Voice* (1992) became widely known for its daring political content.

Michael Chapman, who made a major contribution to the development of literary studies in South Africa in the 80's, and ensured that new black voices were constantly foregrounded, especially promoted Indian male writers. Many black male writers, including Indian male writers, were specifically included in his critical writings and anthologies. Chapman's anthologies, *A Century of South African Poetry* (1981), *Voices from Within: Black Poetry from Southern Africa* (co-edited with Achmat Dangor, 1982), *South African Poetry: A Modern Perspective* (1982), *The Paperbook of South African English Poetry* (1986), *Accents - An Anthology of Poetry for the English-Speaking World*

(co-edited with Tony Voss 1986), featured poems by Shabbir Banoobhai, Farouk Asvat, Essop Patel and Achmat Dangor. Chapman's analysis of Banoobhai, included in an analysis of significant black writing of the period (in *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective*), exposed his writing to the general reading public (It should be pointed out that writers such as Asvat and Dangor would not see themselves as Indian writers but as South African and African writers). Chapman's efforts were clearly 'excavatory', as this was the first time that Banoobhai was given any critical attention, and they were probably influenced by the fact that Kelwyn Sole was responsible for nurturing the young poet into print. Yet there was no apparent awareness of the existence of Indian women who were also writing at the time. The only Indian woman writer that Chapman notes is Jayapraga Reddy and this is likely through her inclusion in the *Staffrider* series.

In her critical work on black South African writings, *A Vision of Order - A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980)* Ursula Barnett also gave attention to Indian male writers. She provided a more comprehensive bibliography than other compilers to date on Indian male writers. Arguing for inclusivity - "you can't carve up the country of the imagination" - Barnett, drawing from Es'kia Mphahlele, expands the definition of 'black' or 'African' writing to encompass colour or birth but also political purposes. African writing is seen as literature with "an African setting authentically handled and to which experience originating in Africa are integral" (Barnett 1983:7).

In the anthology of South African poetry, *SA in Poesie/ SA in Poetry* (1988), edited by Johan van Wyk et al., which tried to provide a corrective balance between Afrikaans and Black poets, the poetry of B D Lalla, hitherto unknown to the wider literary community, was included. Lalla's poetry had not featured in any anthologies, and its inclusion was a necessary corrective. The importance of Lalla's work has been highlighted in Ayub Sheik's research on the writer (Sheik 1998). However, none of the other writings by male or female Indian writers was mentioned by Van Wyk and his fellow editors, and Lalla's inclusion might well have been accidental, or the result of a conscious decision to include an Indian poet. The anthology did not include a single Indian woman poet. If these anthologists had looked closely enough they would have seen a body of writing that was developing a political edge of its own.

Such exclusionary practices seemed to have become 'naturalised' in the literary critical imagination. In her paper on "Asian literature in South Africa" to the Bad Boll (Germany) Conference on South African Literature in 1987 Neela Govender-Alvarez-Pereyre also unwittingly foregrounds Indian male writers as being representative. She pointed out that "nothing comprehensive has been written so far on Asian South African writers in the field of creative literature" as it is "a literature in the making" (Govender-Alvarez-Pereyre 1987:53). She argued that this literature was occurring at a time when "the Asian community in South Africa finds itself, politically speaking, at a crossroads". Her paper focused

on the work of South African Indian male writers such as Ronnie Govender, Kriben Pillay and Farouk Asvat. However, Govender-Alvarez-Pereyre, a writer herself, neglected any reference to the writings of Indian women, even her own, and gave no hint that there was in existence a considerable body of Indian women's literary and non-literary work that had developed since the arrival of Indians in South Africa.

The only female writer who seemed to have enjoyed any critical attention in these years was Jayapraga Reddy. In the retrospective edition of *Staffrider, Ten Years of Staffrider* (1988), Reddy's short story, "The Spirit of Two Worlds" was included. Later anthologies were to continue with this trend. Percy Mosieleng and Temba Mhambi have included Reddy's short story, *Friends*, in their collection, *Contending Voices in South African Fiction* (1993).

The end of the decade of the 80's saw the publication of a critical survey of South African black writing, compiled by Piniel Viriri Shava: *A People's Voice - Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century* (1989). In his book there is an attempt to rectify the imbalance between white and black writers. The survey claims to "draw attention to the rich and diverse literary contribution that black South African novelists, poets and dramatists have made" (Shava 1989:cover page). It foregrounds writers such as Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali, James Matthews, Peter Abrahams and Alex La Guma but, almost predictably, omits women in general. In his criticism of the book a few years later, Mbulelo Mzamane draws attention to a "most telling indictment", that "*A People's Voice* turns out in the end to be no more than an African male-voice choir" (Mzamane 1991a:133,134). With the omission of black women's writings in general, there was no likelihood that Indian women's writings would have had any chance of being included in Shava's critical study.

A Female Tradition

An important development in the 80's was the publication of anthologies and collections of women's poetry and short stories and feminist literary criticism. Susan Brown, Isabel Hofmeyr and Susan Rosenberg edited the feminist publication, *LIP from Southern African Women* (1983), which was the first feminist anthology. It included a lone short story by Sherin Ahmed, entitled "Good Girls Don't Work", but no real attempt beyond this to find more Indian women's voices is evident. *Vukani Makhosikazi:South African Women Speak* (1985) edited by Jane Barrett et al; *Women in South Africa:From the Heart* (1988), edited by Seagang Tsikang and Dinah Lefakane and *Women in Southern Africa* (1987), a collection of essays edited by Christine Qunta followed, with further inclusions of women's writings and views. Although Indian women were not included, the volume is an important one as it dealt with "outstanding African women" from 1500 BC. Further examples of anthologies of women's writings that were published at this time were Ann Oosthuizen's *Sometimes When it Rains:Writings by South African Women* (1987), which included a

short story by Fatima Meer entitled "Amaphekula" (Terrorist), and Nohra Moerat's *Siren Songs: An Anthology of Poetry Written by Women* (1989).

Critical recognition increasingly emerged for women writers, many of them white. The theme of 'recovery', of retrieving a suppressed or lost tradition, of 'finding a voice', underlined this critical, excavatory work. In a climate of feminist ferment there was an attempt to unearth unknown women writers, to criticise the literary establishment for its neglect of women writers, and to develop anthologies, collections and critical works on women's writings. Some of the women writers who have been 'recovered' in this process and are now more widely known are Bertha Goudvis, Francis Bancroft, and Daphne Rook (see Clayton 1989b:6).

The eighties also was the time when black women's writing was coming into its own after the earlier lone attempts of Noni Jabavu (*Drawn in Colour* in 1960 and *The Ochre People* in 1963]), Bessie Head (*When the Rain Clouds Gather* in 1969) and Miriam Tlali (*Muriel at Metropolitan* in 1975). The achievement of Ellen Kuzwayo, with her autobiography, *Call Me Women* (1985), symbolised this breakthrough. Elleke Boehmer highlights the political importance of this black South African woman's autobiography:

...in the 1980s, during the years when government repression was at its height, autobiographies by black women first began to appear in significant numbers in South Africa, a development marked in particular by Ellen Kuzwayo's path-breaking *Call Me Woman* (1985). On the one hand, black South African women struggled to withstand the system of multiple discrimination that was apartheid. On the other, they tried to stake out a place for themselves in the always still male-dominated liberation movements. The autobiography allowed them to give shape to an identity grounded in these diverse experiences of endurance and overcoming. The life-story was also seen as a way of forging political solidarity, reaching out to black women caught in similar situations. (Boehmer 1995:225)

Apart from the autobiography of Ellen Kuzwayo, writings by Emma Mashinini, Miriam Tlali, Caesarina Kona Makhoere, Sindiwe Magona and Gcina Mhlope, became well known. Lesser known writers, and from an earlier time, such as Paulina Dlamini (nineteenth century), and composers and performers of *izibongo* (Zulu praise poetry), such as Princess Magogo, began to receive new critical attention, encouraged by the work of critics like Liz Gunner.

Cherry Clayton, also using Kuzwayo as an example, argued in *Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology* that the experience of authorship was important as it gave black women a voice (Clayton 1989b:6). Clayton maintained that the critical recovery and restoration of "lost" or "minor" women writers would revise "an explicit or implicit literary canon" (6). 'Claiming a voice' was, indeed, achieved for many black women through their writing. This notion of 'recovery' was indicated by some of the titles that were used (and the substantial work they signalled); for example, *Let it be Told*, by Lauretta Ngcobo (1988), was a collection of essays on black women's writings. Writing

helped black women to question and explore their reality. Tsitsi Dangarembga fictionalises this "process of expansion" in the figure of Tambu in her novel *Nervous Conditions*. The novel concludes with Tambu speaking of her desire to tell her story, which is also that of the other women in her life:

Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It is a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and four men, this story of how it all began.
(Dangarembga 1988:204)

In spite of the ferment around women's writings then, and the landmark achievements for women writers, laudable as these were, especially for black women writers, the decade of the eighties ended with scant critical attention still being accorded to Indian women's writings. The late eighties saw some attempt to include the writings of Indian women, but this occurred selectively and unevenly. Again, the only Indian woman writer who seems to have been noticed was Jayaprada Reddy, and it is likely that this was because she was already well known to the male literary establishment. Her short story, "The Spirit of Two Worlds", was included in the *Staffrider* anthology mentioned above, but as a solitary example, with no indication of a wider body of writing by Indian women. Individual writers who were foregrounded would be better appreciated if they were read in the context of other writers from their group and in their wider communities.

The 1990's saw the coming of age of feminist literary criticism in South Africa with the October 1990 issue of *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, edited by M J Daymond, and containing an important introductory overview, entitled "Feminism(s) and Writing in English in South Africa" by Cecily Lockett. Concentrating on feminist theory and criticism in the light of the "marked upsurge in writing by South African women, and in response to topical debates about women's place in the new South Africa" (Daymond 1990:i), the collection of essays signalled a major advance in literary scholarship in the country as race and gender were considered simultaneously. It also interrogated tensions within an emerging 'South African feminism' itself as it opened up discussion on 'positionality', with feminist critics reflecting self-consciously on their critical stances in relation to the texts they were reading.

For this special edition of *Current Writing* Daymond and Margaret Lenta held a workshop on "Black Women's Writing and Reading" which featured the critical views of Sanna Naidoo and Veni Soobrayan, together with those of Boitumelo Mofokeng, Thandi Moses, Lebohlang Sikwe and Momhle Tokwe. In 1996 Daymond's important compilation of critical essays, *South African Feminisms - Writing, Theory and Criticism 1990-1994*, which was also a critical milestone, was published, featuring the 1990 *Current Writing* articles

(including the workshop proceedings) as well as ten new essays. The publication engaged with the crucial questions related to a feminist politics of reading in the South African context. In trying to provide a comprehensive account of South African women's participation in the anti-apartheid struggles Daymond does highlight the significant role that Dr Goonam played. She points out that until a "feminist history of women in politics" is written the "role of 'coloured' and Indian women, as well as that of African and white women, will probably remain obscured" (Daymond 1996c:xxix). Although the collection of essays does not claim to be "exhaustive", as Barbara Bowen, the series editor, points out, it does not give any indication of the existence of a considerable corpus of Indian women's writings in South Africa.

Lockett's poetry anthology, *Breaking the Silence: A Century of South African Women's Poetry*, also appeared in 1990, and was another landmark in feminist studies in South Africa. Lockett adopted a "gynocritical" approach to her research, focusing on developing a gynocritical "map" or survey of women's poetry in South Africa. "Gynocriticism" is defined by Elaine Showalter as "the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female tradition" (Showalter 1986b:248). Lockett's work on the reconstruction and recovery of a female tradition of writing in South Africa, drawing mainly from Western feminism, was both necessary and timely. Lockett criticised the largely masculine trajectory of South African literature. She argued that English studies in South Africa was too busy trying to imitate the mainstream British tradition and to be acceptable to it to be aware of its own exclusionary practices:

This masculinisation of literary studies has its counterpart in South Africa, where South African academics suffering from colonial 'inferiority complexes' were fiercely protective of the 'great tradition' of English literature that they had inherited. They resisted the concept of an indigenous body of writing worthy of transmission to students, and saw their mission to be to teach the 'great' works of their English heritage. English was seen to be the masculine and strong subject, while South African literature in English was seen to be feminine and weak. This can be substantiated by the fact that although South African writing in English had a history of more than a century, the beginnings of the "rise" of South African literature in our universities can be roughly charted to the late 1950s and early 1960s, the period South Africa became a Republic and cut its ties with Britain by leaving the Commonwealth. (Lockett 1991:23)

Lockett cites other feminist critics who also took on the largely male literary establishment. There was strong criticism, for example, when no women poets were included in the publication, *Ten Years of Staffrider*, the retrospective anthology referred to already (other genres by women were represented, however). Boitumelo Mofokeng laments this exclusion and silencing of women. In her essay "Where are the women?" she writes:

...No reason can be sufficient to justify their exclusion: its effect has been to deny them not only the recognition which should belong to them as writers of our times, but their rightful place in the history of the development of our

culture...(In Lockett 1991:296)

Mofokeng draws attention to the exclusionary practices of *Staffrider* magazine:

Ten Years of Staffrider is the history of a magazine, of the people who established it, the writers who published in it...but the truth is that women did write for *Staffrider* and almost all of them have been excluded from this anthology. No reason can be sufficient to justify their exclusion: Its effect has been to deny them not only the recognition which should belong to them as writers of our times, but their rightful place in the history of the development of our culture. The international world has been denied the opportunity of knowing and understanding the role of women writers, especially black women writers. In South Africa...we have heard much in the last few years, about the importance of women's 'Breaking the Silence'; these women who wrote and performed their work have broken it. But this anthology, which ignores or forgets their work has been reimposing silence on them...(296-7)

Lockett drew attention to many suppressed voices in South African poetry. Among those black women who have been 'reclaimed' or foregrounded are Jennifer Davids, Gladys Thomas and Nise Malange. Through her excavatory research, Lockett concludes that Gladys Thomas was the first black woman in South Africa to publish a collection of poems, *Cry Rage*, published in 1972 (278). While Gladys Thomas and Jennifer Davids were the only black women poets to be published in the early 1970s, in the latter part of the decade more opportunities for black women poets, especially working-class black women poets, had become available with the advent of *Staffrider* magazine in 1978 (289). Lockett's anthology included many hitherto unknown women's voices (White, African and Coloured); however, it completely neglected Indian women's writings, and also the fact that Indian women were writing before the 70's. It is surprising that even revisionist and corrective anthologies such as Lockett's did not go far enough in tracking down further writers who had been marginalised.

It is interesting to note that Lockett cites colonial writings that depict the colonised and not also writings by the colonised themselves. These colonial writings were narrow, one-dimensional representations, typical of their time. I refer here to Lockett's citing a poem by Caroline Goodenough who, writing in the 1890's in Colonial Natal, depicts Africans and Indians in a stereotypical way. In Goodenough's poem, "Waiting", we see black women being objectified and exoticised:

A Zulu woman on the highway,
with burden hard to bear;
a slender Hindoo following
with black dishevelled hair,
and gaudy garments fluttering,
and jewel at her nose;
her silver anklets tinkle back,
and glitter as she goes.

and at the door, soft wistful eyes
of one of Ishmael's race,
look mournfully upon the world,
in which she hath a place.

o Arab woman, prisoner!
o Hindoo toy! redemption waits

for woman and her world. (273)

Yet, poetry by Indian women, developing self-representations in a variety of ways, some stereotypical themselves, others resistant, would have served Lockett's century-wide collection of South African women's poetry well, but was totally ignored by her.

Working with short stories rather than poetry, Annemarie van Niekerk's excavatory project was similar to Lockett's. The anthology of short stories, *Raising the Blinds - A Century of South African Women's Short Stories* by van Niekerk (1990), also marked the new emphasis on women's writing in South Africa. Van Niekerk features Jayapraga Reddy's short story, "Friends", in her anthology of short stories. Reddy's writing was gradually becoming representative of Indian women's writings, with only one or two of her short stories being seen as representative of her literary repertoire.

In continental collections of women's writing, as in the new *Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing*, edited by Charlotte Bruner (1993), we note that Farida Karodia's short story, "Cardboard Mansions" is included, alongside short stories by Sheila Fugard, Jean Marquard, Zoe Wicomb and Bessie Head. Farida Karodia, together with the rest of this well-known group, was selected, according to the editor, for the African "feel" to her writing. Bruner presents her selected writers as "role models" for aspiring writers. She emphasises that these writers are being introduced to the younger generation as those who "know their Africa since independence, since 'modernisation', since westernisation, since the feminist movement" (Bruner 1993:vii). She finds the publishing situation for women writers promising:

African women writers are no longer isolated voices crying in the 'wilder-ness'. They are reaching an audience at home and abroad. They are aware of each other. Those who published earlier and are still writing provide role models for others, new and as yet unheard. (vii)

While there is a stated intention by Bruner to include new and unpublished women writers - authors who were recording the "new Africa" - the ones who have in fact been featured are all well-anthologised.

In 1994 another anthology of Bruner's, *Unwinding Threads - Writing by Women in Africa*, was published in the well-known African Writers Series (Heinemann). In this collection the writings of Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, Miriam Tlali, Amelia House and Bessie Head are featured. In 1995 Stella and Frank Chipasula's *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry* appeared. From South Africa the poems included were by Jeni Couzyn, Ingrid de Kok, Amelia Blossom Pegram, Ingrid Jonker, Lindiwe Mabuza, Zindzi Mandela, Gcina Mhlophe and Phumzile Zulu. Here again, in the attempt to project a range of writing from South Africa, Indian women's writings have not been seen as sufficiently 'representative'.

The recent publication compiled by Annemarie Van Niekerk, *The Torn Veil - and other Women's Short Stories from the Continent of Africa* (1998), is a follow-up to her previous anthology of short stories. Jayapraga Reddy's short story, "The Spirit of Two Worlds" and Farida Karodia's "Seeds of Discontent" are included, and it would seem that both Reddy and Karodia have become part of the new 'canon' of women writers in the way that Kuzwayo and Tlali are. There seems to be no excavatory work by the compilers of various anthologies on women's writing to add to the corpus of writing that is already published. And in choosing examples of these established writers' work - if there were consensus that these are the best, or most representative stories - there should have been some indication of a wider oeuvre that has been omitted.

Further Exclusionary Practices in the Nineties

The decade of the 1990's saw several attempts to develop collections in the different genres and in different combinations, in an effort to showcase writing in the country to the rest of the African continent and the international community. With increased attention turned on South Africa there were attempts to provide an overview of literary achievements in the different genres. Again Indian men were chosen as representative of South African and/or Indian writing. This is evident in *Looking for a Rain God - An Anthology of Contemporary African Short Stories*, edited by Nadezda Obradovic (1990) in which Ahmed Essop's "Noorjehan" is included, together with the writings of other South African writers such as Alex La Guma, Mango Tshabangu, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Mbulelo Mzamane and Miriam Tlali. Indian women's writings from South Africa have not featured in wider African collections of writings.

Indian men have continued to be chosen over Indian women in many of the important anthologies that have been published in the nineties. In *The Best of South African Short Stories*, published by *The Readers' Digest* (1991), Ahmed Essop's "The Hajji" and Deena Padayachee's "A New Woman in Town" are included. Jean Marquard's *A Century of South African Short Stories* from an earlier period, revised (with Martin Trump as co-editor) and published in 1993, includes two short stories, one by Ahmed Essop ("The Hajji") and the other by Deena Padayachee ("The Finishing Touch"). In Stephen Gray's *The Penguin Book of Contemporary South African Short Stories* (1993) Deena Padayachee's short story "What's Love Got to Do with It?" and Ahmed Essop's "Shakespeare's Image" are included. The purpose of the anthology was to introduce a "new school in the world of South African letters" (Gray 1993:Introduction), and among those who were so introduced are Ivan Vladislavic and Zoe Wicomb.

The Heinemann Book of South African Short Stories - from 1945 to the Present, edited by Denis Hirson and Martin Trump, and published in 1994, also includes the short story by Ahmed Essop, "The Hajji". Linda Rode's and Jakes Gerwel's *Crossing Over: New Writing*

for a New South Africa (1995) is another new anthology that was published in this decade. Generally, in these anthologies Indian women's writings do not feature at all. Again in the nineties the politics of publishing is evident as particular definitions of who are representative voices of South African literatures influence the kinds of selections that are made.

Ravan Press's celebratory retrospective collection, *Ravan 25 years - 1972-1997 - A Commemorative Volume of New Writing*, edited by G E de Villiers and published in 1997, includes a short story by Ahmed Essop, but this time the story that was selected was "The Banquet". In a recently published collection, *Encounters: An Anthology of South African Short Stories* (1998), edited by David Medalie, Ahmed Essop's writing again appears. *Transitions - Half a Century of South African Short Stories*, compiled by Craig MacKenzie and published in 1999, again includes Ahmed Essop's now well-anthologised short story, "The Hajji". No short stories by Indian women appear, in spite of the fact that they appeared intermittently during the decade.

When looking at poetry anthologies in the decade we see the same pattern of exclusion. An anthology of English poetry for Southern African students, *Seasons Come to Pass* (1994), edited by Es'kia Mphahlele and Helen Moffett, offers a wide variety of poetry from different traditions internationally. Predictably, poems by Essop Patel and Shabbir Banoobhai - "In the Shadow of Signal Hill" and "last poem for the year" respectively - are included, and none by Indian women.

Andries Walter Oliphant's two anthologies, *Ear to the Ground: Contemporary Worker Poets* (1991) and *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry* (1992), do indeed include "new" poetry, and some of the new poets featured are Rustum Zozani, Mark Espin, Mzikayise Mahola, Lance Nawa, and Mxolisi Nyezwa. Again there are no examples by Indian women. Does this suggest that worker poetry or "new" poetry is not being published by Indian women, or by women in general? It is clear that Oliphant's corrective anthologies do not go far enough.

Drama has not been anthologised to the same extent as the other genres. It is therefore heartening to see the work of Kathy A Perkins, who produced *Black South African Women: an anthology of Plays* (1998), in which Muthal Naidoo's "Flight from the Mahabarath" appears. In 1999 a new and interesting collection of plays compiled by David Graver, *Plays for a New South Africa* was published. The book contains a play, "Purdah", written in 1993 by a new playwright, Ismail Mohamed. Mohamed has developed "issue theatre", and this new play deploys the literary device of an extended dramatic monologue, dealing with the theme of religious fundamentalism, men's abuse of women, and women's rights. The collection attempts to present "a wider diversity of South African life", as it "grapples with new social controversies in a democratic South Africa" (Graver 1999:back cover). However, as the survey in a later chapter will reveal, there are a few plays on a similar theme (of tradition versus modernity) by Indian women, but it seems probable that

they are hardly known by compilers and the reading or theatre-going public at large.

Exclusionary practices in critical works have persisted in the 90's. A general critical look at literary historiography is evident in *Rethinking South African Literary History* (1996) edited by Johannes A Smit, Johan van Wyk and Jean-Philippe Wade. However, although the contributors to this volume of critical essays explore important questions pertinent to the construction of a literary history in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, they do not consider the reconfiguring of our literary history through the inclusion of Indian women's writings. Annemarie van Niekerk, looking specifically at a feminist literary approach to "rethinking literary history", does call for an overhaul of the entire "great tradition" through a consideration of writings from the margins. She looks specifically at Afrikaans women writers and mentions the exclusion of Coloured women, but does not consider other marginalised voices.

An important critical publication in the mid-90's was Michael Chapman's magnum opus, *Southern African Literatures* (1996). Chapman does point out that his intention is not to "offer an encyclopaedic survey" (Chapman 1996:xx); rather, he wishes to "offer a particular view of literary-cultural development and value at a particular point in history". In the Chronology of writing, it is good to note that Chapman mentions Fatima Meer's biography of Nelson Mandela, *Higher than Hope - The Official Biography of Nelson Mandela* (1988). Jayapraga Reddy is also included as one of the writers, together with others like Achmat Dangor, Ahmed Essop, Joel Matlou, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Mothobi Mutloatse, Mbulelo V Mzamane and Njabulo S Ndebele, whose works were published in *Staffrider*, and who went on to publish individual volumes (Chapman 1996:383). It is interesting to note that Chapman does not mention any of the other Indian male writers, apart from Achmat Dangor and Ahmed Essop.

Editors Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly in their book of critical essays, *Writing South Africa - Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, published in 1998, have included chapters on important current debates of "centre and margin" in South African literary criticism. While there is no mention of Indian women's writing in relation to this subject, in their "Select Bibliography" they include a few key Indian women writers in South Africa: Jayapraga Reddy, Agnes Sam, and Sobhna Poona. This is the first time that Poona (whose poetry will be discussed in a later chapter) has been mentioned in a critical work.

The way South African literary critics and anthologists represent South African literature to themselves has ramifications in the international community. There is almost total ignorance of the existence of South African Indian women's writings at this level (this is true to some extent with Jolly's anthology cited above as well). When I presented some of my research at international conferences, such as those of the African Literature Association (ALA) and the European Association of Commonwealth Literatures and Lan-

guage Studies (EACLALS) much surprise was expressed by scholars well-versed in South African literature that there existed a corpus of writing by Indian women.

For international compilations local writers and critics are usually commissioned to produce material, and invariably they replicate the patterns of inclusion (and exclusion) that have generally persisted over the years. The Routledge *Encyclopaedia of Post-colonial Literatures in English* (1994) is an "odyssey" into the writings of the colonies of the former British Commonwealth, with particular attention to "new literatures" and "emergent literatures". Tracing the major historical-cum-literary developments in South Africa over the past six centuries the discussion begins with "the mythical origins of the European encounter with the Cape" and works its way to the writing developed by blacks, which is seen as "a discourse of resistance and reclamation" (Benson and Conolly 1994:1517). Among those writers mentioned in the survey are Olive Schreiner, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, H I E Dhlomo, Es'kia Mphahlele, Achmat Dangor, Ahmed Essop, as well as Bertram Mitford, Ernest Glanville, Menan du Plessis, Zoe Wicomb and Deneys Reitz. The Indian women writers who are mentioned are Dr Goonam, for her autobiography; Fatima Meer, for her biographies of Nelson Mandela and of Gandhi; and Phyllis Naidoo for her autobiographical piece on her prison experience. There is no reference to the other Indian women's writings.

The journal, *World Literature Today* (Winter, 1996:No 1), focused on "South African Literature in Transition" for its 70th anniversary commemorative issue. Writers who were featured included J M Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Bessie Head, Alfred Qabula, Douglas Livingstone, Mazisi Kunene, Antjie Krog, Mandla Langa, Mongane Serote, Lewis Nkosi and Zoe Wicomb. The anthology tries to balance retrieval and reconstruction. Although it does not claim to be comprehensive and representative (de Kok 1996:5), and has several glaring omissions, it does include a major essay on women's writing in Afrikaans. Apart from a passing reference to Jayapraga Reddy (in Driver's essay) there is no mention of the corpus of Indian women's writing in this "world of strangers". It is clear that far more effort needs to be made to incorporate other Indian women writers more fully in such compilations on South African literature.

While I have focused mainly on the exclusionary practices against Indian women's writings, it should be pointed out that an encouraging sign in this decade has been the increasing number of critical essays by feminist academics, presented at conferences and published in literary journals, which has slowly been incorporating the writings of Indian women. The edited version of the "Workshop on Black Women's Writing and Reading", which included the views of Sanna Naidoo and Veni Soobrayan, compiled by M J Daymond and Margaret Lenta for the special issue of *Current Writing* in 1990, has been mentioned already. Miki Flockemann (1992) has developed excellent comparative critiques of Agnes Sam and Caribbean women's writing and Wendy Woodward (1993) has compared

Tsitsi Dangaremba and Farida Karodia. Research by K Padayachee (1995) on aspects of politics and aesthetics, exile and gender in the short stories of Ahmed Essop and Agnes Sam has been useful in pointing to the value of such specific comparative study in the context of familiar themes in South African literature. Sandra Young (1996) has written of Dr Goonam's prison experiences in her general study of women's prison memoirs in South Africa. However, although all such efforts are heartening, these critical efforts remained mainly of individual Indian women writers and did not engage in a substantial critique of the larger body of writings by Indian women.

Purpose of the Present Study

This study has emerged, then, in the context of growing awareness of exclusionary practices around women's writings in general and of Indian women's writings in particular. The purpose of this study is two-fold: firstly, to broaden the scope of literary criticism in South Africa by the inclusion of Indian women's writings. Secondly, this study finds its dynamic in analyses of issues of identity and difference as exemplified in the selected writings, in an attempt to show the diverse nature of life under apartheid society, and the varied responses to it. In extending the "community of voices shaping, moulding, and creating images of the human environment" (Stotesbury 1996:6), it is necessary to consider the multiplicity of voices, broadening and deepening and questioning this sense of 'community'. Developing a poetics of reading that is alert to differences, which takes in Indian women's writings in South Africa more purposefully, extends the scope and complexity of both black women's and of post-colonial studies. While I do look for patterns and themes in the writings, I do not wish to suggest that the selected writers are representative of Indian women in South Africa in general.

More importantly, I do not wish to convey the impression that this is a clear-cut and well-defined gynocritical project. I am constantly faced with the conundrum, indeed, the great anxiety, in the very process of the exercise, of what constitutes 'Indian women's writing' and who an 'Indian woman writer' is, as well as the fact that many of the women writers included here would resist such identification or classification. I reflect more fully on the complexities and 'problem' of Indian identity in the next chapter and at various points in the rest of the study, and about the way we might use the terminology. (We have seen similar debates around the terms 'women writers' and 'African writers'.)

While focusing on Indian women's writings, the study attempts to read these writings as an intrinsic part of South African, African, and international literatures. It is for this reason, in the discussion of the selected texts, I suggest possible resonances with a range of other texts. This is not done to 'validate' the writings of Indian women, but to highlight the areas of overlap, and the immense possibilities for comparative research from a range of locations. Each text is used to provide a particular vantage point in the context of a broader

trajectory of analysis, to develop "critical conversations", to use Boyce Davies' phrase, with other texts, thus illustrating hybridity in both subject-matter and content.

The texts selected are used to illuminate the way in which modes of representation reflect identity and difference in variously critical ways. The writings provide alternatives to the representations of Indians either by the apartheid state, or by white and Indian male writers in South African literature. Stratton's point that African literature and other post-colonial literatures are based on their "internal dynamic" is true of the writings in this study. As Achebe so aptly puts it: "Every literature must seek the things that belong unto its peace; it must, in other words, speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destiny of its people" (in Stratton 1994:11).

Growing up in an apartheid educational system in South Africa, I was deprived of an inclusive and critical education in Indian history and literature, and in literary criticism from a post-colonialist perspective. Sensitive to apartheid's ethnocentric categorisings, I myself had eschewed, in past decades, any serious study of Indian writings and history. My initial hesitation in embarking even on this study centred around anxieties over 'essentialism' and 'ethnocentricity', and the need for critical decorum. I have been sensitive to the emergence of "a minority culture" ethos since the April 1994 election, as Flockemann has pointed out (Flockemann 1997:3). I have also been aware of the disposition by some (mainly politicians and 'cultural' leaders) to develop a "culturalist or nostalgic/sentimental definition of being 'Indian'", as Chandra Mohanty cautions in the context of identity politics in the United States (Mohanty 1993:354). These tendencies have gained legitimacy and have emerged at the very moment when a common non-racial South Africa is also being asserted more vigorously than ever before. I am also self-conscious about any perceptions I myself might have about my being an 'authentic researcher' in this field, given my own identity as a woman of Indian origin. I am aware of the criticism pertaining to the politics of research. Black feminist researchers have asked questions about 'appropriation', about who researches whom; at the same time the perception that some individuals are "the legitimate keepers of a culture" is severely questioned.

However, in developing a critical awareness of writings by black women in South Africa and the rest of the Africa, and internationally, I have begun to realise that the voices of South African Indian women have not been given any serious and sustained critical attention in this wider context. The title of the study - "*sister outsiders*" - taken from Audre Lorde, suggests the diminished, and marginalised role that Indian women have experienced in the literary tradition. I have also begun to appreciate the need for a critical evaluation of these literary voices at this particular historical juncture in South Africa in order to counter the very pitfalls of an uncritical appropriation of these writers within narrow ethnic enclaves, and the need to resist the dominant, separatist discourses of identity and difference

and their regimes of representation fueled by apartheid ideology. I reflect on these issues in the following chapter, and where appropriate in successive chapters, in order to foreground the kind of political critique that might be engaged in in an excavatory project of this kind.

Priya Joshi, a scholar of South Asian literary studies and teaching at University of California, Berkeley, notes that "all dissertations are masked lyrics", that the "work both expresses, often in disguised or masked form, something the writer feels very deeply and closely" (Joshi, Priya 1999). Perhaps my decision to work in this area was a way of getting to know a suppressed part of my own self, and overturn the exclusionary practices in this field of scholarship that I myself have been guilty of.

Scope of the Study

In keeping with my "two-fold" aim, in developing an analysis of the selected texts I provide some context for the reading of the texts, especially those that have not enjoyed substantial critical exposure, and I focus on questions specifically related to those of identity, where these seem particularly relevant. This is why the study does not proceed in strict chronological fashion in terms of publication of the writing, but the analysis of each writer is presented in a rough thematic sequence, where the thesis of the study is expanded, modulated, inflected or problematised in new ways. Chapter 2 provides a critical discussion of the other strand of this study, that of identity and of difference, and the complex, heterogeneous nature of Indian identity in the South African social and political context.

In order to give the critical analysis a historical context and a "critical geography", to use a phrase from Toni Morrison (Morrison 1992:3), I proceed to an overview of the history of Indian indentured settlers in Natal. The story of Indian indentured labour has been a major trope of colonial history, as well as that of Indian history in South Africa. It has been the inevitable historical backdrop for the majority of writers considered in this study. In Agnes Sam, for example, the history of Indian indentured labour provides the "discursive continuum" (see Flockemann 1997:8) for her work, *Jesus is Indian and other stories*. Sam sets out elements of this history in clear and unequivocal terms in her Introduction and in the concluding piece, "And They Christened It Indenture", and thus provides a framing device from history for her short story cycle. A reflection on this history will demonstrate that the notion of Indian identity is complex from the very beginning of settlement in South Africa.

Dr Goonam and Zuleikha Mayat also locate their personal narratives in the history of Indian indentured labour and that of Passenger Indians. With Jayapraga Reddy, a much younger writer, the history of this migration is not overtly drawn, but is nevertheless significant in the lives of her grandparents and parents, with succeeding generations drawing from this 'source'. In Farida Karodia's autobiographical fiction, *Daughters of Twilight*, Meena the narrator makes reference to the background of her grandfather, who "had come

from India in search of adventure" (Karodia 1986:24). The grandfather had come at the age of fifteen, when Natal and the Transvaal had passed laws restricting the movement of Indians. Although for Phyllis Naidoo the history of indentured labour does not feature as significantly, Fatima Meer on the other hand has written extensively of the history of Indian indenture in South Africa, in the context of apartheid, colonialism and globalisation.

I consider the history of Indian indentured immigrants from the vantage point of Indian women's experiences in Colonial Natal, weaving a slender narrative thread of my grandmother's life, into this general history. This approach, I believe, would contextualise this study in aspects of my own personal narrative, and perhaps provide a rationale for the project as a whole (as well as criticism of it). By foregrounding elements of my grandmother's story in a wider communal and historical narrative, I hope to provide both a connection with, and a contrast to, the 'high-profile' women selected for this study. I present my grandmother as a paradigm case of the complex cultural site that is Indian identity.

Limitations of space and scope have prevented me from presenting fuller, more intertwined racial and gendered histories of the period of arrival of Indians in this country. More work is necessary on this subject and on the local histories of immigrants in India before they came to South Africa, so that indentured experience is not seen as the 'beginning of life' for Indians in South Africa. I pick up the theme of interrogating questions of identity in the present post-apartheid and post-colonial era in relation to this particular history and collective memory. Indian indentured history is linked in some ways to that of African slavery, and sets the tone for inter-diaspora study in the contemporary post-colonial context, which is a sub-text of this study. Though different in scale and magnitude, there were similar patterns of exclusion in the 'host' societies.

Ongoing diasporic dispersal characterises the Indian experience. Under apartheid, there was internal dislocation and relocation due to the regime's segregationist policies, and fracturing from the 'mother' country through exile. The stories of Zuleikha Mayat and Agnes Sam, Dr Goonam and Phyllis Naidoo show these dimensions. There is also emigration from South Africa, and this has influenced identity-formation and representations of identity, as we see in the classic example of Hershini Bhana's poem, included in the survey of writing.

In a Survey chapter I consider a range of writings by Indian women produced in the different genres, and not considered in the separate chapters in the rest of the study. There is a large body of writing by South African Indian women occurring in the traditionally recognised genres of poetry, drama, short story and fiction. I give some sense of the scope of writing and show the wide diversity among Indian women writers in the way questions of identity have been addressed. The excavatory and the discursive clearly go hand in hand as the one influences and shapes the other.

The writings that are considered here were mainly published after 1960, but in their

content span the history of the late 19th and 20th centuries; the narrative of Indian indenture and colonialism transmutes into that of apartheid, with its more overt racism, spawning segregationist laws and practices, and resistance to this. A few pieces from an earlier period are included - for example, Olga Paruk's poem, "Appeal to the King" and the petition of the Indian Women's Association in Durban, written in the first decade of the twentieth century. My survey has grown sporadically in the process of acquiring mainly published and accessible texts, and is far from comprehensive and exhaustive. This process points to the need for further research, information-gathering, and critical readings of work produced. Writings by Indian women have also occurred in different Indian languages. Research, translation, and publication are required in this sphere to make this work available to wider audiences.

Writers who are featured in the Survey chapter include Muthal Naidoo, Devi Sarinjeive and Krijay Govender in drama, Fayiza Khan in fiction, Sherin Bickrum in short story writing, and Sanna Naidoo, Roshila Nair and Sobhna Poona in poetry. I have also included some reference to the work of South African Indian women now living abroad. Hershini Bhana has published poetry in South Asian Women's collections in the United States, and is working on fiction at present. Josephine Naidoo, in Canada, has written academic papers on multiculturalism, and has included several autobiographical reflections in her discursive writings. Also included is the writing of Neela Govender-Alvarez-Pereyre, now living in France; she had published an autobiographical piece, *Acacia Thorn in my Heart*, which initially appeared in the *Southern African Review of Books* (1988). She has since published the full-length autobiography.

I move on to an analysis of selected writings of specific writers, in separate chapters - giving details of their personal or literary background, the context in which they wrote, and the particular themes or issues that seem to emerge in their writings. In this way I hope to give exposure to each writer, developing an analysis of each work in terms of its own dynamic, yet in keeping with the overall theme of the study. The works that I have chosen are mainly the autobiographical writings that have been produced, together with two examples of fiction. Autobiography is indeed the most self-conscious representation and construction of identity or subjectivity. Autobiographical writings by Indian women is a robust literary genre. In keeping with the excavatory aim of the study, I have included both published and unpublished material, and have tried to balance well-known writings with lesser known examples.

The texts that I have selected are the following:

1. Ansuyah Singh's novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, published in 1960, and labelled as the "first Indian novel" in South Africa.
2. Zuleikha Mayat's memoir, *A Treasure Trove of Memories - A reflection on the experi-*

ences of the people of Potchefstroom.

3. Jayapraga Reddy's unpublished autobiography, *The Unbending Reed* and her short story collection, *Beyond the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*.
4. Agnes Sam's short story cycle, *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*.
5. Farida Karodia's fictional work with autobiographical undertones, *Daughters of the Twilight* and her novel, *A Shattering of Silence*.
6. Dr Goonam's autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*.
7. A selection of Phyllis Naidoo's various political writings, together with her memoir of her prison experiences, "Ten Days".
8. A selection of Fatima Meer's various political and academic speeches, documentary writings and biographies.

Some of these writers, who are described more fully in succeeding chapters, have been publishing work since the 60's, but are not uniformly well-known to the wider South African reading public.

The writings selected begin with Singh's novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, and which may be seen as the first novel by a black woman in South Africa, as pointed out already. Singh was part of the Passive Resistance Movement in the 50's in South Africa. The history of Passive Resistance and protest politics in the 50's provides the background for the novel. There is the need for a new critical reading of this history today in the larger re-reading of our collective past. Issues related to the intersection of ethnicity, gender and nationalism, 'homeland' and identity are considered, as well as the text's marginalisation.

I consider the memoir of Mayat, *A Treasure Trove of Memories - A History of the Peoples of Potchefstroom*, published in the early nineties. Mayat, who lives in Durban, is active in local cultural and women's organisations, but her memoir is of an earlier family history before she was married. I read her work as presenting a family and community history rather than a personal and individual autobiography, as she recalls the way in which her forebears adapted to a new land, negotiating meaning, tradition, identity and 'home'.

Reddy, a younger writer, wrote steadily from the 80's until her death in 1997. As pointed out already, she is one writer who has enjoyed considerable attention for her drama and short stories, which explore creatively her understanding of racial, ethnic, class and gender identity. In this study I compare her unpublished autobiography, *The Unbending Reed* and her short story collection, *Beyond the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*, to explore her identity as a writer and as one who had to cope with muscular dystrophy.

Karodia, Sam, Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Meer - largely through their years in exile or varying activist stances - seem to me to be responding to the need for a South African, and larger African, identity that is forged in a political struggle for freedom and democracy. In their respective ways, they balance and blend their Indian and South African identities in the face of the hegemonic practices of colonialism and apartheid in everyday

living. Indeed, they show that identities are interwoven and layered in multiple and complex ways, and narrow, simplistic binarisms will not suffice in trying to understand their work.

Taken together, the writings of Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Meer, who were well-known political activists in South Africa, provide important historical documentation of the narratives of resistance against apartheid. Goonam weaves her life story around historical events, producing a personal narrative that is implicated in the collective one. Naidoo (apart from her short autobiographical piece on her prison experiences) and Meer do not write from personal, individualistic positions, but are concerned to document political events, trends, and the lives of other political figures. Their "personal itinerary is assimilated into a larger historical narrative of resistance and struggle" and, by writing outside the usual modes of literary representation, they provide "an implicit critique of authorship and the 'task of the intellectual' in the resistance struggle", to employ Harlow's formulations (Harlow 1994:117). By including them I challenge the traditional literary genre distinctions of the academy, and the "disciplinary fences", to use a phrase from Higonnet, erected around literature. Higonnet points out that there has been a move to challenge these definitions of literature:

The line of exclusion between intrinsic and extrinsic analysis is one that comparatists and other critics have steadily worked to efface. In the intervening decades, critical movements such as discourse analysis, semiotics, cultural critique, and New Historicism have each in different ways eroded New Critical distinctions between literary and other discourses. Feminists have been among those critics drawn most dramatically to reject the line between intrinsic and extrinsic criticism. (Higonnet 1994:198)

In the traditional mode of literary criticism, the writings of Naidoo and Meer would have formed part of the "extrinsic criticism" that might have been used in reading the other texts. In selecting their writings, and reading them "intrinsically", I suggest that their writings, documentary or discursive, obliquely *represent* them, and reflect their own personal narratives. The inclusion of their writings, to be true to their work and ideals, also prompts an 'ethics of reading', where the value of literary study in academia is for transforming the world, and not for domestication into institutional 'canon' formation.

As pointed out earlier, because of exclusionary practices of one sort or another, my purpose in this study is to raise awareness of the body of literary writing produced by Indian women. At the same time, my critical approach in reading the selected texts is to pose crucial questions of the modes of representation of identity and difference in the wider context of South African racial and cultural politics. In developing my arguments and questions on the subject of identity politics, interrogating the very category, 'Indian women's writings', I have drawn extensively from various critical nodes of thinking, including post-modernist and post-colonial critique, feminist literary criticism, and the vast body of writing on autobiography as a literary genre. Such a critical *metisage* provides an

inter-textual network of many strands of inquiry in the context of a critical environment in South Africa at the present time.

Limitations of the Study

There are several material and ideological limitations that have become apparent to me in the very process of being engaged in the study. Further limitations are pointed out in the introduction to the Survey of writings and in the concluding chapter.

This study is the first full-length work to focus on a significant number of examples of South African Indian women's writings. However, the selection of texts in this study is limited by various historical and practical constraints. The works selected for study are all in English. Research is necessary in Indian women's writings in Indian languages, and investigation of whether there are instances of writings in Afrikaans or in the African languages. While writings in other languages have enjoyed translation and wide circulation, writings in Indian languages in South Africa have not been read or appreciated outside the immediate language groups for which they were written. At the other end of the scale, it is worth noting that somebody like Nadine Gordimer has been published into thirty-one languages internationally. Writing in English also has ideological implications, as Ngugi has consistently reminded us; we have to appreciate that the texts in English are all in varying degrees assimilated, translated, compromised. We need to be mindful of the politics of language in South Africa, a politics which raises important concerns about literary production and inequities in contexts other than those of the hegemonic languages. Neville Alexander has noted in this respect that

The hegemony of the English language obscures the fact that in this country the language question is an extremely complex issue and that it inevitably shapes the literary domain. Besides intercultural influence, which is an unavoidable and most positive accompaniment of all multicultural settings, the coexistence of many different languages in a single country does, of course, raise serious cultural-political issues concerning the unequal conditions under which literature is produced in the different languages. (Alexander, Neville 1996:9)

The analyses in this dissertation have a specific focus on autobiography and fiction. Further research is required in the other genres and major critical efforts similar to that of the impressive collaborative project, *Women Writing in India - 600 BC to the Present*, edited by Susie Tharu and K Lalita, are necessary. More comprehensive excavatory work is required to expand the critical body of writing and creative expression that is not readily available, especially that which exists in the oral tradition. One has to also go beyond the usual academic boundaries. There is need for a study of writing from working class women, from the factory floor, for example. Many women work in the garment industry and in agriculture, in suburban and rural areas, in domestic settings, where oral history and oral literature projects could be initiated. As it turns out, many of the writings in this study

are by Indian women from relatively educated and privileged backgrounds, and from urban areas. Excavatory projects could also be directed to the many different types of products - creative works, published and unpublished writings, personal and oral histories, letters, speeches, critical essays, writings in different languages and linguistic-cultural communities - by all South African women, irrespective of race, class, location, sexual orientation, language, ethnicity, educational level, or age. Many of these omissions also have ideological implications which should be considered.

Other possible gaps relate to more extensive and critical comparative analyses with different groups of writers, such as Indian male writers, black women writers, and writers in Africa and the African and Indian diasporas. There is also the possibility of exploring comparisons between the representations (and self-representations) of female identity in the selected writings in this study with depictions or representations of Indian women (and men) in other writings in South Africa. Throughout the study I suggest the possibilities for further research in this and related fields. Further comparisons, for example, with women of all groups in South Africa and in the rest of Africa, and writers in the Indian and African diasporas, become a natural and necessary extension of the critical enterprise here.

While the excavation of women's writings and the development of a female literary tradition is an important corrective activity on the literary critical landscape, one should be aware of the ideological critique that attends such a project. There is much value in focusing solely on Indian women's writing to rectify its systematic marginalisation. It is necessary, however, in a study such as this, to be aware of criticisms and reservations that might be expressed. Higgonet's criticism of gynocriticism seems to me to have special relevance to the exclusion of Indian women's writings in South Africa, given the racial segregation through the Group Areas Act that Indian women were subjected to, and the legacy of apartheid divisions that persists to date:

Gynocriticism, however, has been contested as the creation, in Lillian Robinson's phrase, of a 'women's literature ghetto' that would simply reify the alternative canon of feminists without altering the critical institutions that produce such ghettos. In the eighties, further political contestation has in fact arisen over the (non)representation of minority voices within anthologies that themselves claim to speak from the margins. The recent sharper focus on subaltern and minority women has cast light on connections between the experience of social marginalisation, often quite concrete geographically (in ghettos cordoned off by highways or 'high-rise' projects, in experiences of deportation or emigration), and the literary exploration of borderlines and boundary-traversing poetic strategies.
(Higgonet 1994:203)

In the light of these critical views, responding to exclusionary practices in women's writings as a simplistic 'remedy' or 'rectification' would do more harm than good. We, as feminists have been caught in a double bind. We have fought against the exclusionary practices that have undermined women's writings. At the same time we are aware that isolating women and their writing, in Higgonet's formulation, would "mean committing a

biological, or sociological, or even socio-intentional 'fallacy of origins' ...Such separatist research would be logically flawed, according to New Critical theory - as well as post-structural theory" (199). Although feminist critics are acutely aware of these problems they have felt constrained to pursue what is seen as a necessary political project. My purpose in drawing attention to a marginalised corpus, as in this study, is not to ghettoise the body of literature, but to allow it to intersect in a wider critical framework, given its historical exclusion. This theme, in relation to literatures outside the Western 'mainstream', is taken up again in the concluding chapter in the critical discussion of "a New Orientalism".

Writing, and criticism on it, by its very existence, extends the 'culture' of writing and criticism. Jayapraga Reddy points out that black women, and more specifically Indian women, have a significant role to play in the development of South African literature:

Black women have experienced the untold anguish and pain of life under the apartheid system. The breakdown of family life, enforced separation of husband and wife, shack life, being a mother in the ghettos, the tensions of township life during times of unrest. There is so much to write about and we need articulate women to tell the world about these things, for women have always expressed pain and suffering more poignantly than men. I would especially like to see more Indian women writers emerge, to tell their very own story. (In van Niekerk 1994:72)

Expanding the literary tradition by the inclusion of Indian women's writings changes the very tradition. In arguing for the inclusion of various categories of marginalised texts, Higonnet underlines their importance in shaking the foundations of the literary establishment:

These recent critical texts re-centre (if that is the right word) the 'borderlands'. In the process a creative terminology has arisen that strives to define the tools for 'remapping' the world of literature, setting the texts produced by certain ethnic groups or in 'Third World' portions of the globe at the centre of the analysis, both for their own sake and for the insights that may generate into the literary theory and critical methodologies derived from work on the 'First World'. (Higonnet 1994:203)

Rey Chow also draws attention to the political value of the "redemption" of materials which are otherwise lost or unknown, and highlights their pedagogical value. She points out: "For the teachers of literature, who work with texts and who discuss political movements from afar, redemption is the practice of resistance against the obliterating moves of any dominant politics" (Chow 1993:141).

In this study my own role as feminist researcher, critic and theorist inevitably becomes important in the politics of 'centre' and 'margin'. In my autobiographical article, "Reading Under Apartheid" (1996), I give some sense of my own reading journey under apartheid. The present study is part of that on-going journey as I continue to develop and refine my role as reader and writer. While I have worked within the received Western tradition in which I was nurtured, as I pointed out in that article, I am also deeply critical of that tradition. I bring to my reading of it the developing insights of reading the literatures of the African and Indian diasporas, of a critical post-colonialist view. While I draw from different

theoretical positions, which might otherwise be at loggerheads, I have been guided by the over-riding need for a broad political agenda in literature and literary criticism, and in research.

In my concern for 'centre and margin', where do I position myself? As mentioned already, aware of the controversies around speaking of and for black women, I enter this field with some anxiety, even trepidation. Of her own role as critic Spivak observes that she "hyphenates herself and attempts to occupy different sites in order to 'interrupt' the narrative logic produced from a single angle of critical vision...(Indeed) The deconstructivist can use herself...as a shuttle between the centre (inside) and the margin (outside)" (in Higonnet 1994:202). I myself occupy a complex cultural position from which I consider a complex heterogeneous, non-essentialised Indian identity in South Africa.

The temptation to arrogate to oneself the mission of recovery must be resisted, especially when research such as this is done within the trappings of the academy. Tiffin and Lawson caution that the debate about whether the subaltern can speak "is being conducted by non-subalterns, people with voice, institutional power, and unlimited access to the technologies of textuality" (Tiffin and Lawson 1994:10). They also point out that "they seem largely not to have noticed that the subaltern, meanwhile, are speaking. Postcolonial writers from a variety of locations are declaring their spaces, engaging with canonical texts, rewriting not just the tradition but the episteme which underpins it" (10).

As pointed out already, I have become acutely aware of the limitations of this present study by being involved in it, and after reflecting on the work of Tharu and Lalitha in India and their insightful and trenchant criticisms of their own excavatory project. In recovering some voices, as necessary and laudable as such a project might be, in what way might I be silencing others? In relation to the writers I analyse in this study, their own representations of women in their texts, my understandings of my role and purpose as a feminist researcher and scholar, a crucial question, similar to the one that Tharu and Lalitha have asked in relation to their project in India, needs to undergird my activities: "How is the Other being defined in order that the self might gain identity?" (Tharu and Lalitha 1995:Vol.1:38). I am continually constrained to cast my own "literary net" as widely as possible, and to interrogate the ideology of my own position, location, education, training and preferences. I am aware that a reader/researcher is prone to all sorts of seductions, "in search of contiguities and...rogue connections" (Whitlock 2000:4), with the critical readings a reflection of one's own constructions and biases as much as of the writer's.

For me the burden is what it means to live in South Africa at a time of profound and unsettling change, and what it means to be part, long denied, of the African continent, and of the world community. As Abena Busia states: "The past is not reclaimed for its own sake but because without a recognition of it, there can be no understanding of the present and no future" (in Wilentz 1992:117). Such an endeavour draws attention to the many ar-

eas of marginalised writings that require fuller integration into South African writing - such as gay and lesbian writing, children's writing, writings in African languages, to name a few. As Elleke Boehmer states: "At the end of the twentieth century there is no doubt that the days of the 'Borderline' writing have triumphantly arrived" (Boehmer 1998a:xxxv).

CHAPTER 2

THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND OF DIFFERENCE

"I'm a South African born and brought up in South Africa and we are simunye - we are one."

"If you want to call yourself an Indian then you are a refugee in Africa and at the end of the day people must identify with their country."

"I'm an African. My name is Suresh. I'm an African. The continent I come from is Africa. Which part of Africa? South Africa. So I'm a South African full stop."
(In Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:9)

Introduction

In this chapter I consider some of the discursive issues around identity, with particular reference to South African Indian women writers. I begin with general questions of identity in the context of South African apartheid history and the present period. In effect this involves looking at the language of racial identity as much as at its consequences. As Anthony Appiah points out in his recent analysis of racial identity and racial identification, it is about "tracing the history of a signifier, a label, but also (highlighting) a history of its effects" (Appiah 2000:607). While I focus on a mere segment of a wide ranging field, my analysis is sensitive to a complex historical tapestry in South Africa, and to discursive developments internationally in identity politics. I deepen the critical discussion by a consideration of specific aspects of identity in relation to women's writing, particularly black women's writing, and Indian women's writings within this category, drawing from a range of theoretical positions, especially progressive cultural theorists and feminist thinking on identity.

This chapter provides a broad overview only. Many of the issues regarding identity are developed, deepened, modulated and problematised in the actual discussions of the various writers themselves. In the subsequent chapters, which go beyond the scope of this general one, apart from a critical analysis that is developed around the selected texts, each writer is considered from the vantage point of identity, and new variations of the theme are constantly sought. Indeed, this chapter (and the study as a whole) must remain a small window on a vast discursive field, with all its contradictions and incommensurabilities. Speaking of identity at this particular historical moment is indeed difficult and perplexing,

given the changing, complex and contradictory discourses around it. The history of identity formation is therefore relevant as I consider how identity and difference are re-defined at changing political and historical moments.

It is a truism now to state that identities are constructed, that an identity politics obtains. Rather it is necessary to understand the social construction of identities in various contexts, to read the way in which identities are narrated and represented, and the reasons and purposes for different constructions and representations. Manuel Castells (1997), pointing out that the social construction of identity takes place in a context defined by power relationships, delineates three forms and origins of identity building: *legitimising* identity, *resistance* identity and *project* identity. The first, legitimising identity, is prompted by the main and dominant institutions in society. It is interesting to note, as Castells points out, that this could happen in coercive historical contexts as well as in democratic ones, where various "apparatuses" of the state could be used to produce and reproduce identity. Resistance identity is generated in response to legitimising identity when identity is undermined and devalued by those in power; and the third, project identity, is produced or constructed when individuals make a conscious effort to become subjects who claim their specificity and uniqueness in society, and who wish to transform society and its structures on the basis of a set of convictions or beliefs, such as, for example, feminism or fundamentalist religion. While Castells uses this grid to understand the broad network society in an age of globalisation his distinctions of different identities, particularly legitimising and resistance identities, throw light on identity-formation in South Africa, given the power relationships of colonialism and apartheid and the present impetus towards nation-building. Generally the writers in this study fall on the side of resistance identities, with some being more radical than others. They also show the pull between legitimising and resistance identities in their writings; they may variously occupy the gap between the two, or show how the two sets of identities intersect, co-exist, or contradict each other.

In moving from the legacy of apartheid towards nation-building we are inevitably negotiating identity and difference in multiple ways. In South Africa, identity politics is overlaid with the historical background of colonialism and apartheid, which persists in different forms; it is also defined by resistance to apartheid, with such resistance being complicated by different ideological positions. Thinking through the debates and views on identity is useful in appreciating the varying, contradictory and shifting subject positions/identities of Indian women writers. The divergent impulses at work in identity politics are all exemplified in differing degrees in Indian women's writings. Interrogating various understandings of identity is a necessary critical activity in South Africa as a whole at present, and as this study will show, many of the Indian women writers themselves were well ahead of their time in such interrogation.

One of the chief ways in which I use the term identity in this study is to denote selfhood

very much in the mode of a resistance identity. And this is not just in the psychological sense, but the political as well. The two, of course, are closely intertwined in situations of racial oppression, as critics such as Fanon, Manganyi and Amima Mama have argued. It is for this reason that some critics speak of "subjectivity" rather than 'identity' (see Mama 1995). The term 'identity' is used in ways that suggest intersecting social, cultural, psychological and political determinants. What kind of self - political, national, ideological, ethnic, feminist, gendered, trans-national, diasporic - is being claimed by the Indian women writers? In what ways have Indian women writers attempted to resist their marginalisation, their exclusion, and have re-articulated who they are in spite of the dominant and hegemonic discourses of colonialism and apartheid? How are identities, even resistant ones, imbricated in legitimising forces? While identity formations are haunted by past histories of oppression (see Sullivan 1998:434f) there is an attempt to move beyond their legitimising and deterministic influences, as the writers in this study indicate, to create and construct identities oppositionally, either collectively (as with Black Consciousness) or individually. What are the "identity strategies", to use a phrase coined by Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (1996) in their analysis of postcolonial identities in Africa, that the women writers have devised, given the way identity was degraded under apartheid in South Africa? In what way is it possible to speak of their sense of self as exemplifying, in the words of Hall, "imaginary political re-identification, re-territorialisation and re-identification" (Hall 2000:149)? These are questions and issues that, in many ways, drive the study.

Identity, in colonial or other hegemonic contexts, is usually associated with the dominant, with sameness, and difference with the Other, that which is not same. Here I use the terms identity and difference as two sides of the same coin. While the term identity is used to denote a sense of self, difference is also used to assert and celebrate a sense of self different from, or resistant to, the hegemonic norm. It is important to problematise usual notions of difference, which may also be essentialised. The challenge, and difficulty, is to respond to " 'difference' without reifying 'it' as perpetual, closed and unchanging" (Yuval-Davies and Werbner 1999:9). The term "difference" is therefore used circumspectly, and its conventional usage (in relation to the "Other") is problematised, to project a "politics of difference". There is a tendency to speak of "difference" rather glibly, referring to mere heterogeneity and variety in generalised terms, rather than to highlight the practices of domination that exist (see de la Rey 1997:9). In this particular time in our history, emerging from the dynamics of the "negotiated revolution" (which kept intact to some extent the old structures of identity and difference), we see an upsurge of interest in multiculturalism, especially an uncritical, reductionist kind, which seems to invoke a 'peaceful', but still separate, co-existence of the various ethnic or racial groups. The tendency is to absorb alterity and elide difference into a universalism, with complexities within and be-

tween categories of race, ethnicity, class and gender being ignored, and the reality of people's lives even in the post-apartheid era, distorted. But differences within difference are constantly being signalled. In what way, for example, are Indian women writers similar to and yet different from their other South African black counterparts? In what way are Indian women writers similar to but also different from one another? While problematising the notion of 'Indian' identity, I consider certain common, historical features of Indian women's writings, features that are often occluded in homogenising differences among black women, as well as seek out differences among them, as exemplified in their writings.

In speaking of identity or difference in relation to a sense of self, I do not wish to suggest a simplistic, monolithic concept of self. I appreciate that identity has been reconceptualised in recent decades, where the old logic of identity, that of the single, autonomous self, is questioned. The one-dimensional, centripetal view of identity is problematised and displaced by a more radical conception of identity, and we now stress the manifold diversity of subject positions. I explore how the writers assume and construct their identities, and how they express a complex and multiple subjectivity. We see both legitimising and resistance identities co-existing in varying degrees; we also see new forms of legitimising and resistance identities complicating the present context in South Africa.

The need for a problematised and contested view of identity is timely. The way ethnic or minority politics (among Indians) continues to be handled in this period of transition by all political parties, even progressive ones, shows how difficult it is to shake off the legacy of apartheid. The tendency is to maintain or reflect separate identities or 'identity centres', and the post-apartheid era is ironically celebrated for the very 'freedom' it affords to do this. The current slogan, "*one nation - many cultures*", used emotively to create a sense of unity-in-diversity and national identity, and embraced by the present government, is based unwittingly on essentialist understandings of race and ethnicity and ethnic particularism. It implies that 'cultures' are separate, distinct and homogenous and come together as different entities. With the use of the slogan, the African National Congress appeals to the idea of a unitary nation, but at the same time finds it necessary to 'target' the different 'population groups' created during the apartheid era in order to garner votes from these groups, also now sought after by opposition parties. It is predictable and understandable that making a leap out of the mindsets of the past is a difficult undertaking. As Ingrid de Kok asks despairingly, "Given the totalising and introjective power of apartheid, its social controls and binary emphases, is a post-apartheid imagination even possible" (de Kok 1996:8)? In the quest for national unity amidst cultural, ethnic, gender and other forms of difference we should not set up hierarchies of difference. Some writers are aware then that as the nation narrates itself it has the "power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging" (Said 1994:xiii). There are new legitimising identities at work now, as opposed to the old apartheid ones. Vigilance about past and present exclusions will ensure that they

do not persist. It is for this reason that there has been a resurgence of interest in issues of identity among Indians, and Indian women writers (such as Fatima Meer) have reflected on the dynamics of this. These considerations are not of course without their tensions, complexities and contradictions, as we shall see.

As this chapter and the succeeding ones will show, the assumption that the terms 'Indian' and 'Indian woman' denotes a common identity is called into question. I show that the signifiers (as with 'woman' in general) are far from stable; rather they are sites of contest, and causes for anxiety, as Judith Butler has stressed in her complex discussion of gender, race and class (Butler 1990:3). Butler argues that the categories and structures of gender/ethnicity/race are not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical and geographical contexts; and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities (3) identity and difference is in a constant state of flux. And as the analyses of the different writers will show it is difficult to separate reductively issues of identity and difference from the political and cultural intersections and interdependence in which they are invariably produced and maintained (3).

Colonialism, Apartheid and Identity

The history of colonialism shows how European identity was seen as the norm, and difference from this norm was imposed by homogenising oppressed and marginalised groups. This difference was produced and indeed managed through the elaborate discourse of Orientalism, with essentialist understandings of identity and of difference. It was based on notions of pure race and ethnic groups, derived from the "race science" of European thought in the 19th Century, as Judith Raitskin argues in her discussion of women's writing and creole subjectivity (see Raitskin 1996:5).

In colonial contexts the world over an ethnic and racial politics was at work, where ethnicity and race were exploited and reified for political ends (see Hassankhan 1990:9). Jan Rath makes the important point that the colonial state actually created ethnic differences, with its role in identity- and difference-creation being more insidious than we might have realised (Rath 1990:17). He argues that the state categorised differences, and then legislated for their accommodation through a process of "ethnic minorization". This process was usually expressed in the separate barracks and the barbed wire that existed in the colonial state. This "collapsing of space" had begun in the early indentured years when Indians of different languages and castes were forced to live together, inevitably resulting in the emergence of a pan-Indian culture, alongside internal differences (see Haraksingh 1990:8). Consciously or by default, in these circumstances a sense of common identity was developed and reified on essentialist notions of race and ethnicity, sometimes commodified in the anxiety to perpetuate it.

One cannot overlook the homogenising tendencies of colonial authorities which obliterated what were seen as the "untidy" complexities of traditional societies. Werbner and Ranger, writing of the effect of colonial agents (such as missionaries) in Africa in general, point out that

The main thrust of their efforts was towards new social rigidities, the creation of stabilised well-defined tribes, the reifying of custom in inflexible codes, the tightening of control over subjects less able to negotiate their own identities. (Werbner and Ranger 1996: 22-23)

We cannot ignore of course the many forces at work in the creation of identity, especially group identities, even by historians and historiographers. Patrick Chabal has pointed out: "Historians of Africa now readily accept that the notion of ethnicity, like that of the nation, is largely an invention, that our original assessment of the continent's ethnicity was essentially a figment of our historical imagination" (46).

The apartheid super-structure in South Africa built on colonial arrangements, with arguments for maintaining cultural difference (with culture often conflated with race) being used as the corner-stone of apartheid society. This was in effect a coercive identity, with juridical structures of power producing, naturalising and maintaining identity and difference. This process was exacerbated and given further official sanction in South Africa when the Group Areas Act was introduced in 1950 and the 'homelands' were created. David Bunn points out that "it was defended as an attempt to shore up cultural identities that were under threat of being swamped" as the "South African landscape [was] remade according to a series of legislative, juridical and political imperatives that constituted a new landscape semiotics of race, class, and gender" (Bunn 1996:34, 35). The National Party's insistence on ethnic "own cultures" and "own affairs" reached its climax in the Tricameral Parliament politics of the 80's, where Indians, Coloureds and Whites were given representation in a central government machinery, and Africans accommodated within the Bantustan homeland policy. Robert Thornton's observation in this respect shows the calculated severity of apartheid. He states that South Africa was:

known for its apparent totalising system of social engineering in which the vision of 'apartness', apartheid, was implemented through massive and violent spatial dislocation of much of its population in terms of a rationalised bureaucratic master-plan of a total differentiation of spheres of life based on race and (what was the name for its architects) culture. (Thornton 1996:142)

Against the background of apartheid, then, expressions of identity or of difference were often linked to the cultural specificity of groups and communities living in an oppressive society. As the apartheid machinery worked to separate racial groups, it created the impression of a fairly uniform identity on the basis of race and ethnicity for oppressed groups such as Indians. The discourse and legal and cultural apparatus of apartheid promoted differences as 'natural' and 'national'. It also attempted, through education and other forms of coercion, to engender a common interpretive basis from which to interact with apartheid culture. All the writers in this study inherited this colonialist and apartheid his-

tory, and depict in their writings the extent to which a self-fashioning and self-definition took place in such separatist contexts either with themselves or with the fictional characters they create. There was little respite in the political structures of apartheid from such essentialist understandings of identity, even as the Indian women writers themselves show varying degrees of resistance to its formulations.

Apart from the broad vertical background of apartheid, mainly based on race, gender and class, which tended to homogenise oppressed groups hierarchically (the ugly face of modernity is evident in apartheid's attempt to order and 'normalise' differences), we see that identities and differences were influenced by other specific factors such as spatial relationships, political activism, language, religion, education, and historical period. Some of these, such as location and space, were themselves contingent on apartheid policies. Often cultural attributes such as language, religion, food, music, dress, to name a few, became reified and defining characteristics or markers of difference (perceived as cultural peculiarities). And a process of identification began whereby the racial and ethnic labels and ascriptions applied to people were appropriated, with people "conforming to the script for that identity, performing that role" (Appiah 2000:610). Separatist notions of race and ethnicity and even 'community' were nurtured (and 'imagined') in ethnic enclaves and became naturalised. Appiah states:

Once the racial label is applied to people, ideas about what it refers to, ideas that may be much less consensual than the label, come to have their social effects. But they have not only social effects, but psychological ones as well; and they shape the way people conceive of themselves and their projects. (608).

Aleksandra Alund, in her critical discussion of feminism and multiculturalism, concurs, pointing out that such "culturalisation of differences" was created by segregation but often cited as the rationale for it, and even resulted in an "ethnic absolutism", as social havens were created in the midst of a hostile world (Alund 1999:149).

There has been indeed a tendency to internalise apartheid's racial categories and ethnocentric beliefs and myths. A complex picture, with many intersections and contradictions, of complicity in and resistance to apartheid structures is evident in the history of Indians in South Africa. In her short story cycle, *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*, Agnes Sam highlights such complicity, depicting a range of situations of prejudice not only vertically, but horizontally. It is necessary to state that, at an official level, many Indians also did participate with the apartheid regime, especially at the time of the inauguration of the Tricameral Parliament.

Consequently there emerged a trenchant debate a few years ago over whether Indians should "apologise" to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) for their collaboration with apartheid. Recently a similar debate has emerged about whether whites should apologise for the benefits they enjoyed under apartheid. As pointed out already, the present

is a period in which we are dealing with the past, and coming to terms with the truth of the past, through the work of structures like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the kind of confessional politics it encouraged. Many questions are being raised in the light of the current preoccupation with national identity, democracy, justice and development in order to move away from the divisiveness of apartheid. There is still much work to be done to develop a sense of community across the divides of class, race, and ethnicity. It is also a regenerative period, where there is an envisioning of the future free of the many encumbrances of the past.

It is inevitable then that many of the diverse impulses emerging from the political and historical context will be evident in Indian women's writings in South Africa. While they exhibit different identities, in many ways Indian women writers also depict a common identity directly linked to their living and writing under apartheid. Alienation and isolation, for example, from the rest of the South African population groups invariably crops up as a theme in the writing. The policies of separate development based on spatial discrimination directly impact on identity and difference and provide grist for much of the writings here. Stasiulis has pointed out that one's history and various social identities - both individual and collective - affect what one chooses to write about and one's capacity to write "authentically" about them (Stasiulis 1993:36), and this is borne out in the writings selected for scrutiny here.

Place becomes an important dimension of identity. In the writings of Jayapraga Reddy and Farida Karodia, for example, location and topography have racial and ethnic connotations. Reddy and Karodia both write of the effect of the Group Areas Act on their families, the one living in Durban in the 1970's and the other in Sterkstroom of the 1950's. Karodia's years of exile outside South Africa, as with Sam's, also influence her identity and her representation of herself. Many writers experience physical and psychological separation, living within the confines of an alienating 'ghetto' environment in the land of their birth. Writers and critics reflect on the "exilic condition" as being both internal and external - where writers have left South Africa physically or have remained but have had to live in racial ghettos. Sam sees her isolation as being directly created by apartheid:

South African Indians like myself have lost mother tongue, family name, religion, culture, history, and historical links with India. Cut off from India, apartheid has further separated us from the other communities in South Africa, thereby exacerbating our isolation. (Sam 1989:11)

In Karodia's writing we note that exile and ghettoisation have opposite effects on Indian identity - exile leads to a diffusion of Indian identity as opposed to (enforced) consolidation. Some, of course, do not lose their identity (such as Mayat's grandparents), and transplant it on South African soil, where their identity undergoes syncretistic transformations in a new setting.

Many of the Indian women writers consciously bridge the apartheid divide, and find

their political identity, a resistant identity, in trying to break down the physical and psychological walls that are built around them. We see in the writings a determined effort to resist apartheid divisions and depict a larger South African and African landscape. For many of the women writers the deterministic effects of colonialism and apartheid are consciously fought against. In this there are different political allegiances or identities and a variety of resistance strategies adopted, and these change with each historical moment. An-suyah Singh comes under the influence of Passive Resistance initiated by Gandhi in South Africa in the first decade of the 20th century; this directly informs and shapes her novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*. Goonam and Meer actively fight against colonialism and apartheid. Goonam's ironising of the derogatory term "coolie", in her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, typifies her life of political resistance. Phyllis Naidoo embraces a militant political activism outside Passive Resistance, and this leads to her imprisonment and subsequent exile. Much of this resistance, as the writings portray, is from the 'inside' and from below, as the writers show either in their fictional constructions (Sam's *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* is a good example here) or personal experiences (as with Phyllis Naidoo's "Ten Days") the cracks in the colonial and apartheid armoury. It is understandable, too, why the idea of nation-building would be paramount for many of these writers, as much of the past, especially for the women activists, was lived in such a way that contributed to the changed political order in South Africa today.

Black Consciousness

At the opposite end of the spectrum and in contra-distinction to rampant racialisation and ethnicisation was the purposeful and deliberate creation of a broad non-racialism in South Africa. As Said notes: "Resistance is an alternative way of conceiving history" (Said 1994:216). The resistance politics of the African National Congress, which culminated in the Freedom Charter in 1955 epitomised this non-racialism. Under this broad umbrella of progressive politics the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), which began under Gandhi as a separate Indian political organisation, became non-racial and more inclusive in its political agenda. At the time of the Tricameral Parliament, the NIC campaigned vigorously "to prevent Indians from being absorbed into state-created apartheid political structures; and...to inculcate democratic values among its constituents" (Bhana, Surendra 1997:146).

Developing political solidarity has been no easy task. Our history has shown that apartheid was both seductive and divisive, militating frequently against the formation of uniform oppositional strategies. For example, the 1949 Riots severely damaged relations between the two oppressed groups, African and Indian. It was for this reason that the Congress Alliance was formed after the Riots, stressing a common non-racial identity. Surendra Bhana, in his book, *Gandhi's Legacy - The Natal Indian Congress 1894-1994*, published in 1997, shows the gradual evolution in progressive Indian politics to a Black Con-

sciousness orientation. He argues, however, that resistance formations among Indians were originally not as progressive as claimed, and only developed later. In tracing the history of the Natal Indian Congress during this century, Bhana points out that Congress members began to move slowly from an exclusivist 'Indian' identity:

For at least the first forty years of the 20th century, the Indian element of the NIC's identity was important; but its failure to make much headway in winning for the Indians the rights and privileges they were entitled to, stirred progressive Indians into seeking common cause with other disadvantaged groups and people. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the NIC entered into a multiracial alliance; and in the 1970's, the leadership of the NIC generally called Indians 'blacks' to show its solidarity with other black groups. This reflects, of course, the extent of the change of identity among South Africa's Indians. (5-6)

The Black Consciousness Movement, in particular, assumed importance in the 70's and 80's, and challenged colonialism and apartheid and its hegemony of whiteness. Due to the very racial and ethnic divisiveness of apartheid there was a political need to erase or suppress separate identities. Many refused to be passive victims of apartheid, opposing the enforced identities of apartheid and of colonialism.

Neville Alexander states that the values and principles of Black Consciousness were first advocated by students at 'tribal' university colleges. The students "believed that the ideas of Black Consciousness could negate the arbitrary attempt to retribalise the oppressed communities and cut off the struggle of the oppressed from the liberal leadership under which it had once again come as a result of the decapitation of the liberatory movement in the early 1960s" (Alexander, Neville 1992:246). Black Consciousness focused not on colour, but on political solidarity. It provided a political definition of African identity, which was based on a critical awareness and consciousness of oppression rather than on biology, race, or ethnicity. It stressed a collective identity, where dominant regimes of representation were challenged. Cutting across divisions of race, class and ethnicity, Black Consciousness was heralded as a "category of assertion and resistance against white domination rather than as a term signifying subordination and victimhood" (Driver 1996:46). It provided a political space to develop "strategies to subvert entrenched classifications and dichotomies, and to open up new spaces for subjectivity" (46). It adamantly refused to consider the variety of social divisions around which South Africans were constructed, and suppressed differences of race, class, gender, ethnicity. This was necessary to help people of colour overcome the "arsenal of complexes", as Frantz Fanon would have put it, that the colonial and apartheid eras bestowed. Michael Vaughan points out: "The struggle against oppression is a struggle against a *racial* mode of oppression: hence the concern with the positive reconstruction of *black* consciousness, identity, culture" (Vaughan 1984:197).

Politically-aware Indians, especially a younger generation, refused to be associated with the 'Indian' tag, and identified with a black or African identity. (The older generation,

mainly through the Natal Indian Congress, used Passive Resistance as a rallying point against colonialism and apartheid.) The political agenda of activists such as Saths Cooper (cousin of Jayapraga Reddy), Muthal Naidoo (an important Indian woman playwright), Benjy Francis, Sam Moodley, Asha Moodley and Strini Moodley - all working in Black Consciousness Theatre in the 80's - was forged in the spirit of this radical thinking. They were all strongly influenced by Steve Biko, who defined 'black' in political terms rather than by the colour of one's skin:

Those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identify themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations. This definition illustrates to us a number of things: 1. Being black is not a matter of pigmentation - being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. 2. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on the road to emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being. (Biko 1978:48)

The writers surveyed here show varying allegiances to Black Consciousness thinking, but most of them are committed to non-racialism. Muthal Naidoo writes more clearly from a Black Consciousness perspective, while the others, part of an older generation, like Dr Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer, are in agreement with the broad goals and spirit of Black Consciousness but are not aligned to the structures of the Movement in any formal way. Even those who write within an essentialist understanding of identity try to resist racial and ethnic categories from time to time and create a non-racial world in their writings. And for many their very literary activity (their decision to write, in the first place) is linked to this progressive political agenda.

In the present time we may reflect more critically on the constructedness of black identity in Black Consciousness terms and its own hegemonic formulations. Looking at drama in particular, Dellarose Bassa points out that "Black Consciousness Theatre...deliberately propagated the mythology of homogeneity and solidarity within the black community, and suppressed the cleavages and inequalities caused by ethnic and class differences in the interests of uniting against the common White enemy..." (Bassa 1995:20). Dorothy Driver suggests that assuming such a political identity is a "historical necessity":

Given the difficulty writers had emerging from groups other than the politically and economically dominant 'white' group and of creating voices which were heard as oppositional rather than as simply 'non-white', it was a historical necessity for Black Consciousness writers to represent their characters and themselves as a unified group, as if the 'black experience' were characterised by commonality or homogeneity. (Driver 1996:46)

Whether it is true that there was an "imaginary coherence" or "mythology of homogeneity" or not, the Black Consciousness Movement certainly did engender common political identities, strategies and goals. The term 'Black' was actually appropriated and affirmed through positive and inclusive usage, as opposed to the blanket use of 'Non-European' by the regime, and was a way of unifying all oppressed groups. For Cesaire this was a strategy

of defining "a collective, shared history of oneness, to reverse the dehumanising representations of the violence of colonial history" (in Sullivan 1998:434). In many ways it took the form of *project identity*, to use Castells' formulation, in the hope of creating a new and alternative social and political order.

At the present time the hold of Black Consciousness has diminished, and new contingencies of identities and differences have emerged. Stuart Hall identifies shifts in black cultural politics in the United Kingdom over the past few decades, for example, and shows why a black consciousness creed was necessary at a particular historical moment. But, as Hall points out, it also developed an hegemony of its own:

Politically, this is the moment when the term 'black' was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain, and came to provide the organising category of new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. In this moment, politically speaking, 'the black experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/racial identities - though the latter did not, of course, disappear. (Hall 1992:252)

The influence of Black Consciousness lingers on in the present quarrels among South African Indians over whether the terms black, South African or Indian should be used. The question that is often asked is whether using the term 'Indian' is not ethnocentric. While the legacy of Black Consciousness continues in some ways, there is a rethinking of its principles, political purposes and emphases. Against the historical background of apartheid, Black Consciousness had a clear-cut agenda. However, the diverse impulses in contemporary cultural politics have resulted in a blurring, and considerations around race and ethnicity have now become complex and contradictory. Colonialism and apartheid on the one hand, and Black Consciousness on the other, both caught in the same binary of opposites, insisted on a stable subject, whether essentialist or political, and were coercive and regulatory in their own ways. But as Said cautions: "identity does not necessarily imply ontologically given and eternally determined stability, or uniqueness, or irreducible character, or privileged status as something total and complete in and of itself" (Said 1994:315).

Dangers and Opportunities at the Present Time

Moving beyond Black Consciousness, we are beginning to see at the present time (among formerly oppressed groups) the emergence of a "new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities" (Hall 1992:257). Ironically, at the very moment that we are engaged in dismantling apartheid and its baggage in South Africa, cultural identity has emerged globally as one of the dominant political issues of our time (see Papastergiadis 1996). At this particular juncture in South African politics, space is being claimed to assert one's racial or ethnic identity, to 'discover', explore or express suppressed identities, espe-

cially among previously dominated groups.

Stuart Hall argues that there is "renewed contestation around the meaning of ethnicity" (Hall 1992:256); he suggests, as the politics around representation shifts, that the term ethnicity has to be reclaimed in the same way that 'black' has been reclaimed and recuperated (257). Hall describes two "types" of ethnicity, separating the dominant, hegemonic view from a new, reclamatory view from the periphery (258). In such a "new ethnicity", Hall stresses "a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position" (258). This is a sobering dimension of difference from a reputable and progressive cultural critic, and needs to be recognised at the present time. Views such as these are pertinent to the very rationale of this study, which is a reclamatory project sensitive to a new historical moment, as pointed out in the Introductory chapter.

The way the term 'ethnicity' is used in the South African (and Western, Eurocentric) context is worth interrogating in relation to Indians in South Africa in general, and Indian women writers in particular. In South Africa, unlike previously, some members of different groups are arguing that claiming one's ethnic identity is not necessarily exclusivist, segregationist, politically incorrect, or contrary to the full democratisation and integration of South Africa's "population groups". Unlike the past decades of apartheid and of resistance to apartheid, there are now calls for a balancing of ethnic identity with national identity, and the two are not seen as being contradictory. This is why there has been a new interest in the writing of histories, personal or general, related to Indians in South Africa in the present time, as recalling the past is an important way of validating it. In Mayat's memoir, for example, we note that identity formation is closely linked to memory, and she balances the memory of India with that of living in Potchefstroom, as a cultural history is reclaimed at the present time.

There are new expressions of Indianness, which may or may not be aligned to political affiliations. Minorities and marginalised groups, in particular, feel constrained to recuperate subjectivity, as eliding identity into the larger 'nation' tends to diminish the specificities of their histories. Hassim Seedat, a local progressive historian and a past vice-chairman of the Global Organisation of Peoples of Indian Origin (GOPIO) in South Africa, has stated that Indians in South Africa should not experience an identity crisis:

Indians must adopt a South African identity, and the new constitution which is a landmark political document allows for development of all cultures. We need not fear in any way that by projecting ourselves as Indians we are being non-South Africans...Now that we have our liberation, we have a tendency not to project our racial origin. This argument is quite untenable. (Seedat 1998:13)

Saths Cooper, the noted Black Consciousness stalwart, at the launch of *Indigo*, a popular magazine aimed at the Indian community (itself an interesting development in this post-apartheid era), suggests that one should have the freedom to assert pride in one's

cultural and ethnic background and not be locked into predetermined categories. Cooper, who is Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *Indigo* magazine, feels that there is a need to respond to the exclusionary practices of the past:

The largest community of Indians outside of India has contributed disproportionately to the life and development of our country on the southern tip of the African continent. In the almost 140 years of our presence in South Africa, there has been no such regular publication dedicated to Indian lifestyles as well as being significantly owned by us. Although our buying power is some R4 billion annually, our custom is taken for granted, our heritage is devalued, our contributions to society (especially our fledging democracy) tend to be overlooked. Indeed many of our youth may be excused if they were to experience a sense of dislocation in the land of their birth, especially in times of extreme social uncertainty and economic insecurity. (Cooper, Saths 1998:5)

In the same context, Fatima Meer argues that the strategies of the past should give way now to a new freedom to assert one's identity and one's difference. Noting the banishment of ethnic identity into ghettos or its undermining in relation to a Eurocentric 'mainstream', she has always felt constrained to assert (rather than efface) Indian identity, but only in the context of a broad South Africanism. She consistently draws attention to shared oppressions across the racial spectrum, but also to the specificities of oppressions that different groups experienced under (and because of) the apartheid system. In this she redefines a 'South African' identity, arguing that Indianness is part of the South African social and political fabric. In the same way, Ronnie Govender, the well-known playwright, also adamantly asserts that his plays are not Indian but South African, drawing attention to the fact that his depiction of Indian life in South Africa is peculiarly South African. These leaders are claiming the new space and freedom in the present time for greater variety in asserting difference, and point to the general need now, as Gunew and Yeatman have argued, to move beyond the binary politics of coloniser and colonised (Gunew and Yeatman 1993b:xxii).

Even as writers move beyond purely ethnocentric definitions of themselves and their work they are not able to escape lingering ethnocentric labels, due to the ingrained cultural hegemony of the mainstream. This is one of the reasons for the marginality of Indian women writers and their works, as I have argued in the first chapter. There is still prejudice against art that comes from 'minority' groups. Muthal Naidoo, for example, notes that her work has not been received well by white audiences: "All my plays were flops because people saw the name 'Naidoo' and thought, 'this must be an Indian play' and were not interested" (In Perkins 1998:114).

Clearly, academic distinctions are quite different from the way people actually live their lives, and cultural fundamentalism might well persist. In this new discursive space we must anticipate that a range of subjectivities will be reclaimed, recuperated, asserted or created. We must accept that there will be impulses that are resistant as well as reactionary. While

apartheid and colonialism operated through exclusion and othering, this present period of movement to a mature democracy is bound to engender a range of subjectivities, on a wide spectrum, from mimicry, to self-Orientalising, to accommodation, to negotiation, to resistance in various forms and shapes. We certainly see this diversity in the recent views expressed in the media on minority groups and political affiliations, and the debates around "Who is an African". Naipaul's famous phrase, "a million mutinies", used to describe the many groupings and factions in India, may be considered appropriate for South Africa's many debates on identity and difference that have now surfaced.

The present time is indeed one where many different impulses and perspectives on identity co-exist, either directly influenced by our past history or in resistance to it. We note a range of influences, religious, linguistic and cultural, as well as those of Western popular culture, as Sam depicts in her short stories, "High Heels" and "Jesus is Indian". In the endeavour to depict some of the interwoven and interpellated strands in contemporary identity politics and to move beyond the old binaries, some artists dramatise an all-embracing "South Africanness". In this respect the emergence of 'fusion' dance and theatre has been an important development in South Africa. Jay Pather, for example, notes that this is the time for a "variety of formations, like a woman in traditional African dress pulling a Voortrekker cart". Pather states: "We can juxtapose those combinations just as our lives are. It's a way of coherently expressing our language of incoherence" (in Bell 1998:17). His dance cameos illustrate the "powerful and interesting dichotomy of Indian antiquity folded into post-modernity", as his characters wear wedding saris as skirts, with dark ray-ban sun-glasses. The difficulty that some members of his audiences tended to have with this "playful juxtaposition of grotesque incongruities", to use Werbner and Ranger's phrase to describe "the postmodern condition" in South Africa (Werbner and Ranger 1996:7), shows the persistent desire for safe, essentialist definitions of identity and of difference. Although we might agree intellectually with Patrick Chabal who has reminded us that the "thrust of the postmodernist argument in the contemporary world is one in which individual identities are increasingly cross-cultural and values increasingly relative" (40-41) the choices on the ground might be quite different.

Suria Govender's work with fusion dance, through her dance company, *Surialanga*, where African and Indian dance routines are used, also shows the movement away from discrete forms. There has been some resistance to her approach from 'purists' who object to what they see as carnivalesque and cultural melange. Audiences find it difficult to deal with flux in identity or difference, proving Thornton's point that "while there is no nostalgia for...Apartheid, there is nostalgia for the certainties, however grim, that...[it] offered" (Thornton 1996:138). We do find that balancing on the perilous tightrope of identities and differences is fraught with many contradictions, not the least being a reverting to, or entrenchment of, racist and separatist attitudes and behaviour. As Bhana argues, "it would be

a mistake to imagine that an altered political identity wiped away ethnicity" (Bhana, Surendra 1997:6).

Zoe Wicomb's views on the construction of Coloured identity at the present time show that these issues are not peculiar to Indians; her views also provide a valuable criticism of an essentialist appropriation of identity among Indians. Wicomb draws attention to "a shameful excess, an exorbitance of identity currently expressed in the construction of Coloured nationhood that has surfaced since the elections" (Wicomb 1998:105). She points out that "[w]hat the problem of identity indicates...is a position that undermines the new narrative of national unity: the newly democratized South Africa remains dependent on the old economic, social, and also epistemological structures of apartheid..." (94). Wicomb criticises the "complicit construction" of cultural practices, when the ethnic homelands of apartheid, as with District Six, [are] accepted without question". She bemoans a "refusal to engage with the collocations of Colouredness, or with interacting identities in a larger framework of South African citizenship" (95). There is need to be aware of the complex cultural cross-overs and borrowings in South Africa, as Alund argues in another context (Alund 1999:147). Wicomb is keenly aware of this in her own work, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, as is Pamela Jooste in her novel, *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter* (1998).

What is disconcerting about the discussion on the identity and rights of minorities, further, is that this is done selectively, and not all minorities in South Africa are considered 'evenly' and 'fairly'. It would seem that Indians (and Coloureds) are the 'main' minorities in South Africa. Certainly when Indians speak of 'minority rights' they are usually referring to themselves as a minority group and not any other (Amichand Rajbansi's political party, "The Minority Front", was specifically aimed at Indians). All minorities need to be written into the nation's script. In his critique of racism and ethnicity in the United Kingdom Hall states that groups should desist from extolling one ethnicity by marginalising, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities (Hall 1992:258) and work assiduously across boundaries of all kinds. For instance in the fight for 'minority rights' among Indians in South Africa I hardly hear of concern being expressed for the Khoisan groups. A few of the writers in this study are aware of such compartmentalisation, and try their best to avoid retreating into an "ethnic absolutism" that was created by apartheid. Fatima Meer is a good example here, as is evident in her attempt to write the story of Krotoa, drawn from the personal diaries of Jan Van Riebeeck (Krotoa was a Khoi Khoi woman who enjoyed a close relationship with Van Riebeeck). As Meer observes, "It's our history and it's imperative that it is told" (in Ismail 2000:2).

Relations among the Colonised

There has been a history of co-operation and solidarity between Indians and Africans, especially among the leadership, in the liberation struggle in South Africa, as the work and

writings of Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer show, and through the philosophy of Black Consciousness, as argued above. There has also been tension and rivalry between African and Indian, due to the latter's apparent exploitative practices at the cost of the former. The 1949 Riots, in Cato Manor, are often cited in this regard, although it was the complexities of local state and central state segregation policies that were at the heart of the conflict (Maharaj 1994). In the early days of indenture, separate racial groups operated to take care of their own interests. This was seen as being typical of "sojourner politics", to use Bhana's words (Bhana, Surendra 1997), where common cause with other race groups was not sought, and each group generally worked separately.

In this transitional reconstructive period, Indians in South Africa are faced with the continuing challenge of identification with other black groups (Africans and Coloureds), and with whites, in the development of a common national identity, away from narrow tribalisms, and a greater identification with the rest of Africa. That this is an important matter is shown by the "Indaba" that was held in Durban in 2000 to focus specifically on the relations between Indians and Africans. This imperative is being sharpened by a new entry for all South Africans into the rest of Africa, and an awareness of the need for South Africa's participation in and contribution to an African Renaissance and a commitment to Africanisation.

Yet the picture that emerges is a complex one. There have clearly been the negative effects of a 'divide and rule' policy. The pattern of voting among Indians (and Coloureds) in South Africa during the first democratic elections in 1994 shows support for the Nationalist Government rather than the African National Congress. In KwaZulu-Natal this occurred mainly in low-income areas such as Phoenix and Chatsworth (147). Bhana points out that "apartheid demonised African majority rule, and many Indians have yet to recover from the fear and suspicion this process has sown, and ethnically inspired fears have grown among them" (147). And the negative attitude to affirmative action among some groups also shows a critical view of increased opportunity for Africans at various levels of social, political and economic life. There are also anxieties that the drive towards an African Renaissance would exclude Indians. Feizel Mamdoo has noted in this respect: "That an African renaissance could exclude any of the peoples of Africa, is inconceivable" (Mamdoo 1998:39). These attitudes must be seen in the context of a colonial and apartheid past, when ethnic and racial tensions were created and maintained, and the contested way in which racial transformation now takes place. We also have to distinguish between the views of leaders (including writers) which generally tend to be progressive and of those who are part of the 'rank and file', which are conservative.

It is important to remember that divisions among oppressed groups are a common occurrence in the colonised world. Uma Narayan, writing in the United States, makes the important point that ethnic and racial differences among oppressed groups need to be under-

stood in a wider context. She points out that

discussions about colonialism and post-colonialism focus on the relationship between 'western colonisers' and 'colonised third world peoples', and seldom on the impact of colonialism on the relationships between different colonised third world people...One legacy of colonial history is that members of 'dominant' or 'mainstream' groups are encouraged to have contemptuous or 'culturally imperialist' attitudes to their Others. However, forms of cultural insularity, parochialism, and contempt for one's Others are not the unique purview of white westerners. I would argue that serious attempts to think through the task of fostering respect for one's Others must focus not only on relationships between 'mainstream citizens' and 'ethnic citizens' and 'ethnic Others', but on the complex and often politically charged relationships between members of various ethnic groups. (Narayan 1995:80)

The dynamics of such divided living clearly play themselves out in various ways in different contexts. Speaking on the political (and material) differences between "citizen" and "subject", "settler" and "native" in his inaugural address at the University of Cape Town, Mahmood Mamdani notes that Asians in Uganda petitioned in terms of the new constitution in 1991 to be considered as an 'ethnic' group. He argues that "It was a petition that had little chance of succeeding, for its consequence would have been to define an 'ethnic' homeland for Uganda Asians" (Mamdani 1998). Recalling the challenges that faced Asians in Uganda during Idi Amin's reign, Mamdani cautions against a simplistic defence of "rights" without a political critique of "racialised privilege", and suggests that there are "lessons" that can be learnt from this for South Africa:

Though denied a share of political power, this immigrant minority had privileged access to the market place in a growing import-export economy. Without having a privileged access to power, the Asian minority became beneficiaries of inequalities generated by the colonial order. Members of a highly racialised civil society, they depended on the colonial state for a defence of racialized privilege...It needs to be understood as a lesson in the limits to which the non-racial language of rights can be effective in defending racialised privilege once it has become illegitimate in the eyes of the native majority. (Mamdani 1998)

Diasporic Identity

Greater vigilance is also necessary as the new possibilities for a global movement of Indians become evident. Interestingly, at the present time, when nation-building is seen as an important priority in South Africa and Indians/Asians in Africa are being challenged about their wider African identity and identification, there are also new formal diplomatic relations between India and South Africa. This is only natural, as India, together with many other democracies, had been a strong supporter of the anti-apartheid cause. For a writer such as Goonam, for example, South Africa was predominantly a Western country with a Western ethos, and her trip to India gave her the opportunity to enjoy her 'Indianness' not in a cultural ghetto or Group Area, but in an expansive, freedom-loving sub-continent. Goonam identified with India not just for its link with her ancestral roots; India presented a model of independence struggle that inspired and nurtured her own ideals for South Africa.

That the discourse on 'diaspora' has become increasingly prominent is not surprising, with an upsurge of emphasis in diaspora studies internationally. Allan deSouza argues that the notion of 'diaspora', as a politics of dislocation, generally becomes a mode of discourse in periods of relocation and settlement: "Diaspora studies take place... within a social space of relative security and prosperity" (deSouza 1997:65). And Homi Bhabha points out simply that a "scattering" of peoples inevitably leads to their "gathering" (Bhabha 1990b:291).

Indians across the world are being drawn into contact and dialogue with one another (although this is largely a middle-class phenomenon), stressing their common Indian ancestry and cultural heritage. They have been products of colonisation, which caused the large-scale dispersion of Indians in the first place. We have to appreciate, too, in this context, the extent to which the impact of imperialism is deeply reflected in the formation of contemporary ethnic identities, identities, that Arjun Appadurai argues are "direct products of and responses to the policies of various nation states over the last century or more", and that the present trends towards finding global unity among some groups is a direct result of nineteenth century imperial expansionism (in Narayan 1995:80,81). There are those who respond to the globalisation of identity, and among them are some who promote the search for a global Indian identity. The formation of a worldwide diasporic organisation, the Global Organisation of Peoples of Indian Origin (GOPIO), referred to already, is an interesting case in point in this regard. This trend naturally has appeal for many Indians in South Africa, given the obvious links with India which is seen by many Indians as their ancestral land. Yet, as Kavitha Ramachandran points out, this is not without its tensions. Those who have left their homeland may find themselves in an invidious position: "In some cases, the ancestral homeland denies the cultural 'authenticity' of its diasporic children while the adopted homeland insists upon their essential 'otherness' to argue that the group is indeed foreign" (Ramachandran 1997:1-2).

In the academy, research and scholarship has generated critical debates on globalisation and development, multiculturalism, and post-coloniality, where common political ground is sought among all historically colonised peoples through a critique of neo-colonialism and global capitalism. However, at a time when identity and difference, multiculturalism and globalisation, are being spoken of rather glibly, it is necessary to develop a critical view of the trend. I do believe that Indian identity is not about reclaiming a lost sense of 'Indianness', a harking back to some romantic notion of 'Mother India'. The search for 'roots' can also be an essentialising process, perpetuating false dualisms, and exhibiting an exoticised, commodified notion of some suppressed identity waiting to be excavated. Such a search (for 'roots') may make one actually believe that a supposedly 'authentic' Indian identity is attainable. Radhakrishnan cautions against "ideological fixing" when identity such as Indianness "could begin to operate as a mandate with an ontological claim over behaviour as though behaviour were transhistorically mandated and not produced histori-

cally" (Radhakrishnan 1994:19).

Further, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out that the term 'Indian' does not have universal meanings even in India. 'Indian' is clearly not an homogeneous term, and is ambivalently situated between national, racial, ethnic and linguistic identities. Considering ('Indian') identity inevitably raises questions of assumed ('non-Indian') difference. There is clearly no identity-formula that sets out who is an 'Indian'. Like femaleness, Sunder Rajan argues that there is no essential quality that marks it; it is constantly made and remade, represented and erased, asserted and disputed (Rajan 1991:129). Hybridity existed (and exists) already in India, as much as Western culture is also hybrid. Sudipta Kaviraj states that "Indianness" is an historical concept, invented at the time of Independence, and that it is an anachronism to assume that it existed from "immemorial times" (Kaviraj 1993:8).

The writings in this study provide possibilities for comparative study with other writings in the Indian diaspora, though not exclusively. Critical knowledge in contemporary post-colonial contexts is certainly deepened with increased awareness of individual, historical and national particularities. This (the coming together of "peoples of Indian origin") also offers a basis for a new critique on globalization itself, although the temptation might well be to accommodate it, through fostering transnational business interests, among others. Due consideration should also be given to the many different historical and political trajectories that immigrant groups have taken in their different places of domicile, to the demands of a *politics of location*. The positionalities of peoples of Indian origin are inflected by very different histories, and any present affiliations should also focus on present and future challenges. As Larner, writing of identity politics in New Zealand, points out: "The politics of affinity is based on shared purpose rather than common identity" (Larner 1993:99). The writings in this study show in different ways how this is achieved.

The impulses for increased formal dialogue between India and South Africa and peoples of the Indian diaspora, then, after South Africa's enforced isolation during the apartheid years, are to be creatively developed in this present period of transnational partnerships. There is a place, an important place, for thinking through "interdependent histories, [and] overlapping domains" in the process of decolonizing knowledge (Said 1994:257). At the same time we need to ask how this can be balanced, and run parallel, with the fostering of better relations between South Africa and the rest of Africa and the African diaspora. What are the challenges that people of Indian origin face, particularly in the area of race relations, in the places of their present abode? Recent political developments in places such as Fiji and Mauritius, and the history of race relations in Trinidad, show that these are important considerations, that relationships with indigenous peoples and groups of other local citizens require as much attention as diasporic ones.

Looking at similar challenges in Africa, Kwesi Prah makes a distinction between African citizenship and African identity: with the latter there is identification with African

history and culture (Prah 1999:40). This is a challenge to many Indians in South Africa who claim to be born in Africa/South Africa, where the search for 'roots' in this period of national identity takes different trajectories. Writers such as Sam, Karodia, Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer, among others, show in their lives and writings how well they understand the distinction that Prah points to. Goonam especially is able to straddle the dividing line between many loyalties creatively showing, as Meena Alexander does in her own narrative of her journey from India to the Sudan to England, and finally to the United States, the "multiple beings locked into the journeys of one body" (Alexander, Meena 1993:2).

I do not wish to suggest that identification with the rest of Africa, that the assumption of an "African identity", is a simple, one-dimensional process. How does one relate to the many complexities of embracing Africa, itself undergoing changes, and making simplistic identification impossible. One of these changes is a process of "re-traditionalisation", but as Chabal is quick to remind us, this should not necessarily be seen as regression. We should rather, Chabal suggests, question our assumption that progress is linear. In South Africa, at the present time, we are grappling with the issue of traditional leaders, the *amakhosi*, and how they might best be accommodated in a modern (Western) democratic state. The point is that 'tribalism' and ethnic considerations are again becoming increasingly salient in contemporary Africa, and indeed in the rest of the world, but as a reaction to the artificial, and simplistic homogenising that took place during colonialism. How do Indians (and other South Africans) in South Africa react to the present trend to assert new tribalisms and new ethnicities in Africa (we have observed recently how this is a phenomenon in Europe as well), and how does this help or hinder their identification with the rest of Africa, given their own need to assert new ethnicities themselves? Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael argue that cultural theorising has been dominated by the notion of South Africa as a closed space, resulting in the perception that the country was "dislocated from the African continent", that it was not African. They call for a response to South Africa as "open spaces" which would underline its connection with the rest of Africa (Nuttall and Michael 2000b:2).

Oppressed groups must be aware of their own complicities in the manipulations of the oppressor both within their local and national histories and beyond. Ramachandran argues for closer relations between African and Indian diasporas given the ubiquitous influence of the Western "Centre" in shaping the global economy. Charting a mid-course between notions that identity is all essence or all construction, she argues that "diasporic identity exists in a hybrid space which embodies the dialectic between the poles of identity as essences and identity as conjecture. Here we may ask how the Indian and African diasporas have negotiated the essence/conjecture dichotomy in the process of positioning themselves politically with respect to each other and the dominant Centre that mediates their daily lives

through the global political economy" (Ramachandran 1997:2). If peoples of Indian and African diasporas respond to these challenges in the new millennium it will certainly change the face of identity politics.

Feminist Debates on Identity and Difference

Much of the discussion on identity in South Africa (including the debates on the African Renaissance, "Who is an Indian", and "Who is an African"), proceeds in gender-neutral ways. Critical reflection on questions of identity is deepened in the context of feminist thinking in the First and Third worlds; the gendered nature of race, citizenship, nationhood, culture and language is emphasised in these discussions. Colonialism and apartheid worked with taxonomies of difference, such as race, gender and class, as occurring separately. A critical view of history moves one out of narrow binary interpretations, exposing the interdependence and intermeshing of race, gender and class. How is a discursive analysis of identity politics in the context of colonial and apartheid history or of resistance history, for example, modified, modulated or transformed by a gendered perspective?

Issues of identity and the "politics of representation" are central to feminist theorising, and influence the critical reading of women's texts. Critiquing First World (mainstream) feminists, Third World feminists have cut their teeth on debates on the politics of difference, highlighting the different historical and experiential dimensions of women. Many feminists with experiences of life in the Third World contest facile generalisations of gender identity and re-conceptualise issues of identity and of difference particularly in respect of racial and class discrimination.

Their views are crucial to critical readings of the writings of Indian women in South Africa. At the same time, and conversely, by staking out this very field for research, a field hitherto largely excluded, I am trying to explore how Indian women's writings themselves inflect the existing feminist debates in South Africa. Where and how do Indian women writers stand on many of the central issues that many feminists have grappled with? What are some of the resonances between their writings and thinking and those of feminists elsewhere, particularly black feminists, and feminists from the Third World? In what way does a consideration of these writers contribute to an appreciation of a multi-layered subjectivity in black feminist thinking? In what way do Indian women writers in South Africa spell out their own particularities and differences within this broad spectrum, each negotiating their own unique space from which to speak? Daymond writes of the challenge to any notion of "sisterhood" in South Africa: "a challenge to its universalism and its hidden power relations has to be pursued simultaneously with efforts to establish a community of purpose within the recognition of 'difference'" (Daymond 1996c:xix). These are pertinent questions and issues as I work through critical readings of the different writers in the rest of this study, aware, nonetheless, of the many discursive debates on questions of "authen-

ticity" and "appropriation", where the authority to speak is viewed from different angles.

As Western feminists, especially "standpoint feminists", stress identity politics and subjectivity in relation to "locatedness", it is natural that those in the Third World, largely women of colour, would insist on highlighting the specificities of their own experiences. Feminist emancipatory politics is antithetical to the suppression of particularity and difference, as Yuval-Davis and Werbner point out (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999:8), and yet, as I argued in the preceding chapter, it might well be blind to its own exclusionary practices. Third World feminists are challenged to develop identities outside the frame of reference of the dominant, questioning the process of othering in which they are enmeshed. This compels them to claim their space to write of the particularities of their own histories.

Pratibha Parmar, a radical feminist in the United Kingdom, states that:

Being cast into the role of the other, marginalised, discriminated against and too often invisible, not only within everyday discourses of affirmation but also within the 'grand narratives' of European thought, black women in particular have fought to assert privately and publicly our sense of self: a self that is rooted in particular histories, cultures and languages. Black feminism has provided a space and a framework for the articulation of our diverse identities as black women from different ethnicities, classes and sexualities, even though at times that space had to be fought for and negotiated. (Parmar 1990:106)

Parmar draws attention to differences within difference and criticises the tendency to present "the Third World woman" as a monolithic subject. Chandra Mohanty also criticises the totalising construction of "Third World Feminism" by hegemonic Western feminists and insists on the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies (Mohanty 1991:51). Accordingly, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan speak of "scattered hegemonies", where "multiple subjectivities" replace the European unitary subject (Grewal and Kaplan 1994:7). This is a crucial challenge when considering identity politics in South Africa - the need to move outside and beyond binary models that leave out complex, multiply-constituted identities. Spivak has made the important point that it is a mistake to assume that dominant subjects display difference, while those in the margins do not. Indian women writers in South Africa have been marginalised in the past colonial and apartheid structures, and continue to be as the old binaries (between black and white) persist in different ways. A study such as this attempts to remedy such erasure. The task of reworking the tapestry so that it depicts the experiences of all women in South Africa is necessary for the maturing of feminist thought in South Africa. And among these experiences, those that Indian women generally write about - indenture, Gandhi and Passive Resistance, The Natal Indian Congress, Group Areas, relations with Africans, among others - need to be critically considered. Some of the women writers (Mayat, Meer, Reddy, Karodia) also write of the extended family system (*kutum*), which plays a central role in Indian communal life. Although religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, are not mentioned extensively, they do provide

part of the backdrop in the writings of Mayat, Singh, Karodia and Sam, as do many other symbolic forms of ethnicity, such as dress (in *Behold the Earth Mourns*, Singh writes of the saris that are worn) and food (which is actually a marker of difference in Mayat's memoir and in her books of recipes, *Indian Delights*). These elements do not seem to me to be presented in the writings as part of a distinct Indian sub-culture as much as that which makes up the warp and weft of living in South Africa; and what is interesting, as the study of the texts will show, is that many of the key elements (such as Passive Resistance and the family, for example) are gendered in their depictions.

Among the Indian women writers themselves we see wide diversity in respect of racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious and gender identities, among others, within the broader experiences of black women in general. Apart from English, the influence of different Indian languages among the Indian women writers - Goonam (Tamil), Mayat (Urdu/Afrikaans), Singh (Hindi), Meer (Gujerati), Karodia (Gujerati/Afrikaans), Reddy (Tamil), to name a few examples - is worth noting. Although not defining characteristics of the writings, their 'home' languages do provide a rich subtext of cultural references that emerge naturally in their writings. Goonam, for example, writes metaphorically of life that is not a "*pongal*" to be celebrated. They also show regional differences in terms of the places that their families hailed from in India - Goonam's father was from Mayavarum and Mayat's maternal grandparents from Surat - and settled in different parts of South Africa, and they bring the diversity of these backgrounds to their writings. The layering of differences becomes gradually evident, and negates the tendency to homogenise Indian women's writings. While there are common traits among the different writers, each is also unique. For example, against the political background of South Africa, Jayapraga Reddy depicts daily problems. In her writing we are reminded obliquely that in South African cultural history a sense of 'community' is determined by socio-political factors. There is no direct and conscious criticism of living under apartheid, but the plots in her short stories, the relationships across the colour line, the socio-cultural aspects of living under apartheid, the sub-text, the silences, of her writing all reflect this divided living. Her unpublished autobiography, *The Unbending Reed*, shows her personal difficulties of living under apartheid although she does not engage in direct protest against the system. *Coolie Doctor*, the autobiography by Goonam, on the other hand, self-consciously and overtly situates itself in the context of a more radical political history of Indians and other oppressed groups in South Africa. Although Goonam was made 'marginal' in another sense - through banning, house arrest, imprisonment, and exile - she insisted on occupying centre-stage in the fight against the evils of apartheid.

Claiming Identity and Selfhood

Claiming identity has been specifically important in feminist discourse. The 'claiming of voice', the creating of identity and subjectivity and the assertion of difference has been sig-

nificant for black women in general. And literature - as "acts of representation" - has been a powerful means of claiming selfhood (Driver 1996:47). Asserting subjectivity, especially moral and political agency, has been necessary in the face of both racial and gender marginalisation. 'Claiming a voice', or speaking, includes 'speaking up', or speaking against oppression in all forms, or restoring woman to the position of questioning subject, as Spivak has often reminded us in her discussion of the subaltern woman (in Harasym 1990:42), and as we see for example in the life and writings of Fatima Meer, Phyllis Naidoo and Dr Goonam, all resilient activists who claimed their voices specifically in the context of apartheid.

While such 'claiming of voice' may be problematised, the question of selfhood and subjectivity has been important for black women generally as they have attempted to create and re-create new or alternative identities to counter suppression or obliteration of their identity as well as stereotypical constructions of themselves in oppressive contexts. Oppressed women have stressed agency and self-determination through writing, and dispel the notion that all Third World women's experiences are "uniformly degraded, passively oppressed, or lacking in powers of self-determination" (Boehmer 1995:226). In South Africa, most black women's writings, particularly autobiography, are aimed at "setting the record straight". With the telling of their stories black women have in effect been recounting the history of domination that they have been subjected to. Rather than merely reading women's autobiography for an elucidation of identity and difference contained in them, it is worth remembering that autobiographies themselves are active in the politics of identity, as Whitlock points out in her reading of black women's autobiographies in South Africa, as the writing guarantees a textual identity in the face of its erasure in the real world (Whitlock 2000:146). Driver draws attention to a "semiotics of subjectivity" when reading Black women's writing in South Africa. She observes that autobiographic writing "bears witness to a history of deprivation, yet it also suggests ways which subvert this history: not through political or economic change but through a psychological change whose major route is in rewriting representation" (Driver 1996:45). In writing autobiographies especially, the writers have been engaging in the naming of self and asserting ownership of one's self. This becomes evident in the reading of Goonam's *Coolie Doctor*, or Reddy's unpublished autobiography, *The Unbending Reed*, for example.

In spite of being victims of apartheid and of patriarchal patterns of living, Indian women writers disrupt the oppressor/victim category and clearly delineate a "politics of desire" where, as Yuval-Davis and Werbner point out, women are actively working for social transformation (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999:3). The writings of Dr Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo, Fatima Meer, Jayapraga Reddy, Zuleikha Mayat and Farida Karodia all show the extent to which they respond to structural or individual oppression caused by apartheid. These women writers attempt to move away from a victim identity as they confront sex-

ism, racism, ableism, or discrimination and injustice in the community as a whole. In the case of the characters Meena and Yasmin in Farida Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight*, for example, we note that the sisters emerge from their victim status to becoming agents who are determined to change their lives in radical ways. To recreate herself Yasmin chooses exile, in refuge from the annihilation of selfhood in South Africa. In 'claiming their voices', claiming difference, and being clearly aspirational, these women writers obviously contribute to the recasting of the images of women in general.

Questions arise here concerning the images of women or of the selfhood that is reclaimed in the writings selected for this study. How are identity and difference interwoven, and what spaces are there for claiming difference? How do the authors "claim their voices" in their own respective ways, and how do the modes of representation that they choose echo their voices or shape their understanding of agency? What inter-connected roles do race, ethnicity and gender play in identity politics? What is the relationship between identity and the body in the women's autobiographical writings (a discussion that Sidonie Smith enters into directly in her book, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body - Women's Autobiography in the 20th Century*); and is "embodiment" central or marginal to subjectivity (see Smith, Sidonie 1993)? In reading the texts for their various representations of identities, questions that might well be posed are what kind of relationships are there between familial, social or political environments? How are patriarchal family relationships critiqued, or negotiated? How is a "habitable world", as Tharu and Lalita ask in the context of women writing in India (Tharu and Lalita 1995:Vol 1:35), being created out of a history of indenture, or migration, or apartheid (relocation, deprivation, suppression, exile), by the Indian women writers here? What spatial configurations emerge, and are they gendered and racialised? How do the writers dismantle and 'disarticulate' the identities of apartheid and create or 'articulate' new ones?

Claiming a voice often has not just personal but communal value. Identity for black women often intersects with claiming an identity for the community. Most autobiographies by black women, as in this study, share a concern for group rather than individual identity, and are structured by relationships with community and family. We see this, for example, in Mayat's writings where collective communal and familial experience is foregrounded. In this regard Elizabeth Fox-Genovese makes a worthwhile general point:

The identity of the self remains hostage to the history of the collectivity; the representation of that self in prose or verse invites the critical scrutiny of the culture. Both points undercut the myth of the unique individual and force a fresh look at the autobiography of black women. (In Flockemann 1992:39)

The feminist dictum - "the personal is political" - not only counters the traditionally masculine literature, where the public domain is emphasised and the domestic or private domain suppressed, as in black women's writings generally, but the personal is often directly linked to the communal. The Indian women writers referred to in this study directly or in-

directly reconstitute the public space through their writings and activism, and contribute to the gradual gendering of citizenship that we see in the contemporary period. In taking up the cudgels for emancipatory rights for all (by stressing racial rather than sexual politics and avoiding dualisms between men and women), some of these women writers were to make their mark in the public sphere, usually defined as masculine, rational, responsible and respectable, and which is also a complex and stratified political space (see Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999:6; Werbner 1999:228). They were, in my opinion, among those women of many different race groups in South Africa who contributed to preparing the way for the present engagement with women's issues more directly. The specific strategy that some Indian women adopted was that of Passive Resistance, which was an acceptable mode of protest in the Indian community at large. Tharu and Lalita pose the interesting question, which might explain the attraction it had for Indian women in South Africa: "Is there a relationship between *Satyagraha* and Gandhi's identity as an 'Indian', and what is the nature of this relationship?" They argue that *Satyagraha* is symptomatic of the questions of discipline, order, and control that covertly structured concepts such as "non-violence", "self-control", "freedom", and, most particularly, "Indianness". They suggest that the "genius of *Satyagraha*" was that it was considered somehow to be essentially Indian during the freedom movement itself (see Tharu and Lalita 1995:Vol 1:63).

In claiming voice or subjectivity for themselves and the communities around them, Indian women writers claim identity for other women, especially their mothers and grandmothers. (Some of the women also enjoy close relationships with their fathers; we see this in the case of Reddy, Goonam, Meer and Mayat.) A dominant trope is the representation of *motherhood*. Karodia, Reddy, Mayat and Sam all give voice to their mothers or grandmothers; they all go in search of their mothers' gardens, as I do myself in the following chapter on my grandmother. Karodia, in particular, writes of strong female figures, in spite of the token male-headedness of her home. While the sisters in the autobiographical fiction, *The Daughters of the Twilight*, are close to their mother and grandmother, they still want to be quite different from them, to be free and independent, to challenge their lives of conformity. Although Phyllis Naidoo seems to distance herself from her mother, in her prison memoir, "Ten Days", she constantly refers to her own role as mother to her children, as she combines motherhood and politics. What seems to me to be occurring in the writings of both Naidoo and Mayat, albeit in very different ways, is an obscuring of self (a process of generous othering), or a portrayal of self obliquely, for the purpose of foregrounding others.

Wendy Woodward et al (1999) question the simplistic use of the concept of voice which foregrounds phonocentrism, and argue for the need to theorise silence. This is certainly relevant to reading many of the writings in this study, where 'voice' is not claimed automatically, nor is it always synonymous with claiming selfhood. Karodia overturns the

usual dichotomies between speech and silence in *A Shattering of Silence*, where the white woman protagonist is dumb. Issues of power are generally linked with claiming voice, as we see in Sam's short story, "The Seed", where the immigrant mother is not able to protest against the rules that discriminate against her and her son.

Ambivalent roles are played by the female figures in many of the selected texts. It is the mothers who are keen to see that their daughters are educated, as education is seen as making one acceptable in the world. Yet they also play a significant role in domesticating their daughters, as we see, for example, in Sam's short story, "Jesus is Indian". The ideological constructions of 'the family' may not always be contested openly, but there are different ways in which they are subverted, as in Reddy's short story, "The Spirit of Two Worlds", for example.

An important feature of the activist writers here - Phyllis Naidoo, Goonam and Fatima Meer in particular - is their own adoption of "political motherhood". "Political motherhood" is defined as an "encompassing relationship" where "women are responsible to their families and the political community in its entirety, including men, with regard to issues of universal and humanitarian concern" (Werbner 1999:226). Through their work as professional women these writers were able to challenge the confinement of women to domesticity, and valorise maternal qualities in the public sphere; through their "militant maternalism", that is similar to that of other black women activists such as Kuzwayo and Mashinini (see Whitlock 2000:148) they were also able to show their unequivocal commitment to political solidarity against an oppressive regime. It is for this reason, as we shall see, that the women writers did not dwell on personal and private details of their lives to any great extent.

A diverse picture of engagement in women's experiences is evident, and one cannot apply feminist litmus tests to such practices. Jennifer Schirmer points out that there are times when women display a female consciousness and are confined within traditional roles and expectations; at other times, they show a feminist consciousness where they can be quite radical and strategic. She suggests that "women's consciousness is contingent and contextual, arising from the articulations of different dimensions of their activism and their long-term ideals and goals" (in Werbner 1999:229). This is certainly true of the activist writers in this study, who constantly re-negotiate their roles, as they draw from their multiple identities, erupting from the boundaries of some, and being contained by those of others.

What about Feminism(s)?

In reading the selected writers, then, I have begun to appreciate that I cannot approach them with theoretical or feminist literary 'benchmarks' in mind. Theorising of Indian women's writing in South Africa has still to develop, and should occur organically as a

development of the kind of gynocritical work engaged in in this study. In the writers represented here there are no explicit analyses of writing and of writing the self, or awareness of the selective processes operating in autobiography, of its constructedness (although there are, arguably, hints of this in Sam's writing), as we find in some other writing. However, some comparison with other contexts of theorising could serve to illuminate many issues in the reading of these texts. I try to show that the world of the writers in this study, as with writers anywhere, is shaped by complex and contradictory ideological orientations, and might be approached on its own terms.

Among the writers in this study, Reddy, Sam and Karodia are conscious of their identities as writers, and of the practical and ideological restrictions they face in the terrain of production and reception. But while they are aware that gender nuances national, cultural and racial identity, they do not engage in any vigorous or conscious feminist or gendered critique of their role and locatedness as writers, or of systems and structures in which writing exists. While many of the writers write critically of women's experiences, that does not mean that they are all necessarily writing within a critical feminist mode that calls into question all patriarchal structures and ideological formations. The writers who have come directly under the influence of Western feminism are Muthal Naidoo, Sobhna Poona, Devi Sarinjeive and Krijay Govender. Muthal Naidoo, for example, has been able to combine her academic feminist exposure, writing and community work. The others, such as Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Meer, generally become aware of women's rights in political activist contexts, rather than in academic ones.

Tharu and Lalita's reflections on their excavatory work of women's writings in India is pertinent here:

Women writers...are clearly as imbricated in the ideologies of their times as men are; patriarchies take shape and are transformed in specific historical circumstances. Not all literature written by women is feminist, or even about women. Neither is the scope of women's writing restricted to allegories of gender oppression...Opposition to the dominant ideologies of gender can be uncomfortably class- or caste-bound and draw on assumptions about race or religious persuasion that reinforce the hold of those ideologies and collaborate in extending their authority. (Tharu and Lalita 1995:Vol 1:38)

Similarly, Gareth Griffiths points out that subjects may be "typically unaware of the ideological dimensions of the subject positions they occupy", and that they may "occupy a subject position...incompatible with overt political or social beliefs and affiliations, without being aware of any contradiction..." (Griffiths 1994:82).

While most of the women writers do not use the discourse of feminism/womanism explicitly, they have re-interpreted their understanding of it in their own ways. Dealing constantly with racism as well as sexism, among other forms of discrimination, the writers are inclusive in their concerns, generally seeking the liberation of men and of women and with a few exceptions (such as Sobhna

Poona) not stressing strong empathic, emotional or sexual relationships between women at the expense of those with men. Reading women's texts in Africa, Omo-folabo Ajayi argues that the feminism that is deployed here tries to be inclusive, and her views are relevant to reading Indian women's writings. She states, for example, that Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

...advocates feminism without dismissing the specificity of the African experience or the different aspects that constitute a people's culture. It is a feminism that combines the quest for African identity with personal independence, a responsible individualism committed to a responsive collectivity. It supports self-fulfillment but not self-centredness; celebrates motherhood, but not as *the* flag of identity. It calls for the empowerment of and equal opportunities for women. Importantly, this feminism contends that since men and women make up society, feminist concerns should be integrated within nationalist constructions. (Ajayi 1997:48)

The writers in this study do seem more overtly conscious of their race than their gender position, but their political consciousness or activism invariably leads to critiques of the status and experiences of women, even if this is incidental and sporadic. Political activism around causes of justice and equality with Goonam, for example, does lead to critical thinking and action in respect of gender, but this occurs without the niceties of tight, consistent, academic or theoretical reflection, or overt feminist statements of any kind. Goonam is outspoken against specific cultural practices that are particularly oppressive to women, but criticises the visible practices rather than deep underlying ideological causes. Generally, the Indian women writers practise both a feminine and feminist politics alongside each other, without outright radicalisation.

Working in a range of community contexts inevitably leads the women writers to engage in issues of identity in praxis, as they involve themselves in, in Charles Taylor's words, a "politics of recognition". Appiah points out that such a politics "asks us to acknowledge socially and politically the authentic identities of others (Appiah 2000:612). Karodia shows in *A Shattering of Silence* for example that identity is located in identification with political struggle rather than in skin colour, and her writing here articulates what Yuval-Davis and Werbner call, "horizons of possibility" (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999:3) rather than abstract or academic analyses of the contradictions of such a position.

Similarly, for Chandra Mohanty, a feminist critic of Indian origin working in the United States, it is the context of her experience and struggle that makes her think of her specific identity unequivocally. It is her involvement with women on the ground that makes her look differently at her identity. In a world where there are competing and uneven identities among different oppressed groups, Mohanty finds it necessary that her difference is more clearly stated, and that it does not lose its critical edge:

For me, engagement as a feminist of color in the United States, made possible an intellectual and political genealogy of being Indian that was radically challenging as well as profoundly activist. Notions of home and community began to be located within a deeply political space where racialization and

gender and class relations and histories became the prism through which I understood, however partially, what it could mean to be South Asian in North America. (Mohanty 1993:353)

Although a similar degree of self-awareness is not readily evident or overtly stated by the women writers studied here, many of them show in their political choices and actions an understanding of the demands of their identity (whether it is gendered, ethnicised or racialised) in a South African context.

It seems that in order to appreciate the writings of Indian women writers in South Africa, fluid and flexible discursive strategies are necessary. From her wide engagement with black women's texts globally Boyce Davies (1994) concludes that shifting identities, border crossings and multiple discourses are implicit in these writings. She stresses the polychromatic nature of "black feminism", and the political need for "alliances" and "negotiating theories". Boyce Davies calls for a "travelling theory" (to use Said's phrase), aptly describing such a "migratory" approach as "critical relationality", which seems appropriate to the reading of Indian women's writings, given their diverse nature:

Critical relationality...moves beyond singularity or sameness to varied interactions, transgressions and articulations. Critical relationality becomes a way in which other theoretical positions interact relationally in one's critical consciousness. Critical relationality moves beyond a singular, monochromatic approach to any work to a complexly-integrated and relational theoretics...(Davies, Carol Boyce 1994:56)

Conclusion:A Problem of Definition

Negotiating 'self' and 'identity' and 'difference', as well as accountability, continues to be complex and political (Visweswaran 1994:15), provisional and interrogative. Reading the writings of Indian women opens up questions of identity and of difference in South Africa and in the rest of Africa in all sorts of diverse and complex ways. Consciously or unconsciously all the writers referred to in this study are working through a personal trajectory related to identity and a general one.

Identity politics has always assumed crucial importance in South Africa, and has now taken on a new urgency - many speak of an "Indian Identity Crisis" (see *Indigo* magazine 1998:41-47). As I have suggested, how we think about this now comes with its own historical baggage. For a long time, using the term 'Indian' in South Africa was associated with the category, 'Non-White' - which is why some Indians prefer the term 'black', to identify with the larger mass of disenfranchised population. For some the term 'Indian' is an attempt to highlight differences and Otherness within the larger black group, and the term meant 'not White', but also not 'African' or 'Coloured'. The term 'African Indian' is sometimes used as a compromise, or to distinguish Indian groups from other continents. What did not help in the apartheid era was the use of the term 'Asiatic' for those of Indian origin (my old identification card designated me as 'Asiatic'), but was distinct from 'Asian' which included Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese and others not from South Asia, and given

'honorary white' status in the apartheid era. Clearly, there is no uniform, universal meaning of 'Indian', and people choose what they want the term to mean.

Rigid use of racial and ethnic terminology breaks down when we look at the history of communities and groups in South Africa. Ethnic identities can be either tenuous or tenacious. In this study I draw attention to the terminological and perceptual shifts, the fragile debates, and the multiple and competing views on identity and difference to show that defining Indian women's writing is fraught with anxiety and "leakage" (the term is Whitlock's). How does one know who an Indian writer is? Is an Indian writer one who has an Indian name or ancestry, or one who has typical 'Indian' experiences? What are these typical 'Indian' experiences? What is the difference, for example, between Beverley Naidoo (a South African white woman married to an Indian, now living in the United Kingdom, and not generally considered part of the corpus of South African writing) and Ruth Praver Jhabvala (of Polish origin, married to an Indian, and considered very much a part of the tradition of Indian writing on the sub-continent), where both have Indian surnames through marriage, and write about their local political realities?

More importantly, how does the category of 'Indian' blur, with categories such as African, Malay, Coloured, and White, categories themselves unstable? Ethnic and racial categories, as well as that of religion, are not clear and distinct markers of race and ethnicity. When one moves away from the material, but dubious, markers of names and even physical appearance, one then looks for other aspects, such as stories and political causes. These questions become important for me when I consider the identity of Olga Paruk, whose work I have included in the Survey of writings. Paruk was of Jewish origin, married to an Indian Muslim, and identified resolutely with the struggle for the rights of Indians in the first decade of this century. Identifying so closely with the Indian cause was a political decision she consciously made, and this is borne out by the way her performance is described in *The African Chronicle* (a newspaper) in the first decade of this century.

The question of identity does crop up for Meena, the narrator in Farida Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight*, and her sister Yasmin, when their identities straddle the arbitrary divide between 'Indian' and 'Coloured'. In giving the title - "*Daughters of the Twilight*" - to her autobiographical fiction, Karodia draws attention to the exclusion and in-between status of these "daughters" in South African society; she is also perhaps suggesting that categories of classification are to be only lightly appropriated. Of her recent novel *Other Secrets*, a continuation of *Daughters of the Twilight*, Karodia states that it "mirrors particularly the experiences of South African Indian women", although she is writing for "everyone" (Chetty 2000:5).

This leads to questions of how the writers classify themselves and script their identities, and, indeed, the way I define myself. (My own terminology in the study, where 'Indian', 'African', 'black' are used interchangeably, separately, or under erasure, shows the diffi-

culty of using the terms consistently, as one is both trapped by them and attempts to break loose from categories they connote. Generally, though, I use the term 'black' inclusively.) We notice among the writers themselves different ethnic, cultural, or political intersections, depending on the nature of their particular histories, or their purposes. This has been particularly true of the autobiographical and fictional writings considered here, where we see the writers occupying positions accommodative or oppositional towards apartheid's categorisings. In respect of an Indian, or black/African identity, varying responses - from silence, reticence, or ambivalence, to an unequivocal and vigorous assertion of a common black identity are evident, even as all the writers here are conscious of historical categorisations. It is also important to note, as with Fatima Meer and Goonam, that individual writers make strategic choices at different moments of their lives. For example, when Goonam goes to the United Kingdom as a medical student she is conscious of her Indian identity that was denigrated in colonial South Africa. When she is back in South Africa she is conscious of the iniquities of the apartheid race laws against all black people. While in exile (in Zimbabwe and Australia) she feels a camaraderie with all Africans, but also initiates Indian cultural groups in Zimbabwe. When she later goes into exile in England, she longs for South Africa.

In explicating the field of identity and difference, then, Boyce Davies reminds us that it is important to remember that we have to contend with "ideologies of terminologies", that we have to be open to new and creative interpretations:

Each must be used provisionally; each must be subject to new analyses, new questions and new understandings if we are to unlock some of the narrow terms of the discourses in which we are inscribed. In other words, at each arrival at a definition, we begin a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions. (Davies, Carol Boyce 1994:5)

Generally for most of the women writers featured in this study the need to identify with the broader South African and African identity is pressing. The longing for a South African national identity is understandable as such a marker of identity was deliberately denied to all black South Africans. A writer such as Phyllis Naidoo, for example, adamantly refuses to see herself as an 'Indian' writer in any narrow, ethnocentric sense, and prefers a larger non-racial South African identity. Krijay Govender, whose work in drama is included in the general Survey here, also does not use the term Indian, and prefers to be referred to as South African and African. As she writes:

I want to call South Africa 'home', for the simple reason that it is my home. I was born here, I live here, I work here, I play here and, of recent times, I vote here. However, I must admit that as long as I am classified as 'Indian' my identity is somehow prohibited from rooting itself in the African soil. I am finding it difficult to understand why I am not called 'African'. (Govender, Krijay 2000:8)

Roshila Nair, through the genre of poetry, also included in the Survey, sees herself as a black South African woman writer, and finds the term 'Indian' problematic. As she points

out,

While I definitely embrace my historical positioning as an Indian woman in the diaspora, I choose, however, to identify myself as a black South African woman writer. My history, dreams, life experiences and hopes are tied to my country of birth and the continent. Even that, I regard as somewhat restrictive to my identity as a writer. Ultimately, I would say that I belong to a world community and my art is always gesturing towards that. (Nair 1999)

On the other hand Josephine Naidoo, a South African living in Canada, and who is included in the Survey, exhibits a multi-faceted identity. She points out: "My ancestral heritage had its roots in the traditional collectivism of India and the philosophical orientation of Hinduism. This was tempered by at least a century of familial contact with 'Western' European Christianity and British culture. My *weltanschauung*, therefore was a complex interaction of both collectivist and individualist values, vertical but oft times also horizontal in orientation" (Naidoo, J C 1997:3). Naidoo criticises South African race politics, and points out that "apartheid has successfully created an 'ethnic cleansing' along racial lines; emotional bonding is essentially "in-group" (Naidoo, J C 1994c).

I suggest, when considering the narrative of my grandmother, where I develop a historical, gynocritical and discursive backdrop to this study, that more critical reflection is required on the construction of the 'Indian woman' in the context of the dominant ideologies of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism in Colonial Natal of the late 19th Century. What were the ways in which Indian women like my grandmother, and that of Reddy or Mayat or Goonam for that matter, were being constructed and culturally determined; what were their self-representations, and what were the ways in which they claimed, in Sunder Rajan's words, "liberatory spaces" (Rajan 1991:130)? And what were the differences among them? How did they, to use Meena Alexander's words, spell out the "fragments of a broken geography" (Alexander, Meena 1993:2)? In some ways this study creates the space for pondering over these issues from different angles, as we appreciate how some Indian women locate themselves against the background of their history. These are issues that I constantly return to in my reading of the selected texts; at the same time I realise that the writers in this study provide one vantage point for discussion of these issues and that I should resist generalising to all Indian women.

Unlike the response to the term 'Coloured', it is generally assumed that there are fairly stable meanings associated with the term 'Indian'. But I argue that this is clearly not true. For both groups, as indeed for all groups, attempts to homogenise them are highly questionable. Raiskin, studying female subjectivity in the Caribbean, South Africa and the United Kingdom, argues that when considering terms related to mixed race, "it is imperative that we are not seduced by these fictional categories to believe that there exists any 'unmixed' or 'pure' race or ethnic group. These dangerous and injurious beliefs are the legacy of...colonial rhetoric, which had a vested interest in promoting such ideas as national purity..." (Raiskin 1996:5). It is for this reason that Raiskin, drawing from Francoise Lion-

net, suggests the use of the term "creolization" to capture the diversity and *metisage* of cultural experiences, as this better conveys an "evolving emancipatory concept and practice emphasising heterogeneity and solidarity and demystifying 'all essentialist glorifications of unitary origins, be they racial, sexual, geographic, or cultural'"(5). (By Raiskin's definition Olive Schreiner and Zoe Wicomb are described as "creole"). But the usage of the term "creolization" has so far been restricted as it is considered an alien term in South Africa. (However Mamdani (1999) has recently used the term in relation to African pluralism, and Nuttall and Michael (see 2000b:6-10) have convincingly argued for its usage in describing identities in South Africa.)

In engaging in this excavatory project, I have become increasingly aware that I myself am straddling the thin dividing line between essentialist and non-essentialist views of Indian identity. While I problematise identity, the very nature of the project is based on essentialist views of identity. I acknowledge, as already pointed out, that the gynocritical exercise is exclusivist and prompted by old imbalances. Marginalisation of some groups of writers takes place because there is a tendency to construct mainstream identities in exclusivist ways. With increasing attention to, and greater awareness of the literary output of more Indian women, and not just a few selected ones, the tendency to isolate (even exoticise) them will be reduced. Research projects that work on genre-based or thematic lines may offer more inclusive ways of dealing with this problem. Such approaches will problematise questions of identity and difference operationally, and also make room for engaging with other marginalisations, such as those based on language and sexual orientation.

Boyce Davies's critical comments on the phrase "black women's writing" may, in my opinion, be used in relation to an understanding of the use of the term, 'Indian women's writing'. She states that the term "black women's writing" is used "provisionally as a category on the understanding that each of these terms is subject to re-interpretation and deconstruction as they themselves become totalising and oppressive discourses...It is a phrase which...has migratory capability as it traverses a variety of locational, thematic, and generic identities" (Davies, Carol Boyce 1994:3). Her view is that "black women's writings...should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing"(4). And Susan Koshy has argued that the rubrics that we are constrained to use (she speaks with reference to 'Asian American Literature') are deployed catachrestically, as they are marked by the "limits of [their] signifying power"; but, Koshy points out, their very contested and contradictory nature enhances, rather than hinders, theoretical discussion and debate (see Koshy 1996:315-346).

Similarly, as my study will show, I suggest that definitions of 'Indian' should be flexible enough, that it should be seen as a "migratory subjectivity". (Strictly speaking, I should be using the lower case for reference to Indian, Coloured or African, in order to resist centring

any one of these identities, as Zimitri Erasmus states she does in her use of similar terms (see Erasmus 2000:511), and in keeping with my thesis). The writings depict a complex web of experiences and critical positions, and in my reading of them I attempt to balance the two impulses - that of constructing and of dismantling notions of identity and of difference. At this particular juncture in our history, there are two impulses at work - the need to recall a suppressed past, and the need to forge an identity beyond that past. The oppressor might stalk our vision, as Albie Sachs fears, but there are concerted attempts to "win our freedom". This is something the writings here attempt to do - articulating and deconstructing apartheid, as Whitlock points out black women's autobiographies in South Africa generally do (see Whitlock 2000:147). Identities (and differences) are indeed textual - narratives imagined and told from a particular position, both spatially and temporally (although we should not ignore their material effects, and constantly see how the discursive and material are intertwined). Ross Chambers reminds us that " 'reading oppositional narrative' is... a reading of the oppositional in narrative, a reading that both produces that oppositionality and is responsive to it" (14). We (whether writer or critic or researcher) are a tale that is told...

CHAPTER 3

THE INDENTURED EXPERIENCE - INDIAN WOMEN IN COLONIAL NATAL

"The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities...The broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed, are exciting to discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects." (Rushdie 1991:12)

Problems of scholarship

In her collection *Jesus is Indian and other Stories*, Agnes Sam writes of how, at the time of her grandfather's death, she was confronted with the omission of Indian history. She reflects on the causes and consequences of such an omission:

It seemed reasonable to question this omission; to wonder if the presence of Indians on African soil was simply too insignificant for inclusion in South Africa's history; to query its irrelevance in a country where cheap labour is the foundation of the economy; and to pursue the significance of the Indian presence in South Africa, and its exclusion from the history books. (Sam 1989:2)

Such questions might even more pointedly be asked about Indian women in South Africa. Scholarship on the history of Indian women during the early years of indenture in South Africa is scant. Much of the research on Indian history assumes that the term is inclusive of male and female, with little specific attention given to the particular experiences of Indian women. Given the male domination of society generally, it was inevitable that Indian men would have had more opportunities to be chief players in this history ('History' itself is male-defined, a 'master discourse'). Further, because men have held the power traditionally in historical research, Indian women's histories have been insufficiently documented.

In her paper, "Trends in South African Historiography", Kalpana Hiralal notes the general absence of gender sensitivity in analyses of Indian history in South Africa:

The lack of gender-related analysis has resulted in serious shortcomings in South African Indian historiography. One major difficulty noted in monographic works reviewed is the absence from the historical record of women's voices and participation. Women were relegated to the domestic realm with little or no influence in political organisations and movements. (Hiralal 1996:24)

Familiar themes, such as the history of Indian indenture, Gandhian history and Passive Resistance, and "the Indian Question" have been prominent in the work of liberal white histo-

rians such as L M Thompson, Hilda Kuper and Mabel Palmer, early Indian male journalists such as P S Aiyar and P S Joshi and Indian historians such as B Pachai and Bala Naidoo. Surendra Bhana and Joy Brain have contributed significantly in recent decades to scholarship on early Indian history in South Africa, and revisionist work has been done, among others, by Frene Ginwala and Vishnu Padayachee, who present a class analysis. While the research of Bill Freund and Frene Ginwala does include a small measure of gender analysis, these historians, by and large, have omitted reference to Indian women's experiences. Jo Beall's work on gender and class analysis in South Africa is unique for its inclusion of Indian women. The disciplinary compartmentalisation of scholarship has also resulted, for example, in the neglect of literary writing in historical analyses.

Ronald Takaki, a United States academic specialising in multiculturalism and ethnic studies, deplores the lack of "collective self-knowledge" in the writing of the history of the United States. He draws attention to the dramatic gaps in history-making:

What happens, to borrow the words of Adrienne Rich, 'when someone with the authority of a teacher' describes our society, and 'you are not in it'? Such an experience can be disorienting - 'a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing'. (Takaki 1993:16)

This applies to our own historiography and story-telling as well, particularly as regards the stories of Indian women during colonial rule in South Africa. Critical scholarship on gender and colonialism, among many other fields, is necessary in these days of an emerging democracy in South Africa. It is in revisioning and reclaiming our collective past that we will be able to create a new mosaic of history. Such an undertaking should draw from comparisons internationally, where issues of diversity, conflict, and multiplicity are problematised, and the complex nature of identifications is unfolded. It is in unpacking the individual stories contained within the collective stories that we begin to appreciate some of this complexity. One way of beginning this process is to (re)tell the stories of our grandmothers, women whose lives were part of the warp and weft of the colonial era. The search for our "mother's gardens", the desire to envision our grandmothers' lives and reality, and give them 'voice', as Alice Walker and bell hooks among others have done, opens up long-overdue possibilities for changing the face of current historiography in the field of gender and colonialism.

In this chapter I shall consider aspects of the general indentured experience of Indians in Colonial Natal, with particular reference to the experiences of Indian women. I attempt to write this slice of history, albeit a slender narrative, from the vantage point of my grandmother's experiences as a paradigm case to reflect something of the life and times into which she was born, as a possible background against which questions of identity in the writings of Indian women in South Africa may be explored today. In some ways this is also my own story. And in this self-conscious presentation of myself as researching subject, I also provide a personal and historical context for my own research and reflection.

Writing this chapter has been most difficult. I regret that many persons who would have been able to help me piece together a family story are no longer alive. My grandparents, my father and mother, and grand-uncles and aunts, have all died. Much of what I record here had been absorbed by me when I was a little girl, from listening to adult conversations, or directly questioning my mother more recently. I regret now that in my younger days I did not probe sufficiently the stories of their experiences and those of their forebears. I was more intent on reading the official history textbooks, or finding out about Shakespeare or Schweitzer, being taught directly and indirectly that this was 'real' history rather than the stories of those immediately and intimately connected with me. Reading local and regional experiences as 'history' hardly occurred for anyone, but especially not for dominated groups. Homi Bhabha, recalling Franz Fanon, notes that "remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 1994:63). For me the pain has been the incalculable loss, never to be retrieved, of what my forebears knew and remembered, read or wrote - of all that remains buried with them. And the fact that this is hardly a unique pain does not necessarily make it more bearable.

In this exercise I am becoming aware that I am caught up in the general problems of late twentieth century scholarship among women, particularly black women, who encounter a paucity of documentation when researching particular and individual histories (or 'herstories'). As Wilentz notes:

The historicity of the late 20th century has inscribed in many a desire to examine their roots, to (re)define origin. Encoded in this desire is an inequality; for some (the elite of the dominant culture), their past is documented, crested, historicised. For those of oppressed cultures, diasporal ones, their historicity is encoded in cultural imperatives, remembered in collective rather than individual terms. (Wilentz 1992:116)

While women's life-histories generally have been excluded or suppressed historically, with black women this is particularly so. Their individual stories are usually subsumed into a larger narrative of oppression. With Indian women in South Africa their particular stories have been assumed to be contained in the macro-narrative of Indian indentured history and its aftermath. While the idea of "the third world woman" has developed into a "discourse of convenience", as Grewal argues, it is nevertheless illuminating to consider the narratives of individual women, like that of my grandmother, who lived out her particular life as daughter, sister, child-labourer, wife and mother.

'Writing history' is an important reclamatory project for marginalised groups, and has become more and more important in South Africa in this post-apartheid period. This is not done, I believe, to 'find identity' or 'roots' in some kind of simplistic way. One engages in it, even if the outcome is tentative and uncertain. We are aware, before we begin, that our attempts at reconstructing and reconstituting the past will be flawed, incomplete, and even imagined. Stuart Hall argues that we should think of identity as a " 'production', which is

never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term 'cultural identity' lays claim" (Hall 1996:110). Hall asks whether, when Fanon called for "profound research", it was not a *production* of identity, a re-telling of the past, rather than a rediscovery of identity, an archaeological exercise (111). This is similar in many ways to the self-construction through narrative of autobiography. Pratibha Parmar connects identity, historical memory and representation when she says, "All aspects of our...representation are organically informed by and shaped through our historical memories and the raw cultural signs and processes of our subjectivities" (Parmar 1990:101). 'Writing history' shows how we may mythologise our history.

In Memory of Her : Asseerwadhun Manikkam

I was born in Kearsney, Natal, one of the rural areas where the early tea and sugar plantations were established by Indian indentured labourers. In an ironic way memories of my growing up days and their links with the lives of the early settlers become more valued now than before.

I remember very well the day my grandmother died - 13 January 1948, my fourth birthday. She arrived at our home early. She made a delicate rope of little white flowers as a braid for my hair, and had tea with my parents and me. She said a special prayer for me and left. Later that day she died suddenly. I remember the family coming together that afternoon. Everyone was deeply shocked. Ever since that day my birthday was always remembered (though never celebrated) together with the passing away of my grandmother. Yearly visits to her grave at the Stanger cemetery on my birthday became the family custom, and the recounting of the incidents of the day she died a family ritual. I remember her name so well, because it appears in bold print on her tombstone: *ASSEERWADHUN MANIKKAM*. Ironically, I now feel the strongest connection with her, transforming what had undertones of a negative memory of my grandmother into a celebratory one.

Many years before, at the turn of the century, my grandmother, a young girl of eight, came with her mother and father, three sisters and three brothers from Bezwada, Andhra Pradesh, India, where she was born in 1896, a year before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Being immigrants of Andhra or Telegu background, they were described as "Pravasandras" in the nomenclature of the time (Prabhakaran 1991:4). My grandmother's youngest brother had actually been born on the ship. Not much is known of my great-grandmother's life in India, or of the circumstances of their coming to South Africa. The family had left their mother country to make a living as indentured immigrants in a strange land. Although my great-grandfather had been a magistrate in the district where he lived in India, he had to adjust to the difficult demands of manual labour in the tea fields in Kearsney, in Colonial Natal.

From slavery to servitude: the indentured experience

What was the kind of world that my grandmother was born into?

The world of the mid-nineteenth century was entering a new phase in history. Slavery had been abolished, but other forms of labour had to be found to maintain the infrastructure of trade and expansion for the European nations, especially Britain. P S Joshi argues that indentured labour was a new form of slavery, and was inaugurated in India from 1830:

The system of indentured labour had a history of its own. It was unique in that it was an invention of the British brain to substitute it for forced labour and slavery. The indentured 'coolies' were half-slaves, bound over body and soul by a hundred and one inhuman regulations. (Joshi, P S 1942:44)

In 1857 the East India Company was abolished and the Indian sub-continent came under the direct rule of the British Crown. The pattern of indentured labour had already been established in the movement of Indians to Mauritius in 1833, to British Guinea in 1838, as well as to Trinidad and Jamaica around the same time (41). Indians also went to work in the tea plantations in Assam and Bhutan (1860), Ceylon (1870s), Fiji (1879), and Burma (1880s). It is estimated that by 1870 a million Indians had gone overseas to work on indenture contracts, with Indians forming one of the largest labour diasporas of the nineteenth century (Kahn 1995:143). This certainly extended Britain's "sphere of influence", and marked its expansionist, assertive and self-conscious approach to Empire (Boehmer 1998a:xv). While there was free movement of white colonial settlers in the colonial world at this time, indentured labourers were moved from "one boundedness and bondedness to another" (van der Veer 1997:91). It was this 'experiment' in social engineering that took half a million Indians from India to the Caribbean (referred to here as East Indians) as indentured labourers in the decades after Britain's abolition of slavery. It is also important to remember that a global pattern developed whereby indigenous peoples were alienated from their land, and were also excluded, through the large scale of indentured labour, from the commercial developments taking place around them (Kahn 1995:144).

It was at this time that colonial eyes were being turned to the East Coast of Natal in South Africa, where the soil was fertile and the prospects seemed promising for sugar farming. The movement of labour was directly linked to the nineteenth-century expansion of colonialism in these parts of the world, with this period being seen as the time of classical colonialism. Wherever white British migrants settled they required labour, and colonised subjects in the colonies such as India, as Bhana and Brain record, became the logical transportable "commodity" (Bhana and Brain 1990:15).

And so began the "wandering across terrain and time", as Takaki writes of Asians generally (see Takaki 1993:2), and the emergence of the diasporic experience for South Asians. The larger workings of imperialism and capitalism were to determine where I

would be born. Boehmer has written that "it is often forgotten that millions of people, both colonised and colonising, who were identified with or unconcerned about colonisation, formed part of the British Empire, in the sense of responding to it, having to deal with it, and in many millions of cases surviving through it" (Boehmer 1998a:xviii).

The arrival of Indians in Natal was not the first encounter that Indians had had with Africa. Joshi points out that Indians were connected to Africa from the first century AD. There was trade in cotton cloth, grain, oil, sugar and ghee with western India, and in the 10th century in glass beads and porcelain. According to reports, Vasco da Gama, on his way to India, found Indians in East Africa (Joshi, P S 1942:41). Zuleikha Mayat, in *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, also alludes to this history. Indians had first come to South Africa as slaves imported by the Dutch East India Company; and half of the early Cape slaves in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were from Bengal and South India. Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie also draws attention to the fact that, although the "main marker" of the history of Indians in South Africa was the arrival of indentured labourers, many Indian slaves had come from India - mainly from Bengal and the Coromandel and Malabar Coasts - and the Indonesian islands in the seventeenth century, and formed part of the 40,000 slave population in the south-western Cape (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:10).

The Indian settlers of 1860 were coming to a region that had seen a turbulent history from the early nineteenth century. From the early 1800's, with the growing consolidation of Zulu influence under Shaka, there was both settlement (*Mfecane*) and flight (*Difaqane*) of Nguni clans across the region. The Voortrekkers, moving into the interior from the Cape, came into Natal in the late 1830's, and the Battle of Blood River between Boers and Zulus took place in 1838. The British annexed Natal as a British colony in 1843, bringing with them a capitalist system that demanded capital and labour, putting heavy strains on the traditional homestead system that had given Africans a sense of stability. The impoverishment of the African peasantry further transformed the face of South Africa (see Bhana and Brain 1990:17). During the 1880's, when Indian indentured labourers were coming in large numbers to Natal, there was further massive movement of Africans in South Africa, as with the emergence of wage labour through gold mining many of them, impoverished through the changes that engulfed them, moved to the mining centres.

It is often popularly stated (and even by historians, such as Shireen Munsamy in her book, *From Sunrise to Sunset*) that Indians came to work on the sugar cane fields because the 'Africans were lazy', but this perception has been contested. Keletso E Atkins questions these stereotypes in well-documented research on the subject, and gives an important alternative view:

Natal Africans were themselves experiencing an unprecedented socio-economic crisis; and both private and governmental agencies had already invested time and energy designed to mould blacks into a European ideal of what workers ought to be like. From the beginning, however, the

results of their efforts were discouraging. Finally, the European recognised that only by a complete immersion in Western culture - that is, only after a prolonged process of acculturation - would the pre-industrial African worker be transformed into a model based on the Protestant capitalist work ethic, itself a contested area in nineteenth-century Europe. (Atkins 1993:2)

African men were being thrown into a wage economy, and the emergence of colonial capitalism at this time in the development of South Africa led to their increasing proletarianisation during the rest of the century. This was a time of major changes on many fronts, amounting to an 'upheaval' of considerable magnitude. Cheryl Walker points out that there were

massive changes in the economic, political and social life, from precapitalist to capitalist relations of production, from African political independence to subjugation, from rural to urban forms of social and spatial organisation, and from white co-existence with indigenous societies (and Indian settlers) to white supremacy within a new, racially structured state. (Walker 1990:1)

Agnes Sam also gives a corrective view on the subject that the arrival of Indian indentured labourers to Natal was due solely to the African workers being considered unsuitable for labour on the sugar plantations:

Illiterate Indian peasants were introduced into a political situation of which they were wholly ignorant. Transporting people from India to work on the plantations effectively frustrated the Zulus' attempt to bring about the failure of the sugar cane economy. Yet, from another perspective, the introduction of Indentured labourers from India is testament to the victory of Africans who refused to labour for the plantation owners in Natal. (Sam 1989:10)

To this very day there is a long and simmering disquiet about the way this history is understood and related, with the theme of African and Indian relations itself being a persistent one throughout the past century and a half, as these writings will show.

The grand design for global transportation of human labour was made possible by the invention of the steamship at this particular time in world history, and the history of indentured Indians is arguably linked to the advent of the steamship as the sole means of travel between India and South Africa. The first 'batch' of Indians, a total of 341 labourers, mainly from Madras, came to Natal in the *SS Truro* on 16 November 1860. A few years later (in 1870), apart from the indentured Indians, there came Passenger Indians - entrepreneurs, mainly from Bombay and other parts of the west coast of India. They formed an independent, privileged group, and set up businesses of all kinds among the new immigrants. By 1866 a total of 6,445 indentured immigrants had arrived in South Africa. Immigration was temporarily halted in 1871 to deal with complaints about the treatment of Indians in Natal, and then resumed in 1874. By 1911 152,184 indentured migrants from India had arrived in Natal, and an estimated 30,000 Passenger Indians (Bhana and Brain 1990:15,36).

All indentured labourers endured abject working conditions. Although they constantly claimed their British subjecthood, they were treated as second-class citizens, and hardly in

the same category as British settlers in Canada and Australia. Indians were imported as 'Coolies', a term that had a derogatory connotation at the time. They always fought the perception that "India was going to South Africa as a serf" (Joshi P S 1942:43). It for this reason that Indians in South Africa always felt constrained to emphasise the heritage of an 'ancient' civilisation and culture, especially when they were subjected to inhuman laws of segregation. For example, in 1946, Yusuf Dadoo, in response to the iniquitous Ghetto Act, wrote: "It must not be forgotten that the Indian people are sons and daughters of a country with a proud and cultured heritage. Their ancient motherland is the bearer of a tradition of civilisation as old as any in the world" (Dadoo 1991:75).

Indentured workers came in accordance with an agreement (*girmit*) or contract concerning their stay, and they were referred to as *girmityas*. They worked for sugar farmers in Natal - farmers who were mainly English. A near-feudal system of labour operated, with the indentured workers being recruited to work for a particular employer, and being bound by contract to live on the estate of the employer for a stipulated period of time. This is seen by many historians as not unlike slavery which was, as defined by Takaki, a "system of bonded black labour" (Takaki 1993:7). The labourers were offered a monthly wage of ten shillings. In the decade that my grandmother arrived there was a particularly "virulent anti-Indianism" (Desai 1996:4) among whites in the province. It was also the time after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) when, as Rob Turrell points out, there was "an explosive climate of ideological race purity" (Turrell 1998:19).

Recruiting Indian women was not the principal part of the scheme for indentured labour in Natal since the need was for male workers to come to the sugar plantations. Although Indian women made up only 29% of the total number that came to South Africa, they nevertheless played an important part in the development of the country, and their presence in the Colony had implications for the rest of the inhabitants, as I argue below.

By the end of the nineteenth century and over the decade into the twentieth, when my grandmother actually arrived in South Africa, peace between Boer and Briton had been signed in 1902, and British hegemony was consolidated all over South Africa. There were greater restrictions on movement of Indians to other parts of South Africa, and the segregation of Indians from the rest of the population groups began in earnest. The place to which she and her family were taken immediately on their arrival was Kearsney, six miles north of Stanger or Kwadukuza, which was developing into an important town in the North Coast sugar belt. Kearsney had a large concentration of indentured workers (it was to the larger towns such as Durban that the passenger Indians mainly went), and was divided into two areas, Old Factory and New Factory. Kearsney was controlled by Sir John Liege Hulett, a sugar baron, who was Prime Minister of Natal in 1903. The Hulett dynasty continued in successive decades under Jack Neville Hulett, Ted Hulett and G N Hulett, who were to dominate my family story for many years to come, with family members of suc-

cessive generations being in their employ.

Women in Colonial India

What was the nature of the colonial home that my grandmother was leaving?

It is necessary to ask this question as the background of life in India is often omitted in considering the history of indentured labour. India was declared part of the British Empire in 1858, two years before the Indian indentured scheme to South Africa got under way, and it is clear that the British Crown readily assumed that it could do as it pleased with its subjects. The scientific theories of race that had originated in the late eighteenth century were very much the order of the day by the mid-nineteenth century, as Jenny Sharpe has pointed out (Sharpe 1993:5). It seems to me that this ideological background is not unconnected to the indentured schemes that were promoted at this time.

Politically, British rule was firmly entrenched in India. The War of Independence in 1857 had been lost, and there was no hope of withdrawal of the British. India was to continue to be under the British up to 1947. For women the entrenched traditional patriarchal society did not seem to slacken under the new dispensation. The classic examples of the status and plight of Indian women is reflected in the paradigmatic practices of *sati*, of child-marriages and polygamy. The British government did not unequivocally condemn these aspects of Indian society. For example, although practices such as *sati*, common in North India, were condemned during the time of the British Raj, there was no immediate attempt to legalise widow marriage. *Sati* was also a class issue, mainly performed by upper-class Brahmin women who seemed to have been immobilized by very tight societal control. Ironically, it seems that 'lower' class women had more scope to negotiate social transgressions of all sorts.

Sunder Rajan argues cogently for a more critical interpretation of *sati* in the context of "continuities and discontinuities" of the colonial period in India, with its interplay of ideology and politics (Rajan 1991:40). Protests against the discriminatory practices, both direct and tacit, under British rule were hardly heard. Further, colonialist history tended to denounce practices such as *sati* as being backward, and yet condoned and ignored the oppression of women in Victorian England. Sharpe argues that the confinement and "absolute devotion" expected of Victorian women may be seen as a form of "self-immolation"; yet "unlike the Victorian woman, the Hindu widow is positioned as an object in colonial discourse and a victim to be saved" (Sharpe 1993:14).

It was also not uncommon for Indian women to be abandoned by their husbands, or widowed early. Many who chose to come to work in South Africa, then, were leaving situations that were becoming untenable for them, both at a personal and social level. I wonder sometimes about my own great-grandmother and her family. What tales of the new land flowing with milk and honey were they regaled with by the *kanganis*, who were paid

to entice prospective labourers to the new land? Even though they were not specifically recruited, as pointed out earlier, Sam notes that women in particular "fell easy prey to the *kanganis* if they were escaping a domestic or legal situation, or even if they were simply looking for work" (Sam 1989:3).

What is worth exploring is the kind of life many of the indentured labourers, such as my great-grandmother, had been subjected to in India. We need more scholarship on the histories of peasant groups in India, of differentiation among the peasantry (see, for example, Damodaran 1992), especially in those places from which indentured labour was mainly drawn. Scholarship in South Africa on this aspect of indentured experience has been absent, and the time for a new 'subaltern' project of historical analysis - a more 'rounded history' - here in South Africa as in India is long overdue. Such scholarship will take in a more critical analysis of colonialist and nationalist interpretations of history of the period. This was a time when, in the main, the colonials defended themselves against possible moral condemnation of colonialism by posing as the saviours of barbaric groups (see Sharpe 1993).

"Treated as chattels"

The sea journey from India to South Africa was not in the same category as that of the 'middle-passage' of the slave-trade days, but it was hardly a journey made in comfort and safety. Women, in particular, were subjected to all kinds of ordeals and abuse on the ships. Jo Beall records that, apart from those who came in families, many Indian women who came to Natal were abandoned wives and widows or destitute prostitutes. The women, like the male travellers, were subjected to diseases such as cholera, typhoid and dysentery, and venereal disease, but were also victims of sexual assault.

On arrival in South Africa, the newcomers had a difficult time. Family life among Indians was affected by the sparse and poor living conditions. The disparity in social spaces reflected the inequalities of the social hierarchy. Life in small, crowded barracks-styled apartments for the new immigrants did not afford much privacy, and this was compounded by inadequate ablution and medical facilities. On the other hand the white employers lived in large, manorlike country estates. Fatima Meer draws attention to the fact that "life on the Coolie lines, or barracks, was grim, highly controlled and not conducive to developing free and spontaneous associations" (Meer 1990:5). Hassankhan (1990:9), writing of the situation in Trinidad, has pointed out that with the plantation system being generally one of rigid control and separation, and social and geographical isolation, it did not augur well for relations between Indians and Africans.

Women received rations, and had to supplement their income with work on plantations (Beall 1990:157). The worst hit were single women, who were treated as chattels. Sam records aspects of the discrimination that the women endured: "The regulations governing

the payment of indentured labourers provided a clue: there was a proviso that 'females and children under ten years of age' were to be paid half the adult male ration" (Sam 1989:5). There were poor standards of health in the settlements, and diseases such as colds, fever and dysentery were quite common. I often heard my parents speak about the scourge of 'TB', with sufferers being ostracised. In 1904, when my grandmother arrived in Natal, tuberculosis accounted for 27% of deaths among Indians. The incidence of infant mortality was also high.

At the time when my grandmother arrived, market gardening and farming were an important source of income. As many of the Indians earned ex-indentured status when their contracts ended they were able to move into the free labour market and become self-employed in a range of occupations, becoming in the process successful traders, hawkers and farmers. Although there was greater diversification in the rest of Natal, the coastal area where my grandmother lived still concentrated predominantly on the cultivation of coffee, tea and sugar.

Indian women worked very hard. My grandmother worked from the time she arrived up to her marriage in the Hulett's tea plantations in Kearsney, near Stanger. I have now learnt that "the most intensive use of women's labour on plantations was made by tea estates in the Stanger district on the North Coast" (Beall 1990:153). Young women were seen to be particularly suited for this job as they were considered to have small, deft fingers, as Munsamy points out (Munsamy 1997:29). My grandmother worked for a shilling a month. When she moved to work in the nearby mill, her work included scaling and packing the tea that was brought in by ox-wagon from the outlying fields. The bags were hoisted up to the second floor of the mill, where they were spread out to dry. My grandmother's job involved turning the leaves on the shelves lined with hessian, and then packing them for transportation by train to Durban via Stanger; ships then took this cargo to India. In India the leaves were processed and blended with "Ceylon Tea", and exported to different parts of the world. My grandmother was thus a small participant in a larger capitalist enterprise for the 'mother country', Great Britain.

Women like my grandmother contributed to the growth of the Colony, not only in terms of capital accumulation, by virtue of their role as forced labourers, but later as independent peasants, petty traders and merchants:

It is only by looking at more detailed Indian employment statistics in the 1891 and 1904 censuses that a clearer picture of Indian female employment can be derived. According to these censuses, Indian women constituted between 13 and 15 per cent of the total Indian labour force. The higher proportion of economically active Indian women as compared to economically active white women can be explained partly by the greater sexual imbalance amongst Indians as well as their general position as part of Natal's proletariat. (Beall 1982:175)

Although women's economic participation was solicited, they were not given economic

recognition. In spite of their contributions Indian women were subjected to the social ills of a rampantly patriarchal society. They were victims of rape; some took to prostitution due to their social and economic circumstances. The earlier commissions set up to look into the plight of Indian women did not make much difference to their lives: the Coolie Commission of 1872 reported on the incidence of prostitution and its link with desperate socio-economic conditions, and the Wragg Commission of 1885 saw all Indian women in general as being wantonly and naturally promiscuous.

Educational opportunities for Indian women were scarce. Like numerous child-workers around her, my grandmother received no formal education. Indian, Coloured and African groups as a whole were neglected in the sphere of education, and the most severely disadvantaged were the women and girls in these groups. The lack of educational opportunities must be seen as one of the reasons why Indian women's output in writing in English was minimal at this time. The conservative attitudes of Indian families regarding the education of girls exacerbated the situation. Goonam's own story of her determination to go for 'further study', depicted in *Coolie Doctor*, shows the way this prejudice was broken down over the years. 'Vernacular' classes managed to flourish in an informal manner, with remarkable success, for both boys and girls, and girls were able to take advantage of this facility, as we see in the cases of Goonam, and Mayat's mother as recorded in *A Treasure Trove of Memories*.

Missionary effort was responsible for at least some educational opportunities being opened up for Indian boys and girls in the years when the indentured labourers first arrived. In 1869 Rev Ralph Stott had commenced a boys' day school. An Indian school teacher, John Thomas, opened a school in 1883, and with the help of the Anglican Church, established 9 of the 21 schools for Indians in Natal. By 1886 this number had increased to 14. In the same year St Aidan's Mission schools were established by Dr Lancelot Parker Booth, an English medical missionary. In 1889 the first school in the colony for Indian girls was opened. By the turn of the century, through the efforts of Dr Booth, there were 62 Indian girls in mission schools (and 1251 Indian boys) in Natal. (Jo Beall notes that there was a very small number of Indian girls attending school: there were 400 Indian female children at schools compared to 8,000 white girls, at the time when my grandmother arrived in South Africa.) Dr Goonam, in her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, recalls her own schooling and that of her mother in these mission schools. I feel a personal link to this history as well, as my parish church is St Aidan's in Durban, part of St Aidan's Mission, now in its 118th year, with the pioneering work of Dr Booth being frequently recalled and celebrated.

It is worth noting that the rise of the white private schools in Natal, for English boys and girls, and developed by the churches during these decades of economic growth, may be linked to the successful sugar industry. All the established private schools in Natal - and

the majority were for girls - were developed in the decades after the first indentured Indian labourers arrived: Hilton, 1872; St Anne's Diocesan College, 1877; Girls' Collegiate, 1878, Durban Girls' College, 1877; Michaelhouse, 1896; St John's Diocesan School for Girls, 1897; Wykeham Collegiate, 1905; St Mary's Diocesan School for Girls, 1919 (Randall 1982:77). Many Indian and African women, before and after my grandmother arrived, who continued in their proletarianised state in Colonial Natal, were undoubtedly part of the unacknowledged props that supported this social and cultural infrastructure for the dominant class.

A new restricted homeland

My grandfather, Manikkam Munisamy, was born in 1891 and came, as a seven-year-old boy, together with his mother and younger brother, from Ussoor in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, to South Africa on 28 March 1898, in the *SS Congella*. I find it worth noting that in his case his mother, who was a daughter-in-law in a large family in India, did not come with her husband. My grandfather arrived from India in the same decade as Gandhi. Gandhi was born in 1869, nine years after the first settlers arrived in Durban, and spent the period from 1893 to 1913 in South Africa. Like my grandmother, my grandfather worked in the tea fields in Kearsney. My grandparents married around 1909, when my grandmother would have been barely thirteen years old. In time my grandfather rose to the rank of 'sirdar' or supervisor (a status that Indian women seem not to have enjoyed) in Huletts Estate.

Together my grandparents set up a proud family home in Kearsney. Their eldest daughter, Mercy Karunnam, was born on 29 November 1914 (the first native-born South African Indian in the family), the year when indentured labour was officially terminated and the time when many colonials from around the British Empire were fighting for the 'mother country'. The second daughter, Sampooram, died at the age of two, during a great flu epidemic at the time. Of all the homes of my growing up days, my grandparents' homestead is the one I most clearly remember, with its large and spreading tamarind tree, curry leaf and navel-orange trees, and sprawling mango and banana plantations.

My grandmother's entire life was spent in Kearsney, Natal, the place where she had first arrived when she left her ancestral home on the Indian sub-continent to set down new roots in a strange land. She raised her seven children - my mother, aunts and uncles - who naturally thought of South Africa as 'the land of their birth', with questions of 'home', identity and history obviously taking on different meanings for her and her children, in contrast presumably to her own mother. By all accounts she certainly did not contemplate leaving South Africa. Of the majority of immigrants Fatima Meer states: "For many, no matter how deplorable the condition, there was no return to India, for their manner of leaving was such as to constitute an irreconcilable breach" (Meer 1969:12). Or, perhaps, as with the fictional Mrs Tulsi in V S Naipaul's *A House for Ms Biswas*, living away from

India was to constitute an "interlude", as Michael Gorra suggests (Gorra 1997:69), but an "interlude" that for so many immigrants was gradually to become permanent.

While many remained in Natal, there were some immigrants who moved to Northern Natal, or the Transvaal. Mayat's story provides another strand of Indian settlement in South Africa, with her focus on the former Transvaal. Indians, of course, were not allowed into the Orange Free State at that time, their free movement being curtailed by government policy.

The ideal of 'the family' (reflecting both Victorian and Indian values) certainly held sway in my grandparents' household, and Indian women were as much the preservers of their 'race' through the values of motherhood, tradition, and stability as were their colonial counterparts, as Catherine Nash points out in her discussion of women in the context of colonial and postcolonial geographies (Nash 1994:237). My grandparents' home became, as I realise now, that private recuperative space in a society based on power relations (see Blunt and Rose 1994b:1-25). This situation had its obvious merits in a racially alienating world, but it also meant that it would have been extremely difficult for my grandmother to be aware of, let alone challenge, the patriarchal order into which her life was inexorably embedded and inscribed.

In the writings of some of the Indian women featured in this study, such as Sam, Jayapraga Reddy, Goonam and Mayat, we read of the example of strong grandmothers and mothers in their different life situations. For Sam for example, Indian women played an absolutely essential role in the family's general survival in a new country:

Indian women were essential to the process of adaptation. They confronted new school systems for their children; struggled to maintain the old religion in a new country; faced prohibitions about marriage that further restricted the limited number of suitors from the same religious background, the language group or caste; they experienced indentured labour; discriminatory laws; a poll tax and imprisonment when they could not pay; isolation from their families in India; and even the unwanted attentions of European men. (Sam 1989:10)

Indian women, like my grandmother, contributed mainly to the development and cohesion of family and community life. This is all the more remarkable, considering the young age at which she married and set up home, and her lack of formal education. Beall stresses the important role that Indian women played in the preservation of family and community life:

In addition to labour force participation, therefore, credit should be given to those early Indian women who, despite an uncompromising beginning and in the face of incredible odds, worked towards the re-establishment of cultural cohesion in a strange land in order to carve out for themselves and their descendants a niche in a hostile and oppressive environment. (Beall 1982:183)

All this while (and for almost half a century more, right up to 1948, the year in which my grandmother died), as my grandmother was setting down new roots in a new land, and contributing to its development, there was a sustained and vicious campaign for the repa-

triation, and failing that, segregation, of Indians. Periodically from 1885 there were various Anti-Indian laws that ensured segregation, discrimination against Indian trading and land rights, restrictions on movement, and withdrawal of political rights. The threat of repatriation hung over Indians as a sword of Damocles into the middle of the 20th century. However, only a few Indian immigrants returned to India, and by 1911 my grandmother was among the 152,184 Indians who had decided to make South Africa their permanent home.

Both my maternal grandparents came to Natal during the phase of growing resistance to the inequities of the indentured system. They were to witness during their lifetime the institution of the Union of South Africa, the growing impact of the Natal Indian Congress, the rise of the African National Congress, and the consolidation of the apartheid stronghold. Goonam's autobiography is located directly in this narrative of political developments from the turn of the century. And many of Meer's writings show the way in which South African Indians were systematically discriminated against; Meer shows, too, the unwavering response from Indians to such discrimination. Gandhi's own role is pivotal in this history; he led two Passive Resistance campaigns in the first decade of the century. A third gained momentum in 1946 when the Indian Land Act was passed by the Smuts Government, which imposed segregation on Indians and gave them a "loaded franchise" (Russell 1988:71). In her interview with Russell, Meer points out: "This 1946 Passive Resistance Campaign was very important because it marked the beginning of international concern over racism in South Africa. It coincided with the independence of India - which gave India an important position in the United Nations" (71).

Inspired by heroines

My grandmother's inclination to eulogise Indian women well-known for their struggle against injustices must say something about her own longings for a brave new world.

Two exemplary women, Sarojini Naidu and Pandita Rama Bai, were much revered by my grandmother, and, in turn, by my mother and father. When my great-grandmother and grandmother left India for South Africa, Sarojini Naidu and Pandita Rama Bai were already prominent in the fight against the imperialism of Britain and against a patriarchal society. My grandparents' (and parents') obscure and simple lives were enlivened by their claiming and absorbing the examples of these two eminent women in a personal way. My earliest memory of Sarojini Naidu as a personality of importance is of a sepia-coloured photograph of her, mounted on the coarse white-washed wall of my grandparents' sitting room (I was to discover gradually that this was a familiar sight, as was the photograph of Gandhi, in many an Indian home of the period). There were many references to Sarojini Naidu in the family conversations, and she acquired a legendary status for me when I was growing up. It is only now, however, that I am beginning to appreciate the full stature and greatness of these two women.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), an eminent poet and politician - referred to as "The Nightingale of India" or "the Joan of Arc who rose to inspire India" (Naravane 1996:41) - worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi. She had formed the South African Indian Congress, in direct protest to new restrictions on Indian land and trading rights (Meer, Fatima 1969:43). In Goonam's autobiography Sarojini Naidu's association with her (Goonam's) family is celebrated, and there is no doubt that her example significantly influenced Goonam's own participation in politics. There is also reference to Sarojini Naidu in writings by Ansuyah Singh who seems to have been influenced by her literary style. Sarojini Naidu was considered the most prominent woman in the mass movement for independence in India (Paranjape 1996:vii), and a key person in the Passive Resistance Movement during the time of Gandhi's resistance to British colonial rule. She played a leading part in the non-cooperation movement, travelling through India spreading the Gandhian message. Apart from making India's freedom her cause, she worked hard to improve the status of Indian women, fighting for their education and their franchise, and campaigned against purdah. Sarojini Naidu first came to South Africa in 1924, as part of an official African tour from India. For the four months that she was here, she protested strongly on behalf of the Indian Government against the discriminatory measures endured by Indians in South Africa. She pointed out that this was a violation of the Smuts-Gandhi agreement. In 1925 Sarojini Naidu was elected president of the Indian National Congress, and was also president of the South African Indian Congress at the same time, thereby becoming an eminent figure in South African politics during this period. Her vision for the liberation of the wider continent marked her approach to her work among Indians. In a speech to the South African Congress in April 1924, Sarojini Naidu stated categorically that there was no place for "colour bar" in Africa.

Her particular impact on South African Indian politics was evident during the years of the Indian Agent-Generals in South Africa, especially those years when Sastri was in South Africa. She returned to South Africa twice between 1926 and 1932, speaking strongly against the treatment of Indians in South Africa. At Indian Independence Sarojini Naidu was appointed governor of Uttar Pradesh. She died a year after my grandmother's death, in 1949, and her work was remembered and celebrated in South Africa for many years to come. Her concern for South Africa was continued in some ways by Vijayalakshmi Pandit, who with the help of South Africa leaders such as Yusuf Dadoo, took the struggle of "The Indian Question" to the United Nations. Their efforts, among others, were largely responsible for putting South Africa eventually on the United Nations agenda - in the same month that my grandmother died.

Pandita Rama Bai Saraswati (1858-1922) worked hard for social reform, the emancipation of women, and for the improvement of their status. A B Shah states that she was acclaimed as "the greatest woman produced by modern India and one of the greatest Indians

in all history...the one to lay the foundations for a movement for women's liberation in India" (Tharu and Lalitha 1991:Vol 2:243). Rama Bai, of Brahmin ancestry, was born in 1858, two years before the first indentured settlers arrived in Natal. She was encouraged to study Sanskrit and the ancient Scriptures by her father. She worked with orphan girls in Poona and also for the welfare of child-widows (Firth 1961:191-192). I realise now that the fact that she converted from Hinduism to Christianity would have added to her appeal for my grandparents and parents.

It is interesting for me personally to ponder on the connection with a woman I had heard so much of in my childhood days, especially since we now encounter a "sudden" interest, to use Meenakshi Mukherjee's view, in Pandita Rama Bai among feminist historians, political thinkers, sociologists and literary scholars in India (see Mukherjee 1999). Contemporary scholarship highlights the protracted battles of women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in India's struggle to nation status.

The achievements of Sarojini Naidu and Pandita Rama Bai, among those of other Indian women, are all the more remarkable, given that it was British women who were given easy access to the public sphere in India during colonial rule, and indigenous men and women were systematically infantilised. The two women's lives intersected poignantly, when at Pandita Rama Bai's Memorial Service in 1922, Sarojini Naidu described her as "the greatest Christian saint among the Hindus" (Naravane 1996:82). The representation of Sarojini Naidu and Rama Bai as "mothers of the nation" in the discourse of nation and nationalism in India perhaps gave my grandparents and parents, like so many other Indians in South Africa, a sense of belonging to a wider family. At the same time it is worth noting that Rama Bai and Sarojini Naidu, part of a larger history of anti-colonial feminist struggle in India, were admired by both Indian men and women, as in my family, who still continued to live in, and accept, a traditionally sexist society and imperialist world.

It is ironic from the vantage point of the end of twentieth century, that the other 'heroine' for Indian indentured labourers was Queen Victoria. I see vividly, from the photographs of my grandmother, her gold sovereign brooch with the depiction of Queen Victoria on it, although when the Queen died my grandmother was still a little girl. In spite of the treatment that Indians received at the hand of the British Crown, and the resistance that the very persons they adulated (such as Sarojini Naidu) presented to it, my grandmother and her family were also ardent royalists, and spoke of 'the Royal Family' (the succeeding Edwardian British royal household) with great affection. I grew up in a family where deference to the British Crown was accepted as indisputable. There was an ambiguous relationship between Indians and their colonial masters. Indians in South Africa saw themselves as a proud part of the British Empire, even if they were treated as its step-children. This is evident in Olga Paruk's poem, cited later, and in the way Gandhi always approached Britain - as one who was only asserting his rights under British law.

Queen Victoria was represented by colonial women who supported and maintained the super-structure of colonialism at 'home' and the far flung parts of the Empire. The grand design of the Crown proceeded inexorably, affecting the lives of those who lived in the little rural outpost in Kearsney, Natal. Elleke Boehmer points out that at the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, in 1897 (which was a year after my grandmother was born), "the entire course of the British nineteenth century...seemed to have unfolded in accordance with a uniquely ordained pattern" (Boehmer 1995:29). My grandmother would have surely believed this - that there existed a divinely "ordained pattern" - for Queen Victoria, for her (my grandmother's) own private life, and for the affairs of 'men'...

A new pattern of racial and cultural complexity

The introduction of Indian indentured labour was to change the racial composition of Natal, and introduce a new pattern of racial diversity in South Africa. We have to reflect on how British political appropriation of the colony, and subsequent apartheid policies, resulted in cultural appropriation as well, as generally occurs in such contexts (see Takaki 1993:1). Both the indigenous and indentured peoples were seen as foreigners and outsiders, and were systematically 'othered'. The history of the past century has been a struggle to change that very perception - to ensure that Indians, Africans and Coloureds belonged to South Africa as much as the English and Afrikaners did. Both white groups were a powerful minority who had the power to define South African culture. It was through the example of Gandhi and others that Indians were seen not only as victims of discrimination, but actors in history, as subjects. It was through such an engagement that the derogatory term "coolie" was redefined into a symbol of resistance.

It is important to remember that when my grandmother left her home country to settle in this strange land, she was hardly moving out of a "pure" home country to a "contaminated" diasporic location, as Grewal and Kaplan point out about all Indians who left as indentured labourers (see Grewal & Kaplan 1994:16). It is also worth stressing that the sense of a single political and cultural identity - a nationalistic identity - was hardly present at the time when my grandmother left India. An earlier historiography that depicts an image of a homogeneous India has been questioned by, among others, the Subaltern Studies Group, and a "history of difference" has been developed (Kaviraj 1993:3,5). At the same time, if the immigrants were transporting a homeland culture and ethos that seemed, in part, homogenised, this was largely due to colonial manipulations already in India. This commodifying tendency, which persists to this day, facilitated complicity with racial ghettoising under colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, where individual identity was predicated on racial difference.

Grewal and Kaplan rightly emphasise the concept of "scattered hegemonies", where "multiple subjectivities" replace the European construction of a unitary subject (Grewal

and Kaplan 1994:7). They argue that syncretism and hybridity in contemporary culture are not a mix of two different and distinct cultural groups. Syncretism is not the neo-imperialist mode of a western and non-western mix, which tacitly mystifies non-western cultures. Hybridity existed (and exists) already in India, as much as western culture was also hybrid (8). Rushdie argues that "the word 'Indian' is a pretty scattered concept" (Rushdie 1991:17), while Sudipta Kaviraj points out that "Indianness" is an historical concept, invented at the time of Independence, and that it is an anachronism to assume that it existed from "immemorial times" (Kaviraj 1993:8).

Migration, then, through indentured schemes, and later 'voluntary' movement, was to have a significant impact on the character of the Empire. A "deep disorder" resulted, which persists to this very day, altering the character of the contemporary world, as V S Naipaul points out in his novel, *The Mimic Men*:

It is my hope...to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organisations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors. It was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about. The empires of our time were short-lived, but they have altered the world for ever; their passing away is their least significant feature. (Naipaul, V S 1969:32)

The general effects of migration and uprooting, and the consequences of the peculiar practice of apartheid in South Africa, resulted in considerable measure in the naturalising, and 'solidifying' of ethnic identity among Indians in South Africa, by the creation of "imagined communities". V S Naipaul, in *India - A Million Mutinies Now* (1991), points out that it is the very dislocation from 'home', when one is on foreign soil, that creates an exclusive identity:

These overseas Indian groups were mixed. They were miniature Indias, with Hindus and Muslims, and people of different castes. They were disadvantaged, without representation, and without a political tradition. They were isolated by language and culture from the people they found themselves among; they were isolated, too, from India itself...In these special circumstances they developed something they would never have known in India: a sense of belonging to an Indian community. This feeling of community could override religion and caste. (Naipaul, V S 1991:7)

Sonya Domergue, a French academic specialising in Asian literature, supports this contention:

The concept of a fluid, shifting self poses no ontological problems to the Indian living in India, for he lives in a 'cosmos of interpersonal flow...changing and interchanging with others...protected by an identity that is derived endogamously'. The problems arise, however, when the individual is deprived of this endless source of defining others. (Domergue 1998:7)

Predictably, the early indentured settlers, in the process of cultural transplantation, created "little Indias" here (whether this meant, among other things, building temples or

mosques, observing religious festivals, setting up shops for saris or Indian musical instruments or nurturing plants required for typical Indian cuisine). This did not entail replicating the mother country but, as with settlers everywhere, reworking and recreating it in a new context. Rushdie argues that a "sense of loss" through separation from the "homeland" results in all sorts of constructions of it, that emigrants are

haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge - which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 1991:10)

In an insular new world it is difficult to realise this, and ethnic identity is embraced, even naturalised, and one tends to forget that one has been 'ethnicised'. And part of this ethnicisation takes place as one is made to seem different from others. In *An Area of Darkness*, V S Naipaul, whose own family went as indentured workers from India to Trinidad in the 1880's, reflects on his experience when visiting India, and compares it with those in England and Trinidad. In India he was one of the crowd.

To be an Indian in England was distinctive...Now in Bombay I entered a shop...And there was nothing. It was like being denied part of my reality...I was faceless. I might sink without trace into that Indian crowd. I had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me. I felt the need to impose myself, and didn't know how. (Naipaul, V S 1981:45-46)

There has always been this tension between embracing difference, and resisting difference or being perceived as different.

Something of this diversity and complexity is evident in aspects of my grandmother's own life. My grandmother developed into a dignified, matriarchal figure through what she learnt from her everyday experiences and communal sharing in traditional Indian culture as well as in Christian religious life. My grandmother and her family had come as Christians from India, and my grandfather's family as Hindu (he converted to Christianity here in South Africa), and they were to be described as 'Christian pioneers' in Kearsney.

Indian Christians formed a small percentage of the Indian population in the early years of settlement, and continue to do so. Originally my grandparents belonged to the Telegu Baptist Church, started by the first Indian Baptist minister in South Africa, the Revd John Rangiah, in Kearsney in 1908. The Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) to which my grandparents later became affiliated was part of an important wave of Pentecostalism, which had its roots in African spirituality in the United States. The AFM was founded in South Africa in 1908, and a branch was initiated in Kearsney in my grandparents' home in the 1930's. Dean Charles Reddy notes that the "Pentecostal Movement made its greatest gains in the labouring class of the Indian community rather than among the traders and others from the Passenger class" (Reddy, Dean Charles 1992:47). In South Africa it was organised along

separate racial lines, and I only discovered in later years that this was not a solely 'Indian' church but that it had strong Afrikaner and African membership.

My grandmother was literate in Telegu, reading the Telegu Bible at family prayers, and instructing her children in the ways of the world with confidence. She learnt Tamil, the language of my grandfather, and together with him also developed competence in conversing in Zulu as the community in which they interacted expanded culturally. My grandparents' linguistic heterogeneity was adeptly transmitted to my mother and her brothers and sisters. The little girl who worked in the tea plantations grew into a woman of stature, running a household that became the centre for family and friends, missionaries and community leaders. She was clearly mediating a complex subjectivity, that cut across racial, cultural, religious and linguistic affiliations.

Like Hama in Sam's story, "Jesus is Indian", I imagine that my grandmother was yearning for a Christianity in an "eastern cup", but the missionaries around her and her family would have been oblivious to this need. My parents would often talk about Sardar Sundar Singh, referred to as "the Saint Paul of India" (Parker 1922), and of his resolute preservation of his Indian identity even when he became a Christian. The church would have not raised to the fore in those days questions of culture and identity. My parents were resolutely taught by the white missionaries that religious syncretism was a cardinal sin. As a devout Christian woman, my grandmother was to accept unquestioningly the teachings of the missionaries of this period that she and her family were being saved from superstition and 'idol worship', and what her 'proper place' in the larger scheme of things as a Christian woman was to be. And while there were very cordial relationships with families of other faiths (mainly Hindu in Kearsney) in the neighbourhood, friendships that endure to this day, there was a complex mix of contact and separation between 'self' and, what was perceived to be, 'other'. While many Indian cultural practices were preserved, a continual process of sieving and sifting out 'true' Christian identity was also taking place.

More critical reflection is required on the construction of the 'Indian woman' in the context of the dominant ideologies of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism in Colonial Natal of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. What were the ways in which Indian women like my grandmother were being constructed and culturally determined and what were their self-representations? And what were the differences among them? How did they, moving from one diasporic location to another, spell out the "fragments of a broken geography", to use Meena Alexander's ringing phrase (Alexander, Meena 1993:2)? In some ways this study begins to ponder over these issues, as I consider how some Indian women, as reflected in their writings, articulated their identity and sought liberatory spaces against the background of their history.

Conclusion

Of course, the challenge now, as postcolonial academics have argued, is to assert a suppressed cultural identity, yet avoid a narrow ethnocentricity; to straddle the line between authenticity and "a cult of authenticity" (Brydon 1991:191-204). In the understandable quest for self-definition how do we straddle the delicate dividing line of reclaiming a suppressed and undervalued identity, as well as engaging, with our counterparts all over the Third World, in a critique of 'nativisms'; how do we engage in a 'refusal of Orientalism'?

Against this background of reflecting our oppressor's invention of us and of inventing ourselves, we have to consider the question of identity among Indians in South Africa since the advent of the new democracy, and what it is to be 'South African'. It is interesting that in Thabo Mbeki's well-known "I am an African" speech, delivered when the New South African Constitution was adopted in 1994, he incorporates the place of Indian experience in the context of a wider Asian identity in his quest for national identity, reminding us too of (the oft-forgotten) Chinese indentured labour in this country:

I come of those who were transported from India and China, whose being resided in the fact, solely, that they were able to provide physical labour, who taught me that we could both be at home and be foreign, who taught me that human existence itself demanded that freedom was a necessary condition for that human existence. (In Hadland and Rantao 1999:155)

Pre-echoes of Mbeki's visionary speech may be found in the following example of Urdu poetry, written in South Africa in the previous century:

I love thee my land Afrique!
I love the sea, that rolls on its coast
Love the rivers that flow through its veins
Love its every bird, every flower,
Each mountain, hill, rock, grain of dust
I love all of these and share with these
My love, my Africa, my land. (In Meer, Fatima 1969:230)

In Mbeki's vision of the new nation, there is spontaneous celebration of the contributions of the different and distinct racial or ethnic groups historically to the emerging nation, and of the crossing-over and interconnectedness that makes each group inextricably linked with the other. It is an appropriate and necessary line of thought at this historical moment, though it took a century and more, with all its travails and upheavals, before the political and psychological space was fully claimed to develop it. (This still does not sit consistently though with the belief in "one nation, many cultures", as pointed out earlier.)

Even if my grandmother were oblivious to the fact that she was part of, to use Gorra's phrase, "an experiment in human engineering" (Gorra 1997:67), and some of her colonial contemporaries little understood these questions of identity and difference, certainly her offspring now grapple with the incessant 'existential' question: "How do we live in the world" (Rushdie 1991:18). Or as Fanon would have asked: "How can the human world live its difference; how can a human being live Other-wise" (Bhabha, 1994:64). When my grandmother travelled to this land at the beginning of the twentieth century she did not

have a way of knowing that arising out of that very migration and translation to another place and time, questions of identity and difference would become the most vexed at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

She had no way of knowing that, with the intrusion of the historical present, the need to grapple with a 'politics of location' would take her grand-daughter on a quest back in time and place; back in search of her grandmother's garden...and those of the many women who have tried to articulate their varied responses to living in this country. I feel instinctively that when my grandmother came to see me on my fourth birthday, and then died on that very day, at the age of 52 (six months after Independence was gained in the land of her birth, and seventeen days before Mahatma Gandhi's own death), my own "pilgrim life", as Pandita Rama Bai would have said, had begun...

My grandmother (like her daughter, my mother) had thus lived her entire life not knowing the rights and privileges of a democratic society. I, her grand-daughter, was to exercise those rights for the first time in the land of my birth almost half a century later.

If my grandmother, claiming a room of her own, were able to 'write back', I wonder what she would say?

CHAPTER 4

A SURVEY OF INDIAN WOMEN'S WRITING

Introduction

Room of their own or not - and in spite of material and psychological deprivation in the early years of their indenture - Indian women in South Africa have produced a significant corpus of writing. In this chapter I give a broad survey of the writings produced by Indian women, focusing on some of the ways in which issues of identity are reflected in them. I provide an overview of mainly the genres of poetry and drama which are not covered in the other chapters. I begin by considering a few key issues, both descriptive and discursive, as a way of framing the survey. I also point to gaps in the survey and the need to search for further writings.

Attributing periodisation to writings is a problematic process, and tracing a linear narrative of literary output simplistic. I realise that while I present the writings in rough chronological order, the time of writing is often removed from the time of publication. I will nevertheless show how the question of identity changes historically, and with different writers. The first examples of writing relate to the indentured labourers in the early decades of the twentieth century. The historical and political determinants of the period - the treatment of Indians in the British Colony of Natal, and their relationship with the British Crown - are reflected in the examples here. The second group of texts are by women who were born in the first and second decades of the twentieth century, such as Goonam, Singh, Mayat, Meer, and Phyllis Naidoo, and whose lives and writing careers spanned the better part of the century. Goonam, for example, was born in 1906 and published her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, in 1990. A further group of writers emerged in the 50's and 60's, and the fourth group may be seen as the contemporary generation of writers, who have been publishing since the 80's. Muthal Naidoo, who began writing from the 50's, developed her work into a significant body in the decades that followed.

This survey mainly provides information about work produced in the traditional genres of Western literature, such as poetry and drama. Many types of writing have been omitted. A variety of other examples of writing needs to be more assiduously researched. An important genre, and one not represented in the survey, is that of children's writing. Brenda Kali (1987) is one of the few Indian women known to have contributed to this genre. She has presented stories for children, using narratives of Rama and Sita and the annual Festi-

val of Lights, Deepavali. "Natyam", a documentary drama by Kali was produced in 1990, and tells of the story of a young girl who pledges her soul to a swami in order to learn the secrets of dance. The other writer who has written specifically for children is Ansu Naidoo. Among the many stories Naidoo has written are "Hug Me", "Dinika visits Grandpa's Farm", "I Love You", "The Clothesline", "Elephant's Big Discovery", and "The Ugly Potato". Some of the stories have been published by the popular magazine, *Personality*; others have been published in India by Children's Book Trust which is based in New Delhi. A potential publisher in England, Avon Books, has described Naidoo's stories as "engaging", and noted that "(t)here is a fundamental feeling of charming decency and innocence in these tales, which makes a refreshing change from the gimmickry and sensationalism that have crept into so many children's books" (Rawlinson 1994). Naidoo's work needs to be publicised more widely.

A genre that is popular is that of recipe books. After the appearance of *Indian Delights* by Zuleikha Mayat and the Women's Cultural Group, discussed below, more and more recipe books have been published by Indian women. Other instructive books include Premilla Dhunpath's compilation of a book of Indian names, *Baby Names from the East* (1993), which makes an important contribution to the field of language and culture.

Another emerging genre is that of popular, journalistic writing by Indian women, which is generally neglected by literary critics. In recent times regular newspaper columns have appeared such as "Devi Rajab's Diary" in *The Natal Mercury*. A selection of Rajab's articles has now been published in a book, *Devi's Diary*, by Ravan Press (1999). An "Opinion" column by Devi Sankaree Govender in *The Sunday Tribune*, and another by Vasantha Angamuthu in *The Daily News*, are published weekly. Krijay Govender presents weekly comments on television programmes in *The Saturday Independent*, as well as occasional pieces for an opinion column. These writers reflect on a range of current South African issues and topics and, together with other black women, enjoy greater visibility in the media than before.

Writings produced in Indian languages in South Africa need to be researched, analysed and anthologised. For example, the short stories, plays and devotional literature in Tamil and English by Pushpam Murugan, a Durban writer, who has found a publishing outlet in India, are worth considering. Murugan's works include *A Bride for Vasu*, a play with an ethical and moral purpose for young people, and *Porkizhi*, a collection of historical short stories that were originally written in Tamil by K V Manisegaren in Madras, India, and adapted by her for local readers. Her book of nursery rhymes, songs, "show and tell", in both English and Tamil, *Muthamizh Malargal - Blossoms of the Three Forms of Thamizh* (1999), is used in racially mixed classes in a primary school in Durban. In *Thirumalar*, a book of informative and exhortatory speeches on a range of topics, Murugan points out that the Tamil Eistedfodd played an important role in the perpetuation of the Tamil lan-

guage, religion and culture from the early days of indenture. She has also put together an important documentary book on the history of Magazine Barracks. There is need for fuller and more comprehensive surveys of Indian women's writings that include production in Indian languages, as well as expressive work in the oral tradition.

Many of the writers in this study have encountered problems related to writing and publication. Access to publishing is a major obstacle to writing. Writers also seem to lack a community of support where they may share their work and discuss problems related to publication. This may indeed be a universal problem, but it has affected the development of writing among marginalised groups in particular. The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) did play a supportive role in the 80's, but is no longer an active body. Writers often experience loneliness and isolation; Miriam Tlali notes that when she needed the guidance of other writers she found a "void" (see Daymond 1995:11). We have to appreciate the extent to which the very fact of publication validates women's writing and makes it acceptable to a readership, and how reputable publishers provide a 'halo effect' for writers. This was true of the writing career of Sobhna Poona, who developed as a result of being able to have her initial work published.

Writing by Indian women in South Africa and its reception generally occurred in cultural ghettos, and part of the obscurity of some of the writers may be attributed to the fact that they used unknown or 'ethnic' publishers. This is a probable reason why Ansuayah Singh, for example, who published in the 60's, was largely unknown outside the Indian community. In recent decades black publishing ventures, such as *Staffrider Magazine*, *Seriti Sa Sechaba*, which is a publishing house solely for women's writings, and Madiba Press of the Institute of Black Research at the University of Natal, Durban, have provided a publication outlet for black women writers. 'Alternative' writing and publishing by non-governmental organisations also tried to compensate for the lacuna in some way. This effort was part of a large body of liberatory and oppositional writing during the apartheid years, for which COSAW Publishing provided an important formal structure for both women and men. There have also been numerous pamphlets, magazines, and journals that have given women and men access to writing and publishing. This field is being researched from various perspectives at present.

Shamin Meer has been part of a non-racial women's collective which played an important role in the development of literacy and communication for adult women through non-governmental organisations. The Durban Women's Group initially produced a newsletter called *Speak* in 1983, which was designed to provide a forum for women's voices; it gradually grew into a reputable alternative publishing venture in the 1980's. Others in the *Speak* collective are Karen Hurt, Gill Lincoln, Libby Lloyd, Nise Malange, Jackie Mondi and Elinor Sisulu. *Speak* magazine has been instrumental in drawing attention to issues of violence against women, housing struggles, problems and concerns related to women's

employment in domestic and public spaces, rural and urban experiences of women, and mobilisation in the mass democratic movement. In a fractured society it showed the way in which a community of resistance might develop through writing. Recently a retrospective edition of *Speak* magazine, *Women Speak - Reflections on our Struggles 1982 - 1997* was compiled and edited by Meer (1997). This collection contains selected short stories, poems, narratives of women's struggles in communities, and personal stories. Meer, who also edited *Women, Land and Authority - Perspectives from South Africa* (1989), contributed to the development of *Agenda - A Journal on Women and Gender*, and more recently to *The Women's Budget Book*. The journal addresses issues that are of concern to all South African women.

In addition to considering issues around publishing, we should look at the way a text is reproduced, and the role of teachers, lecturers, critics and the media in this respect. Writers become 'established' through exposure in various forms, such as reviews, invitations to writers' festivals, or by being 'prescribed' at schools and universities. Many Indian women writers have not enjoyed exposure in these ways. The kind of work that Priya Joshi at the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS) at the University of California, Berkeley seems to be engaged in is sadly absent in South African literary studies. Joshi, a scholar of the "history of the book", is engaged in research on the impact of the colonial enterprise on the Indian cultural and literary landscape. She points out that the "history of the book basically means a study of the production, circulation, and consumption of print in any form, including serials, manuscripts, and ephemera. It is an approach that is invested in uncovering how the history of documents themselves reveals broader social and political currents in historical periods" (Joshi, Priya 1999).

The question of literary merit inevitably comes up. There is a general assumption that what writing there is by Indian women is of poor quality, and that there is no need to expend energy excavating writings from obscurity if they are mediocre. This is the general impression of the work of Ansuyah Singh, for example, whose writing is considered unimportant by many readers. But it is worth remembering that good writing is not produced in a vacuum, that it is generally shaped and developed in a context of critical reception. In South Africa texts with historical and sociological value may be reclaimed as much as those with literary merit. Further, the uses that writing may be put to change from one period to another. A text may be important for historical reasons, for example, rather than the purely aesthetic. Lockett maintains that an alternative discourse to the formal one of "aesthetics" needs to be formulated in order to recuperate all women's writing within the South African literary context. She points out that aesthetics "is not a neutral concept, but is part of a politicised discourse - political in terms of race and gender" (Lockett 1991:2). She insists that feminists define their own theory and discourse, and following Elaine Showalter's warning, calls for the framing of a "gynocritical" model, with reference to women's work

and women's criticism.

Certainly to judge from its limited range and themes and stylistic innovation, and its stridency of purpose, the writing of poetry by Indian women shows the extent to which it has suffered from being secluded from the mainstream of South African literature or from that of other marginalised groups. Short story writing seems to be confined to the more successful writers, such as Reddy and Karodia, although it is arguable that they have achieved their success through the genre of the short story.

Lewis Nkosi speaks of the impoverishment that is manifest in black writing generally due to separation from the literary mainstream:

I wish to argue that its formal insufficiencies, its disappointing breadline asceticism and prim disapproval of irony, and its well-known predilection for what Lukacs called 'petty realism, the trivially detailed painting of local colour': all these naively uncouth disfigurements of which many critics, including myself, have sometimes complained, can be seen to be a result, in part, of a claustrophobia related to this internal colonialism from which, it is hoped, a post-apartheid condition will set it free. (Nkosi 1998:77)

Nkosi states that one may "trace much of the backwardness of black writing to its state of internal isolation and surveillance under the apartheid regime and some of its disabilities to wounds inflicted by cultural deprivation and social neglect" (79). Nkosi's general point about the difference between black and white writing in South Africa is pertinent to reading Indian women's writings. He draws attention to the "split between black and white writing" in South Africa, where the former seeks to "bear witness" and the latter attempts "to experiment" (75). He argues that though this difference is treated as a:

positive sign of our cultural diversity and richness...this difference between black and white writing can also be read as a sign of social disparity and technological discrepancy. In a post-apartheid South Africa it is clearly a cause for embarrassment. It exists on the one side as a reminder of historical neglect and the impoverishment of black writing and on the other of cultural privilege and opportunity in the case of white writing. (75)

There is the crucial (and prior) question of the problem of developing a "writerly self" when the literary imagination is impoverished because one is othered in a racialised society (see Morrison 1992:xii). Certainly the need to carve out new physical and intellectual spaces is necessary for women writers in general and black women writers in particular.

In the writings in this survey I feel that the tension between the aesthetic and the political is never fully resolved. I am conscious of how the texts will be read by a literary establishment, in spite of disclaimers I might make from time to time. Which is the real achievement: the fact that writing by Indian women in South Africa was produced at all, or that it was produced well? And how is "well" defined, and by whom? I warm to the idea of stressing the political value of much of the writing. Surely these writings, if nothing else, provide insights into the intricacies of our historical legacy? Yet I am sobered by Sunder Rajan's view that "the attempt to stress the political in women's writing results in its divorce from historical everydayness and in its attainment to the status of a heroic excep-

tionality" (Rajan 1991:3). Certainly, these larger conflictual questions and issues are held together by my larger thesis concerning the question of identity among Indian women writers in South Africa.

Finally, and most importantly, in this chapter, in reading the selected texts I attempt to see them in relation to the overall theme of the study. Through the various examples of women's writings I show how the notion of identity has changed over the decades, how the signifier 'Indian' has been variously claimed, changed, modified or made unstable by different writers. Several important questions emerge. How are aspects of identity and difference being portrayed? What political themes in relation to South African history are being explored? What images of women, for instance, are predominant in these writings? Are there gendered roles, with women as mothers, or good submissive wives, as Mary Ferguson asks in her study of images of women in literature (see Tharu and Lalita:1995: Vol 1:17)?

While there is a wide range of themes that emerge in the writings, traditional 'women's experiences' relating to households and families rather than public relationships feature prominently. A large number of examples, predictably, focus on South Africa's race politics: "The multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination", as Albie Sachs has formulated it, are evident again and again, but often these are situated in ordinary everyday living, such as family relationships and in domestic settings.

As far as the processes of my research are concerned much of my work was undertaken in libraries and documentation centres such as those at the University of Durban-Westville, University of Natal and the Killie Campbell Library in Durban. The assistance of the National English Literary Museum was also sought. I made formal requests to specific organisations, like the Indian Women's Association; I followed diverse leads, checked old anthologies, newspaper articles and reviews, spoken to various persons in academic and community settings, and have been generally on the alert for any information relevant to this topic. Wherever possible, I contacted the writers themselves for examples of their work, or for critical comments; friends and relatives of writers have also helped. Consequently, I have also been able to include some hitherto unpublished material. The gaps in archival collections themselves have become obvious through this study. What has become apparent is the need for an efficient, co-ordinated process of investigating and researching this area in order to uncover unknown material more reliably. Data bases at archival and documentation centres (with their male bias generally) do not provide much help in tracking down Indian women's writings, and there is need for development and updating of records.

In this survey I document some of the writings that have been either published or circulated informally. Some writers have been fortunate to have their works published in individual collections, or in regional or national anthologies. The writings surveyed here are

those that have appeared in print, as well as those in informal publications, such as school magazines, or through private publishing ventures. There has been a steady stream of published material since 1960, and this work is now more accessible to readers.

Although much of my work has been confined to the province of KwaZulu-Natal, and largely in the Durban area, I have also drawn from writing in other provinces. There is need for this research to be undertaken more extensively in the other provinces, and across urban and rural areas. There are many gaps in the study which may provide opportunities for further research, such as writings by girls at school level. A great deal of research is required into the early period of indentured labour in South Africa. Although, as Ayub Sheik points out, a strong written tradition did not exist among the descendants of indentured workers in South Africa (Sheik 1998:22), there is need for work on the oral and artistic traditions which persist to date, as well as the kind of precise literary heritage, including a book culture, that was brought from India. Some of these forms include story-telling, satsangs, prayers, songs, and letter-writing. More work is required to find further literary 'foremothers' in the earlier part of the century among Indian women. Broadening of the research base will have a significant impact on the discursive nature of the project. More archival work and research in communities is required to uncover writings that occurred in the early decades of this century. There is also scope for all kinds of stylistic, linguistic, genre-based, comparative, thematic and ideological critiques evolving beyond the present study.

Writings at the Turn of the Century

During the decades of empire, writings by colonised groups were not nurtured and recognised readily. Emphasising the "ubiquity" of "white encirclement", Boehmer asks: "how were native writers from places under colonial occupation to inscribe their own points of view, let alone threaten colonial authority?" (Boehmer 1998a:xxx). We have to consider that many of the early Indian women settlers were not in an English writing culture as their later sisters were. I have pointed out that formal educational opportunities were scant for Indian women in the early years in South Africa. There has not been the same tradition of private school education for Indian girls as there has been for White girls. Missionary effort in the education of Indian girls during the indentured period was hardly aggressive; and the lack of public libraries for a long time contributed to the impoverishment of a culture of reading and writing in English among Indian women.

Among Indians in South Africa the early literature was obviously both oral and written, and would often have been expressed in religious practices. The collective artistic culture of women, expressed particularly in dance, music and other forms in the past has gone unrecorded, and this has resulted in gross impoverishment of study in this field. There is the challenge now of going back to find examples of our foremothers' orature and literature,

their "herstories" as reflected in folk culture and incorporated in various forms (Wilentz 1992:xxv). It must also be remembered that oral literature continues to be interspersed with written forms, and more research in this field is required.

Fatima Meer (1969:220-221) points out that art forms among indentured Indians were brought over from India, and comprised the performing arts such as music, story-telling, dance and drama. Indian musical instruments, such as drums (*avanghm*) and string (*tat and betat*) were used. Local performing groups were formed to provide entertainment, drawing from North Indian and South Indian traditions. Performance of *Qawwalis* (Muslim), *Bhajans* and *Katcheries* (Hindu hymns and South Indian communal devotional singing) drew from ancient Indian sources or used new local talent. These were executed solely by men, with women as part of the audience. The Urdu gazals performed at *mushairas*, which were gatherings of poets, along the lines of the old Moghul concept of popular poetry, were also composed mainly by men, but dealt with social constructions of women, with love, marriage and family themes. Other early examples of music and drama groups were in Magazine Barracks; these groups performed the Theru Kooththu (street dance), for example, and Indian dramatic pieces, with exclusively male actors (Murugan 1997a:92).

There were interesting examples of Urdu and Gujerati poetry written in South Africa, some with a striking identification with the continent of 'Africa'. A few appear in Meer's book *Portrait of Indian South Africans* (1969); these poems are apparently written by men referred to only by their first names - Ahmed, Safee, Alif, Farooqi, and Ayub. There does not seem to be any record of writings by women at this time. The following poem sets out how a bride will adapt to her new home. It is presumably written by a male, and is in contrast to the poems that were later written by women, where there is some attempt to critique or modify these assumptions. The context of these poems is pre-20th century; a patriarchal culture is firmly intact, a culture where women's gendered roles, fitted especially for domesticity, went unquestioned.

Bride's Farewell (Bida)

My behnie leaves today
Leaves for her sasural
Bid your father pranaam
Bid your mother pranaam
Bid your brothers pranaam
Bid your sisters pranaam
Bid your grandsires pranaam
Bid your kutum pranaam.

Gentle as the shade of the mango,
Gentle is the care of your parents
You must leave that care and go this day
You must leave and go your saas's way.

As the king rules with crown on his head
You must obey, with your laaj of respect
Showing deference to parents-in-law
Obeying new kinsmen in silent awe.
Wide as your sari's festive borders
Will be your jhetani's daily orders
Dear sister you'll have to carry them
You dare not flout them
You must bear them.

Our sister goes with her husband today
Our sister goes to her sasural today
Her mother's love walks with her all the way
Her father's guidance goes with her to stay.

Take your leave of old relatives and friends,
Bid fond farewell to bonds of departed youth.
This day you forge new bonds of adulthood
Forge them with the flame of your parents' name.

Your father-in-law is father to you
Your mother-in-law is mother to you
Your sister-in-law is a sister to you
Your husband now your life's comrade.
Remember life is woven of two threads
One joy, one sorrow, you must wear both well,
When trouble comes, meet it with proud courage.

Our sister goes with her husband to-day,
Our sister goes with her sasural to-day
Her mother's love walks with her all the way
Her father's guidance goes with her to stay.
(Meer 1969:233)

Alongside the emphasis on maintaining traditional values there was a growing interest in political themes. By the turn of the century indentured Indians had lived for forty years in South Africa. The Anglo-Boer War was over, and there was a move towards Union, a unification primarily between English and Boer. The history of the decades after the Anglo-Boer War was dominated by records of the treatment of indentured Indians, Africans and Coloureds, with the beginnings of a rising tide of resistance, and this was to be reflected in the writings that emerged at this time.

One of the first known, published examples of Indian women's writings in South Africa was a collaborative one, when women were constrained to respond to anti-Indian legislation. Indian indentured labourers were subjected to several laws aimed at perpetuating their servitude. Act 17 of 1895 ensured that all those Indentured Indians who had completed their original contracts with their employers and had "failed, neglected or refused to return to India or to become re-indentured in Natal" (this group was referred to as "Free Indians") were forced to pay three pounds annually for a residence licence (26). Meer points out that "the government knew full well that this was beyond the means of the average ex-indentured Indian, and had passed the law to satisfy White demands to enforce re-

patriation of Indians, if they sought a status other than that of labourers" (26). Joy Brain also notes that the amount of three pounds was insupportable, given economic depression in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War (Brain 1989:267).

Letters of protest against this and about other grievances appeared in Indian newspapers of the time such as the *Indian Opinion*, which was started by Gandhi in 1904 in South Africa and served as the mouthpiece of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), and the *Colonial Indian News*, initiated by P S Aiyar, and which was in existence from 1901 to 1903. In 1907 Aiyar established *The African Chronicle*, representing the Natal Indian Patriotic Union, to express issues on which he differed from the NIC and Gandhi (Bhana 1997:17-18). *The African Chronicle* published petitions from the Indian Women's Association, which was started around 1908, with the help of Gandhi. One of its petitions, entitled "Domestic Unhappiness", was addressed "to the Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Natal", and published on 19 September 1908.

The Petition follows:

- 1. That your petitioners beg leave to make representation on behalf of a class of Indians introduced into this Colony under indenture, and who labour under great disabilities and grievances owing to strict enforcement of Act 17 of 1895. The severity and hardship arising therefrom have impelled your petitioners Association, to espouse their cause owing to the serious nature of their case.*
- 2. Your petitioners respectfully submit, that the Indians affects by the aforesaid Act, irrespective of sex, are subjected to an Annual imposition of 3 pounds, which sum owing to their helpless and indigent state, they are virtually unable to pay.*
- 3. Owing to indiscreet enforcement of the aforesaid Act, great hardship and considerable suffering are inflicted upon them.*
- 4. Your petitioners Association in their endeavour to ameliorate and elevate the condition of their sex, have been informed of startling revelation of misery and serious annoyance which have resulted from the severe enforcement of this aforesaid Act that your petitioners deem it their duty to bring the unfortunate and unhappy state of existence to the notice of this Honourable Assembly.*
- 5. In normal times of prosperity, common labourers such as the Indians are, must feel heavily the strain of an imposition of kind of - 3 Pounds - (for the privilege of living in this Colony) and much keener the bitterness of feeling must be, which no doubt at present exists, owing to chronic depression that prevails in all branches of trade in this Colony, from which the Indians are specially suffering.*
- 6. Whilst the sterner sex - men - keenly feel and resent the severity of this Act, the women-folk, weak and gentle by nature, who come under the category of the stringency of this measure more acutely.*
- 7 Your petitioners beg to draw the attention of this Honourable House to the tendency of*

the aforesaid Act, on women and girls, who are liable to pay this 3 Pounds, which is not calculate to afford protection to the inherent rights of the gentler sex, for it fosters domestic infelicity.

8. Your petitioners regard with great shame and sorrow, that women who are in default of payment are sentenced to imprisonment;

and the very dread of being marched up to Court and gaol is enough to numb their intellect and cause terror, to escape from which, the aforesaid Act fosters in them a temptation to barter their female modesty and virtue.

9. The aforesaid Act has been a source of breaking up many a home, alienating the affection of husband and wife, besides separating child from mother.

10. There is no precedent in the legislation of any other country under the British Flag, where women are taxed for the privilege of living with their husbands of under the protection of their nature guardians.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray, that this Honourable House will be pleased to repeal the aforesaid Act 17 of 1895 or to grant such other relief as it may deem fit. For this act of justice, your petitioners will ever pray (African Chronicle: 19 September 1908; (errors and irregularities in the original printed version).

The Indian Women's Association was clearly adding its voice to protests against the treatment of Indians that emerged from various groups after Gandhi had formed the Passive Resistance Association in 1907. The Petition draws attention to the direct and indirect consequences that Act 17 of 1895 had on women. While located in the ideological constructions of womanhood and of family of the time - the title is worth noting in this respect - it highlights the vulnerability of Indian women and girls after the promulgation of the Act. The particular use of the English language and idiom supports a rather deferential position in relation to the Assembly. However, the representation of Indian women as weak and dispensable in the Memorandum is contradicted by their very petition, in that they act as agents and append their signatures. The Act was instrumental in radicalising Indian politics (Brain 1989:267), and was repealed in 1913, as a direct result of the massive Passive Resistance campaign that was mounted against it (Meer, Fatima 1969:44).

This type of petition-writing was inventive in the political climate of the time, conscientising women and symbolising group solidarity and non-elitism; it was also strategic in that individuals would not be singled out for prosecution. Although it is not unlikely that the women were assisted by a man, and though couched in legalese obviously to make it more acceptable, it was an ingenious, even if unconscious, way of merging the private and public spheres - a step that was to influence the trend of local political activism among other Indian women and contribute to the emergence of Indian women leaders.

Fatima Meer suggests that this pattern of collective resistance was established by the Passenger Indians:

The conditions of Indians in South Africa during the last century might have deteriorated and their cause might have been forgotten, had it not been for the efforts of the *passenger* Indians. They were the forerunners of Indian deputation-and-memoranda type of leadership which dominated Indian political life for a considerable period. They sought legal representation, and succeeded in persuading Britain to act on their behalf on several occasions. (27)

The Petition was a forerunner to mass action and the politics of open confrontation and non-violent defiance with Indian women taking part. The first Passive Resistance Movement march, when women were to join in increasing numbers, with Gandhi formally inviting women to become *Satyagrahis*, occurred in 1913 (Reddy and Meer 1996:45). Gandhi refers to Valliamma R Munswami as a martyr when she chose incarceration and death rather than compliance with unjust laws. Valliamma had died after contracting a fever in prison. Among those women who participated in the Passive Resistance campaigns in succeeding decades were Cissy Gool, Dr Goonam, Ansuyah Singh, Zainab Asvat, Ama Naidoo and Fatima Meer.

The Indian Women's Association became known as the Durban Indian Women's Association under the leadership of Kunwarani Lady Maharaj Singh, wife of the Agent-General of India in South Africa (see Govinden 2002), and continues to exist to this day, as the Durban Women's Association. It provided an initial platform for activist Indian women, who were to participate in broader non-racial formations in the decades that followed. In 1952, when Africans and Indians organised the fourth Passive Resistance Campaign, a Multiracial Conference of Women was held in Johannesburg. This culminated in the historic march by South African women on the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956.

A transition from this early group effort to an individual effort, but still in the spirit of the times, was a poem written by Olga Paruk, entitled "Appeal to the King", and published in *The African Chronicle*. The poem was sung to music (composed by Mr Sol Royeppen) at a Variety Concert in aid of the Transvaal Passive Resistance struggle. The concert was held in a theatre in Grey Street, Durban, and the date of the performance is given as 30 March 1910.

Not much is known of Paruk, except that she was a theatrical personality, and that the poem was her own composition. She was a white woman, of Jewish background, married to an Indian Muslim. Certainly the poem, and the article in the newspaper, show a woman who was close to "the Indian cause", and one who was celebrated for identifying so closely with the problems that Indians faced at this time, as mentioned earlier. Her identity does raise the wider question, "Who is an Indian?". One might well ask whether this question is not compatible with the more frequently asked one in recent times: "Who is an African?" The latter is interpreted as being linked to a political identity; why not then the former?

Paruk's poem is principally an appeal to King Edward VII (who also bears the title of

"Emperor of India") against the laws directed at Indians, and the abject conditions under which they lived. These laws came into effect when the more affluent Passenger Indians, who arrived in the wake of the poorer indentured ones, began to develop an economic power base in the country. The Immigration Restriction Bill and the Dealers' Licences Bill were passed after 1896, and in 1906 the Transvaal Government passed the Asiatic Registration Law making it compulsory for Indians over the age of eight to carry a Pass bearing their thumb-print. Although Gandhi took the fight to London, the law was re-introduced in 1907 (Reader's Digest 1988:275). The issue of thumb-printing - referred to specifically in the poem - was a contentious one in these years, with 2000 Asians being jailed in 1907, and 3000 burning their registration certificates in 1908 in protest against this particular law. It was during this time that Gandhi developed his method of Satyagraha (Parekh 1997:6). Other writers have referred to the finger-printing episode as a significant historical happening. Karodia writes about it in *Daughters of the Twilight* (see Karodia 1986:24). In 1990 the play, *The Sacrifice*, written by Mohamed Khan and Essop Alli, also depicted these events, the play being produced to mark the 130th anniversary of the arrival of Indians in South Africa. This play tells of the real-life story of the first woman martyr of the Passive Resistance campaign initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, Valliamah Moodley, mentioned above. The story is set in the context of the enforced carrying of passes, finger-printing, and the compulsory poll tax.

Paruk's poem shows the influence of Gandhian philosophy and the Passive Resistance Movement on literary output in South Africa (see Jamal 1998). (I shall consider further examples later, in my discussion of Ansuayah Singh, and draw attention to similar writing in India.) It was composed during the period when there was a groundswell of support for Gandhi's calls for protest in both the Transvaal and Natal against the Pass Laws for Asians (it is worth noting that in this he was supported by representatives from the Chinese community, who had also come to South Africa as indentured labourers). There is explicit reference in the poem to Gandhi as "A Barrister-at-law", who went "hawking from door to door", to test the application of the Asiatic Registration Law. It is interesting to note that this plea on behalf of Indians, who felt part of the British Empire, appeared a few weeks before the Union of South Africa would be accomplished. Paruk's poem was published in *The African Chronicle* of 9 April 1910.

Appeal to the King

1

King Edward! Ruler of our land,
Of a Nation proud, and free.
Mar not our Empire's greatness,
By this petty tyranny.

2

Look o'er the land you conquered,
Fought for with soldiers brave

There see your British subjects,
Treated worse than the lowest slave!

3

You Oh King! before so just,
Hear your subjects cry for right!
Must they always be oppressed?
Because they are not white!

4

Hearken Oh Emperor of India
Help ere it is too late!
See not this great injustice;
And leave them to such fate!

5

Stop all this useless fighting
Show them Justice again,
Give us cause to remember,
Our good King Edward's reign.

6

Surely this cannot be English?
For a Barrister-at-law,
To go around with a basket,
Hawking from door to door!

7

A Gentleman refined and learned!
To have to fight or give,
Finger Prints! Degrading law,
Or else he may not live!

8

His fellow countrymen to help!
Their grievances to shew,
He works this noble-hearted one,
For your Majesty to know.

9

How your country's been blighted
By a bitter feeling there,
Show them a just and ruling power.
And quell this dark despair.

10

Force them not to extremes!
For this t'will surely be;
Unless Oh King, your ruling Hand
Is stretched across the Sea.

Of particular interest are the questions the poem might raise in the light of identity politics: whether the poem reflects an 'authentic' 'Indian' voice; what the character of this 'voice' is; whether the poem is similar to traditional writing in India, or to colonised writing in India and South Africa; whether the poem exhibits mimicry or parody of the dominant colonial style; or whether Paruk is, ironically, simply speaking in her own colonial tones to voice the grievances of the colonised. In sharing this poem for the Women Writing Africa project (co-ordinated by Feminist Press), I found that one reader noted the influence of writers such as Kipling on Paruk's style; another drew attention to the "fascinating blend of colonised and independent attitudes which the poem deploys" (Daymond 1998). Some criti-

cised the poem for being "poor" poetry. Possible comparisons with other appeals, at the time the poem was written, to the British Crown, for example those by Sol Plaatjie and Pixley Isaka Seme, would yield a rich comparative study of various forms of resistance to colonial rule. Seme, for example, in 1912 spoke from a position of undisputed confidence in his identity and his cause: "I am an African, and I set my pride in my race over and against a hostile public opinion" (Ferris 1913:436).

While the text is resolute in its mission for liberation from unjust laws, we also read it for its ambivalent and compromised location in relation to the colonialist style and discourse of the period. This text, with its interpellations at various levels, and others from other colonial sites, already exhibits the complex, "hybridised condition of the colonial society" (Griffiths 1994:81), and the need for suspicion towards deploying "an over-determined narrative of authenticity and indigeneity" (84) in post-colonial criticism.

Writing from the Mid-Century

In this survey there is a wide gap between the first decade and the middle of the century because I have not been successful in finding material written in English by Indian women during this period. This is clearly an area that requires more research.

By the middle of the twentieth century, when Indians had been in South Africa for almost a hundred years, there was a strong appeal to constructions and representations of women in a traditionalist mode. Mayat, whose autobiography, *Treasure Trove of Memories - A reflection on the experiences of the people of Potchefstroom* was published in 1990 (discussed in a later chapter), epitomised this spirit. She was founder of The Women's Cultural Group, based in Durban, which came into being in 1954. The Women's Cultural Group was also responsible for the development of local Gujarati theatre, which featured folk dancing, fashion and cosmetics, in order to initiate the younger generations into cultural activities. Among its many activities, in addition to the traditional *mushairas* and *qawwalis*, it produced plays and organised poetry recitals, speech contests, eisteddfods, and variety concerts. Many of the performances took place at the Bolton Hall, in Durban.

Mayat was also responsible for the writing of plays, and may have produced the very first plays written by an Indian woman in South Africa. Her play, "Be Ghadi Moj", which means "a few moments of fun", was a comedy. Her second play, produced in 1957, was entitled "Be Ghadi Ghum", which translated, means "a few moments of sorrow". A third, "Be Ghadi Vichaar" - "a few moments of reflection" - was planned, but never executed. These efforts were impressive, as this was a time when attempts to fight purdah, to enable Muslim women to act on stage, were still in their early stages. The increasing professionalisation of the arts and their movement into the wider public space has undoubtedly led to the suppression of amateur ventures.

The Women's Cultural Group, with Mayat as editor, compiled the well-known *Indian*

Delights, a recipe book which provides valuable information on Indian cuisine in South Africa. The editor takes on the persona of a matriarchal figure, giving advice on culinary skills to novices, presumed inevitably to be women:

Dear Beginner, Welcome to the club of homemakers. Yours will be a great responsibility for in your hands rests the health and welfare of the persons for whom you will be preparing meals. For the Indian daughter, cooking is not a chore it is a labour of love and if this attitude is maintained you will find half the battle already won. (Mayat 1961:20)

This echoes the earlier example of writing depicted in Meer's book, *Portrait of Indians in South Africa*, where women were groomed for domesticity. The 'Art of Indian Cooking' is seen as a highly valued and natural element in the adherence to cultural traditions. It must be seen, together with the oral tradition and the perpetuation of family organisation and community patterns, as an important role that women especially played in providing continuity during migration to a new land (see Wilentz 1992:xxxii).

Good cooks, especially those renowned for mass cooking (*Dekchi* or Cauldron Cooking), were both female and male, as this work was seen as more strenuous and positioned in the public space. Cooks, such as Mr Manjira Mota, Mrs Essop Paruk and Mrs Ebrahim Mayat, are commended in the book as "great giants", who provide an important service during communal functions (Mayat 1961:177).

A recipe book is not likely to be considered as 'literature', but when one pages through *Indian Delights*, which continues to be a best-seller (a new revised version appeared in 1999), one begins to appreciate that it projects a fascinating dimension of cultural history, with a strong appeal to narratives of the early indentured Indians who "alongside their sleeping quarters in the little apron gardens...sowed the precious seeds of vegetables and herbs that they had brought with them from home" (18). Interestingly, Rushdie uses pickling in *Midnight's Children* as a symbol of recuperating and preserving history. Cuisine was an important way of preserving cultural identity in a strange land. In her novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) Chitra Divakaruni writes, with sensual descriptiveness, if not melodramatic overtones, of the "longing" that diasporic Indians feel in America for Indian food and delicacies. The narrator, Tilo, the spice-girl living in Oakland, California, tries to understand the feelings of transplanted, and now over-worked and exploited, compatriots: "Emerald-green *burfis*, *rasogollahs* white as dawn and, made from lentil flour, *laddus* like nuggets of gold. It seems right that I should have been here always, that I should understand without words their longing for the ways they chose to leave behind when they chose America" (Divakaruni 1997:5). The general critical issues of "food colonialism" and "culinary imperialism" in colonial and post-colonial contexts, the social meanings of "ethnic food" in western contexts (see Narayan 1995), and generally the "desperate yearning for authenticity" in Indian writing (see Kumar 1998:101) are relevant here in reading these texts.

Interwoven with the recipes in *Indian Delights* are numerous vignettes, nostalgic family anecdotes, convalescence remedies, giving the book an invaluable intertextual and social character. This is understandable as the presumed readership of the book was the Indian community itself. (While this was initially true, the book is now more widely used.) The legendary folk tales, mainly about emperors and moghuls (from India and Pakistan), reveal a degree of self-exoticisation or orientalisng; these are matched however by narratives of stark survival, as in the following cameo entitled "Paper Tablecloths":

Harsh and rough were the times, when our great-grandparents arrived from India. With prayerful hearts and sweating brows they tilled the soil or hawked the streets as vendors.

Long and lean were the years when our grandparents tried to strike new shoots around the parental trees. Of hardships there was no dearth but firm in their Faith they rather counted their blessings. When the home-spun cottons they had brought from India wore out and few had the money to buy new tablecloths, mothers substituted these with something for free.

Armed with a pair of scissors and dextrously folding old newspapers, beautiful repeat designs soon emerged. Shelves and tables were covered with these and it is in memory of those days that we present this menu on our newspaper cover with its pretty crepe flowers for decoration.

Wholesome and simple was the food of those days. The platter of rice, dhal or spiced yoghurt, curried potato slices, onion and tomato relish, quarters of oranges sprinkled with salt and roasted cummin seeds for dessert and a jug of iced water was sufficient for the most fastidious to exclaim *Shukar Alhamdolillah* (God be Praised for this Bounty). (Mayat 1961:40)

What is ironic is that *Indian Delights* came into being as a reaction to the comments of anthropologist, Hilda Kuper, that "despite the hundreds years in South Africa, the Indians here, had not achieved much in the field of literature" (in Women's Cultural Group Brochure 1972). The Women's Cultural Group began by working on something 'literary', but abandoned this for what was thought to be a more modest, manageable project such as compiling a recipe book. While there is an attempt, as the above passage indicates, to be 'literary', and this is no doubt due to the perceived images of what conventional literature should sound like, the book provides an interesting source for study of what might be seen as popular literature.

Further efforts in a traditionalist vein were undertaken by other women in community groupings. Kantha Sunderjee (Soni) formed a cultural group called the "Nishani Kalakaar" in 1982. She was a composer, singer and choreographer, and wrote a book entitled *Garbhas, Wedding Songs, and Bhajans*. One of her plays, *Jeevan Saathi*, was written in Gujarati. She composed the songs for the play *Gandhi Act Two*, produced by Saira Essa. The following is an example of her songs written for the play; they were composed in Gujarati and translated by her into English. The presumed audiences for the play were mainly Indian, and the composing of the songs in Gujarati (Gandhi's 'home' language) would have provided an authentic spirit to the play that the translations invariably lack.

Woh be ek tha

Mahatma baan gaya
Who sara jige me mahaan bun gaya
Sunleh waeloh. Woh yaade be he

Shree rame hare ram, hare sunte ja
Shree rame hare ram, hare sunte ja

Ladaate apree who nayarie tee
Who deshaane diya woh kahete
asha ka baandan rubaya ta

Ab sope duya woh jeewan ka
Kadam pur rame ke he te te
Angrez ko hataya barat ne
Tub barath ko aagaad mila

There was a person
who became a saint
in the entire world he became great
Listen, people, do you remember him
He used to say 'hare ram, hare ram'

He sacrificed himself for his country
truth and non violence is what he preached,
he has now placed his life in the hands
of his country,
Every step he took, he took in the name of Ram.
He removed the enemies from his land.
It was only then that India was at peace.

(Programme Notes)

In a similar vein, Bharati Lakhani formed a drama and theatre unit in the early 80's for a group of women. A comedy, "Maan Maan Maroor Maan" was produced in 1986 by the Milan Kendra Women's Group, a Gujarati group based in Durban. It was a domestic farce with eccentric characters, mistaken identities and deception, and generally described as being in the "Bombay" style. These writings were confined to Indian, and mainly Gujarati, audiences, and have been unknown to Western ones. These attempts seem to depict notions of multiculturalism that existed in this period, when efforts were made to depict an "Indian" identity. Wider publication of these efforts is necessary in order to appreciate fully the range of artistic expressions occurring outside of the English literary mainstream.

The representation of women in traditional Indian culture continued in the plays of An-suyah Singh. Singh was an important early writer, and is generally seen as the first Indian writer, male or female, in South Africa. Apart from the novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, published in 1960 (which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter), Singh has also written plays, poems, short stories and essays. Her plays are set in India, and she uses Indian mythology and legend, with appropriate symbolism and language, evoking a different world from that of the everyday and ordinary in South Africa.

Her poems were published in a collection, *Summer Moonbeams on the Lake* (1970), and

are on a range of topics, from the very private and personal to those dealing with universal human life and an "immortal creator" (Singh 1970:12), or about the soul, life and death, and existential realities. She writes about family experiences, as in her poem, "Yavani has her friends to tea"; another is on the death of her husband, Ashwin. There are poems where violence is decried, as in the poem "To Dharini". A number of her poems show the influence of Christian thought, as in "The Christmas Night", "The Reward of Resurrection", and "My Country". In Singh's writing we see stylised and ponderous language; she has a penchant for formal rhyme schemes and archaic syntax. The title "Moonbeams on the Lake", and the references in the collection to nature, flowers, birds, sky and dreams, indicate elements of a 'Romantic' consciousness. With its philosophical aspirations, Singh's writing is reminiscent of that of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, as well as *The Ramayana*, all of which may well have been influences on her literary style. Many of her poems show a syncretism of influences from East and West.

Singh's poem on Mahatma Gandhi, composed to celebrate the centenary of his birth, and invoking many images that are generally associated with representations of the "great soul", also shows these features.

To Mahatma Gandhi

I saw the stain of his blood on earth
 Tears filled not my eyes, but the girth
 Of my soul, for he was born more of God than of man,
 A spirit that cleaved an empire's span.

Humility was as natural as love to his heart,
 He strived to banish all earthly desires and impart
 Disobedience against the side that made laws
 Which destroyed the dignity of man, paled with flaws.

It could not have been easy to sever
 Ties of family and worship chastity forever,
 And draw upon her austere glory,
 That lights upon this century a wondrous story.

A woven cloth wound upon his body lithe,
 That no seasons, nor age did blight
 With a simple staff within his hand
 His song of freedom spread from land to land.

Among princes, emperors and men of learning
 His presence filled them with awe and yearning
 That the world would never come to an end
 But men with fortunes and riches should bend.

The rolling wheels of inventions and toil
 Would enrich the already fortunate few
 Millions still were bereft and poverty slew
 Them with a life of shameless squalor.

If men could throw the shades of subjugation
And build a new world upon truth's intention
The songs of summer would fill the sky
Children and lovers in a new country would lie.

He suffered the darkness of prison cells
Insults and punishments the scroll tells.
Men, women and children followed him
Like a pure star upon the earth's rim.

He a beggar was enthroned the master
His teachings menaced the subduer faster
Than any lethal weapon defouling the air
The change of time in truth's name was fair.

Alas, the hearts of men change but little
Inequality, poverty outbalances the might
Of systems a few score years cannot falter
And again the moon revolves upon disdain's altar.

Time shall not forget his unconquerable soul,
Nor the clutch of his hand upon the staff
For when the wound bled his heart
With lowered head his dying lips uttered truth, truth.

Remember therefore men of all nations
The seasons, the cities, the world never stations
But like a glowing star is born in centuries but one
And leaves this mortal mire his spirit a sun.
(53-54)

This poem recalls a poem on Gandhi written by Sarojini Naidu and published in her collection, *The Broken Wing* (published in 1917). Gandhi is compared to the "mystic lotus, sacred and sublime", and remains inviolate, in spite of attempts, as Sarojini Naidu writes,

To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart.
But who could win the secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty, born of Brahma's breath,
Or pluck thine immortality...
(In Naravane 1980/1996:123)

Naidu was influenced by the folk conventions of Indian literature. There were also similarities between her and the poets of the Romantic revival in England and the Metaphysical poets (10). The observations that Arthur Symons made of Naidu may well describe Singh's writing, while it also says something of the way Western readers approached 'the Other':

They hint, in a sort of delicately evasive way, at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the east, finding expression through a western language...they do not express the whole of that temperament; but they express...its essence; and there is an eastern magic in them. (23)

Boehmer's assessment of Sarojini Naidu may be seen as appropriate to Singh as well, where Naidu's work is described as "a symptomatic case of extravagant mimicry", a "ventriloquism of an 'Easternised' poetic voice" reproducing Orientalist images - in the mistaken belief that this will draw attention to the work among Western readers (Boehmer

1998a:xxxiii).

In strong contrast to Singh's formal poetic style is the poetry of Sanna Naidoo, an artist who lived in Durban for many years, and who has now moved to Pretoria. Naidoo displays distinct political concerns, choosing the medium of poetry and art to depict her strident critique of apartheid society. She has produced poetry that is simple and direct, and concentrates on the "present". As she notes in an interview with M J Daymond and Margaret Lenta: "Our stories today should reflect the consciousness of present times so comparisons can be made, so lessons can be learnt about people of different times" (Daymond and Lenta 1990:73).

Naidoo was a member of the Congress of South African Writers, and was part of many grassroots activist groupings in the 70's and 80's. Her work has been published in different journals and anthologies. From the examples of her writing included here, we see a strong feminist consciousness at work. In her search for an appropriate medium for her thinking, she evokes, with broad brushstrokes, images of life under apartheid, asserting emphatically that,

I write as a woman, for women. I try to deal honestly with my own experiences, the inequalities I've endured as a woman, the traditions I've dared to break away from. I write about my survival in a male-dominated society - above all about the positive changes I've made in my life, and what I still want to do. It's a call to women to aspire likewise. (74)

As her poems below indicate (the poems are not published and readily available and therefore not widely known), she finds her own style in formulating an aggressive voice against oppression. In these poems what is readily apparent is their vibrant oral, performatory texture, aimed at a mass readership.

From Mothers to Daughters

Here,
our children were born,
Here we women,
Refusing to be defeated,
disillusioned,
sang, hoped, sorrowed...
Believing
That the norms,
taboos...our society imposed...
contrived ...

Together
We can now, dispel ...
Changing a system
That continued
To steal...
Minds... Hearts
Bodies... egos.
- our aspirations
- our identities...

And Rise

Challenging new limits
New possibilities...
To illuminate lives...
expanding
Horizons...

To go up for ever,
From here...
From mothers
To daughters...
From woman
To woman
Colouring lives anew...
Refusing to be
Put into Places...
By those
who claim
to be our Superiors
- our keepers

Saturday Night

The welcome night
- at last.
Over the city
Enveloping all...
The bright city hums,
Neon lights dazzling bright,
Flashing off and on -
Beckoning seductively,
To pleasure-seeking
Privileged few!
Yet elsewhere...
Voices hushed...low...
Black numbers growing
Looming large...
Footsteps echoing -
Hastening,
Feelings of Hunger, Poverty, Pain.

Terminal - stations - teeming - overflowing...
Scenes of homeward returning...
To What?
Another Sat. ending.
Loaded hours spent...
Empty pockets...
Empty hands...
Saddened souls...
Creeping back -
Gaunt, gigantic shadows -
etched.
Groping by
Dripping hot candle-light!
Into the ghetto...
grey homes, they go...

Black, Black, Despair
Black Black Saturday night!

Familiar Thick
Love-bound books.
Golden days,
Gone by...
Memories - burn
for a while...
Shadowlike - fade away...
Forgotten scenes...
Forgotten faces...
Come, bursting in again...
There was a NOW..
Here... then
That once!
Called my world.
When life...
Was, I thought a
bed of roses...
Those illusions...
up and down...
The track of time
Pictures of joy -
innocence...
ecstasy ... sadness
reality - pain...
Faces - faces...
In this book of life...
This ...that...
Many faces...
Many lives...
In the open...
behind the scenes...
Yet I long,
to face the world...
like a forgotten seed...
Waiting for fertile soil
- to be drenched
in dew and mist
- for the sun
at last,
were it too late -
to defy, the arid land...
the wintry blasts...
and eventually - to struggle thru'- rise
- to bloom!!!

The Image

Stark, forbidding shapes,
Loom, large ahead -
The little urchin - lost
Near naked - bewildered
Sits shivering - sits screaming
Trapped under sombre -

Threatening skies...

Only the drowning sounds
Remind
Those fast fleeing figures...
Of never ending
Tanks and trucks
Crossing
on its relentless duty -
Menace of hostility - Hate
Guns...
Another day ends
Another image sown!

Naidoo's poetry, with its evocative, elliptical style, reflects a painter's way of working with words, as indeed her comments at the workshop (referred to above) suggest:

I 'paint' when I write poetry. My poems are like paintings. When I search for words, I am virtually working like an artist on canvas. Words, like colours, have to be selected and worked in line by line until the whole picture is complete and real. These paintings, or poems, are very much the real, private me. (89)

Gcina Mhlophe and Nise Malange adopt a similar approach, dwelling not on an inner life but on protest in the public, social arena, and working with rhetorical and functional poetry (see Lockett 1991:300). Much depends on oral delivery, demanding a spontaneous, participatory audience. Naidoo's work may be considered against the background of what other black poets were doing at the same time. Mbuyseni Mtshali, Mongane Serote, Siphosiphiso Sepamla, Mafika Gwala, among others, provided new models for protest writing. They themselves were to go beyond their protest mode that tended initially to concentrate on victimhood and black powerlessness. In her survey Lockett speaks of this change:

...the events of 1976 and the death of Steve Biko were instrumental in bringing about a change in writing practice. Black poets began to write for their own communities, they began to empower blacks in their work, to show them as heroic resisters, determined to end apartheid and achieve freedom, in a bloody and violent revolution if necessary...The poets began to write a poetry of resistance - rhetorical, inflammatory, and based on the public African tradition of oral poetry rather than the hermetic Western tradition of the lyric poem. (282)

From another vantage point, Sanna Naidoo's work may be seen in contrast to that of Jennifer Davids, the other black woman poet of the 70's. Davids's volume of poetry, *Searching for Words*, appeared in 1974 in the Mantis African poets series under the David Philip imprint. She perceived her role differently, as Lockett points out: "she is a poet of the inner life rather than of protest politics; she inscribes herself within the tradition of Western poetry rather than of African protest and resistance" (285). Sanna Naidoo was trying to find a voice that was quite distinct and different, refusing to have her identity 'stolen' by the 'system'.

With a similar political purpose to that of Sanna Naidoo is the writing of Muthal Naidoo. Muthal Naidoo is a unique voice in South African literature, making her contribution

largely to the world of theatre. A former vice-rector of the Giyani College of Education, Naidoo has been significantly involved in South African theatre since the 50's and 60's. She was originally associated with DATA (Durban Academy of Theatre Arts), whose membership included Devi Bughwan, Guru Pillay, Rad Thumbadoo, Benjy Persad and Roy Jagessur. She then initiated her own community theatre project with students and members from working class groups. Together with Ronnie Govender and Benny Bunsee, Naidoo formed the Shah Theatre Academy, which tried to foster local talent. The Academy provided the training ground for drama personalities such as Benjy Francis, Welcome Msomi, Saths Cooper, Essop Khan, Mahomed Alli, Stanley Mynandu, Guru Pillay, Babs Pillay and Solly Pillay (Joseph 1991:7).

Naidoo has observed that the Indian community is often seen from without as homogeneous when it is in fact "an extremely diverse group with different religions, languages, customs, class and political affiliations" (Naidoo Muthal 1993:1). She distinguishes three types of Indian theatre in South Africa - the dramatisation of the great Indian epics, adaptation of classical European plays to a local context, and works that draw on local apartheid realities.

Naidoo's own work falls into the last category, and may be seen together with the work of Indian male playwrights and the general development of indigenous theatre in South Africa. The Indian playwrights who enjoyed particular prominence were those, mainly males, who worked experimentally in protest theatre, with some developing a more revolutionary mode: Ronnie Govender, Kessie Govender, Benjy Francis, Kriben Pillay - with Muthal Naidoo as the only woman writer in this progressive group.

Dellarose Bassa, in her critical work on Kessie Govender, has aptly drawn attention to the general marginalisation that Indian writers, male and female, have been subjected to. She notes, "...Govender and other South African writers of Indian extraction seem to have been marginalised in the Black-White dichotomy that pervades the South African literary landscape" (Bassa 1995:i-ii). Indian theatre and the arts were also marginalised by the dominant and powerful performing arts councils of the time, NAPAC (Natal Performing Arts Council) and PACT (The Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal), that 'played' to a Eurocentric norm and gave white performing artists preference (13). Where playwrights and writers did enjoy prominence, as with Ronnie Govender, this was the exception rather than the rule.

Muthal Naidoo also came under the influence of Black Consciousness writers, who played a significant role in the development of indigenous theatre. Strini Moodley, Sam Moodley, Asha Rambally and Saths Cooper were founding members of the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), part of a national initiative in revolutionary theatre. This group was "concerned with creating 'relevant' theatre in the 70's and 80's (Wilson 1991:29). They started off as students, workshopping their ideas, and developed various practical com-

munity programmes. Their work and theatre involvement related to South Africans as a whole, as they saw theatre as an important cultural weapon required to criticise an intransigent regime. Their work was important in keeping the ferment of resistance alive, dangerously and surreptitiously. Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper were imprisoned on Robben Island. Naidoo recalls that it was a constant battle to "get our plays staged, to keep our theatre movement alive" (in Raphaely 1982). One of the problems was the lack of venues for black theatre in Durban; another was the blanket of repression on political activism in any form. Through her plays Naidoo tried to resist this: "I want to see whether I can achieve a state of freedom in a totally unfree society".

These playwrights, working between "struggle theatre and ethnic farces", to use Hansen's descriptions (Hansen 1999), see themselves, in the main, as South African writers, rather than as 'Indian' writers. If their writing is about Indians, they contend, it is still about 'South African' life. Ronnie Govender attributes a conservative attitude to 'white society' in Natal, which influenced the type of audiences that the plays received: "In Natal an Indian cannot be accepted as a playwright. We have had predominantly white audiences in Jo'burg and Cape Town, and many black intellectuals as well, but never in Durban. We were always dubbed as Indian theatre, no whites took us seriously" (in Hansen 1999:7). Govender points out that his writing and the themes that he projects are still seen through the apartheid lens, which sees individuals and groups in terms of race and ethnicity:

I didn't write this because I wanted to do something on Indians but because it was my life and my world...I believe one has to find the universal in the unique experience. That is not ethnic, that is how art is made. Outside this country one appreciates this, but here we are invariably dubbed as Indians.(14)

It is against this background that Naidoo's plays should be read. Compared to Ansuyah Singh's plays, they have a distinctly indigenous feel about them. Like many of the Indian writers in general, she has not enjoyed critical exposure in South African theatre and drama criticism, and her work has yet to be given its full due. The impressive number of plays by Naidoo includes *We 3 Kings* (1982), *Of No Account* (1981), *Coming Home* (1982), renamed *Inkhyalethu*, *Nobody's Hero*, and *The Flight from the Mahabarath*. The plays are not in print, with only the last one included in a recent anthology of South African plays by Kathy Perkins (1999), possibly because of its over-riding 'Indian' content.

Naidoo writes of diverse experiences related to the South African context, and resists being locked into an ethnic ghetto. She parodies traditional Indian practices and conventions, in the way that Ronnie Govender and Kessie Govender do; she explores cultural identity against apartheid delineations, and sees identity in a broader context broader. As she notes, she is "embarked upon a road in search of an identity that would carry [her] beyond the confines of the Indian community" (Naidoo, Muthal 1993:9). She also points out that the "right to be called African" is claimed by some Indians:

Some Indians have sought to emulate white norms, values and customs and

deny their origins. Others have acknowledged the strong influence of the West on their socialization, but do not deny their origins, have asserted their right to be called African. (2)

Her plays, written and produced mainly in the 80's, reflect some of the preoccupations of the decades before the period of political transition - mixed marriages, the effect of apartheid on one's mental and psychological well-being, student activism, white liberal values, and Indian participation in the Tricameral Parliament. Notwithstanding the political harassment and censorship that anti-apartheid writers were subjected to, she shows her commitment, activism and courage in foregrounding issues of justice and political liberation.

The first play written by Naidoo was entitled *Masks*, produced in 1983. It was actually written in 1966 in the United States, where she was studying for her doctorate. Inspired by Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*, the play is a psychological drama set in the context of apartheid. It probes what is happening in a woman's mind, as she moves from insanity to sanity. *Masks* particularly questions essentialist notions of identity in the South African context.

As Naidoo notes:

The play takes place in the mind of a woman who is of Indian and Coloured parentage and all the characters that appear on the stage are various manifestations of her split personality. Her psychosis is born out of racism, and it is only when she can acknowledge all elements of her heritage and accept them as valid within herself that she becomes a whole human being again. (In Perkins 1998:114)

The woman's psychosis from living in a divisive society is gradually worked through in the play; the fragments of her divided identity come together into a meaningful whole, as she confronts them.

Outside In is a play about mixed marriage. Naidoo also directed this play, which was presented in Durban in 1983. In 1984, *Chicken Licken*, adapted from the Mother Goose Fairy Tales, was performed in Durban, and deals with politics surrounding the President's Council, and the white referendum to ratify the Tricameral Parliament. Created in a satirical vein, characters, with names such as Chicken Licken, Henny Penny, Pee Wee, represent various politicians and political parties at the time. The play concludes with a rousing support for the United Democratic Front, the forerunner to the mass democratic movement. Naidoo's other plays, *Nobody's Hero* and *Coming Home (iKhaya lethu)*, were presented at the Market Laager in 1987.

Willingly Detained was written by Naidoo for the Detainees Support Committee and depicts two university students responding to the apartheid society in their different ways. Speedy, a young male student, is eager to get to know Shireen, who is devoted to knowing about political heroes of the liberation struggle. Shireen's idealistic bent is indicated when, as the real test comes, Speedy is able to respond more urgently to political demands than she is. The play *Of No Account* is set in an office, and is described by Naidoo as a "metaphor and a microcosm of the old South African situation" (in Raphaely 1982). Naidoo's feminist values are clearly evident in *Flight from the Mahabarath*, where she places the

female characters from the Indian epic in a contemporary context. Influenced by Mary Daly, the well-known feminist theologian, she questions the way women were defined solely in terms of their relationships with men.

Coming Home is very moving play about a black stranger, S'hlobo, who arrives at the home of a progressive white couple, David and Sally Kane. The couple's safe space is invaded, and there is a gradual shift in the political positions between the two sides, with the liberal views of the white couple changing into suspicion and violence against the black man, and the black man showing up their racial bigotry. Reviewed by Lynne Kelly when it was first performed in Durban (1982), the play was compared with an Australian film, *The Plumber*, by Peter Weir, in which an aboriginal descends on a liberal white couple. Kelly saw Muthal Naidoo's technique as being reminiscent of J B Priestley's style, with its taut dialogue and action. (This theme of 'middle class guilt' is also found in Kriben Pillay's play *Looking for Muruga*). In *Coming Home*, the couple immediately sees S'hlobo through racial stereotypes - as someone seeking work or looking for their housekeeper. During their encounter with him they go through various stages of racial paranoia, considering themselves victims of a "ritual killing" (Naidoo, Muthal 1982:29), as if trapped in a weird game, or being subjected to "primitive rites" (30) or "black magic" (48). They fear that S'hlobo's knapsack contains a bomb, or that he is mad, psychopathic, or savage. Their reactions show that for them the only way to "understand" him is to slot him into a category.

S'hlobo, for his part, speaks of finally "coming home" - he sees the Kane's garden as his ancestral home, and gives, in my opinion, an alternative view to the question of "entitlement". He states that his ancestors were in this garden, which is their "ancient burial ground". In a spirit of generosity, S'hlobo wishes to be their brother, while the Kanes see that this is a mere charade, confounding reality and illusion. The Kanes fail to appreciate that it is they who are the trespassers. For S'hlobo returning to this place is like returning to a part of himself. This notion of identity is also found in Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories*, where an uncle educates his nephew ('*mshana*') to always see 'home' as the place of his ancestors: "And that is where I buried your umbilical cord. Right here in the yard. Wherever you are in the world, you must return to that yard" (Ndebele 1983:85).

Violence inevitably becomes the central issue in the play. The Kanes introduce the issue of the gun, which gives them identity and control. They are the ones obsessed with killing, which then makes S'hlobo resort to using the gun: "But it's the only thing you seem to respect. Without it, I am nothing to you. With this thing in my hand, I become someone. So temporarily, I am forced to borrow my existence from this instrument of death" (Naidoo, Muthal 1982:20). With the gun he is able to control them, and for a time the traditional master and servant roles are reversed. There is constant changing of roles between host and victim, each seeking to control the other, and make the other the victim - as in Andre Brink's novel, *An Act of Terror*, in which the roles of the hunter and the hunted are re-

versed.

In Naidoo's play, the wife, Sally, appears to undergo an emotional somersault for a while, and feels a dramatic release in doing so. She sees herself as superior to her husband because she thinks she understands S'hlobo. She suddenly feels free, and changes her affection from David to S'hlobo. She switches places, and asserts that *she* has "come home". Sally is ready to identify with S'hlobo, but only because she sees him as different: "Because you are different. You are exciting. There is something pure, simple..." She compares him with David - who lives in a cold world of calculation, a world of profit and loss, and says to S'hlobo, "Yours is a world of feeling; of instinct; of basic emotion"(50). Again she is stereotyping him at the very moment when she thinks she is praising him. S'hlobo realises this when he criticises her for turning him into "something exotic, strange".

The sexual dynamics of apartheid and colonialism are hinted at here - an important strand in South African drama as a whole. While Fanon writes of the black man trapped in sexual desire for a white woman, either out of revenge for her race, or for acceptance, Naidoo depicts S'hlobo, the black man here, as being independent enough to judge the situation more circumspectly.

There is a contrast between the rational approach of David, and the one adopted by S'hlobo, which is emotional and empathic yet different from the stereotypes attributed to him by Sally. David rationalises that someone has to be in charge. He is prepared to use the apartheid system, and get S'hlobo arrested for trespassing, for not having a pass. He claims that he is not a "hardened racist"(45), but argues that "democracy" forces him to turn to the police - "is it democratic to rule without consent?"(45). On the other hand S'hlobo wants to "come home" - he is "tired of being on the road" (46), and wishes to set them all free of their imposed tyrannies of racism. David is exasperated by all these machinations and complexities, and puts the gun to S'hlobo's forehead, seeing him as a terrorist. He fails to understand S'hlobo when he says that he (David) has killed him already.

S'hlobo reminds Sally that there is no need to prove anything, that "all will know when all will know". Transformation is not in mere gestures; it is radical and fundamental. They need to know one another, to peel off the masks. Identities are assumed to be secure and normal, but they are disoriented when their safe spaces are invaded and their safe roles confused. When David says, "We are equal because you're as much my prisoner, as I am yours", S'hlobo realises that there is no longer any need for the gun. The Eurocentric existentialist problem of human existence versus the African collectivist view - *a person is a person through other persons* - is given a new twist here, where you gain 'identity' when your oppressors come to appreciate your real worth.

Coming Home shows that way in which Naidoo is developing a critical response to living in a racially-divided society. It shows the nuances of racial relationships in the context of suspicion and fear, and although written in the early 80's, it has a particular relevance to

the politics and social relations in South Africa in the present time, where issues around the psychology of race and racism are still pertinent. There are interesting parallels with Nadine Gordimer's novel, *The House Gun*, published in 1998, where the characters are entrapped in violence in one form or another. I have engaged in a fairly detailed analysis of this play to show the kind of concerns that preoccupy Naidoo, concerns that relate to a wider identity of living in South Africa. It is worth noting that a play like *Coming Home* is not given wider coverage (it was not selected for the Perkins anthology, cited above, for example), when it actually depicts Naidoo's political views and beliefs better than the play *Flight from the Mahabharath*, which was selected.

Naidoo is one of the most important woman playwrights in South Africa despite the fact, as pointed out already, that her works have not been widely circulated or published, and have suffered from the absence of serious critical consideration. For Naidoo to write is to feel liberated, and her focus is resolutely on South Africa. She recalls that she felt isolated in the United States: "In America, I was in limbo in spite of several exciting and creative years in mid-western black theatre. I was isolated from the South African situation, even the Indians I knew were from India, from a different tradition" (in Raphaely 1982).

Naidoo undoubtedly served as a role model for other aspiring playwrights. Saira Essa also began her drama career with similar interests in community theatre, and was to use drama for political and social commentary. The founder of the Upstairs Theatre in the 70's, she was an influential and well-known theatre personality until her move into television in the 90's. She has acted in and directed several plays; these include "Call Me Woman", "The Revenge" and "Over the Edge". Together with Rod Bolt, Essa wrote *Gandhi Act Two*, referred to above, which was "a collage of impressions which portray Gandhi's life and philosophy, during the time he spent in South Africa" (Programme Notes). *The James Commission*, in which she portrays aspects of Amichand Rajbansi's participation in the Tricameral Parliament, was another play written and directed by her. In collaboration with Charles Pillai, she also wrote *The Biko Inquest*, which was produced in 1985. Essa established her drama career by choosing themes which had political and historical relevance. This is in contrast to Essa's later portrayal of the Orientalist character, Lakme, in the TV opera *Lakme*, and her spectacular Indian weddings shot on many different locations in India and televised in South Africa. (More research is also required on Essa to draw attention to her contribution to the development of theatre especially in the 1980's.)

As with Muthal Naidoo, the instability of the signifier, 'Indian', is directly amplified in the writing of Roshila Nair, who through the genre of poetry, touches on experiences of black women in general in a divided society. In the following poem Nair wonders why we endure the futility of classroom practices when so much is happening in the real world.

But, Oneday Madam

do you remember that day
we were not analysing
John was away
and I was ranting
raving about how boxed in I feel
in class,
that I want to snort
on the words to analyse
that very moment a life's being born
and somebody's burning
then,
your dark glasses inquired,
why are you here then?
but, what I really wanted to say
is: for to reduce the odds
my just becoming your maid,
oneday madam.

The following poems are about abuse of women by men who pretend to be good. The first shows the complicity of religion in silencing women and maintaining a facade, and the second shows the mother's outrage when such violence is perpetrated by her own son.

What does God See

Does God see
the bruises
my sisters wear
at prayer
on their faces
in their hearts
under their blouses
does God see
the bruises
my sisters wear
to church
to mosque
to temple
and after prayer
does he sip sweet tea
with condensed milk
and play with babies
who smile up at him

How Dare You

You who have issued out of my loins
How dare you
raise your hand
to a woman?
You who fed at my breast
vulnerable and fragile
Now a 'man'
How dare you raise your hand
to a woman?

When you see her
 blue and bleeding
 what goes through your mind?
 When you see her spirit
 broken
 cowering for mercy
 what spurs you on
 'Man'?
 Child of mine
 that I want to deny
 Who are you man?
 What are you man?
 'man'
 monster rather
 you have issued forth from my loins,
 I wish I had
 closed my legs shut
 and killed you instead!

Syeda Lubna Bano Nadvi, who was a young student still at high school when she published her poems, *Reflections on Water*, in 1989, seems to me to sit lightly on questions of identity. Writing in her matriculation year, she reflected on a range of experiences, such as loneliness and solitude, soldiers at war, the elements and nature, and rural life. She compiled two collections of verse, and has read her poems with two well-known poets, Shair and Muradabadi, from India and Pakistan.

Nadvi, who is at present teaching at the University of Durban-Westville, was born in Pakistan in 1972. She came to South Africa when she was four years old, and points out that her "background and upbringing reflects a mixture of cultures" - Pakistani, Indian, Middle-Eastern and South African. She reflects that "it is difficult for an individual growing up between cultures, to know which one to embrace completely. I have learnt that this is not possible, and can best be described, as a "mixed masala" syndrome. However, I believe in the importance of combining elements of all, and creating a harmonious balance for oneself" (Nadvi 1999). The following poem from her earlier collection shows her, as an adolescent Indian girl writing in the voice of a young African boy, and attempting identification with social injustice:

Lament of a young African boy

you took away the lands of my forefathers
 you took away my parents
 and my brothers and sisters
 yet I did not feel lonely
 you took away my home
 and I spent my nights on blackened grass
 the sky my only shelter
 you took away my clothes
 yet I did not feel the sun burnish my back
 or the cold bite through my skin
 you took away my food

yet I did not feel hungry
but when you took away my dignity
I held my head
low in shame
and cursed all mankind

(Nadvi 1989:7)

Writing in the 90's

The writing by Indian women in this decade is diverse, with publication in different genres. Writing at the present time does seem to be more prolific than in the past. The decade shows a wide diversity of output, with young writers coming into their own, and an earlier generation of writers continuing to publish. The latter group is best represented by Mayat, Goonam and Phyllis Naidoo, whose autobiographical writings are considered in fuller detail in separate chapters.

I have included a few examples of my own poems which show my perspectives of faith and identification with political causes. In 1997 The Creative Arts Centre at the University of Natal invited me to participate in an International Poetry Festival, where I read a selection of my poems. Some of my own poems have appeared in a publication by the Congress of South African Writers, *Like A House On Fire - Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography*, and in my critical essays, published in various anthologies, journals and edited collections on women's issues.

Some of my poems are poem/prayers, written for the Good Friday Services organised by the para-church organisation, Diakonia, in the quest for peace in KwaZulu Natal. One such poem is entitled "The Bhambayi Cross", and depicts Bhambayi, one of the violence-ravaged places not far from the centre of the city. Bhambayi was, in fact, "Bombay", the name given by Mahatma Gandhi, who lived there during his stay in South Africa. The warring factions at Bhambayi in the early '90's were from two political parties, the Inkatha Freedom Party and the African National Congress. In this period we were so engulfed with concern over the tension between these political groups that other issues of identity (such as relations between Indians and Africans) were eclipsed. As I recited the poem women from Bhambayi walked solemnly down the aisle at the Emmanuel Cathedral in Durban where the service began, bearing pieces from their burnt-down houses, to make a cross at the altar. The cross was used to head a procession through the streets of Durban; at the end of the two-part service it was ritually decorated with flowers, and taken and placed in Bhambayi. I wondered though about words and poems, prayers and peace services, when I learned that on that Easter Sunday, a woman was shot while kneeling before that very cross...

The Bhambayi Cross

pieces of wood
broken and burnt
stained with blood of family
derelict in the smouldering heap
the smell of death
in dusty roads
sounds of weeping
darkness and gloom

*my god, my god, why have you abandoned us
why have you forgotten us
forsaken us*

pieces of wood
pierce the wounded side
lightning and thunder
shots of gunfire
rending cries of
mothers and daughters
in the sleepless houses
waiting for the first light

this is a cross
too heavy to bear

*my god, my god, why have you abandoned us
why have you forgotten us
forsaken us*

cry rage and revenge
slaughter and destruction
how long will this be
terror in the faces of children
hatred and fear

over a wilderness of shacks
the other side of the city wall
longing for peace

*my god, my god, why have you abandoned us
why have you forgotten us
forsaken us*

come
let us carry these pieces of wood
once part of the same ancient tree
used to build houses, proud and sturdy
now charred ruins of dwelling places
scattered and aloof

bind piece with piece
to build one cross

cross of bhambayi
shelter me

hide me from the
pain and agony
as the blood
like justice
flows from the cross

from the soil
sprouts a new year of freedom and healing
for captives
maimed in body and
maimed in hope

sacred mystery
on this holy ground
tree of redemption
the flowering tree which withers
and blossoms again
from eden to calvary
to easter...
in bhambayi...
(Govinden 1999b:50-51)

This poem has been recently published by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in a collection of *Prayers From Around the World* (1999), to mark its 300th anniversary. It is included here also to suggest the relationship between politics, spirituality, gender and identity that needs to be emphasised across faith traditions and genres. Religious-cum-political poems seem to me to be a dormant tradition (in contrast with, for example, the African-American one) in women's writings generally in South Africa in terms of publishing and research.

I wrote the poem "Memory of Snow and Dust" after/while reading Breyten Breytenbach's novel, *Memory of Snow and Dust* (1989). This poem, as yet unpublished, was originally composed as a response to the novel, and presented to Breytenbach himself when I was part of a group of post-graduate students meeting with the author. Rather than a simple response, I entered into the reading experience, interweaving lines from the book with the act of reading itself, conflating writing and reading, time and place, identity and difference, moving in and out of the role of reader, of author, character and 'meaning-maker'. Allusions to the lives of indentured settlers, my own grandfather, resistance as well as posturing in relation to apartheid and the changing political climate towards political negotiation, and different ways in which 'Africa' is appropriated and commodified are woven into a collage. The poem shows the anxiety of rupture from the continent of one's birth, and the need to belong. Interestingly, this poem, composed in 1995, captures many different discursive strands in the present study.

Memory of Snow and Dust

Dear Blackbird
i look for the image of

africa
wanting to belong
crossed between two continents
to the northern edges
so long denied in this claustrophobic world
blood and shame
our prisonhouses
searching for community

sister exile
you lost a closed world
for the wide open spaces
of desert and sand dunes
for the crosswinds of peoples
perched on its own horns
away from the inward gaze

i thought i needed to be confident
with whites
show i know who i am
now i can relax
be diffident and awkward
quiet let them think i am a fool

i read your story
listening to chopin
and mozart
feeling deep and ruminant
vigilant for clues
waiting to meet your creator
proud moment for a photograph
i spoke to the author you know
the awkwardness of saying the right thing

must not appear too intrusive
knowing all the meaning
try to ask intelligent questions
expect perverse answers
i think i should listen to black mambaso
writing to you

i too sat at fireplaces
on my father's lap
listening to tales of kings and kingdoms
of wrestlers and gatekeepers
of lovers beyond their reach
wily grandmothers
temples and human snakes

time collapses
dream and reality
stories of ramayan and soundiata
words on water

my grandfather held his mother's hand
severing memory
time of lion and tiger

elephant and demons and stars
to find treasure in this land
castaways
tilling in coolie canefields sighing
toiling for tea for empire
stonebodies in compounds

you will never know how much i long to belong
to africa
denied in the land of my birth
not at ease with my identity
living imitation
translation
in diasporas
i peer into the long hollow tunnels of the past
unremembered nights filled with dreams
nostalgia for what i do not know
my face in the mirror
creating moist eyes

let me add a few more lines
light from the computer
white on black

the lion lies down with the lamb these days
but they are still plotting
you never can be sure
they have hidden agendas
and writers huddle in groups

life is text and shimmering discourse
pity the land with too many intellectuals
the poor and ignorant we shall always have with us

no inner self surfaces
when will i look to the future
stitch what i find from anywhere
wrench my body of the many myths
that sustain me

africa
how i love to intone
sensual and magical
my paperword
presence in absence
so long denied me
echoes that mingle and meet
fleetingly
weaving dreams
exilic in the land of my birth
inventing my life again and again
against the shape of loneliness

only dying is real
and desire
for eternity

be silent my heart
and wait
memory of snow and dust
for the day you will be born

i luxuriate in unknowing the deceptions
that scaffold me
happy to be dangerous
for the next book

Dear Nobody
i am jolted
kicked and bruised out of my senses
complacent
waiting in the dark of the pages
between lines for the birthpangs
the word-womb
stillborn and in shreds

hope of the merging of cultures and history
a new child-africa
lost to the winds of cold prisons
theory and love cannot hang together
save me from perdition
treachery and happy endings
forever foraging for new thoughts

on the precipice
hurled headlong
with shells bulls birds inscape
and the stench of the city
my hesitant fingers on the computer
respond to your call
shudder of ecstasy
the place of death
of living
cannot erase the memory of the cold walls
long dark night

the prison of being
being in prison
dancing patterns out of chaos
life is story with no beginning and no end
i write to myself
a nobody
cut
(Govinden:unpublished)

In my textual *metissage* the inter-connectedness of histories, collective and personal, the struggle for self and selfhood in the stultifying and seductive prisons of the mind of an apartheid- and colonial-ridden African world show that issues of identity are both tenuous and complex. I felt that Breytenbach's straining between an insider/outsider view on South African and African identity provided me with the opportunity and freedom to experiment.

I identified with Breytenbach's critique of the commodification of 'Africa'. And yet, as much as I want to be a 'world citizen' as he did, I also felt a longing to be accepted, albeit with part of my history and background coming from the Indian sub-continent, primarily as African.

Sobhna Poonna is a young writer who has claimed an independent voice through her writing. Her collections of poetry are entitled *In Search of Rainbows* and *Words on a Blank Page* published in 1990 by Skotaville and Seriti sa Sechaba respectively, publishers who have been particularly interested in promoting black women's writings. Poonna describes herself as being "born into a multicultural family, and raised in the Warwick Avenue Triangle, as it is now called" (Poonna 1990a:iv). She was born, Jacqueline Prince, her mother of French and English ancestry and her father Indian, and had to live under the cloud of the Group Areas and Immorality Acts. When Poonna was nine years old her mother agreed to be reclassified, which gave Poonna the opportunity to choose her present name. These personal experiences gave Poonna a sense of the complexities of identity and racial classification in South Africa, but she sees herself simply as "a South African". In the Introduction to her collection, *In Search of Rainbows*, Poonna points out that "as a feminist and a woman writer in a sexist and patriarchal society, I write about a woman's experiences, and emotional and physical tribulations. Much of my work stems from experience, which has helped mould my perspectives" (Poonna 1990a:Introduction). Her poems are part of the growing corpus of South African writing that develops lesbian themes more overtly. *In Search of Rainbows* in particular shows that her sexuality is a strong determinant of her identity.

This first collection is an extended poem, introspective, reflective, sensual, cascading through images and words, set indisputably in the experiences of apartheid. There are the yearnings of "an itinerant soul" - for love, freedom, sanity, hope, amid an "exorable struggle"; there is a consonance between self-love, physical love, and a passion for truth and justice.

exiled
among a foreign nation
i see my people
shackled
drowning in a reservoir of tears
 cemented in pain
 burdened
by lamentations
of barbed wire
foetuses
groping in the darkness
to suckle
empty gourds
with suffocated nipples
bare

covered in dust

Poona writes of the way one has to insist on one's identity in the world; the struggle to be oneself means resisting falsehoods, lies and deceptions, a life "suffocated" in "a plastic existence". Her writing shows the changing images of women in Indian women's writings since colonial times, expressed especially through the explicitly sexual language of a "modern" woman.

bitch
whore
madwoman
lesbian
they,
they called
me names
witch
frigid screw
they tormented me
shamed my existence
i was afraid
i was not ashamed
i was not selfish
i would not love
i could not love...

latent yearnings
screamed
into orgasmic silence
as erotic passions
were subdued
by clawing fingers
i hated myself
yet
i was proud
to be me
to be a woman

Poona's second collection, *Words on a Blank Page*, also combines personal, emotional concerns, mainly of a heterosexual nature here, and social and political issues. Poona's living in Gauteng has given her poems a larger topography. The following poem from this collection shows the influence of Wally Serote and Gcina Mhlophe, who have written in a similar vein:

the early traffic hums
across the freeway
roaring into the pulse of the city
city Johannesburg...
i love you
you stole out my life
a long time ago
and crept into obscurity

Hillbrow to Brixton
I searched
across the maze of
rasta, hip, t-shirts and takkies
I have returned
wept in silence
and suffered torment
i was guilty
i did not know...
when you appeared on the hill
memory flooded my communication
i dropped my head
and followed your shadow
too proud
too hurt
too sad and exulted
i have since parted...
and lived at your side
i do not want to see
shadows and images

say no black woman
when they break up your family
and send your son to fight
for a land that already belongs to him

say no black woman
when they tear down your home
and take away your bread and shelter
in an attempt to break your spirit

say no black woman
when they accuse your son of rape
and send your husband to prison
for a crime he didn't commit

say no black woman
when they curse you
and call you names
say no black woman
say NO!

Poona, identifying with all black women's experiences in South Africa, combines her feminist and anti-apartheid dispositions in her writing naturally and forcefully. As she states in the Foreword to her second collection, "I am a feminist, and firmly believe in a non-racist, non-sexist democracy. I write about my experiences as a woman and about the forces of oppression, prejudice and related sexism" (Poona 1990b:Foreword).

Sherin Bickrum, though a prolific writer, has not enjoyed any prominence or recognition for her writing. She approached David Philips and Kwela Books with some of her work, but has not been successful in securing publication. She has been writing poems and plays since she was a student at high school, and continues to write discursive and creative

pieces. She obtained her PhD in Psychology a few years ago, and is currently employed by Transnet in Gauteng.

Bickrum has written several short autobiographical cameos and anecdotal pieces, which deal with a variety of her personal experiences. Her experiences of living as a student in the United States provided a background for some of the stories she has written, as have her travels in India. She enjoys strong family ties, and many of her stories centre around her relationship with her father and grandfather. Bickrum has written an evocative piece, entitled "Baba", which recounts stories from Indian folk tales, the *Ramayana* and the "Akbar and Birbal" tales that her grandfather used to tell her. She notes that her grandfather staged four Hindi plays, and wrote songs, recalling a world of ancient Indian festivals:

We would sit around the thakath, each with some percussion piece; brass manjeeras as large as saucers, little skin drums and a wooden piece filled with stacks of brass plates that you could fit your fingers through. And as Baba's very philosophic, melancholy pieces were rendered in several toneless voices, we would provide the cacophony of percussion as incongruent background. (Bickrum 1994:3)

The story, "Meeting the Giant", relates Bickrum's meeting with Nelson Mandela. When Mandela was released in 1990, she was studying in the United States, and could not be a part of the jubilation in South Africa. She recalls that she thought it would be impossible that "Mandela would be free some day" even though she participated in many student rallies and protests for his release. In the short narrative piece she writes of the time when she returned to South Africa and attended a Diwali Festival in his honour. It was at this meeting that she felt compelled to go up to Mandela, and was utterly overcome by the experience of shaking his hand.

In "Wachera", named after a Kenyan student-friend and written while she was studying in the United States, Bickrum reflects through this story on her identity as an African. Like Goonam when she went to study in the United Kingdom, Bickrum felt a closer bond with those who had a common political history:

Over coffee, we continued our bonding. 'We', the Africans, Indians and Taiwanese and Native American in the room, versus the 'Americans'. We spoke of 'our' sense of hospitality, family values, generosity, selflessness, humility, even culinary skills, and other generalisations that shamelessly glorified our communities. Ah, we were homesick, estranged from our families and homes. Any chance to recreate a sense of family and home was seized by us, even if we did engage in pompous American-bashing. (Bickrum 1998:1)

This piece shows the diasporic world that has come to characterise her writing. Bickrum was able to record poignant descriptions of life overseas, while feeling a nostalgia for 'home'. The opportunity to leave South Africa invariably gives a writer a wider context than that of traditionally-defined 'Indian areas'. In "Paper Cups" Bickrum describes a "vibrant canvas" far away from South Africa:

Springtime in Santa Barbara happens to you one morning. Wake up, and suddenly the parched Santa Ynez mountains are kissed with green. In the

foreground, the hills are painted with brilliant cerise and purple blossoms, where thirsty iceplants struggled only the day before. The Golden Monarch butterflies, in their teeming clusters flutter in the groves around Goleta, and the seagulls, they come out to sing! The Springtime seemed more beautiful in my sadness; my sadness, more poignant. (Bickrum 1998:1)

Other writings such as "The Bus Ride to Chandigarh", recalls her travelling in India, and her fighting off prejudice against Sikhs, when she sat next to a fellow traveller, Sathvinder, who lived with his wife and young children in Mohali, a little town before Chandigarh. She describes in vivid detail the bus ride, and the Sikh's gracious friendship and hospitality towards her. In these stories she balances her claiming her identity as a South African with the delight she experiences in discovering her ancestral roots in India.

Selina Bickrum, a sister of Sherin Bickrum, has also written short pieces. "The Visitor" deals with the anticipation at the arrival of Mandela, and "Kim Su" is a story of her trip to Agra, with a friend from Korea. In another story, "Train Ride from Chandigarh", the passengers are curious about the identity of the two sisters, who speak both in Afrikaans and Hindi to each other. A larger South African identity is naturally assumed on foreign ground, as Selina Bickrum balances many different identities, each an integral part of who she is.

Fayiza Dawood Khan, who lives in Durban, takes us into a localised world, almost claustrophobic in nature, in her first novel, *Sounds of Shadows*, published in 1995. Through her studies in Psychology and Law, and working at present as an attorney, Fayiza Khan combines her theoretical knowledge and practical experience to depict the plight of women in South Africa. She describes her work as "a literary text based on contemporary South African socio-political realities" (see cover). Her writing deals with contemporary inter-group relationships among women. Khan depicts the abuse of women, and the effect of abandonment and poverty on women. The story is told through a young Indian girl, Sham, who narrates the story of her mother, Naju, caught in a web of poverty and degradation. Naju was deserted in pregnancy, and has a look of "perennial depression" (Khan 1995:2). In Khan's novel we see writing against the grain of a racist and patriarchal society, with her unambiguous feminism grounded in harsh social reality. She writes of the rawness and grubbiness of life for women, both Indian and African, caught in the web of poverty and neglect, women for whom the quest for selfhood devoid of material considerations must surely be the real obscenity.

Sudarsh Moodliar, like Khan, draws from her study and experience for her writing. She teaches English at secondary school level, and also works actively in the South African Democratic Teachers' Union. She states that she finds much joy in the creative work of her students, and has edited school magazines which include some of her students' writings. Moodliar has written poems on her teaching experience. "The English Teacher", written in 1989, deals with the indifference of students. She wrote the following poem in 1997, when

she found discipline in her school disintegrating. With wide media coverage and community involvement protesting against and contributing in some ways to the vandalism in the school, she began to search for answers:

The Teacher

Last week, my classroom window
was broken,
Because I scolded a child
For being impertinent.

Yesterday, my name (together with other words)
was sprawled across the school walls,
Because I reprimanded a child
for being late.

I wonder what mischief
awaits me today.
It is my turn to:
accost latecomers,
check the wayward fancies
of teenage couples,
Scatter ruffians from
the toilets, and
remind the outsiders of
the rules of the school.

They told me that teaching
was a noble profession,
The teacher, a respected
Member of society,
The school, a place
To nurture minds!
They lied:
I've become a tyrant, and my children,
The products of my tyranny.

Moodliar does not write of racial identity directly, but shows how security and selfhood in an alienating world are sought in small and private relationships. Influenced by Kahlil Gibran and his writings in *The Prophet*, the following poem by Moodliar, composed in 1995, shows unusual juxtapositions:

Work is Love made Visible

I don't know much
about guinea fowls -
Certainly not their conservation value!
But there is a strangeness
of spotted beauty
That attracts me.

Perhaps they remind me
Of my teenage years -

The time I searched
Wide-eyed for opportunities,
Riveting my head
This way and that
To grasp
The link between work and love.

I am glad I found that link;
Like the beauty of guinea fowls
captured in a gilded frame,
I feel a completeness
When the hand of love
Is made visible in work.

Larger issues of living in South Africa, of race and identity, may sometimes be subsumed in deeply personal experiences. This is true when tragedy prompts one to write, as in *My Tears My Rainbow* (1995), by Frances Charles, whose daughter, Moira Rose was killed in a car accident when she was seventeen years old. In her book Charles remembers the childhood days of her daughter, their family life together with her husband and two sons. She writes of the time when the accident occurred, and of the traumatic experience of coming to terms with the death of her daughter. Charles's identity is mainly as a grieving mother who has learnt to cope with her grief. She has written several poems in memory of her daughter and these are included in the book. A retired school principal, she is engaged in voluntary work as a counsellor for "The Compassionate Friends", an organisation for parents in similar circumstances, and as caregiver at the Highway Hospice in Durban.

Writing as a means of overcoming disability is especially important to Zohra Moosa, who has produced a short collection of poems entitled *Silence* (1997), published by Madiba Press. Moosa is "profoundly deaf", and from her school days has tried to overcome her disability. She was born in Durban and attended the Durban School for the Hearing Impaired, completing her Matriculation in 1989. She plays an active role in the work of the Natal Blind and Deaf Society in Durban. Identity for Moosa is closely tied up with asserting her dignity and pride in who she is as a person in spite of her hearing impairment. Sam Moodley, who was her mentor, and who wrote the Preface to her collection, observes that for Moosa "Poetry is the medium she uses to interpret her visual world" (Moodley 1997:7). Her poems, now angry, now suppliant, might be seen as an extended dialogue with herself ("The Creature") and her Creator ("You Know, It's not Fair"), as she tries to cope with her condition. The collection as a whole is "a reflection of the 'Walls' in Zohra Moosa's life, which she attacks with sarcasm, cynicism and mockery....Often there is a question of self-doubt about her worthiness, but she emerges victorious because she refuses to be silenced or to be silent" (7). The poem, "The Creature" shows Moosa's self-definition, and determination to be accepted for her worth in spite of all odds. She concludes the poem with the lines:

I am not
a toy
I am not
a toy
I am not
an animal
I am not the creature
I am Me!

In reading these writings (of Moodliar, Charles and Moosa, for example), it is necessary to remember that Indian women are not all concerned with racialised, ethnicised or gendered identity in the South African context. While it is an important consideration in South Africa, given its history, and an important element in this study, different Indian women, as with women everywhere, are driven by different circumstances and priorities, and it would be shortsighted to look for either an essentialist or problematised Indian identity in each. Desiree Lewis's caution against isolating a gendered identity, for example, and ignoring a "web-like social identity" that characterises many black women's writings, is pertinent here. As she writes: "A failure to explore the web leads to a devaluation of their writing as lacking in 'feminist' consciousness - because it does not reflect the normative patterns of gender politics. Critics who isolate 'gender' elevate identities and relationships with which these writers are not concerned" (Lewis, Desiree 1996b:99). Similarly, I have been aware of a tendency in my own reading to privilege certain 'normative' patterns, and exclude other features of these writings.

Devi Sarinjeive, for her part, does work from a conscious feminist position in her short play, *Acts of God?* Sarinjeive is a professor of English at Vista University in Sebokeng. The play was performed in 1997 at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and will be published in a collection entitled *Siyabola - Nine Plays by South African Women Playwrights*, edited by Hazel Barnes and Lynn Chemaly. Barnes and Chemaly have been involved in excavatory work in the field of drama by South African women, and have also initiated workshops for post-graduate students and prospective writers, in order to create a much-needed collaborative and supportive community for aspiring writers. Chemaly has worked with her honours students in encouraging writing and production, and one of the students, Rekha Nathoo, has written and produced a play, *Slices of the Curry Pie*, in which she explores the role and identity of Indian women in South Africa (Thacker 1997:24).

Candice Thacker (1997), for her Honours project in the Drama Department at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, describes the processes involved in revising Sarinjeive's script. She recounts the many changes that were effected in order to make the play theatrically suitable as attention was paid to dialogue, characterisation, dramatic action and flow. Chemaly, Thacker's tutor, who worked with Sarinjeive and post-graduate drama students, used the idea for such necessary experimental theatre from her British and American thea-

tre experience:

In Britain, starting from the early sixties, many women's theatre groups and companies consciously formed to promote and develop theatre around needs and issues pertaining to women. Women started focusing on collaborative techniques in order to inform their work and create a wider pool of women's experience to draw from...their aim was to restore the balance of power and improve the status of women. (25)

Acts of God? is similar to Ronnie Govender's writing in its use of Indian idiom, and the way it plays on cultural idiosyncrasies. The play, in five acts, is set in Chatsworth in Durban, and takes place on the day of a father's funeral. The action consists mainly of dialogue among three women - an educated, independent woman named Leela, her maternal aunt, Baby, and her sister-in-law, Kanna. The play is an interesting one in that it deals with conflict over family inheritance, and the marginalised role of women in this respect. In the process, it raises issues concerning the care of the aged, and the question of Indian women's independence in particular.

In presenting the action around three main characters, all different women, Sarinjeive shows the differences among Indian women. Kanna, regarding her lot fatalistically, calmly accepts her oppressed role in a suffocating patriarchal set-up. Auntie Baby, in her fifties, dreams of a life beyond the confines of her puny existence and feels that she has lost her opportunities for a better life. She is reminiscent of Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things* by Arundathi Roy. In some ways Auntie Baby straddles the worlds and values of Kanna and Leela. Leela (in the mould of Sarinjeive herself) has extricated herself from conventional family bonds and responsibilities to live a more independent, individualistic existence. As Sarinjeive states: "All in all the play is about crossing boundaries, taboo and otherwise, testing the waters and taking the plunge" (39). She describes Leela as a type of "hybrid as she zigzags between the past and the present; straddling two different worlds" (44). In many ways, Leela epitomises many women in this chapter, women who straddle the 'identity-line' in various, multiple and ambivalent ways.

Sarinjeive's play shows the different influences and values which dictate identity for women, and the stigma still attached to single status among Indian women. The need for security and social approval is important, and one marries to escape negative public opinion, and loneliness, but the price one pays is the sacrifice of independence for the sake of financial gain, and the suffocation of one's individuality. As Sarinjeive reflects:

What is the self? What is identity?...it is unknown territory and you are changing all the time...Liberate yourself to go where? You don't know...It is the risk you take...There is no guarantee...(29)

What was interesting in the writing of the script was that gradually more weight was given to women's voices. Male characters were consciously removed from the stage, so that the female characters and their experiences could be foregrounded. As Sarinjeive workshopped with the group, she realised that

The men don't figure anymore...they are not a focus necessary for women's

liberation. Ninety percent of the issues that come up are from the men, but it is far more realistic a picture, and an instinctual response, not to have them there. It's a play about women, I want to see women! (48)

It is evident from Thacker's record that working in this improvisatory and exploratory way had enormous advantages for Sarinjeive; it points to the need, as pointed out earlier, for this type of workshopping on writing to encourage and improve the literary output by Indian women. Sarinjeive reflects that "the events portrayed began simply as the experience of women in a closed community, but in representing it, it just grew and grew until it became many-sided and many layered...I think that's allowed me to take risks, like you know, this very personal story...bringing it out in public" (23,29).

Sarinjeive's play is similar to Muthal Naidoo's *Flight from the Mahabharath* (though the latter takes one into a totally different world) in that they reflect feminist thinking and critique in a South African Indian context. While Sarinjeive's play does not put apartheid society too closely under the microscope, we are only too aware of its presence everywhere in this play with its closed-world concerns and 'silences'. As with Agnes Sam, we see internalised racism and sexism manifesting itself in oblique ways, with some of the women socialised into these values. The lack of a culture of rights and individual freedom and the absence of integrity and ethical behaviour within a family set-up exacerbate the oppressive conditions experienced at various public levels. And while the play centres around women, it shows how the 'voices of men' are still mediated through them. In this it is similar to Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, where we see that "the female-defined space is actually structured and controlled by patriarchy" (Ajayi 1997:35).

Krijay Govender's play, *Women in Brown*, performed in Durban in September 1998, is similar to Sarinjeive's and Jayapraga Reddy's plays, with their depiction of the different roles and identities of Indian women. Govender's aim is to change the apathy of Indian women who accept and normalise their roles and position in society. The play, described in a newspaper review as dealing "with the psyche of three Indian women living within patriarchal society" (Scott 1998:4), centres around the way the women are each trapped in situations beyond their making. Pritha is a traditional wife, under pressure to produce a child. She is smothered in a life of domesticity but asserts, poignantly, that she still has dreams. Mona is a modern and liberated woman, disillusioned with her father who has been unfaithful. The third woman is a teenager, Kameshri, who is restricted and inhibited by her family's conventions and traditions. Govender describes her impatience with a racially-stratified society, and the need to assert a hybrid identity:

I wrote this play because I'm angry and frustrated for the following reasons: Firstly, because this suppression of South African Indian women is a reality that exists under the banner of preservation of culture and tradition. Secondly, because I believe that many Indian men believe that the patriarchal order is the only and correct one. Thirdly, because the apathy of Indian women leads them to accept and normalise their roles and position in society. And finally, because I am tired of being called a 'coconut' when all I'm

doing is expressing myself. (Govender, Krijay 1998:Programme Notes)

There are three male characters in the play as well, and in performances they were played by the same female characters. An interesting theatrical ploy is the role of the director-figure herself, Krijay, who acts as commentator. The staging is minimalist, with hanging saris as a backdrop. There are five women dancers, of different races, behind the screen of saris, re-enacting the action of the foreground in stylised fashion, and suggesting the universality of women's oppression. In describing the play, Govender observes:

We look into the private moments of three very different women characters each of whom is trapped by particular circumstances. Alone they are able to express themselves freely and openly, but in the presence of the male are instantly silenced and sidelined, disappearing behind the screen of saris. The male characters in the play are deliberately stereotyped to highlight the contrast between the male and female experience. It is my hope that this play might force the audience to recognise the 'truths' behind the sari. (Programme Notes)

Govender, a Masters graduate in Drama at the University of Natal, Durban, produces a taut and shorn script, with a brisk, dramatic style. Her characters are wrapped up in their own preoccupations and solitude, soliloquising or talking to the director or puppeteer.

In the play the views of the parents, who are conservative, are challenged. Yet Kammy herself is caught in the web of Western popular culture and Western stereotypes of femininity:

Kammy: "I think they'll like Shaylen, when I finally get around to telling them. He's got good manners, proper English manners. They like that. But Shaylen's everything I want. He's intelligent, funny, witty, generous, charming...he's Perfect! No, really, it's impossible not to like him...Shaylen thinks I have beautiful lips - like Demi Moore he says. And he claims that if I work a bit harder on them, my legs have the potential of looking like the 'heaven reachers' of Naomi Campbell. Ha - I wish!" (Govender, Krijay 1998:6)

The traditional Indian housewife, Pritha, is pathetically entrammelled in her life of domesticity, at once a refuge, her "space", and her prison:

He says: 'Hallo doll!' Doll...He used to call me 'doll face' for many years, but recently he just call me 'doll'. Must be cos I'm getting little bit old, eh? (feels face) Oh - he loves me, he loves me! No doubt about that! He takes such good care. Where you'll find one man who'll take you anywhere himself to his family's house? But nice he's at work and I'm at home during the day. I got some space to myself...little space, but as Des always say: 'Something is better than nothing'. Half loaf is better than no loaf! (6)

While she is, deep down, aggrieved at her husband's behaviour, at the same time she fights it off valiantly, doggedly. Her speech is full of the cliched wisdom that her husband, posing as her superior, has bestowed on her:

Sometimes when I'm by myself, I think of all the things I could have been. I too got dreams, but that's all they can be - dreams. You marry young, you get old. Des always says he got me when I was ripe for the plucking! I always wanted to be a singer, like Latha Mangeshkar, or Dolly Parton - what - I'm halfway, there, right?(6)

The three women are differentiated in terms of class and age, and these differences are

shown in language and accent. By presenting three different, yet poignantly intermingled, life experiences and linguistic styles, Govender challenges the notion of 'authentic' Indian identity. The mixed linguistic styles of the play, of *heteroglossia*, in which words, phrases and syntactic structures from Indian idiomatic usage and slang are intermingled with western popular culture and language are similar to what Gcina Mhlophe in *Have you seen Zandile* (1991) and Fatima Dike in *So What's New* (1994) have attempted with African cultural settings. Govender, together with Muthal Naidoo and Agnes Sam, are among those who have explored the transgressive possibilities of language. Michael Gorra has observed that Rushdie, with his invention of "Angrezi", has brought Indian spoken language off the street and to the printed page (see Gorra 1997:136). Similarly, playwrights such as Muthal Naidoo and Krijay Govender (and Sarinjeive to some extent), as well as Kessie Govender and Ronnie Govender have taken this kind of language onto the stage.

'Indian Theatre' in South Africa has developed as a genre in its own right, marked by domestic concerns, and leaning towards local humour generated by the use of local 'Indian' dialects. I believe that the views of Shari Benstock on Gertrude Stein are also applicable to the writers considered here, though Stein was working at an important linguistic modernist moment (when there was a decline in confidence in logocentrism) and with more conscious experimentation:

[she is] able to demonstrate in multiple ways the uncontrollable divergences of form and content, style and substance, signifier and signified. Rather than trying to control language's every movement, to discover the perfect match of word and meaning through an image, metaphor, or symbol, Stein began by careful observation of linguistic nuance, submitting herself to the rhythms and sounds of language, listening carefully to the speech around her, allowing herself to be educated by language. (Benstock 1987:16)

Because of the need for dramatic effect, dialogue and spoken, heard language, and the dynamic nature of reception, the playwrights, though few in number, have been better able, it seems to me, to experiment with language than those writing poetry, which often involves the single lyrical voice. With Muthal Naidoo and Krijay Govender (both have had the benefit of academic exposure in the field of drama), as with Devi Sarinjeive, the benefits of workshopping their scripts are visible in their plots and dialogue, and in the economy of style, directness and compactness of language. Their themes show the influence of feminist critique and reflection, as they position Indian women between tradition and modernity.

Women writing overseas

A consideration of writings of South African Indian women now living outside the country is a possible field of study, if we are to resist the "incarceration" - to use a word by Appadurai in relation to identities of "non-western peoples" (see Abu-Lughod 1993:11) - of South African Indian women in a particular time and place. What connections with the land of their birth are evident in the writings? What influences of the host country are cap-

tured in these writings? Does the influence of wider diasporic experiences result in further inflections and greater problematising of South African Indian women's identities (as is evident in the short story, "Maths" by Agnes Sam, discussed in a following chapter in this study)?

Josephine Naidoo has been a professor of Psychology for many years at Wilfred Laurier University, in Ontario, Canada. She was born in Durban in the 1920's, studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, taught at Roma in Lesotho, and went on to study in the United States. In 1964 she emigrated to Canada, during the "open door" period under the Trudeau government (Naidoo, J C 1997:3), and has lived there ever since.

She has written on a range of topics, particularly on race and ethnicity, gender and multicultural relations among minority cultures. In her paper, "Combating Racism Involving Visible Minorities - A Review of relevant Research and Policy Development", she points out that racism occurs at individual, institutional and cultural levels, with peoples from Third World countries being particular targets of racism. She is critical of Canadian society, where in spite of its multicultural, multilingual, multi-religious, and multi-racial nature, there is no attempt to appreciate the "signs and symbols of diversity" (Naidoo and Edwards 1991:217).

Her interest in these topics, as well as the fact that she has family ties in Sri Lanka, probably prompted her to write an informative paper on the historical origins of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict. She points out that in Sri Lanka the conflict between the two ethno-cultural groups, with its differences of language and religion has been exacerbated by colonial history. The country was seen as an "administrative unit" by colonial Britain in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, Sri Lanka, one of the first countries in the twentieth century to gain universal suffrage, exhibited peaceful co-existence until the concept of identity surfaced. This, according to Naidoo and Schaus, was an import of a "western view on allegiance and historic rights" (Naidoo and Schaus 1997), with the British divide-and-rule policy originally favouring Tamils.

What is of particular interest to me in this research project are the autobiographical vignettes that she has composed, interspersed with information on South Africa's racial history. In 1994, when on sabbatical here, she served as an observer for the Independent Election Commission. As she conducted her tasks, her mind went back to the time when apartheid was in its heyday in every sphere of life. The following excerpt has echoes of Sam's short story "Jesus is Indian":

A young girl, about seven years, is standing in line outside her classroom in the Catholic school established by Irish nuns exclusively for Asian Indian children. This was the customary procedure after an open-air school assembly that included prayers, then a march to the classroom in step to military style music blaring from a loudspeaker. The children waited for the teacher-nun to allow them into the classroom for their daily catechism class, largely memorised from a little blue book of 'do's and don'ts' presented at

the time as the 'Catholic faith'. As the priest came in sight the children greeted him cheerily. His eyes moved down the line to the young girl. He called the child out from the line and ordered her to make the 'sign of the cross' with her tongue on the dirty concrete floor! That little girl was me... (Naidoo J C 1994b:4)

Naidoo exhibits a multi-faceted identity, as a South African of Indian origin living in Canada (similar in some respects to Selvarani, the fictional character in Agnes Sam's short story, "Maths", set in Britain). She points out that her "ancestral heritage had its roots in the traditional collectivism of India and the philosophical orientation of Hinduism. This was tempered by at least a century of familial contact with "Western" European Christianity and British culture. My *weltanschauung*, therefore was a complex interaction of both collectivist and individualist values, vertical but oft times also horizontal in orientation" (Naidoo, J C 1997:3). She further points out that, in South Africa, "apartheid has successfully created an 'ethnic cleansing' along racial lines; emotional bonding is essentially 'in-group' " (Naidoo, J C 1994c).

Like Naidoo, Neela Govender-Alvarez-Peyere, referred to earlier, is an Indian woman writer living outside South Africa. An extract from her autobiographical fiction, *Acacia Thorn in my Heart*, appeared in France, entitled *Une Epine D'Acacia*; it also appeared in the Southern African Review of Books (October, 1988), and was entitled *Thatha* (grandfather). The autobiographical fiction has recently been published in France. In the following excerpt Govender-Alvarez-Peyere conveys something of the elements of living in the *kutum* (extended family): Thatha was her grand-uncle, but she looked upon him as her own grandfather, and he, in turn, expected the hospitality and attention normally due to a grandfather. In her descriptions of Thatha, she emphasises the different ways in which he freely reflected his Indian customs and habits. This is in contrast to Agnes Sam's experiences of her family's reluctance to celebrate the various rituals of Hinduism openly, given the watchful eye of their Roman Catholic priest. Govender-Alvarez-Peyere and her family lived on a farm in Ashburton, near Pietermaritzburg. Her grand-uncle came from a village near Madras, Patnooru. He was a typical patriarchal figure common in the early days of settlement:

He was dressed all in white and a long, home-sewn calico shirt hung loosely over his pants. On his head was a yellow turban. His long tresses of hair had matted together from not having been combed for years. Matching them was an unruly, white beard and moustache which contrasted with his very dark features. His forehead was smeared with ashes and he wore several strings of beads around his neck. (Govender-Alvarez-Peyere 1988:12)

The uncle revelled in his senior status, where he presided over the family ceremonials: When mother and Vimla had arranged the food offering before the lighted valku, Thatha checked that everything was correctly placed. Dad lit the incense sticks and the camphor. Thatha commenced by chanting the prayer in Tamil. After each one bowed and prayed before the valku we had to wait for all the camphor to burn off. Thatha broke his fast and then the others were allowed to do so by drinking some milk mixed with bananas. Thatha ate his supper and then smoked his pipe.(12)

In contrast to the writing of Govender is that of Hershini Bhana, a young writer living outside South Africa, who writes about contemporary realities of identity and dislocation. She was born in Durban, and now lives in the United States. She recently completed her PhD in literature at the University of California, Berkeley, and has begun teaching at the University of California, Riverside. The following poem appears in an anthology, *Our Feet Walk the Sky*, which is an important collection of writings by South Asian women in the United States. The poem is evocative in its depiction of the trauma of alienation that marginalised women experience and is provocative in its tone:

Boundaries

My poem is about this fucked-up African/Indian/Kansan,
angry in California
It talks of women who run in place and write of
lost braids and even more lost children
It whimpers of aching feet and the only fingers to
heal them being thousands of spaces and telephone calls
away
It whispers of mothers with round backs and long
hands that dig deep between legs for loneliness
It tells of wanting and wanting and never being
sure
It screams of dislodged food in toilet bowls
scrubbed clean with tears
It sobs of losing and losing and being tired of
losing

My poem is about boundaries and
my poem is about a lack of boundaries

(Bhana, Hershini 1993:296)

This poem is unique in this survey in its meta-textual emphasis on textuality and the process of writing itself: the poem is presented as a textual experiment, a move from presentation to issues of representation, and provides an emotive commentary on women adrift in an alien society. It is interesting that Bhana's persona in the poem is a fusion of a larger African and Indian identity together with a regional Kansan one, "angry in California".

Conclusion

What impact the changed political climate in South Africa is likely to have on the production and reception of writings by Indian women can only be speculated upon. On the one hand, the disciplines of literature and literary criticism are having to fight for critical spaces, given that national priorities are changing from a critique of apartheid and from political activism in various forms to reconciliation, reconstruction and development, and to the maturing of a democratic and human rights culture.

The view has been expressed that liberatory and progressive writers in South Africa had previously come into their own because of their critique of apartheid. And the question is

often asked: What will they write of now that "apartheid is over" ? Many black writers have moved into government positions, and have not produced new creative work. The established writers - Jeremy Cronin, J M Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Antjie Krog - have continued to reflect on the changing political scene and the challenges of the unfolding new democratic society.

With South Africa enjoying more attention from international audiences, writers from within the country have had to compete for publicity and recognition, and lesser-known writers continue to face marginalisation. For example, the 1999 Writers' Festival, "Time of the Writer", organised by the Centre for Creative Arts, University of Natal, Durban, had no South African Indian writers on its programme, and just one local African writer - the rest came from other parts of the world. Coming out of the literary cold, South Africa is experiencing an exciting time for the development of a more cosmopolitan book-buying and readership culture in South Africa, but this is probably at the expense of exposure for local talent.

On the other hand, there has also been a resurgence of interest in lesser known writers, and of women writers. There is a new interest in writing family histories, biographies and autobiographies, and drama. Women are also writing about community histories, as in Pushpam Murugan's work on the history of Magazine Barracks, *The Lotus Blooms on the Eastern Vlei* (1997), referred to already. Recently Karthigah Moodley compiled the biography of her husband, Justice Manival Moodley, entitled *Footprints in Africa - A Posthumous Tribute to a Distinguished South African* (2000) and Kogi Singh has written *A Labour of Love - The Biography of Dr Shishupal Rambharos* (2000). (What seems to be a gap is the writing of biographies of Indian women.) Indian women writers are poised in this ambivalent space, between the threat of obscurity if they do not produce cutting-edge work of 'universal' value or international appeal and producing necessary documentary type of writing in a simple and culturally unselfconscious way for a local audience.

There is every indication that further landscapes, both inner and outer, will be explored, and with increasing idiosyncrasy, as the plenitude of life in South Africa is captured through the literary arts. Elleke Boehmer expresses the hope that writing emerging out of this transitional state in South Africa will form a "parabolic loop": "South African writing will again be whirled into the centrifuge of the country's changed but still-turbulent history" (Boehmer 1998b:51). I expect that writings from Indian women in South Africa will be part of that "parabolic loop".

CHAPTER 5

RECLAIMING ANSUYAH SINGH'S *BEHOLD THE EARTH MOURNS*

*"As a woman I have no country.
As a woman I want no country.
As a woman my country is the whole world."*

(Virginia Woolf, in Rich 1986:183)

Behold the Earth Mourns, by Ansuyah R Singh, was acclaimed as the "first Indian novel" in South Africa. Published in 1960, it was also the first novel to be written by a black (inclusive of African, Coloured and Indian) woman in English in South Africa. The second novel by a black woman, Noni Jabavu's *Drawn in Colour*, was published in 1962. Bessie Head wrote her novel *The Cardinals* between 1960 and 1962, although it was published only in the 1990's.

Singh was born in Durban in 1917, and died at the age of 61 in November 1978. She studied medicine in Edinburgh, and practised as a medical doctor in the United Kingdom and South Africa. Like Goonam, she participated in the Passive Resistance Movement when she returned from the United Kingdom in 1956. Her husband, Ashwin Choudree, was the South African representative and adviser to Mrs Jayalaxmi Pandit, India's representative at the United Nations.

Singh acted in plays such as *Sakuntala* and *Natir Puja* (by Kalidasa and Tagore respectively), which were performed in Durban; she also wrote articles for *Jyothi*, the journal of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. Her other works included two three-act plays. The first, *Cobwebs in the Garden*, completed in 1963, is set in India in the period of the rule of Akbar, who became third monarch of the Mogul dynasty in 1561. The second, *A Tomb for Thy Kingdom*, completed in 1966, is based on the Mogul period after 1605, that of Persian Emperor Jehangir. Her next publication, *Summer Moonbeams on the Lake* (1970), is an anthology of poems, short stories and essays, which covers a wide range of topics, both personal and public. In these later writings, unlike her novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, Singh conjures up a romanticised image of India, seeing India as a "dream land of pageants, poets, bazaars, veiled beauties and Oriental splendour", as Paranjape describes the country in another context (Paranjape 1996:xxvi). Before Singh died she had just completed the proofs of her fifth book, but this manuscript is still to be published. Singh was fortunate to have had the benefit of the mentorship of Elizabeth Sneddon, doyenne profes-

sor of Speech and Drama at the University of Natal, who provided helpful criticism of all her writings.

In this chapter I consider the marginality of Singh's novel, *Behold the Earth Mourns*, in South African literary criticism, and suggest some reasons why the novel has not enjoyed critical acclaim. I consider several important discursive strands in the novel in relation to questions of identity. Tracing the narrative cartography in this work, particularly between South Africa and India, is especially illuminating, as identity is mapped in the novel in spatial terms. In *Behold the Earth Mourns*, which may be described as a novel of ideas, Singh explores various forms of prejudice - racism, sexism, classism, casteism, xenophobia, religious sectarianism - that occur in our social intercourse and hinder the creation of a just and egalitarian world. Ultimately, she envisions a universal human existence at one with nature and the cosmos. She sees the striving after such a state as a striving after truth, drawn from all religions, and reflected in word and deed. *Satyagraha* is an important and particular expression of such striving. Singh is critical, however, of *Satyagraha* because of the difference between the intentions and the practices of *satyagrahis*, and of all organised religion that ignores social reality.

Behold the Earth Mourns made its appearance on the literary scene in the early 60's, a watershed time in the history of South Africa. On the one hand there was a growing consolidation of apartheid ideology and strategy, which would reach its peak in the 'Tricameral politics' of the 80's. The counter movement was protest and resistance in all forms from the early 60's on, gradually developing into a more strident, revolutionary impulse in ensuing decades.

In the years immediately after the publication of *Behold The Earth Mourns*, the main signposts in the history of the country were Sharpeville, the Rivonia Trial, and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and several other key persons in the anti-apartheid struggle of that time. As the decade progressed, the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement, with the growing influence of Steve Biko, became an important dimension of historical developments in the country. In a larger context this was the decade when Franz Fanon's works - *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967), and *Toward the African Revolution* (1967) - were to make a significant impact on revolutionary movements across the world, being re-published in different languages and editions after his death in 1961. The 60's marked the beginning of a spate of post-independence writing from other parts of Africa. Sembene Ousmane's novel, *God's Bits of Wood*, published in the same year as Singh's novel, and Chinua Achebe's ground-breaking novel, *Things Fall Apart*, had appeared two years earlier. Singh's novel was eclipsed by more obviously significant writing from newly independent Africa.

On the literary front in South Africa, there was growing development of protest literature, such as the genre of Immorality Act literature, and the "tendenzroman", which was a

"literature of victims" (see Wagner 1994:47). In drama, Fugard's writing provides a good example of these times and themes. Singh's novel was clearly in this protest tradition of writing against apartheid legislation. The banning of Indian brides from coming to South Africa in 1956, though not as severe as the later Immorality Act, was part of the same general intention of maintaining white privilege and hegemony.

Chapman sees the 60's as a time of recovery and reassessment (Chapman 1996:247). He points out that the characteristics of this period were essentially modernist, with particular inflections in the South African scene. He records that white poets in this period - Douglas Livingstone, Ruth Miller and Sydney Clouts - were moving away from British humanist approaches; they came under the influence of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Eliot. Gordimer, writing from the 50's onwards, was developing a "sustained critique of liberalism", with *The Late Bourgeois World* being published in 1966 (Chapman 1984:13). Her work would take on a more revolutionary texture in the course of the following three decades. Ingrid Jonker and Breyten Breytenbach were also important literary voices in this period, as well as the Sestigers, such as Andre Brink and Etienne le Roux. New black voices in South Africa were those of Es'kia Mphahlele, who had published *Down Second Avenue*, and Bessie Head. Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's publication, *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, set the tone for more strident black voices by the end of the decade, heralding the development of a black poetry renaissance from the mid-seventies on. His success in the face of the white monopoly in publishing at the time was to encourage other black writers in the years to follow. With all these important developments on the literary scene in South Africa it is understandable that Singh's novel went unnoticed.

Singh's writing, like Paton's, may be seen as part of a more benign, liberal tradition. (There is a striking similarity between the titles of the two books, *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Behold the Earth Mourns*.) The motif of black-white conflict was to have greater import and consequence in a literature for national liberation than the kind of theme that seemed to preoccupy Singh. The novel might have appeared parochial, being peculiar to the interests of a 'minority' group. Certainly, her plays, *Cobwebs in the Garden* and *A Tomb for Thy Kingdom*, also written in the 60's, were far removed from the type of radical and more politically relevant writing that was being produced in this period by other black, and some white, writers in South Africa.

It must be remembered however that most local writers, even white, were not enjoying a great deal of prominence and support at this time. As pointed out in the first chapter, the poor reception of many works was due to the general down-playing or ignoring of indigenous works in favour of overseas literature - a clear indication of the persistence of the "colonial cringe". As Chapman suggests, this was the effect of the "colonial inferiority complex" in relation to what was published and widely accepted in South Africa. Incidentally, Chapman himself has not included Singh's writing in his otherwise comprehensive

critiques of South African literatures. (Singh might have been further disadvantaged by the book being published by an obscure publisher, Purfleet, in Durban, as pointed out already.)

As far as women writers were concerned, the largely English readership in South Africa was responding to white women writers such as Sarah Gertrude Millin, Daphne Rooke and Joy Packer, who together with the already-established Gordimer, enjoyed prominence at this time rather than black women writers. An alternative feminist literary 'mainstream' was gradually developing, with writers such as Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith and Doris Lessing, who had already occupied canonical status, being drawn into the feminist fold. To this list the names of Gordimer and Sheila Fugard were being added (see Christie et al, 1980), but this transformation of the alternative 'canon' was very slow and cautious. There were also white women writers of this time, and before, who were not well-known or recognised (a writer such as Phyllis Altman comes to mind), and are only enjoying critical attention in recent years.

As pointed out in the first chapter, the Indian writers who received some recognition were male writers, such as Ahmed Essop and Essop Patel, as they were probably seen to be writing of a larger 'black experience'. Essop, writing after Soweto, captured the township experiences of Indians in his collection of short stories, *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978). It does seem to me that apart from the other reasons advanced here the intersection of ethnicity and gender is a crucial factor in the marginalisation of *Behold the Earth Mourns*. The novel did not enjoy enduring interest among Indians themselves, and this might be attributed to the fact that the potential interpretive community was largely influenced by a dominant white readership. It is also worth noting that much of the *gynocritical* work of recovery of women's writing has been uneven. Cecily Lockett (1989:276), for example, cites Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at Metropolitan*, published in the early '70's, as the first novel to be written by a black woman. If we use the term inclusively of African, Indian and Coloured, as pointed out earlier, then Singh's work would assume that distinction, but Lockett does not seem to be aware of Singh's writings. (It is likely that Singh was not seen as black, or not 'quite black', but in any event, her exclusion remains.)

Was Singh's writing ignored because it was of poor quality? Her work will probably not score very well on the two counts of 'literary excellence', or political relevance (in the larger progressive context). Achmat Dangor (in a personal interview conducted by Martin Trump in 1983) has distinguished between a "privileged" style of writing and "ghetto" writing in South Africa, with writers such as Gordimer, Essop and Paton in the former category and Dangor himself, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Njabulo Ndebele in the latter. Singh's writing is, arguably, "privileged", and may be considered as being similar to Gordimer's in some respects in that she is writing from a position of class privilege. Trump's own views on Gordimer (he was looking mainly at her work that stretched from the late 1940's to the 1980's) may be considered apposite for Singh as well: "The

ideological implications of her works are populist, and yet their form and mode of expression are elitist" (Trump 1989:185). This is equally manifest in the language of Singh, which exhibits a poetic sensibility; her style is lyrical, and sometimes ornate and highly descriptive, while her themes have serious political import.

Although Singh's writing is highly wrought, the plot contrived, representation of character one-dimensional, the history linear, and its context and ethos decidedly bourgeois in comparison with writing that was to be produced by other black writers in South Africa, it is worth remembering that her work was deriving its cultivated sensibility more from Eurocentric notions of 'high art' than from life lived in the raw in South Africa. The contest over notions of literary excellence was to take a more vigorous direction after the Soweto revolts. The writings that were to follow by black writers in general were to search for an "African aesthetic and [for] artistic roots" (Petersen and Rutherford 1991:iv) away from dominant cultural centres.

Satyagraha

Behold the Earth Mourns revolves around the lives of two Indian families, one in South Africa, and the other in India. Krishandutt Nirvani is a successful businessman, with a house on the outskirts of the city of Durban in Natal. Although the family have ties with India, South Africa is their home. Krishandutt's father had progressed financially, having begun as an indentured labourer. Krishandutt now owns a sugar cane farm, with acres of fruit groves. He is also an importer of goods from India, with business contacts in Egypt, Great Britain, and Japan. Krishandutt reflects on how his father had been determined to find his niche in the country: "Our father was adventurous. He could face the barrenness of a new place. Through sheer perseverance and courage he built this - all of this, into something that breathed and felt of success" (Singh 1960:8). The father had tried hard to succeed in an alien land, despite the two World Wars and the intervening Depression. The traditional expectation of the male in these 'frontier' circumstances was one of strength and adaptation. We see a similar pattern of survival in the autobiographical writings of Reddy, Mayat and Karodia, with the emergence of the class of small shopkeepers and hawkers. The families in each case set up businesses, and despite the different hardships that they endured, mainly through relocation and displacement, established themselves and became financially prosperous.

Unlike Krishandutt, his brother, Srenika, is a young activist, disillusioned with the racist character of society in South Africa and determined to contribute to changing it. He joins a group of Passive Resisters who have been influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, or *Satyagraha*.

The counterparts of the South African Indian family are the Jivan-Sinha family in India; they have a daughter, Yagesvari, who is considered a 'good match' for Srenika. Srenika

has, in the meantime, already met her, and has fallen in love with her. Krishandutt is sent to India to settle the 'arrangements' for the wedding. Yagesvari and Srenika marry in India; but the problem of South African legal restrictions against the entry of brides from India then becomes the chief obstacle, and provides the main element for the rest of the plot. The story unfolds as the marriage between Srenika and Yagesvari has to weather the restrictions of the South African government. This ban on Indian brides, which was instituted in 1956 (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:16), should be seen in the historical context of the continual threat of repatriation that Indians were subjected to after indentured immigration was officially terminated in 1913. It was the culmination of an aggressive campaign to restrict Indians in various ways that had characterised the policy of the colonial and later apartheid governments from the time of the arrival of Indians in South Africa in 1860.

The two families in the novel are both inspired by the principles and practices of Gandhian philosophy. Yagesvari's grandfather had joined the ranks of the *satyagrahi* led by Gandhi in India, and had been killed in police riots in Bombay. He had believed firmly in Passive Resistance as a way of "saving" India:

His deeply orthodox, and religious background, a Brahmin by caste and belief, resisted any means that would contribute to active revolution. He knew that India had bled in too many bloody wars contrary to her philosophy and teachings. Her own people had undergone a slow degeneration in their way of life. The very soul of India was weakened and writhing. It must only through struggle, pain and sacrifice regain her spiritual strength. (Singh 1960:40-41)

For this work, which was written to mark the centenary of the arrival of Indians to South Africa, it is not surprising that Singh chose the theme of Passive Resistance. Gandhi and the legacy of Passive Resistance have been seen as defining motifs of Indian history in South Africa. The novel is linked to the history of indenture in that the earlier immigrants have now settled more permanently in spite of endless attempts to repatriate them, and have moved on to a new phase of their lives in the land of their adoption, while continuing the tradition of resistance begun in the early decades of their arrival.

With this novel Singh joins the company of writers who have been influenced by Gandhian thought. Among them are major Indian writers - Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R K Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Arun Joshi, and Chaman Nahal (see Jha 1983), some of them described by Rushdie as "midnight's parents" (Rushdie 1998:xvii) in that their writings hastened the birth of independence in India. Rama Jha argues that the very rise of the "Indo-Anglian" novel in the twentieth century may be attributed to the influence of Gandhi's philosophy and life (Jha 1983:5). These writers, influenced by Gandhi's call for freedom and independence, expanded on these themes (of the dawning of independence) in various ways in their writings.

A local tradition of Gandhian writing is evident in the literature of South African Indian writers, both male and female, as Rafick Jamal has observed (see Jamal 1998). The protest

poem by Paruk, "Appeal to the King", already referred to, written and performed in the first decade of this century in Durban, is noteworthy in this connection. Singh herself published a poem, "To Mahatma Gandhi", to mark the centenary of Gandhi's birthday. (It is included in this study in the general Survey of writings by Indian women.) Another example is Essop's short story, *The Betrayal*, depicting a conflict between a non-violent political and cultural organisation called the Orient Front, influenced by Gandhian principles, and a new, rival organisation. Meer has written a biography of Gandhi's life, entitled *The Making of the Mahatma* (1970), and Saira Essa has written a play entitled *Gandhi Act Two*. Goonam, in her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, emphasises the foundational influence that Passive Resistance philosophy had in shaping the choices she made throughout her life. Deena Padayachee's short story entitled "The Visitor", published in his collection of short stories, *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1992), tells the story of squatters who moved to Gandhi's ashram in Durban, and shared the spoils from this historic site.

The narrative in *Behold the Earth Mourns* is set at a time in the history of South Africa - before and during the 50's - when there was entrenchment of discriminatory laws and much ferment over the question of non-violent versus violent means of opposing the apartheid state. Many South African Indians followed the example of Gandhi, who had formed the Natal Indian Congress at the turn of the century and initiated the Passive Resistance movement in South Africa. Gandhi had left South Africa in 1914, but the legacy of Passive Resistance remained a significant influence on political developments in the country. The 40's and 50's saw increasingly repressive laws against Africans, Indians and Coloureds in South Africa. In 1946 The Asiatic Land Tenure Act, appropriately dubbed the "Ghetto Act", was passed under the Smuts Government, and restricted movement and access to property ownership among Indians. With a growing consolidation of white hegemony after the National Party came into power in 1948, the infamous Group Areas Act followed, described as "the foundation of residential apartheid" (Mandela, Nelson 1994:114). Other laws that were passed were the Suppression of Communism Act and the Population and Registration Act in 1950. Mass resistance consequently characterised this period. A well-organised Passive Resistance Movement against the government was launched, in which leaders such as Dr Dadoo and Dr G M Naicker played an influential role. Singh herself was part of the Passive Resistance Movement of 1946, when many women went to prison. Other women in this group were Goonam, Dr Zainab Asvat, Mrs Amina Pahad and Mrs Cissie Gool. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela describes the effect that the Movement had on African resistance politics:

The Indian campaign became a model for the type of protest that we in the Youth League were calling for. It instilled a spirit of defiance and radicalism among the people, broke the fear of prison, and boosted the popularity and influence of the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress. They reminded us that the freedom struggle was not merely a question of making speeches, holding meetings, passing resolutions and sending

deputations, but of meticulous organisation, militant mass action and, above all, the willingness to suffer and sacrifice. (98)

The 50's was a vibrant period in the South African liberation struggle. It was the decade that saw the Congress Alliance grow in solidarity, the signing of the Freedom Charter, the mobilisation of women against pass laws, culminating in a mass demonstration in Pretoria, and the unity of purpose that surrounded the Treason Trial. It became known as the era of multi-racialism, disrupting the weight of repression that was ushered in when the Nationalist Party came into power.

Behold the Earth Mourns itself reflects the political discourses of the times, and a large part of the novel deals with different responses and strategies of resistance to apartheid laws. The novel reflects obliquely the different political groupings among Natal Indians in the 1940's and 1950's. Bhana points out that there was both defiance and acquiescence among Indians: "There was the Natal Indian Congress's politics of defiance under leaders who offered them a non-racial vision; or they could place their trust in the politics of quiet persuasion which placed a great deal of trust in white goodwill" (Bhana, Surendra 1997:54). In Singh's novel, Srenika and Krishandutt epitomise these differences.

In this respect it is worth exploring the ideological positions of the different characters, who may be seen as types that stand for attitudes in society at large. The major characters in the novel - Srenika, Yagasveri, and Serete - draw their identity from Satyagraha in varying ways, defined here in political terms. There is a fundamental difference between the two brothers, Krishandutt and Srenika, in their responses to the South African political situation. Krishandutt is quite content to pursue a self-contained existence as long as the unjust laws of the country do not tamper with his own security and life: "All the laws, the cancerous plans could go on as long as it did not touch him, his home, his life, his family and business" (Singh 1960:6). He wishes to enjoy a quiet, private existence. His "children were the third generation of settlers in this southern land of sunshine and adventure" (3-4), and he looks on his accomplishments, and those of his family, with pride.

It is not that Krishandutt does not love South Africa, but his care and concern are expressed in an abstract way. He wants to embrace the landscape and not its people. In his living room are "oil paintings of the beautiful landmarks of South Africa - the Montagu Pass, the Drakensberg covered with snow gleaming in the winter sunshine" (7). He is seen as an ostrich which buries its "head in the dry desert sands to efface the danger out of his vision" (50). For him South Africa is a new country, needing to be developed. In the changing times, with creeping urbanisation as the city of Durban changes into a metropolis, he looks inwards to his family for cohesion and stability. His father had done the same: "The late Nirvani believed in his family keeping together as a closely knit unit"(5).

Krishandutt is passive (rather than a Passive Resister), and chooses to view the historical reality around him in a wider, impersonal context, seeing it as part of an inevitable cosmic

trajectory beyond his intervention and agency. He is in the mould of the masculine and rational pragmatism that Gandhi criticised. He argues that one should accept forces beyond one's control, as his words to his brother indicate: "Srenika, you forget that we are only part of a vast plan - the design of God. We are but one small unit in the unappreciable universality of man, and this too is based on laws, the laws of creation and destruction, the pattern of action and reaction"(8). At the marriage of Yagesvari and Srenika, Sangamitra, Yagesvari's mother, expresses a similar view that life and living are fore-ordained: "The Great Master has patterned our birth, marriage and death. We are only the medium of this moving picture" (54).

If we see shades of fatalism here, with the great karmic wheel continuing to grind relentlessly, the example of Srenika soon contradicts this. Srenika takes up political protest in an unequivocal way and refuses to condone the obvious injustices he sees around him: "I am interested at this moment in my action, and my choice. I am real. I accept and am part of that great universe you describe to me. I want to do - and to do that which my conscience feels is right. I want to destroy that which is wrong, not by another action of wrongness, but by my own sacrifice and practice of truth" (8). Srenika is portrayed not as a passive observer, but as an agent, as one who acts against injustice.

Srenika refuses, as a matter of conscience, to stand by and watch an unjust and untenable situation unfold around him: "For Srenika, it was difficult to be blind to all that was happening...the threshold of his own tolerance was at breaking point" (6). He responds to the insistent challenge to resist subtle and gradual co-option in a system of injustice. One must be vigilant, he states, in a situation that tends to inure one to violations of basic human rights and decency:

We have talked, planned, we have gone on compromising with our conscience. Gradually, we become saturated with the thinking of some things that are wrong, and the thinking becomes pushed back in our subconscious. We resign into a comfortable trance until the wrong becomes part of us, and we think nothing is wrong any more. (9)

Krishandutt views Srenika's behaviour as an example of youthful idealism and martyrdom, of "incoherent emotionalism"(3). He argues that, as a family, they have made their "contribution" to the society: "Our father was conscious of all the jibes, the hurt and the humiliation. He did his share towards his people. There's the Nirvani school, the Nirvani beds in the hospitals, the money invested in some of the weekly papers of which he was an editor" (9). For Srenika, however, this is mere tokenism; he feels that he has to do something more tangible: "I cannot follow in this soft, sitting back and hoping for something to change. I have got to begin with myself in this change for the better. You know well that an accumulation of hurt within one is not healthy"(9).

Unlike Krishandutt, Srenika is more aware of exploitation at many levels: "Exploit the soil, exploit human beings, their labour, their sweat, to keep the bank balance soaring" (6).

He sees such exploitation affecting especially "the small-incomed family" (6). At a personal level, he recalls the injury his niece, Almon, sustained, where she was subjected to the indignity of "petty apartheid" - she was not given prompt treatment when she was seriously ill because of the "Europeans Only" rule followed by the ambulance service. Srenika feels that "restraint" is tantamount to compliance: "The whole structure of this system is based on a menacing wrongness. You cannot demand restraint from me, because you want me to accept it. My being, the whole of me cannot, Krishan"(9).

Srenika chooses to be resolute in his course, and will not be influenced by the expedient choices of his brother. He becomes a *satyagrahi*, thereby identifying with the growing force of Passive Resistance of the times rather than with his brother. As he expresses his decision:

From now on there will be some parting of the ways in our lives. I have always held my head high while my emotions were fired with the cry of retribution for many a slight, and a silent vow was locked in my bosom that I must make some contribution to an enlightenment of a people who could be so godless in their vision...It was inevitable. It is becoming infectious. It makes a new era of feeling, of thinking. Of living. It is inevitable.(10-11)

In the air, indeed, is a new mood of protest and revolt. The powers that be cannot forever keep people down, and it is inevitable that they will claim their full humanity. Through the life of Srenika we catch a glimpse of the meaning and purpose of Satyagraha. It is not passive, but as a "truth force", will actively destroy evil. The narrative provides a definition of Satyagraha through the speech that Srenika makes to a large group of protesters:

It is with great happiness that I court imprisonment today in the true spirit of Satyagraha. Passive Resistance owes its origin to the deep fundamental truth of Hindu philosophy. It has the foundation of the teachings of Christ and Buddha. It is a truth, a love force endeavouring to uphold non-violence, for violence and force have never solved any problems. They never will. Force must never be used to redeem our freedom as a free people amongst the nations of the world.(16-17)

While a didactic note is struck here, Singh does highlight an important theme of the novel - the deeply religious character of Satyagraha. She suggests that the philosophy of non-violence is derived from different faith traditions. Both Srenika and Serete Luseka, Srenika's African friend, see hypocrisy in organised religion; they emphasise truth as a dimension of spiritual consciousness:

The search for truth - you can call it godliness, the way of Christ, of Buddha, of Gandhi, of men who have served and will serve for the good of mankind till the end of time. This goodness to give to mankind is not security of material things - a house, three meals a day, clothes and plenty, and to destroy their initiative, their very souls' acquisition and turn men into self-satisfied bloated creatures. (66-67)

While Krishandutt also draws from the different faiths in an eclectic way, he does not transform this into a creed for justice. Srenika, on the other hand, believes that the need to react to injustice is unquestionable. Religion may be manipulated as a way of lulling the poor and turning them away from the material reality of their existence. On a visit to India

Srenika sees this occurring at Benares, the holy city, where there are teeming multitudes of poor people who seem oblivious of their poverty-stricken state. He observes that religion as a vehicle for cognition, as the space for relating the self to the material and the spiritual being, is suppressed in favour of religion as ritual. Gandhi does point out in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, that "the essence of religion is morality" (Gandhi 1927:x).

Srenika is at pains to insist that Passive Resistance is not to be seen as a soft option; it calls for great strength of character:

We believe only in making our cause felt by physical suffering. After deep and serious thought, I have come to the conclusion that there comes a time when the spirit rebels against a way of life based on exercised superiority. Timid and passive acquiescence makes it possible to strengthen this superiority. Silence and compliance are taken as acceptance. History of man has evolved two contradictory and distinct courses by which it is humanly possible to save people from disaster. The popular road is the path of revolution with violence. When the burden of humiliation becomes unbearable and beyond human endurance people revolt...The road to non-violence is harder. (Singh 1960:17)

Srenika's speech, at the time of his incarceration for his opposition to the apartheid state, shows him fearlessly embracing a course of action that will lead ultimately to universal peace and Truth. He chooses to break the law, when the laws are unjust - it is his duty, his "right":

He was now guilty of breaking a law. Laws and rules are made in society, by the men in society, for the protection of that society. It is a dynamic and moving force as is the broad spectrum of life...It cannot move backward, for when it does it becomes negative, unprotective, and if made for the benefit of few men and not all men, then it becomes for no men at all. Then it is a duty to break that law. It is his right to break it, to accept the guilt of it, but not feel guilt. It is his call to suffer in a positive way to refashion the modelling of that law. (21)

These words anticipate Bram Fischer's own statement to the court at his trial in 1966, when he categorically stated his commitment to transgressing the laws of the land in the name of justice:

My Lord, there is another reason, and a more compelling reason for my plea and why even now I persist in it. I accept, my Lord, the general rule that for the protection of a society laws should be obeyed. But when the laws themselves become immoral, and require the citizen to take part in an organised system of oppression - if only by his silence and apathy - then I believe that a higher duty arises. This compels one to refuse to recognise such laws. (In Clingman 1998:410)

Ironically, Srenika, who is seen as militant in comparison with Krishandutt, has also to defend his cause at the opposite end of the political spectrum. Serete feels that a course of action such as Passive Resistance is too mild. Srenika and Serete argue about the efficacy of Satyagraha in eradicating poverty and ensuring a good material existence. John Brendon, a white English friend, also suggests, like Srenika, that material things do not really matter:

Why do you make everything centre on material things, Serete? Man's movement - his harmony or disharmony in life is surely not always centred on economic calculations. There is a thing called civilisation. To me it is the awakening of a spiritual search where the emotions inspire or stimulate the mental faculty to achieve some goal - some aim. Sometimes this happens to one person alone, sometimes it is powerful enough to inspire a whole group or race of men. Sometimes it happens quietly and we think of it as evolution. But if the search for this vision is initiated by accelerated activity, it is revolution. A spiritual search - your search - is nothing new. Some races are sleepy, dormant, or tired, or having a respite. The upsurge takes place to someone else in some place else. (Singh 1960:142)

However, Serete counters this by asking: "But how does all this improve my situation? How do I get a job, some money, some land to build a home. I must breathe, eat, sleep. Neither God nor the devil give me anything" (67).

Although the characters are made to carry the burden of Singh's ideological arguments, with their 'speeches' amounting to several mini-monologues or disquisitions, it is worth reflecting on their relative positions. For Serete, Srenika's stance is ineffectual in the face of gross injustices. He compares his life with Srenika's middle-class comfort, and points to the effects of apartheid's hierarchy of oppression:

I am part of a life where it is a jungle existence for me. To live, to breathe, is the survival of the fittest from the point where conception takes place in our mother's womb. We have to thwart the elements, thwart the physical background: our home life is unstable, divided and depressed...Do you think you can turn the fear that hurts within me into a quiet suffering and expect repentance from whoever causes it? ...People like Srenika spoil things for us and there is no strength in this type of talk. (17,18)

It is not as if Serete totally distances himself from Srenika's cause. It is he who leads the procession to the place of arrest from where the Passive Resisters are taken by the police van to the detention cell to await their trial. But he constantly expresses reservations about Passive Resistance and calls for a stronger response. There are echoes of Serete's sentiments when Mandela, in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, recalls some of his own misgivings about the conciliatory politics of Passive Resistance that many Indians were championing; he was also dubious about the participation of Indians and Africans together in resistance politics, because "our grassroots supporters saw Indians as exploiters of black labour in their role as shopkeepers and merchants" (Mandela, Nelson 1994:115).

On non-violent strategy Mandela writes:

I said that the time for passive resistance had ended, that non-violence was a useless strategy and could never overturn a white minority regime bent on retaining its power at any cost. At the end of the day, I said, violence was the only weapon that could destroy apartheid and we must be prepared, in the near future, to use that weapon...Non-violent passive resistance is effective as long as your opposition adheres to the same rules as you do. But if peaceful protest is met with violence, its efficacy is at an end. For me, non-violence was not a moral principle but a strategy; there is no moral goodness in using an ineffective weapon...(147)

Mandela also writes of the agonising that he and Indian leaders experienced in the early 60's, before many of them decided to move beyond Passive Resistance and throw in their

lot with the armed struggle through the formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*:

Yusuf Cachalia and Dr Naicker pleaded with us not to embark on this course, arguing that the state would slaughter the whole liberation movement. J N Singh, an effective debater, uttered words that night which still echo in my head. 'Non-violence has not failed us,' he said, 'we have failed non-violence.' I countered by saying that in fact non-violence had failed us, for it had done nothing to stem the violence of the state or change the heart of our oppressors. (261)

Apart from Serete's misgivings about Satyagraha as a viable philosophy for action, there are inconsistencies in the beliefs and practices of those who profess to follow Satyagraha. When the businesses of Naresh Jivan-Sinha, Yagesvari's father, in India are not going well, and there is friction between employers and workers, his adherence to the values and principles of Satyagraha are brought under question. Naresh has difficulty appreciating the point of view of Shaharan, his opponent from the working class, who he sees as wanting to "change the face of India" (Singh 1960:169). He has difficulty appreciating the workers' perspective:

Yes, Yagesvari. Our affairs are not going well. Shaharan and I are at cross purposes again. The men have formed themselves into a trade union. They are demanding an increase in wages. We can't do it. I refused to hear about it. Shaharan thought I was obstinate and strong-willed. He seems to think that Satyagraha, Gandhism is socialism. I told him to go to... Let them go on strike. If necessary I shall get the police to deal with them. (169)

Yagesvari sees the conflict from the point of view of the workers, and accuses her father quite directly - "So you were never part of the Satyagraha - the spirit of Passive Resistance. I can't believe it of you" (169).

Through the characters in the novel Singh weighs the different ideological responses to the political challenges of the times. The novel reflects the protest politics of the decade, when the influence of Paton, both literary and ideological, was a significant one nationally. Whereas Paton advocated the path of reconciliation in a liberal mode, this was changing radically in the black writing emerging at this time. Black writers saw the need to assert a more aggressive (and more masculine?) response to oppression. At the same time, Singh anticipates the arguments for a revolutionary, more apocalyptic battle against apartheid, which would become more strident in the 70's and 80's. Around the time of the novel's reception in South Africa, the influence of Gandhi on revolutionary change was being underlined by an African writer such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o. One of Ngugi's characters in his novel, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), set in Kenya, expresses strong admiration for Gandhi:

The example of India is there before our noses. The British were there for hundreds and hundreds of years. They ate India's wealth. They drank India's blood. They never listened to the political talk-talk of a few men. What happened? There came this man Gandhi. Mark you, Gandhi knows his whiteman well. He goes round and organises the Indian masses into a weapon stronger than the bomb. They say with one voice: we want back our freedom. (Ngugi 1967:77)

Ngugi was to move beyond Gandhi and Passive Resistance, and develop a more assertive

revolutionary voice in his later writings, such as *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. Ngugi, like Mandela, came to realise that Passive Resistance was not a viable way to deal with oppression as it intensified.

The role of women

The first half of *Behold the Earth Mourns* centres around the concept of Satyagraha and the liberatory role that males, such as Srenika and Serete, play in the struggle against injustice (even though, in my opinion, Srenika's character is developed contrary to the norm of the tough, rational male). The novel must be unique in South African writing of its period in that it gradually changes from being male-centred to being female-centred. In the second half we see an emerging female consciousness as Yagesvari decides to act in order to deal with the predicament that she is placed in. Singh portrays the emerging consciousness of a female *satyagrahi*, thus tacitly questioning the primacy of men in the Movement.

In a broader historical context, *Behold the Earth Mourns* may be seen as a response of Indian women to their treatment in South Africa. The ban on Indian brides was to affect middle class Indians mainly, but must be seen in the context of the wider historical prejudices and racism against Indian women (and women of colour generally), both in the British Empire and in colonial and apartheid society. Women were not seen as part of the indentured Labour scheme, with the sugar industry calling for adult male labourers alone (Beall 1990:146). It was only in later years, when the tea plantations were developed, that the productive use of women (as in the case of my grandmother) was gradually appreciated.

Yagesvari's upbringing in India just after Independence ensures that she embraces the values of freedom and justice. As her father states: "She has been brought up with unlimited freedom, for I should know that the sweetest treasure of mankind is to feel free. She has learnt this when she was still very young, and can be trusted with great responsibility" (Singh 1960:53). She is inspired by the example of her own grandfather who, although blessed with a large fortune through his work as a successful industrialist, "contributed most of his wealth to the Satyagraha Movement, and donned the swadeshi cloth to march the country in search of freedom" (40). Yagesvari's grandfather sees in non-violence the only means of freedom for India:

His deeply orthodox and religious background, a brahmin by caste and belief, resisted any means that would contribute to active revolution. He knew that India had bled in too many bloody wars contrary to her philosophy and teachings. Her own people had undergone a slow degeneration in their way of life. The very soul of India was weakened and writhing. It must only through struggle, pain and sacrifice regain her spiritual strength. (40-41)

When Yagesvari returns to India after her marriage, she finds the separation from her husband insupportable, and decides to return to South Africa. On her return journey, she travels on a steamer, the *Govora*, which is headed for Trieste, via Durban. She plans to disem-

bark as a day visitor in Durban, and then remain in the city. By choosing to return to South Africa in a defiant manner, Yagesvari refuses to acquiesce to powerlessness in the face of an intransigent regime, and sets out on a course that makes her a 'reluctant revolutionary'. We see her emerging consciousness as she struggles to find her own space, her own voice. Constricted by the larger forces of apartheid society - a world that controls not only her movements, but her identity - she is determined to be an agent, to do something to change her circumstances.

Singh anticipates the emerging feminist writing of later decades in South Africa. Writing in the 50's, she is inevitably influenced by a patriarchal perspective, in terms of which the female characters are defined in relation to their male counterparts. Subsequent black women writers in South Africa were to explore more fully the nuances of women's experiences in apartheid society, and to examine the options and roles available to them. The need among women to seek self-definition, given the constrictions of the laws in which their lives were caught, was to become more pressing in the following decades. Yagesvari, for example, longs to live in what she hopes will become her adopted homeland, and identify with its history, culture and tradition.

Yagesvari's decision to act is prompted by her unquestioning love for Srenika and the possibility, through such action, to develop as a whole person. One might ask whether Yagesvari's heroic act does not exemplify the "self-sacrificing Hindu wife [who is] the very paradigm of Hindu femininity" (Mehta 1997a:4)? Writers in the Indian diaspora have drawn attention to the phenomenon of "*pita vrata*" (father worship) and "*pati vrata*" (husband worship), where a "woman's worth is measured in terms of the specific amount of 'male service' she can accomplish in her lifetime in her capacity as wife, mother and daughter" (4). Expanding on this point Mehta states:

The Ramayana presents a galaxy of women who are simply exemplary in fidelity to their spouses, in rendering ungrudging service, in enduring untold hardship in the hour of trial, in being ever vigilant about the welfare of their husbands, in making sacrifices for the interest of their lords, in ready obedience, and their promptness to stand by the side of their husbands in the hour of need. (5)

In fact, as Maria Mies argues, Gandhi actually constructed the image of the "ideal Indian woman" based on the example of the chaste Sita from the *Ramayana*, rather than the more aggressive Draupadi, from the *Mahabharata*, stating that women were better able to personify the principle of non-violence than men (see Mies 1980:124-125). It is worth pointing out that Madhu Kishwar argues that at times Gandhi favoured a combination of Sita and Draupadi to symbolise women (see Kishwar 1985). Indira Gandhi, for her part, endorsed the role of women in the Satyagraha movement when she asserted that "the female sex is not the weaker sex; it is the nobler of the two; for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humiliation, faith, and knowledge" (in Rajan 1991:208). These 'womanly' qualities obviously make for very good satyagrahis. Of course, many women

were not just acting as mere spouses, but in their own right, and for a just cause. Kasturbai Gandhi, the wife of Gandhi, was a trail-blazing satyagrahi; others were Valliamma Muniswami Mudaliar and Veerammal Naidoo. They were among those responsible for turning satyagraha into a mass resistance movement in which ten thousand people from the small Indian community went to prison and 60,000 went on strike, the largest strike in South Africa at that time. When we look at women from other oppressed groups we see a remarkable resilience as well. Meer points out that women in general played an important role in the struggle:

Women have always played a very important role. They have very often been ahead of the men. For instance, during the whole anti-pass struggle, it was the women who rose in spontaneous revolt in 1953. The women were very very militant, particularly in the rural areas. The men joined in the anti-pass campaign only in 1960, almost a decade after the women had taken it up very for cibly. (In Russell 1988:72)

As pointed out already, what Satyagraha was able to achieve for women was their greater participation in political life, and through this, more awareness of the plight of women. This can be seen in the public political role of many South African Indian women who came under the influence of Gandhi. Gandhi first appreciated the role of women when they were enlisted to swell the ranks of a massive protest organised in 1913 against the Black Act which declared Hindu, Muslim and Parsee marriages invalid. The role of women in struggles for national liberation in India was also significant, and Kishwar stresses that it is necessary to remember Gandhi's role in "bringing a large number of women into the mainstream of the national movement and of politics, and the quality of women's participation under the leadership of Gandhi" (Kishwar 1985:1691). Kishwar also points out that Gandhi used the traditional female roles (such as spinning) to invite women into the national movement, without actually challenging these traditional roles (1695).

I believe that these many discursive strands are evident in the construction of the character of Yagesvari. The point is that Yagesvari is acting out of her own convictions and compunctions. Singh presents Srenika and Yagesvari as having great love for each other, but they are also passionate about truth, justice and fair play. Certainly Yagesvari's life would have little meaning outside the pursuit of these values: "She looked at Srenika. For him, for his love, for their marriage and for their child her strength was boundless" (Singh 1960:184). We find that the character of Yagesvari generally reflects both delicacy and strength. When Krishandutt first saw her as a possible "match" for Srenika, "he looked pleased that Srenika should have been drawn towards this delicate flower, nurtured in the grace and affection of this lovely home" (49). Yet, on her return 'illegally' to South Africa she becomes defiant against the unjust laws that are keeping her away from Srenika.

How then do we respond to the ending of the novel? When Yagesvari returns to South Africa she is duly arrested in Durban for unlawful re-entry and put in gaol, where she shares a cell with five other women and her daughter Malini. In desperation, she finds the

unjust forces of the country overwhelming her: "I cannot live. I must not live. I am tired of trying. It is all hopeless. I cannot bear it" (190). She feels pushed to the very edge while in prison, and attempts to commit suicide in a moment of desperation: "Her endurance had come to an end. Her patience faded" (190). Mingled with a tragic, individualist heroism at the end is a sense of fatalism, as Yagesvari, plagued by a "devouring fever", loses her earlier resolve to fight the evils of apartheid:

Life in its brief space of time unfolds many fashions of existence. All our trials, experiences, and people are puppets in a drama. The Unknown Hand pulls the strings in the drama - the illusion to which our mind and our emotions play. (200)

Yet, Singh counterposes this very view of life with its opposite: that human agency is imperative for change, and Satyagraha is an active, not passive, force in this quest for change. The note of despair in Yagesvari's words is transcended by intimations that truth will triumph over evil in the end. Certainly the story of the Independence struggle in India is not all triumphalist. And Gandhi did say, after all, that his life story was the story of his "experiments with truth" (Gandhi 1927).

In her chapter, "Endings and new beginnings - South African fiction in transition", Boehmer (1998b:43-56) points out that "zero endings", "suspended endings", a "tailing off", and "indeterminacy" are characteristics of fiction produced in the 80's. Boehmer states that "[o]ne gets the sense that the writer's craft is shaped by circumstance, it does not actively *shape*" (51). We see Singh's work, published in the 60's, already reflecting in its creation a "parched place, a society of dead ends...blockages of every kind, spiritual and political" (52). The ending in this novel shows the difficulty of waging a lone battle against the monolithic state and, more important, the limits of, if not ambivalence towards, the philosophy of Satyagraha itself.

The individual actions of Yagesvari gradually dissipate and do not change the system. This is in contrast, arguably, to Raja Rao's novel, *Kanthapura* (1938), where we see the collective action of the women of the village of Kanthapura in India and their response with long-suffering Passive Resistance to imperial police brutality. In the real-life struggles of South African women such as Phyllis Naidoo, Ellen Kuzwayo, Emma Mashinini, Fatima Meer, Ela Gandhi, for example, a more militant, collective stance in fighting the evils of the apartheid system was taken, thereby contributing to the emergence of the mass democratic movement of the 70's and 80's. These women were imprisoned and subjected to banning orders and house arrest. Black writing after the Soweto riots was mainly to focus on the "collective predicament" (Mzamane 1991b:192) of the oppressed, rather than the construction of unified selves in the western mould. As Mzamane points out, "The epistemology of the individual gives way to the political ethics of the greatest good for the vast majority..." (192). The policy of apartheid was to reduce black women (and men) to a status of "nobody". The reduction of a "person" to a "nobody", to the position of "other",

was the inexorable plot of racism (Suarez 1991:294), but resistance gave them a sense of self.

The search and struggle for 'an authentic female self' then, the theme of subsequent novels by black women writers and of feminist critics is, arguably, adumbrated in Singh's novel. Singh does not overtly explore the gender politics of Satyagraha, which is used mainly as a liberation strategy against the British, but she does implicitly question the construction of the 'prototype' *satyagrahi* or liberator as male. Singh also questions idealist representations of Indian women. Ironically, Krishandutt, when he first encounters Yagesvari, thinks of her as the symbol of womanhood, which, "like the Mother of Earth and Creation protects and procreates, whatever the philosophy, the strife, the happiness. She was pure. She was eternal" (Singh 1960:52). He does not imagine that Yagesvari will make political decisions to fight an unjust system in the very name of truth. Even though Yagesvari falters in the attempt, she initiates some active response to the unjust laws in the country of her adoption. Such "small acts of subversion" are necessary ethical and political strategies as one tries in various ways to realise a better world, as David Attwell argues in another context (see Attwell 1993b:112-113).

Between two worlds

As part of delineating and problematising political identities, Singh explores questions of identity in spatial terms, both between and within the worlds of India and South Africa. Generally, writing between two worlds is a typical feature of diaspora literature, with writers setting their novels between the 'home country' and the adopted country. This self-conscious literary cartography is a feature of post-colonial writing. There are numerous examples of this in Indian diasporic writing - Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* are but two well-known examples - with writers exploring the dilemmas and complexities of a post-colonial consciousness. Peter Nazareth, the East African writer of Indian origin, for instance, divides the interest in his writing between his Goan experience and the overall political situation in Uganda, whereas Amit Chaudhuri sets the action of his short novel *Afternoon Raag*, in England and in India.

As far as I am aware, *Behold the Earth Mourns* is one of the first examples of writing in South African literature that straddles India and South Africa, depicting a dual Indian-South African world and the intersections between the two (Imraan Coovadia's novel, *The Wedding*, published in 2002, is a recent example). The action of the entire narrative moves between the two countries, which are compared and contrasted in various ways. Singh portrays an intricate and complex relationship between the two countries, showing links as well as differences, and the great diversity within each.

Singh suggests that there are primordial links between India and South Africa. Apart

from specific connections between the two countries through the history of indentured and Passenger migration, natural links are evoked: the continents were geologically united in pre-historic times. There are evocative and lyrical descriptions of the landscapes of India and South Africa, with their permanence and timelessness being underlined as a transitory human drama is enacted. Singh weaves part of the narrative around the South African landscape, recalling Paton's style in *Cry, the Beloved Country* and the tradition begun by Olive Schreiner. She is unique among the Indian women writers in developing literary descriptions of the South African landscape - a typical feature of "white writing". The many descriptive passages of both Africa and India give the novel the texture of romance from an earlier period of writing in South Africa. Singh's description of the Valley of a Thousand Hills in Natal is balanced by that of the Malabar Hills rising from the west coast of India. When Yagesvari is in India, from the terrace of her home she can follow the expansive coast-line westwards towards the Arabian Sea, the sea that joins with the Indian Ocean and Africa. In her delicate descriptions and weaving of motifs, Singh depicts a sense of continuity between nature and history, time and space, topography and identity. Spiritual links are forged with the landscapes, and identity is shaped by the earth and sky and, ultimately, the cosmos. This is in keeping with Singh's grander theme of the universality of human existence and identity. Yet she is careful not to represent the 'Orient' as an unchanging essence, but shows it as various and changing.

The physical similarities between India and South Africa are all the more stark because of the political differences that separate the two countries. There is a chasm between the law of nature and the laws of "man" (93), which militate against unity, both at a local and at a global level. In South Africa structured socio-spatial relationships are distinguishing features of colonisation and of apartheid (see Maharaj 1995:33). Boundaries are set up between peoples and countries, and also within the country, with discriminatory "group areas", immigration and nationality laws all affecting individuals on a daily basis. Srenika captures this, when he asks in desperation: "Had it not struck you before how the whole human race is patterned on an intricate system of classification on paper" (Singh 1960:107). The need for territorial separation makes some insiders and others outsiders, robbing all of integrity and wholeness in the process:

And he thought how a piece of paper gives the impression of one devoid of senses, minus a soul... then was man so wrapt in the physical, that his power, his identification, his labelling has got to be on a plane without feelings, without sensations. He is conditioned from birth to death, because he has removed himself from the simplicity of life. Even speaking to her, all the things he said to her did not make sense to her...(108)

This general unity as well as division between the two countries is expressed at a personal level when the marriage between Yagesvari and Srenika is contemplated, and later contracted. The Jivan-Sinha family in India are endeared to their South African counterparts; it is about the tyrannical laws of the country, however, that they have grave misgivings. They

are not able to accept that they are to send their daughter to a country politically so different from India. In reflecting on the home that his daughter will adopt, Naresh Jivan-Sinha, finds "it most painful to send her to any place where her dignity as a human being, where her nobility as a person would be ignored or wounded" (53).

It is for this reason that there is a struggle for unity over and above the constrictions of state policy. Srenika and Yagesvari constantly assert the vital connection between South Africa and India as symbolised by their marriage. This is why their marriage imbues them both with an expansiveness that reflected "the oneness of love and the infinity of the universe"(199). At the marriage ceremony, where Srenika and Yagesvari "become one", Naresh Jivan-Sinha draws together the different aspects of their lives in a larger elemental context: "With the sky above sheltering me, Mother Earth protecting me and in the name of all the gods and goddesses, I solemnly promise to give my daughter, Yagesvari, in marriage to Srenika" (82).

When Yagesvari arrives in South Africa her misgivings about the country are confirmed: she finds life in South Africa suffocating. At a familial level Yagesvari is denied her personhood by a mother-in-law figure in Santosh, Krishandutt's wife, who sees herself as the sole authority in the domestic space. At a wider social level Yagesvari does not feel a whole person in being denied her full status as a citizen of South Africa. She expresses her intense feelings of rejection: "You cannot know how intensely I sense this. I move around in an unreality - an existence of day to day - a feeling of not being wanted, not being accepted. Since my arrival my life has been untenable and difficult" (144). Singh develops a view of the world where "narrow domestic walls", to use Tagore's famous phrase, should be transcended; she contrasts the narrowness and xenophobia of South Africa with a more universal, global sense of community.

In contrast to South Africa, India has become a great melting pot of peoples; it has assimilated all the influences from its varied history:

Yet silently it had watched the adventurers of the ages - the Aryans, Persians, Portuguese, Mogul and British. Each had been quickly absorbed into the great plains of the Ganges, out of which was created a philosophy and religion that sought to find through struggle and penance, peace, the peace of emotion, the peace of the physical and the peace of the spirit...(39)

Indian identity is linked to an eclectic past, to the history of Aryans, Persians, Portuguese, Moguls, and British. This is reflected in the architectural pattern of Yagesvari's home in India which reflects this cultural mix that epitomises India: "It was not strange that the architectural pattern of her home combined the design and atmosphere of the late Mogul period, the impress of the British and the contemporary influence which flows so rapidly into the work, thought and activity of modern India, without disharmony" (39). If India can absorb its differences in the quest for peaceful living, why then cannot South Africa? Singh writes of a similar theme in her collection *Summer Moonbeams on the Lake* (1970), where

one of the adults is explaining to her child the history of India: "...India herself is a complex mixture of the human race... with many types of peoples - Negritas, Australoids, Mongolians, Dravidians, Indo-Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British" (Singh 1970:97). Jawaharlal Nehru stated that India was "like some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously" (in Naravane 1996:74). Bombay, in particular, seems to typify this eclecticism: the city, Singh suggests, has been the great "gateway" for the passage of peoples through the ages, and yet has a very modern, cosmopolitan character.

In presenting India generally as a place of openness and oneness, Singh does not suggest that Indian identity is one-dimensional and uniform, but problematises it. Apart from drawing many connections between the two worlds of India and South Africa and the divisions that separate them, Singh also draws attention to the great diversity and divisions that are contained in each country. 'India' is represented in the novel through differences of religion, caste, customs, region and geography. The politics of difference is significant at a personal and interpersonal level, as we see complex contradictions among the various characters regarding key elements of identity.

First, we note class, caste and race differences between different groups and individuals. Yagesvari's grandfather, an eminent industrialist blessed with a large fortune, had joined the ranks of the satyagrahi led by Mahatma Gandhi. When he joins the Movement the family live a more simple life-style, baring their "home to utter austerity" (Singh 1960:44). However, after the heyday of the Movement they revert to their former life style. Their social network comprises family and friends of similar standing; they have domestic employees such as a nanny (Vasantha) and chauffeur/gardener (Pasni), reflecting their middle-class station in life. The friends of the Jivan-Sinha's are of the same class, and none are from among their workers or employees.

The Jivan-Sinha family in India are conscious of caste, in spite of the fact that they object to the discrimination caused by apartheid. Srenika, in particular, sees the double standards among Indians who accept the caste system yet object to apartheid in South Africa. Gandhi himself was unequivocal in his condemnation of the caste system. Fatima Meer, in *Apprenticeship of a Mahatma*, notes that he even forced his wife to accept his beliefs in this respect: "He repudiated the caste-bound life of a Vaishnava and replaced it with a strange intermingling in which 'god-decreed' barriers fell away, forcing her to associate with people who understood neither her ritual nor her language and were not of her caste" (Meer, Fatima 1970:47).

When Srenika sees a *sudra* at Adjodyha with clothes that marks his station he observes: "Why has a young creature - this beautiful child with almost a godlike beauty - to wear the label of his birth? It will mark and determine every possible thing he wishes to do?"

(Singh 1960:101). The irony is that Yagesvari also accepts the caste system and defends it as a rational and necessary system of differentiation. When Srenika questions Yagesvari about the caste system, and whether the lower caste do not also have ambitions, Yagesvari is evasive, and tries feebly to justify the perpetuation of the system:

They do, but many of them dare wish to aspire towards such ambitions. I do not think they have it in them. I don't know if they have time. Oh, I don't know...all these rules rose out of sensible reasons. Gradually these people became classified into caste. The reason may have been exploited and some of them made senseless. (101-102)

It is only when she is confronted with the race laws of South Africa that she realises her own prejudice against low-caste Indians ("Now I know that it is also wrong that Prabhu should wear his dhoti short" (130). We also see class differences and differences in sensibility between Yagesvari and the women inmates when she is later incarcerated at the end of the novel. Srenika, however, does make the important point that such prejudice is out of keeping with the principles of satyagraha (102).

The divide between the rich and the poor in India is also stark. This is evident during the visit of Srenika and Yagesvari to Srenika's relatives in Uttar Pradesh. On a train journey to Srenika's ancestral home, Srenika and Yagesvari become conscious of toiling peasants, living in shacks. This is in sharp contrast to the Nirvani home, which is styled as an English manor of the early Victorian period, and their gracious living complete with silverware, fine bone china and maltese poodle. On the same trip, they make their way to Adjodyha, and they are faced with another anomaly. Conscious that this is the hallowed religious and mythological land of Adjodya, Srenika pays homage at the shrine of Rama and seeks blessings of both Rama and Sita for their marriage. There is a moment when he feels a bond with the great epics that have fashioned him. But, at the same time, he is forced to notice the low-caste *sudra*, who are beggars, even at this symbolic place where freedom and equality for all was fought for by the great Lord Rama:

Beggars in tatters, crippled with crutches, without, the blind with eyes and others without lined the entrance in an unavoidable seemingness. They had to be seen. They forced their vision. No matter how much they wished to reject them the mud coloured tatters, dark brown, grey black persisted. Srenika emptied his pockets. Yagesvari gave everything she had, but it was unending. (103)

Predictably, Krishandutt goes along with the tenets of the caste system. When he suggests that Srenika meet a family (Amrit's) in India, because they are the same caste (*Kshatriya*), Srenika retorts: "Do you still want to consider caste? Do you still believe in its abominable atrocity? I cannot. I have renounced that background almost from my cradle..."(34) - to which Krishandutt replies: "Oh yes, but when it comes to marriage, and the making of a new family, the right two people have to come together. This is our tradition, our culture. We cannot rebuke it" (34). Gandhi had strongly criticised the prejudice against the Untouchables; it was also deeply embarrassing to Indians at the time of national independence

in India, when the British were taken to task for their denial of democratic rights to the peoples on the sub-continent.

Secondly, differences are also expressed in terms of location. The inhabitants of Bombay, such as the Jivan-Sinhas, claim a more cosmopolitan lifestyle than those of other parts of India. Yagesvari observes that this is so, for example, in their tastes in cuisine. Benares, on the other hand, being a 'holy city', a place of pilgrimage, has a totally different character from that of Bombay, and is more inclined to preserve its age-old character. As they stand on the embankment of the Ganges, which divides the holy city, they behold both the rich past heritage of Benares as well as the present dire poverty:

They went into a carriage towards the embankment of the Ganges, which divided the holy city. The mother of all rivers, the Ganges flowed smoothly, quietly like a great ocean in some places. Ancient palaces, the temples of the maharajah's that make men's fate, that broke them, that changed men's lives, who passed into immortality perhaps. But they remained in silence, speechless except to embrace and exchange their messages with the moving waters, the gentle breezes that come and go, and round and round from end to end, form time to all time. The waters washed the feet of the magnificent city, and along the steps of the ghats the impoverished beggars - how strong their spirit to live through this unholy impoverishment. (171)

But, interestingly enough, it is at this place that Naresh Jivan-Sinha suddenly and out of context, says, "Sangamitra, Shaharan is right" (171). It is clear that he comes to the realisation, after prolonged reflection, triggered by the sights of the "impoverished beggars", that what his own workers are saying is correct. Singh is suggesting here, as pointed out earlier, that there are contradictory discourses around the practice of Satyagraha, and that there are dilemmas and moral choices that those who profess Satyagraha must confront. The workers seem isolated from the political rhetoric of Satyagraha, but actually become the vanguard of revolutionary transformation through organised labour. There is no simplistic binary division between oppressor and oppressed, but shades of difference and division within the oppressed group itself.

Thirdly, on the South African side, diversity is expressed mainly in terms of racial difference. The differences in caste in India are counterbalanced by racial divisions in South Africa, with attempts by Srenika and Serete in particular to strive for the racial integration of all South Africans. Indian, African, Coloured, and White (English) friends form a social network, clearly in defiance of the apartheid government's attempts to keep the races apart. There is an expressed need for interaction among the different race groups, and this is demonstrated, for example, when they are all huddled together in Srenika's car on a trip to The Valley of a Thousand Hills.

Differences in race and class intersect in South Africa, and these intersections are expressed in life-styles and standards of living. Srenika and his family are used to a middle-class style of living largely through their success in business. Krishandutt sees this as something they have earned, while Srenika feels that they have an obligation to share out

of their bounty. Krishandutt feels that Indians must not be judged for their material wealth:

If my birth has placed me in this house and business with plenty above other men, I want not to be judged, to be treated by all these paraphernalia. We have a personality half God, half Devil. It's how to strike a balance between the two that matters. (67)

In spite of good intentions to erase racial differences they persist in unsuspecting days. For instance, stereotyping is not beyond even the well-meaning Srenika. When he tries to describe the life of 'Africa' to his curious listeners in India, he unwittingly chooses to refer to stereotypes such as the beadwork of the Africans: "The beads are used as letters or messages or stories. The women thread them in colours and designs to tell of love, of disappointment, of hunting and weddings and other sad things that happen to them. They are all sent to their men in the city or in the next village" (78). Srenika panders to the images of 'Africa' that the distant observer is likely to have and this is different from his preoccupations when he is in South Africa. While this might be well-meaning, it is not the kind of conversation that Srenika and Serete have between themselves; in South Africa they speak of their common and shared response to apartheid, and to the poverty that Africans have to endure. Of course, stereotypes of Indians are shared by others as well. Although Elizabeth Brendon is a broad-minded and liberal white friend she is still dogged by prejudice when she asks Yagesvari: "Was your marriage arranged" (115)?

In South Africa the Indians themselves follow certain stereotypes, presumably to ensure an 'Indian' identity. Almon dances the *bharatya natayam*, which is usually seen outside India as the definitive Indian dance; yet in India itself a wider variety is evident, and other dances such as the *karthak* are noted. It is also interesting that Almon and her family take Yagesvari to watch Zulu dances in Durban, but more as spectacle, with Yagesvari growing afraid as the dance sequences become more frenzied.

It is illuminating to amplify the debate here on racial politics, a little tangentially perhaps, by interrogating the silences and omissions of the novel, especially in respect of the relationships between Africans and Indians. The over-riding challenge in South Africa for the better part of this century was to free the black majority from white minority rule. While Singh is ultimately concerned with a wider struggle for full liberation from all forms of oppression, political and economic, racist and sexist, the novel's initial, if not controlling narrative thread - 'Indian brides for Indian men' - might be seen to be parochial, if not ethnocentric, in the face of large-scale black oppression and dispossession. In the novel Singh does portray relationships across the colour line, but there are no love or marriage relationships. It is worth drawing attention to the fact that there has been no intermarriage to any significant degree between Africans and Indians in South Africa; this was similar to relations between indentured Indians and Afro-Guyanese in Guyana, for example (see Bisnauth 2000:211-223), where caste and race prejudice, as well as the colonial plantation

economy, all combined to keep the two groups apart.

Arlene Elder presents an interesting comparative analysis of a few Indian writers in Africa who have pointed to the need for Asians to identify fully with African challenges. This is illustrated by Jagjit Singh, a writer in Uganda, in one of whose plays a character sums up the general attitude to Asians: "One foot in Britain, the other foot in India and only their hands in Africa playing like prostitutes with our commerce and trade (in Elder 1992:120). In Shiva Naipaul's *North of South - An African Journey* (1978), we find the same criticism of Asians, whom Naipaul saw as exploiting Africa. Bahadur Tejani's novel, *Day after Tomorrow*, written in 1971, also offers interesting comparisons with *Behold the Earth Mourns*. Tejani's novel is set in Uganda, after independence, around 1964, and looks at the life of the Asian community. The community is caught between imperialist exploitation and power, the needs of an oppressed African majority, and its own anxieties and prejudices over identity and difference.

One of the characters in Tejani's story, Samsher, is a rebel from his insular Asian society, and in some ways may be seen as the "prototype of a new African of universal sensibilities, incorporating the best in both Indian and African cultures" (Elder 1992:127). Samsher sees intermarriage between Africans and Asians as the way of abandoning the old divisions and creating a new race. What are the possibilities, one might ask hypothetically, for Malini, daughter of Srenika and Yagesvari (in *Behold the Earth Mourns*), a child of two worlds, to find her destiny in Africa, and in a liberated South Africa of the 90's?

Mthuli Shezi, a South African Black Consciousness writer in the early seventies, was to reflect on some of these questions in his play, *Shanti*, which enjoyed much popularity in the townships of Lenasia and Soweto. The play depicts a love relationship between an African man and an Indian woman, and its theme of inter-group harmony and unity among blacks showed a conscious effort to speak directly to issues of identity and difference, at a time when it was not common to do so. As Mzamane writes:

Shanti...expresses solidarity between men and women, and among oppressed groups, irrespective of their racial categorisation by the apartheid state, whose purpose was divide and rule. The play extended the definition of Pan-Africanism, in line with Black Consciousness ideology, to include blacks of mixed and Asian ancestry, all of whom were victims of the same oppressive system. (Mzamane 1991b:186)

South African Indian writers were to pursue this theme as well. Kriben Pillay, in his play *Waiting for Muruga*, explores the relationship between an African and Indian; Dinesh Narandas wrote and produced *Inmates* (1990), in which he probes relations between a middle class Indian and a working class African, in the disturbing context of a psychiatric hospital. In the play *Hamba Kahle Moodley*, produced in 1991, Kessie Govender, also explores Indian-African relations, and he includes trenchant depictions of inter-racial relationships in *Working Class Hero* (1979) as does Ronnie Govender in his play *1949* (1996) (see Kruger 1999:148). Suria Govender, through fusion of Indian and African dance forms

has developed this theme creatively through another medium. Sam in her short story cycle, *Jesus is Indian and other Stories*, has depicted inter-racial relationships between women and men in various ways, as the chapter on her will indicate.

Fourthly, language is an important marker of identity and difference in the novel, and is a means of distinguishing class, caste or race. Singh presents the domestic employees in a stereotypical way, as the ones unable to speak English properly. Anna, a Zulu woman who works for the Nirvani family in South Africa and Vasantha, the domestic employee in Yagesvari's home in India both speak in 'broken English', and are similar in this respect to the Indian characters in *Ratoons* by Daphne Rook. When Yagesvari decides to do a portrait of Anna, she prompts Anna to tell her her life story, which Anna does, these two women having become quite attached to each other:

I is sick of babies. Baby vomit, and become like dry old man. After that all my baby die in stomach. My man take me to hospital and the doctor say I don't eat the good food. That is why I get sick. On the farm there is only mealies when the rains come. We have some goats. We had few cows. There is little food and no money to buy bread. My man send me one pound a month. The stream is far away from our huts. We walk for a long time to get water. In winter there is little water. It is dark with mud and evil. We live on the grain kept from the summer. (Singh 1960:145)

The language of Coloured children, who are presented as indigent, is also a 'broken English'.

It is ironical that language in the novel is used to differentiate, when it is in language that Singh gestures towards a vision of a future free of strife, ethnic divisions, and racial hatred. The several pieces of poetry in the novel may be viewed in this context. These poems appear at strategic moments as a way of capturing the mood or the essence of the drama that is unfolding. They are generally uttered by characters close to the emotion and action at a given moment, but it is interesting that they are not placed in the mouths of the lower-caste or lower-class characters. In one of the many poetic pieces, Singh writes about them, rather than giving them 'voice':

*Women clutch their babies, and thin dogs bark.
They bend their heads low lest their sad eyes behold dark
Hovering clouds that shadow the southern sun
Not knowing when they must leave the home
That their forefathers built with sweat and toil.
Life hath no meaning in this withering soil.
Baffled in silence, life's betwixt the living and the dead. (12)*

And it is Serete who encapsulates the themes and mood of the novel in the following poem, which contains the title of the book:

*"I dreamt of the valley of a thousand hills
Whose vales had fortune of beauty and bounty.
Dew trickled on the slope in the morning light
While sorrow and passion were put to flight.
But the golden dawn glimmered deception.
Its light coloured the peaks in perception of arrogant
pride and might.*

*The galloping steed restlessly shuffled bruised earth
 And searchingly called for his fugitive love.
 His master, the rider, had brought forth his bride
 And for a while great jubilation, feasting such as ne'er had been tried.
 Then this bride, no graceless heathen, would not heed
 That so much land so few did need.
 So little pastures for so many
 Hath made this earth dry, hungry and wanting,
 And whining torturing winds were panting
 As day paled in farewell before the nights dark.
 Children were awed by the rumble of thunder,
 For rain, wind and storm had pledged to plunder.
 The rider stood on the crest of the hill,
 In the white morning light children wept for the bride.
 A thousand tears shed filled the stream murmuring
 'The winds sing thy name and behold the earth mourns'." (74-75)*

Perhaps Singh shows, in the way she uses language, another aspect of what Zucker refers to as the "problematics of home" (see Zucker 1997:125). Singh is not "at home" in language, and creates class, gender and race stereotypes. She is not able to break free from imagined models of writing, and writes in a stilted and conventional style.

Finally, an important determinant of identity in the novel is related to feelings of nationalism or national consciousness in the context of the politics of the Indian diaspora. At a mundane level, some Indians in South Africa see themselves as being different from those in India. Yagesvari's Indian identity comes under "inspection" (Singh 1960:115) when she arrives as a new bride in South Africa. She is seen as an oddity and scrutinised by friends and family at Santosh's home. She feels that she is not suitably dressed in comparison with those who are heavily decked out in their finery. She is compared with local Indian women, who seem to have moved away from their 'authentic' Indian identity. The following conversation between Almon and Yagesvari reveals nuanced and subtle prejudices at different levels:

"Some of our young women are very modern. I mean they are very westernised. You know, Yagesvari - short hair, long cigarette holders and long 'Pimm' cocktails. Their accents are of so many kinds. I love listening to you. You sound like natural melody that flows from deep inside you."

"Nonsense. I think it is a terrible sing-song, with bad pronunciation. Not a bit westernised, but I'll learn."

"No Yagesvari, don't change. It's what you say, the beauty of your thoughts in words that counts."

"Oh, You mean I am so Indian." (123)

A distinction between 'us' and 'them' is evident here, as Yagesvari is only too aware. There is direct prejudice expressed towards India, as we also notice in the encounter between Ravina and Yagasvari, although Ravina's views contain personal jealousy. When Yagasvari says she does not look at the time, Ravina replies caustically: "That is why India took so long to change..." (135). However, Yagesvari settles the dispute when she asserts her

diasporic hybridity: "You forget you are all Indian, and I am both, a South African by marriage and an Indian by birth" (136). She asserts that while identity may be a question of heritage, it is also one of identification, as indeed she shows when she returns to South Africa and challenges its laws.

In the novel we notice that identification with South Africa is felt keenly by Indian characters here in spite of their being disowned in the land of their birth. National consciousness for someone like Srenika is closely linked to political identity. Singh is not suggesting some essentialist, ethnocentric notion of nation but one that must be created by sacrifice and struggle for all citizens. Yagesvari's father, for example, seems to assume that national identity might not necessarily be important. He invites Srenika to make India his new home: "What does it matter where he lives, or stays as long as he has near him the people dearest to him. Srenika has a great future before him if only he would bend. If only he would accept this. There is no point in being obstinate" (175). Yagesvari sees this as contradicting everything that Srenika is, his very identity as a person, and his identification with an imagined nation: "Father, Srenika does not belong here. This is part of your country. You are its life. He has his own life, his own country and I am his wife" (174). Yagesvari writes to Srenika about her father's offer, but knows that Srenika's commitment is to his place of birth: "I did feel that his thoughtfulness would clash with your ideals and that no matter how generous and attractive the gesture, your life was patterned in the country of your birth. I have made it quite clear that you would find it unacceptable" (177).

Yagesvari affirms that Srenika's political mission is tied up with living in South Africa: "He and many like him have started something in a small river that must flood in the heavy rains, and when it becomes a tempestuous torrent, it will grow rapidly in a swift current seawards" (175). Srenika's commitment is to the country's political struggle rather than a matter of nationalistic fervour or some vacuous patriotism, and is in the same vein as that of Bram Fischer. Clingman writes of Fischer's assertion that he would not leave South Africa and go into exile, and reflects on the importance of Fischer's decision:

'I have no intention of avoiding a political prosecution. I fully believe that I can establish my innocence. I am an Afrikaner, my home is South Africa. I will not leave South Africa because my political beliefs conflict with those of the government ruling the country.' It was a statement that went to the core of Bram's convictions, presaging many of his actions in the months to come: South Africa was his place, where he was rooted, where both his obligations and his destiny lay. While the government had done its best to narrow and corrupt an Afrikaner identity, it was his responsibility to remain true to an alternative and more redemptive definition. To that extent, for Bram, wider affiliations were ultimately connected with a personal sense of belonging, broader liberties with the assiduous discipline of an inner liberation. (Clingman 1998:338)

The development of national consciousness in the decades around the publication of *Behold the Earth Mourns* was an important defining characteristic of anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa alike, although it was to gradually slide into an expression of ethnic

politics, as Partha Chatterjee points out (Chatterjee 1996:214). Chatterjee concludes that it is not surprising that the "recent genealogy" of nationalism indicates that it is "viewed as a dark, elemental, unpredictable force of primordial nature threatening the orderly calm of civilised life" (215). It is understandable that, ultimately, Singh's vision should be for a world beyond narrow and totalising nationalisms.

While identity is seen in the novel in spatial, temporal, ideological and national terms, Singh consistently invokes a Utopian vision. Although the characters in the novel are largely confined to identities determined by nationalistic considerations, there is a striving for identity beyond national boundaries. When Sangamitra, Yagesvari's mother, receives the news of the ban on Indian brides in South Africa and that Yagesvari will be without citizenship through her marriage to Srenika, she asserts:

Naresh, there is a greater citizenship than the one that man creates. It is a deep communication of the self in God. If we understand this then our relationship to one another, to the sentiments of country, to people is without any barrier. It does not matter if one is incarnated in the human form and relates with himself and his fellow beings with harmony and godliness. (Singh 1960:90)

It is when Yagesvari is on the high seas, between India and South Africa, that identity is considered in terms beyond race and nationality. With national, cultural, racial, class and caste identities all vying with one another, Yagesvari longs for a sense of belonging to the whole world and the universe, as she looks at the sea and sky: "There was no room for pettiness in the midst of bounteous nature. The changeable sea, the immense covering sky made mere mortals measurable on a measureless universe" (180). This is a central concern of Singh's in the novel, as she depicts the protagonists both ensnared in the politics of ethnocentricity and racial and religious prejudice, and constantly rising above it:

We are enchained to wrong values. The architecture of our lives is overwhelmed with too many designs. It has become complicated. Instead of feeling a sense of beauty it expresses ugliness. It has overpowering, stifling sensations from which I desire to be free. We are never content with our field of horizon no matter how vast it is. Our spirit always cries to move forwards to search and scan the universe. (197)

The differences, the many strands of identity and difference, are woven in the "intricate tapestry" that, Singh asserts, makes up our existence; and life is seen as a striving to move beyond it. The marriage of Srenika and Yagesvari symbolises the compelling need to come together into a universal human family and build a transnational culture. When Srenika gives Yagesvari a gift-chain he says: "These inter-linking chains, the thick centre ones are our lives joined together, the smaller is the chain of human interdependence without which there is no survival" (194-195). In the incessant search for a physical and material home, the *heimlich*, and confronted with numerous obstacles, Srenika concludes in philosophic desperation: "Let the cosmic heavens be our home" (198). Yagesvari may have fleeting doubts about the future, but she is confident that truth (the truth of love) will ultimately triumph: "She could not hold the fluid moment of life, of time, of living. But still the bright

night filled their hearts and spirit in the oneness of love and the infinity of the universe" (199).

Singh, writing in the 50's and 60's, could not foresee the extent to which two opposing trends would emerge in the decades to follow, when capitalism would culminate in both its development of the nation-state and national cultures and, at the same time, its transnational imperatives, encouraging a flow across national frontiers (see Hall 1993:353). Globalisation, with its cosmopolitan consciousness, is quite different from the cosmic unity envisioned by Singh. Singh was not to know that, after a long century of liberation struggles, of which the Passive Resistance Movements were an integral part, South Africa, being a late comer to the notion of nation, would be poised, as Attwell points out, in the ambivalent and disjunctive space between nation-building and persistent tribal (be)longing (see Attwell 1993b:108). Nor did Gandhi himself foresee this, for that matter. Apart from the protracted and continuing political conflict between India and Pakistan, his autarchic notion of the self-sufficient nation or village (see Ghosh-Schellhorn 1999) has been superseded by the reality of the present-day global village.

Singh is also, arguably, anticipating the kind of debates that Said would later raise in *Culture and Imperialism*, where he stresses the need to move away from a "separatist nationalism...toward a more integrative view of human community and human liberation" (Said 1994:7). Radhakrishnan has observed that Said's quest, a grandly humanistic one, is "to enable a universalist imagination [to] travel across the asymmetry of divided histories and spaces" (Radhakrishnan 1994:16). In this I believe Singh's objective is similar to Said's; but while Said puts his weight strongly behind secularism, and in a Western epistemological trajectory, albeit a critical, broad and all-encompassing one, Singh charts a unique course, very much like Gandhi himself, through an eclectic faith drawn from different traditions and world views. Radhakrishnan criticises Said, stating that Said "seems to posit that the secular imagination is the only way perhaps to do and live history, and in doing so, he overlooks the epistemological agenda of secularism: an agenda that has unfailingly trivialised native, indigenous, and traditional ways of doing and living knowledge" (19). Unlike Said, Singh moves to a non-sectarianism, ironically, through a religious route. This is in keeping with Gandhi's own beliefs and practices, where he worked tirelessly against the technicism of modern science and the secular world for a transcendent moral universe.

Conclusion

In his critical writing, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, Njabulo Ndebele has discerned two traditions in the writings of black South African authors. There was the "spectacular tradition" of protest literature which emerged in the late 1950's up to the 1980's, and the other, the tradition which sought to depict "the ordinary", affirming in the process the sub-

jectivity of individuals in the face of anonymity created by apartheid. Singh's novel may be seen as falling between these two traditions, and incorporating elements of both "spectacle" and "the ordinary". While it may not be seen as part of the ordinary lives of millions of blacks who lived in this country, it does highlight the concerns of a small group within a small community at a particular time in our history.

Singh's writing offers interesting possibilities for reconsideration of the politics of identity from a new angle for a readership grappling with different challenges in the late 90's from those of the 50's and 60's. Stephen Slemon suggests that "literary resistance" is not necessarily embedded in a text, as much as it is "produced and reproduced in and through communities of readers and through the mediating structures of their own culturally specific histories" (in Mongia 1996:73). Perhaps the present time is more opportune for a critical reception of Singh's novel than when it first appeared in 1960 - when works such as Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End*, and Richard Rive's *Emergency* mirrored more closely the turbulent political activism of the time (Shava 1990:38), and when "gutsy" writers like Malcolm X were preferred by the radical left to even the likes of Martin Luther King (Wilson 1991:29). 1960 - the year of the first public appearance of *Behold the Earth Mourns* - was, after all, the time of the historical and political watershed, Sharpeville. The shootings at Sharpeville and the subsequent bannings of the African National Congress and Pan African Congress confirmed, inevitably, the growing unease with the policy of Passive Resistance.

CHAPTER 6

'A WORLD OF DIFFERENCES' : ZULEIKHA M MAYAT'S *A TREASURE TROVE OF MEMORIES*

"The longing to tell one's story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release. It was the longing for release that compelled the writing but concurrently it was the joy of reunion that enabled me to see that the act of writing one's autobiography is a way to find again that aspect of self and experience that may no longer be an actual part of one's life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present." (hooks 1988)

"The world's earliest archives or libraries were the memories of women."
(Trinh T Minh'ha 1989:121)

Introduction

Zuleikha Mayat's *A Treasure Trove of Memories: A Reflection on the Experiences of the People of Potchefstroom*, published in 1990, has not enjoyed any exposure, such as a literary review or critical analysis, and its omission in discussions of South African literature is symptomatic of the general marginality of Indian women's writings in South Africa. Perhaps the book, published by Madiba Press, needs to be marketed more aggressively. In informal conversations about the book, I have found that local readers dismiss it as lacking in 'aesthetic' value. Mayat's narrative is written simply, and this has perhaps belied its real worth. As the following analysis will demonstrate, the work yields valuable insights into a range of pertinent contemporary issues nationally and globally. Similar to that of other writers in this study, Mayat's work takes us into a world of colonial and apartheid history, and does more than simply provide a political and socio-cultural backdrop. We enter into the diversity of this world from the vantage point of one of the oldest towns in the development of modern South Africa, a town that comprised several diverse communities at the turn of the century. Mayat's writing, as that of the other writers in this study, illustrates the obviously South African nature of her experience, yet in all its uniqueness and complexity.

As pointed out in the opening chapter, in the decade of the nineties there was a spate of autobiographical writings in South Africa. *Memory against Forgetting* (1999), the title (taken from Kundera) of Rusty Bernstein's autobiography, epitomises the kind of writing that has characterised South African literature in recent times, similar to Don Mattera's

Memory is the Weapon in the 80's. Indeed, this period may be described as another "threshold moment" when an "enunciative space" is being claimed, to use Whitlock's description of a nexus of factors that influenced the production of South African black women's autobiographies in the 1980's (Whitlock 2000:147). Much of Mayat's memoir is set in the period of the arrival of the Passenger Indians and their settlement in the Transvaal. Yet as 'memory work' it is more about our present time rather than the past. This is the time when recollection of the past has become necessary. Such recollections are either of atrocities and injustices (as we see in the work of the TRC), or of histories of families and communities. I believe that Mayat's text can also be read in a trans-national context, for the way it highlights typical experiences of immigrants in a post-colonial world. The experiences of Mayat's grandparents who came from India to live in Potchefstroom are an important component of the book, and illustrate a local instance of the global theme of cultural translation, seen by Homi Bhabha as an important facet of the "spatial histories of displacement" (Bhabha 1994:172).

There are two main, and interconnected, strands of memory in the writing. One is the memory of life lived in Potchefstroom and its world of the late nineteenth and early- and mid-twentieth century. The other is that of memory within memory: the remembrance, as the family settled in Potchefstroom, of life lived in India, their ancestral home, of their gradual adaptation to the land of their adoption, and of the feelings of ambivalence and acceptance that accompanied this.

Redefining identity politics

Through her memoir Mayat shows that the people of Potchefstroom experienced a rich interaction of histories and cultures. These histories and cultures were not pre-given and static, but were the product of the interweaving of many traditions, with these traditions themselves being multi-layered. At this particular historical juncture when we are valuing the diversity of South Africa's 'cultural mosaic', thinking of cultures in terms of simple, one-dimensional difference and 'pluralism', as in the apartheid or 'multi-cultural' mould, misses much of the inter-connections of histories and cultures, their multi-dimensionality and contradictions in a living context that Mayat presents. Said's views on the contingency and permeability of culture allude to such a perspective, and are relevant to a reading of the relationship between cultures in Mayat's text:

If we no longer think of the relationship between cultures as perfectly contiguous, totally synchronous, wholly correspondent, and if we think of cultures as permeable and, on the whole, defensive boundaries between polities, a more promising situation appears. Thus to see others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least. Cultures may then be represented as zones of control or abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element. (Said 1989:205-225)

In this chapter I shall consider the extent to which Mayat's text demonstrates that such a process of "permeation" was constantly at work, and in curious and unintended ways. The text suggests a complex interweaving of diverse elements, with an identity politics that goes well beyond the simplistic dichotomies of apartheid and colonialism. Albie Sachs urges us to go beyond the paradigms of opposition that emerge from apartheid. He sees the need to remove the obsession with the oppressor; he calls on oppressed groups to develop a more independent existence, and criticises the fact that we have consistently used apartheid as a reference point:

The oppressor stalks our vision. We should be speaking more about ourselves and exploring ourselves. It's another form of domination if you like, where the whites dominate the image, even if it's the image of the enemy and the focus of our artistic endeavour is trying to dispel - to reduce to size - this overwhelming presence of the oppressor... Even if the oppressor is there, physically is there, and is trying to penetrate our minds and to push us, and even to tell us how we should win our freedom... We should also not be afraid to enter into our own contradictions and difficulties, because we have sufficient confidence to do that. If we can reach down to our roots - and not invented roots, real roots - with all the tragedy of contradiction, the interest, the variety, the surprise that's involved in that, then I think that will do more to destroy the domination of the oppressor than simply putting the oppressor up as a target all the time. (In Jolly 1996:377)

Rosemary Jolly, prompted by Sachs, also challenges us to move beyond our "complicity with the colonial imagination"; she urges that, "[w]e need to forge a language beyond apartheid that refuses to hypostatize South Africa as the model in which the colonised black and the settler white eternally confront each other in the "ultimate racism" (Jolly 1996). Mayat's memoir shows a community which had understood this in its own way decades ago. Although the narrative is inevitably set in the logic of colonialism and apartheid, it shows how this logic was constantly sidestepped or transcended. Mayat claims a freedom to write of the people of Potchefstroom in all their "contradictions and difficulties".

In my reading, an important underlying question in Mayat's narrative is the definition of 'home'. How was home defined in the past, and how is it defined now? How do definitions of 'home' determine definitions of identity, and how do definitions of identity, in turn, determine or suggest definitions of home? I explore Mayat's text for the elucidation it might offer of these pertinent and perplexing questions of our time. *A Treasure Trove of Memories - A Reflection on the Experiences of the People of Potchefstroom* may be read as a text that explores various conceptions of home, of the home in India, and of those in Potchefstroom, and the way a dual, embattled, ambivalent existence between original and adopted homeland gradually gave way to acceptance, adaptation, survival and resistance on the terrain of the new home. I explore the way these two homing impulses co-existed, were in conflict, and were accommodated or negotiated.

In a similar vein - in a wider context of post-colonial and global transnational politics and also that of South African history and cultural politics - Mayat's text offers possibilities

for feminist comparative studies which, as Louise Yelin has argued, have hitherto been "stymied by the impasses of identity politics, impasses that inhibit or foreclose the possibility of writing across, beyond, or at the borders of differences of class, race, ethnicity, nationality" (Yelin 1996:193). Rather than isolating any of these categories, I consider how the text shows these differences, and others (such as religion, history and location, for example), interfacing and interacting, not in linear and one-dimensional ways but in dynamic and unpredictable ways, in the construction of female identity.

A people's history

Mayat, whose family name was Bismillah, was born in Potchefstroom in 1926. She completed her matriculation by means of correspondence studies, and took a course in journalism. She came to live in Durban when she married Dr Mohamed Goolam Mayat, who became a well-known Durban gynaecologist in the early 50's. She developed a strong interest in Oriental languages and Islamic history, and extended her knowledge of these subjects through her travels in Africa, Asia and Europe. Her book, *Quranic Lights*, emerged out of this interest, and contains pithy and popular quotations from the Qur'an. In 1956 Mayat formed the Women's Cultural Group, whose major achievement was the publication of *Indian Delights* (referred to in the Survey chapter). She also developed an interest in Indian textiles, and this resulted in her third book, *Nanima's Chest* (Grandmother's Chest), published in 1981.

Nanima's Chest is itself a treasure trove of memories. Mayat writes that "beyond the veils of childhood memories, lingers the vision of mother's chest - or *peti* as we called it" (Mayat 1981:8). Things owned and loved have a special place in Mayat's life, and are described in loving detail in *Nanima's Chest*:

Her beautiful brass bedstead, her horse-hair sofa, her almirah and sideboard with their recesses and niches filled with miniature marble and silver ornaments, her bead curtains in the doorway of her lounge that jingled a tune each time the passage door was opened, her maroon and green velvet tablecloths. (Mayat 1981:8)

Nanima's Chest contains information about Indian heirlooms from Natal homes, and is documented by the Women's Cultural Group. Mayat was concerned to encourage fellow Indian South Africans to preserve their traditional arts and crafts as a way of preserving history. Mayat has woven her own memories together with those of her contemporaries in this unique book. *Nanima's Chest* effectively depicts five hundred years of Indian textile history with illustrations of pieces from private Memon and Surtee Muslim homes in Durban.

Mayat's narrative, *A Treasure Trove of Memories - A Reflection on the Experiences of the People of Potchefstroom*, is both a personal, private story, as well as that of a family in its interaction with the "people of Potchefstroom". Feminists have pointed out that autobi-

ographies by women challenge the western, male approach to autobiography with its notions of the autonomous, individualistic self. In Mayat's writing, as in Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography *Call Me Woman*, we see the boundaries between individual, family and community as being fluid, with a significant shift from 'I' to 'we' within the context of the family and community. In turn, the 'we' is constituted variously in relation to the 'they'.

According to Judith Coullie black writers such as Ellen Kuzwayo

do not blur the boundaries of the narrating and narrated 'I' because they, as women, conform to some essential pattern of autobiographical self-exploration which emerges out of essential truths of femaleness. Nor are these autobiographical subjects depicted in the texts as selves who cannot be 'distantiated' from their families, as has sometimes been claimed by women autobiographers. Rather, these autobiographical subjects smudge the boundaries of the 'I-land' because...the argument for the importance of the women's testimonies is reinforced by the implication that their oppression is shared; or because, as in Kuzwayo's case, indigenous black cultural models construct communally defined selves...(Coullie 1996a:133)

Like Kuzwayo, although in another context, Mayat straddles the dividing line between being unique, individual and personal and being representative. Her story is not "distantiated" from that of her family but intricately bound up with theirs.

It is also important to see how Mayat's personal story intersects, like Goonam's, with the general history of the time. In telling her story Mayat is changing the official trajectory of historiography, thus providing another significant instance of 'history being told from below', giving us in this case a face of Potchefstroom that is normally not projected in the history textbooks. The historical events of this important town in Afrikaner and South African history are usually those of the major events of the settlement of the Boers and the establishment of the Boer Republic, but not of its mix of peoples on the ground. As Mayat notes in the Prologue: "It's not only the leadership, but essentially, the grassroots community who create history" (Mayat 1990:Prologue). She observes: "This is a record of the trials and travails of four generations of Indians who enjoyed the calms and weathered the storms in the process of becoming South Africans". Such writing, and re-writing, is all the more important given the attempt during the apartheid years to erase this history. Mayat points out that: "We have survived through a period, the history of which the past governors of our country did their utmost to eradicate. Entire neighbourhoods, and shopping complexes were bulldozed or taken over for the accommodation of white citizens. Every vestige of the presence of Indians, they were determined to wipe out. Large areas were ethnically cleansed".

The "recollection", as Mayat calls her writing, is presented as both a family and general community story. As Mayat notes: "Even though the recollection is centred around the life of a single family unit, essentially it represents the collective experience of South African Indians". She states that her "recollection" must be viewed as "fiction", that she has "fic-

tionalised the characters, putting into their mouths words that I had heard emerge from other mouths or words that had never been vocalised"; she also points out that the "recollection" has a fictitious narrator, and that she created the story out of "repressed memories" (Prologue).

Mayat's is clearly a selective, constructed history, as we see in the friendly arguments between her grandfather and grandmother about the veracity of the stories of the past (20-21). There are different history-making endeavours coming out of the different strands of the larger history of the Arab and Indian past. Much was handed down orally by her grandfather, who obviously enjoyed being the 'official' family raconteur ("Dada's stories were mostly from oral renditions he had heard from his elders" (22) while he savoured the betel leaf lodged at the corner of his mouth, which heightened the sensual pleasure of oral performance. Her father was later to go to the history textbooks to verify the information that was given by her grandfather. The younger members of the family were curious to know about life in India, and this curiosity was mainly satisfied by the aunts and grandmothers in the family.

Mayat's memoir is set against the background of the history of the early Passenger Indians, the second wave of Indian immigrants to South Africa. From the late 1870's the new class of Passenger Indians reached Natal under their own initiative; they were Gujarati traders, from the north eastern parts of India, commonly Muslim in their faith, who set up shops in effective competition with whites in towns in Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State (see Davenport 1977:92). Mayat's narrative covers the arrival and settlement of these immigrants in the Transvaal. The Indians who came to the Transvaal were largely Passenger Indians; Natal was the more usual destination for indentured labourers, who came mainly from the Tamil south. Apart from regional and class differences between the two categories of immigrants, there were also cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. Among the immigrants from the southern part of India were Tamil and Telegu speakers; and those who came from the Northern and Western parts spoke Bhojpuri and Gujarati respectively (see Bhana, Surendra 1997:4).

Bhana notes that there were around 15,000 Indians in the Transvaal in the closing decade of the nineteenth century, at the time of the gold rush in South Africa. Gold mining had created opportunities for trade and work in the service sector; and in the Transvaal as in Natal, the Indian traders had also dispersed to small towns in rural areas. Their presence was resented, and the Boer government sought through Law 3 of 1885 to restrict the Indians to segregated areas. In the Cape Colony, there were probably no more than 5,000 Indians in the 1890's, most of them located in Cape Town and Kimberley (4), while no Indian was permitted to reside in the Orange Free State.

Mayat shows how the story of these Indian immigrants began on the Indian sub-continent, already in the throes of a colonial onslaught. Her own forbears were re-

stricted from continuing in their thriving cotton industry by the trading policies of the British. Cotton suppliers were no longer able to cater for their usual customers in Ahmedabad and Surat. The sales of cotton were deliberately reduced in order to make the British cotton mills more prosperous. In this way the British textile industry wished to wreck the Gujerat one. Of the effect of all this Mayat writes:

...so many young men dreamt of leaving the villages... These unfair trading tactics of the British were ruining our economy. The landless peasants and the artisans were the first to indenture themselves for work in fields in foreign countries. (Mayat 1990:32-33)

It was the destruction of the textile industry, among other things that made Gandhi later, in the 1920's, develop the Charkha movement, when great bonfires of foreign cloth took place and local spinning of cotton began in earnest, with the use of the *khadi* (local cotton garments) being seen as a symbol of self-reliance (see Kishwar 1985:1695).

Mayat thus suggests that the creation of an Indian Diaspora was not accidental but due to compelling economic reasons, as Indians set sail to places that lay on the trading routes of the time - Fiji, Mauritius and South Africa - in search of their "Eldorado". The lure of travel from India to South Africa was great as the movement across the seas gathered momentum: "By the turn of the century the villages around Surat which were bound together by the Tapti River were threadbare of its young population. Every able-bodied man itched to get to South Africa, its colour policy notwithstanding" (Mayat 1990:59). There had been earlier migration as well, to East Africa for example, though in smaller contingents, when Indians travelled during the time of the 'voyages of discovery' and that of the spice trade. But historically the mid-nineteenth century migration is a most significant movement of Indian peoples across the globe, the effects of which are still being felt today.

It is interesting to see how Indians gained entry into the Transvaal, given that it was a fully independent Boer Republic at this time. Apart from coming via Natal, many entered through Mozambique, from Delagoa Bay, the present-day Maputo. A good number, coming from Surat in India, were in fact guests of Portuguese merchants. Mayat relates in graphic and evocative detail the arrival of one of the early settlers, the patriarchal Mohi-nuddeen Chacha. This arrival is very likely to have occurred around the 1890's. Her description of him gives some sense of the general circumstances under which the early settlers in the Transvaal arrived. Chacha was escorted across the country by a great and swarthy Shangaan: "The man was a giant carved out of black ebony, with gleaming pearls for teeth and a pair of white eyeballs that shone like searchlights. Clad in a lion-skin kaross, with only a stick in his hand, he was ready to escort yet another Indian across the border" (58). There was a strange silent friendship between the two as they made their perilous journey from Mozambique across the border post of Komatipoort:

In between hiding from the Portuguese and the South African guard patrolling the borders, creeping under fences and through thorn thickets, weathering torrential rains and suffering bouts of malaria, there were also the wild

animals to contend with...Those long marches through thick bush, mosquito swamps and elephant country, made Mohinuddeen Chacha wish he had never heard of the Eldorado which was his destination. The trumpeting of an elephant sent him crashing through bushes and the roar of a lion, clambering up trees. (58)

The source of this narrative is very likely the communal "treasure trove of memories", and one can imagine that the "trove" would have comprised the 'legends' that were passed on to the younger generation. That this image of Chacha remains imprinted in Mayat's mind is not surprising as this seems formulated as a 'myth of origins', a founding legend. As she notes, "Since I learnt of the story of his arrival, I could never pass him without trying to visualise that tall, robust Mohinuddeen Chacha with his arms around the neck, and his legs dangling down the huge body of the lion-skin karossed Shangaan" (61). Her description points to a natural and implicit bond between the prospective Indian settler and the local African inhabitant, and belies the fact that it was also an economic relationship.

Mayat's maternal grandfather arrived in South Africa as a teenager; he came first to Natal, gradually travelled north, to Volksrust, then to Johannesburg, working as a shop hand, and finally came to make his home in Potchefstroom. There was much appeal to the town as he viewed its prospects strategically:

It had a rich farming community, it was on the route of the transport service between the Reef towns and Kimberley, the Jewish *smouse* were all flocking to Johannesburg, and there were a few other Indian shopkeepers and hawkers there....When the rest of the world was flocking towards the Witwatersrand, my grandfather decided to quit it for more tranquil surroundings. (42)

Mayat's grandfather settled in Potchefstroom in 1885, when he joined the small group of Indian hawkers there. The town had been founded by the Voortrekkers, and was the first capital of the Transvaal. A conservative Afrikaner town in apartheid history, it was established when the Transvaal followed in the steps of the Republic of Natalia, and the Free State, by forming itself into an independent republic in the 1840's. Potchefstroom was established as a new Voortrekker republic north of the Vaal in April 1844. One of the larger towns in the Transvaal, it boasted a market and courthouse, among other buildings. Imposing in this old Afrikaner town were the traditional landmarks - the church and church-yard, the town hall, the Volksraad, and the home of the president of the then Boer Republic.

Mayat records that her grandfather began hawking in the district of Potchefstroom in 1885, and after a few years, established his own shop. There were other families from Surat, some even from the same village of Dahbel in India (sons of the Mia, Minty, Motara, Nana, Gardee, Akhalwaya, Surtee, Pandor, and Patel clans), who settled in other parts of the Transvaal. The hawking businesses of these families spread far and wide in this area, to such places as Schoemansdrift, Koedoesfontien, "Scandinavia", Ventersdorp, Klip-drift and Machavie.

When Indians established themselves as shopkeepers whites felt threatened. Mayat records that "White shopkeepers in Natal, the Free State and the Transvaal began to agitate against the Indians, alleging unfair competition" (92). At a political level lines of racial demarcation were set early. A discriminatory law, enacted in 1885 by the Volksraad of the Suid-Afrikander Republic, stipulated that "Coolies, Arabs and Malays could not be owners of fixed property in the Republic, except in such streets, wards and locations, as the Government, for purposes of sanitation, shall assign to them to live in" (44-45). An anti-Indian campaign was gathering momentum, designed to restrict the economic and political power of the Indian community. There was an attempt to disenfranchise Indians in the Transvaal in 1885 and in Natal in 1896. It was to protest against these restrictions imposed on Indian residential and trading rights that Gandhi developed the philosophy and practice of Satyagraha (see Davenport 1977:92). Gandhi, after his arrival in South Africa in 1893, was involved in both the political affairs of the Transvaal as well as of Natal. In 1903 he was instrumental in founding the Transvaal Indian British Association, whose structure and aims were similar to that of the Natal Indian Congress; he also visited Potchefstroom around this time to mobilise support for the Passive Resistance Movement.

Conceptions of 'home'

The strand of memory in Mayat's narrative of her grandparents' background in India, their ancestral home, and their settlement in South Africa, the land of their adoption, is a past within the past of living in Potchefstroom, a memory within memory. Parallel with the memories of establishing a home in Potchefstroom, with all its joys and vicissitudes, were those of life lived in India. When the settlers arrived images of 'India' were kept alive at the same time as life was being lived out in South Africa. The effect is an unusual blending and interweaving, through memory, of the worlds of India and of South Africa.

Mayat writes of the way the memories of her grandparents were handed down to her parents, herself and her siblings. The settlers felt uprooted and developing a sense of memory of their ancestral past was one way of maintaining the link with the 'motherland'. Nalini Iyer, in a critical essay on Bharati Mukherjee, a writer in the United States, makes observations that may well apply to Mayat's text: "This problem of identity is strongly connected to the geopolitical space that the immigrant occupies and is manifested... not as a simple nostalgia for one's country of origin but as the need for immigrants to construct for themselves a narrative of home" (Iyer, Nalini 1996:29). Mayat's grand-parents constructed a "narrative of home" out of their experiences of life in Surat and their nostalgia for their past home. And Mayat, in connecting with the lives and experiences of her grandparents who cherished the memory of India in a strange land felt a close bond herself with an imagined and constructed 'motherland'. *Their* memories became *her* memories:

So over the years of my childhood, I gathered vignettes of life in the vil-

lages of India, where our parents were born. We became so familiar with the village life and its environs that many decades later, when I first visited the birthplace of my grandparents, I had no hesitation in recognising some of the landmarks. (Mayat 1990:64)

On her visit to India Mayat recalled the pipal tree, the village bullock, the neem tree, the verdant fields, the mango and coconut palm orchards - all part of the fabric of her parents' lives in India, even though she herself was seeing all this for the first time. In recollecting the past, simple elements of the material, physical world become important links with that world, and landmarks of ordinary, daily living become clearly etched in her mind. As pointed out earlier, Rushdie sees this longing to hold on to a lived and imagined past as symptomatic of the migrant condition:

The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities...The broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed, are exciting to discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects. (Rushdie 1991:12)

Mayat's experiences indicate that remembering is not merely temporal - it is also spatial and emotional. Chandra Mohanty asks pertinently: "Is home a geographical space, an historical space, an emotional, sensory space?" (Mohanty 1993:352). We see all these elements coalescing in the memory of 'India' that Mayat's grandparents savoured.

The Role of women in re-defining home

In this process of remembering, women play a central role. Trinh T Minh'ha speaks of the long line of remembering that women participate in: "Mother always remembers. And what she remembers, she never forgets to weave with what her mother, her grandmother, her great grandmother remembered" (Trinh 1996:27). And this is true of Mayat's narrative as well; she demonstrates that women in particular - her grandmother, mother and aunts - were important in a chain of remembering. The notion of maintaining ties with the 'homeland', and of creating a 'home' from 'home' indeed has a gendered inflection. And in writing *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, Mayat is herself providing a link for her own children and grandchildren, as well as for an extended readership. This is similar to Sindiwe Magona's purpose in her autobiography, *To My Children's Children: An Autobiography* (1991).

Mayat shows that in a strange land it is the women who were responsible for keeping the memory of life 'way back home' alive. Part of her narrative is actually about the important role that women play in the process of defining 'home', through memory. One of the more obvious ways of preserving the old is through the sharing of stories during domestic duties, and women are especially well-placed to achieve this. Rituals of remembering by the women would take place during homely chores of cleaning cupboards, when the "memory boxes would be simultaneously aired and dusted, before being restored to safe custody"

(Mayat 1990:63). Trinh has written that the very domestic activities that women engage in gives them the opportunity to create and "knead" their stories into something quite dynamic. Kathleen Renk highlights Trinh's point that women's storytelling is the "oldest form of building historical consciousness", and is directly related to the work of women's hands, for these stories are usually told as women engage in domestic labour (Renk 1996:98-99).

Mayat suggests that in telling stories the women are actually performing the important role of sustaining the family traditions:

It wasn't story telling, but a more sacred duty that mothers and aunts seemed to be performing. As sustainers of family traditions, we learnt the fundamentals of our faith in their laps. Before being handed over to a teacher or Maulana, we already knew our kalimas duas and the Arabic alphabet. (Mayat 1990:63)

In the other books that Mayat has written or edited, her accounts of some of these important duties of cooking, sewing and preserving cultural artefacts are both to inculcate an appreciation for these specific skills in the younger generation as well as to transmit a larger ethos of cultural values and tradition. Often identity is defined and preserved by cuisine or dress, for example. Mayat emphasises that it is the women who are engaged in these activities: "As custodians of family and community traditions, they were busy cooking, entertaining, sewing, arranging receptions and keeping daughters in tow. This was my mother's life too, when she had arrived from India, heavily cloaked in a burkha, but as long as I can remember, she was a picture in motion" (158). In preserving the memory of a past home with its traditions and culture of the past, we notice that women are often caught in the contradictions of transmitting gendered roles. Sandra Ponzanesi sees the multi-faceted role of women in the domestic context of the diasporic home as one of translation and transference of culture and tradition:

There is a particular cult of domesticity which tends to fixate women to home as a timeless space whereas men tend to be associated with mobility and notions of progress. As far as the condition of migration and diaspora is concerned women are often called to preserve their nation through the restoration of a traditional "home" in the new country. This idea of home entails the preservation of traditions, heritage, continuity; there is even an intense emotive politics of dress for some communities. (Ponzanesi 1998:7)

Jo Beall points out that "The retention of cultural values was often a defensive strategy in an alien and hostile environment, and found expression particularly in the sphere of gender relations" (Beall 1990:159). Invariably, it is the women who were called upon to preserve the ways of the old country. Gay Wilentz, drawing from Nancy Tanner and Beverly Stoeltje, draws attention to this "matrifocal" emphasis in "generational continuity", where women are central in transmitting cultural values (see Wilentz 1992:xii, 121). They point to the role of African women historically in bridging the gap between Africa and the New World, and in preserving the values and customs of Africa. Women either preserved old values or modified them in the new country. Agnes Sam points out that women may have to engage in a "balancing act" between the old and the new home: "Conscious that

multaneously, and that she experiences an ambivalent, shifting relationship with each from time to time.

Trenchant critique of the ideological constructions of the family or of traditional gender roles is absent in Mayat's writing; there is tacit acceptance of women's subordinate, supportive role, even as she re-defines it. Inderpal Grewal's argument that we should not reify women in the Third World is relevant here. She points out that women display "negotiation", with "complex and varied agency...in forming their roles and living within them...as neither full subjects within society nor as mere objects of European imperial subject formation" (Grewal 1994:237). Grewal urges that one-dimensional generalisations do not capture the diversity of women's lives and choices: "Particular social contexts are not taken into consideration, creating an anthropological totality in which all Third World women are considered passive, non-resistant, living in destructive, uniformly and similarly repressive, patriarchal families" (238). The women in Mayat's story show all the complexity of "third world" women, as they, in order to avoid domestic conflict, forge a dual, ambivalent existence between 'home' and 'homeland'.

Ambivalence towards 'home'

Alongside remembering India, there is also a gradual attempt to push such "rituals of remembering" behind, to sever ties with the 'mother-country'. Mayat's text reveals how from the time of their arrival the Indian settlers slowly grow accustomed to seeing South Africa as home (Mayat 1990:70). This often involves adjusting to the customs and habits of a daily life different from that in India. The recollection of an Indian past, and its reconstruction, take place alongside their encounter with a life lived in South Africa. Interestingly, already with Mayat's father and his generation, the call of the Indian sub-continent gradually diminishes. The trips to India, for one, become less frequent. As Mayat records: "Father's generation, while assuming the responsibilities of looking after the family way back home, no longer thought of India as home. They had their feet firmly fixed in South Africa. They no longer made those trips to India every few years. In fact my mother returned to visit her family in India after she had given twenty-seven years of her life to South Africa" (183). Nalini Iyer's exploration of the renegotiation of 'home' with reference to Bharati Mukherjee's fiction also applies to Mayat's writing:

Mukherjee's work emphasises the need for immigrants to choose their home by constantly adapting themselves to the new homeland and by constantly re-negotiating their relationship with the old homeland. The immigrant's relationship with the old home and the new home is neither static nor monolithic, and...emphasises the heterogeneity of the immigrant experience. (Iyer, Nalini 1996:29)

But accepting South Africa as home is fraught with contradictions for Mayat and her family. It does not automatically guarantee stability and permanence. In Mayat's writing, as in that of Reddy, Karodia, and Goonam, we find, after the initial dislocation from the place

of their birth, a further sense of dislocation being caused by additional factors. In South Africa there is the on-going adoption of, and adaptation to, new living spaces, of having to create new homes because of Group Areas removals. There is the continual attempt to find new permanence, of having to live with multiple dislocations, and of living with on-going provisionality. Once the people in Mayat's story are dislocated, they relocate, and strike new roots. When the Indians of Potchefstroom are moved as a result of the Group Areas Act, they pull up their roots and move to another place. As Mayat writes: "While the state was knocking nails in our coffins and demolishing all vestiges of our habitations, trying to obliterate signs of our existence from the history of the town, we started to strike new roots and build our lives again" (Mayat 1990:256). The need to preserve identity becomes essential as they are subjected to constant uprooting and relocation.

Mayat's depiction of 'home' here echoes another diasporic context. Marina Warner, drawing from Elizabeth Bishop and writing in the Caribbean, speaks of the metaphor of the wasps' nest, to suggest provisional dwellings:

...The papery wasps' nest is the idea of a hanging home, of dwelling without roots, of weaving a home out of your own body. It is an image of the imagination working to make the home rather than actually belonging to the place where you come from. And this is directly counterpoised to the empire's view of history, to the idea that the web must have a centre. The wasps' nest, however, has no centre, it is just a series of hanging crustations of cells. (in Harting and Doring 1995:41)

This is analogous in some ways to Mayat's narrative, where there is a gradual shift away from one home to another, and her family's carrying of the memory of these homes with them. But, as Mayat's narrative shows, the distinctions between each home are not always clear-cut. Using a different image from Bishop's, Bhikhu Parekh makes the interesting observation that the diasporic Indian is not rootless. But, he states,

rather it means that like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world (Parekh 1993:2)

Mayat shows that a complex identity emerges with the mixing of cultures and races and the development of a sense of patriotism for the adopted country. She reflects on the fact that, whenever the threat of repatriation of Indians surfaces, South Africa is seen by Indians as "our country", and she makes an important distinction between race and culture:

Go where? This was our country. Even our grandparents were buried here, and there were two more generations after mine. Sure, we had our roots in India, just as the whites had theirs in Europe. We had our culture, one that was richer and older than the one of the whites. Into a race, one has to be born. A culture is transmittable, it is capable of striking roots and spreading in alien soil, and it is so much a part of a people that without it, it leaves an impoverished skeletal community. (Mayat 1990:245)

Even though the memory and identification with an ancestral home diminishes for Mayat's grandparents, they continue to be disowned in the land of their adoption, and in Ma-

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Go where? This was our country. Even our grandparents were buried here, and there were two more generations after mine. Sure, we had our roots in India, just as the whites had theirs in Europe. We had our culture, one that was richer and older than the one of the whites. Into a race, one has to be born. A culture is transmittable, it is capable of striking roots and spreading in alien soil, and it is so much a part of a people that without it, it leaves an impoverished skeletal community. (Mayat 1990:245)

Even though the memory and identification with an ancestral home diminishes for Mayat's grandparents, they continue to be disowned in the land of their adoption, and in Ma-

Mayat's own case, of her birth. Forging a cultural identity in a country such as South Africa is fraught with tension. While the emotional pressure to return to India does indeed diminish in Mayat's grandparents' lives and, more and more, South Africa is seen as home, this does not mean that the experiences of and attitudes to the new home are not uncomplicated. Conflicting responses to South Africa suggest a sense of belonging and not belonging, of wanting to identify and being hesitant about such identification, of being accepted and of being rejected. In this respect Homi Bhabha reformulates the Freudian concept of the *unheimlich* or the "unhomely presence" in relation to the diasporic home, where home is both strange and familiar at the same time. Bhabha, thus, relocates 'home' within the parameters of a newly-formulated third space:

Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an 'inbetween temporality'... This... represents a hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between reality'. (Bhabha 1994:13)

Bhabha is suggesting that there is a move beyond simple binary divisions into a more complex relationship that combines aspects of the two halves of the migrant's life, yet transmutes it into something new and different. In Mayat's narrative one may see this "third space" as a state of "interstitial" tension, as the Indian settlers contend with all the conflicting impulses of living in South Africa.

Ien Ang's point that the minority subject is positioned in the grey area of inclusion and exclusion, in the ambivalent space of belonging and not belonging, throws light on the complex inter-relationships that the people of Potchefstroom experience. Ang concurs with Homi Bhabha that there exists a "third space" - that of ambivalence, a space between sameness and otherness, occupying the gap between equality and difference. She sees the possibilities here of going "beyond the contained grid of fixed identities and binary oppositions through the production of hybrid cultural forms and meanings" (Ang 1996:45). In Mayat's narrative certainly what existed was the promise and the possibility of this "third space" as the people of Potchefstroom interacted with one another both within and beyond the simple binaries of apartheid's logic. It is also an embattled space as Mayat and her family are intermittently confronted with rejection and marginalisation.

Potchefstroom : A mix of peoples

The other strand of memory in Mayat's narrative, within which the first is contained, is that of her experiences of living in Potchefstroom. Mayat's book presents a process of cultural translation and is engaged in a cross-cultural discourse. Mayat shows how the Indian immigrants settled in South Africa from India and the process of cultural adaptation that slowly unfolded. She also engages in cross-cultural reflection, depicting the encounters of the different peoples of Potchefstroom, their different life-styles and values, both individ-

ual and communal. In presenting a particular time and place, with its many asymmetries of relationships across different divides, Mayat foregrounds the complex question of identity in South Africa. There is a weaving together of relationships across race and class, gender, and religious persuasion, even at a time when racial, class and gender hierarchies were clearly being etched out on the South African social landscape. Differences were spelt out, contained, or blurred. Van der Veer's general contention that the *location* of culture is difficult to pin down, and "any unitary view of culture that stressed boundedness, continuity and homogeneity" is questionable (see van der Veer 1997:91), is relevant to reading the narrative of the people of Potchefstroom in Mayat's text.

In spite of the hierarchical racial separation that was devised by apartheid legislation, the memoir depicts the interaction of the early Indian settlers with a variety of local peoples. Mayat creates a variegated picture of inter-communal living in South Africa in the decades before the entrenchment of apartheid. There is a mix of peoples, many of whom are her family's neighbours, and who share in one another's lives through all the changing scenes of birth, growing up, and death. The life that Mayat depicts includes a colourful mix of stories of ghosts and djinns, of superstitions and of exorcism. Tongue-in-cheek, she describes the lively trade enjoyed by the *maulana* who peddles exorcism rituals. There are "spook stories" that are figments of the imagination (Mayat 1990:108), and witchcraft and black magic that are practised by different race groups in different forms. Mayat describes this assortment of peoples through another of her tapestry metaphors:

All the characters who fill the pages of this book, create a tapestry of community life that was rich and memorable. Together they compose an intricate and colourful pattern. Even if some threads appear to be weak and faded, they are essential for the background of the community whose struggle for survival, this recollection attempts at portraying. (Prologue)

The melange of peoples in those days in Potchefstroom reflected the different languages, religions and creeds that contributed in part to the formation of South Africa - Indian, Coloured, Afrikaner, Chinese, German, English, Scottish, Christian, Muslim and Jewish. Of a special quality for Mayat is the encounter between Boer and Indian. Mayat suggests that the relationship here is one of ambivalence - characterised by mutual dependence as well as separateness. The Boers depend on the Indians for clothing, groceries and general merchandise; the Boer farmers, in turn, bring their eggs, butter, chickens, honey and fruit to the Indians, in a natural spirit of "barter" (50). Through his hawking business, Mayat's grandfather gets to know the Afrikaner women who are left alone on the farms, and his visits detract from the boredom they experience. He enjoys the hospitality of these women - a hot cup of coffee and "boere" biscuit, and they refer to him respectfully as "the Arabier".

In this coming together and mixing, the family shop becomes the natural space that enables cultural and social exchange, the 'contact zone':

Our shops were a focal point in the lives of all those who were served there.

Friends often arranged coinciding shopping hours. They would discuss their children's schooling, their in-laws, their church affairs, their neighbours and their politics. This way we gained insight into the lives of the various races amongst whom we lived, to which, in our apartheid-ordained lives, we would otherwise have had no access. (228)

The family shop is named Dahbel House, after the village in which they lived in Surat in India (the same village, incidentally, that Ahmed Essop was born in); it is first called Bismillah's Shop, and "Mina se Winkel" by the locals (160), and would have celebrated its centenary in the past decade. Mayat's family are forced to move the shop to Mohadin, an Indian area, and predictably the business suffers greatly as a consequence of the move. Other shops are set up in Bloemhof, Fietas, Sophiatown, Jackson's Drift, Potchefstroom, Heidelberg, and Wilverdien. As with Farida Karodia's family shop in Sterkstroom, in a society where there is nervous policing of all 'border crossings', the shop serves as a 'no-man's territory', the 'contact zone' or 'borderland', and is a familiar trope in much post-colonial writing. Myrtle Hooper refers to the shop as a "nodal point" in a community (Hooper 1996:66). David Goldblatt documents similar stories in his photographic retrospective, *South Africa the Structure of Things Then*. As one of the inhabitants of Pageview, a Johannesburg suburb, recalls: "I was 19 when I went into the shop...It became the best-known shop in Fietas. Except for clothing and textiles, I stocked from a pin to an anchor. But it was not only a shopping place. It was a meeting place" (in Green 1998:14). Other examples of the trading store may be found in Gordimer's *The Conservationist* and *The Lying Days*, and in the writings of Daphne Rooke, Mphahlele, and Lessing, and its significance in South African fiction is worth considering (see Hooper 1996).

In Chitra Divakaruni's novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), set in Oakland, California, referred to already, we note the central position that 'the shop' occupies in the lives of Indian exiles as it takes on a deeply philosophical significance. Sonya Domergue sees the shop in Divakaruni's novel as "an interstitial space" signifying a "mandala of the Indian mind where the sacred and the secular are contiguous" (Domergue 1998:3). While this rather excessive claim is understandable in describing the context of Divakaruni's world, in Mayat's family shop there was a coalescence largely of the familial, the economic and the social. Through the single, but significant, motif of the shop Mayat's work suggests that a vibrant interactive cultural mosaic had been in existence in South Africa for the better part of the century, as a natural community developed, resisting in the process the separatist ideology of apartheid.

Mayat's family also enjoys the friendship of members from the Chinese community. She notes that her grandparents' neighbours, the Tsun family, have a cordial relationship with them; "despite the Himalayan differences in the lifestyles of both communities" (Mayat 1990:129) friendships develop and are sustained. Their friendship goes beyond playing fahfee when Oupa Tsun joins them in Passive Resistance activities. He is disillusioned

with Gandhi, however, for agreeing to the thumb-printing law after having originally refused to comply.

Mayat points out that it becomes obvious that there is a great deal of ignorance of one another's customs, traditions and habits, and this ignorance becomes particularly apparent when groups are juxtaposed, as they are in Potchefstroom. While apartheid is based on the "notion of pluralities of cultures as totalities with clear boundaries, confined to their localities" (van der Veer 1997:91), what prevails is a natural movement towards inter-group contact. Often ignorance results in judgemental and dismissive evaluations of others and assertions of cultural dominance. Mayat's mother is described by Potchefstroom University students as "illiterate" because she does not read English and Afrikaans; yet she is actually fluent in Afrikaans and spoke a fair amount of English. Besides, she knows Arabic and Gujarati well, both spoken and written. A neighbour, learned in Urdu, Persian and Arabic, and tutored by her father who was an eminent scholar, is also considered "illiterate" by the Boers. Mayat points out that young Afrikaner students are grossly ignorant of the lives that Indians lead: "What did the youth of Potch University know about the classical languages of India? They were a most unenlightened lot when it came to cultures and civilisations beyond their limited European horizons" (Mayat 1990:197). Inevitably, we see in the interaction a measure of cultural cross-fertilisation, when families imbibe new traditions and customs, culinary habits and cuisine from one another. Lichis, for instance, are first introduced to whites by Indians. Curry is 'discovered' and relished, yet there is initial objection to its smell. There is ignorance over some eating customs, as in the case of bhaji - with Indians being ridiculed for eating "grass" (195).

The effect of the interaction of the peoples in Potchefstroom is demonstrated vividly by Mayat's natural and spontaneous use of different languages in the course of her narration. In practice the Indian languages were assiduously preserved through private study and religious instruction, and English was enriched by the use of Afrikaans and African words that were peculiar to the region. Many terms were assimilated into English usage, providing a 'taal' that is quite natural and peculiar and shows, if anything, the difference between the linguistic style of those who lived in Potchefstroom and those who lived in Natal, for example, or in India. The following sentence reflects this diversity of language: "There was talk in the *lokasie* of a *tokolosie* or a *Slaamse toor-dokter* who had caused his death. Some even swore that Twinkie had one night gone and poured a whole tin of *skokiaan* over Sergeant Grobelaar's grave" (137). This colloquial language, with its cross-cultural influences, is hardly the kind that Mayat's grandmother would have used in India or during the early days of her settlement in South Africa. Mayat shows through her language, which is part of the fabric of her experience of living in the country and in the particular region, that a unique South African identity is being forged. As Raymond Williams notes: "Human community grows by the discovery of common meanings and common means of commu-

nication" (Williams 1961:10).

Complex identities : the impact of race

The issue of cultural identity is often seen as the exclusive domain of so-called 'ethnic minorities'. It is implicit in *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, however, that all groups represent themselves in ethnocentric ways, seeing this as a way of anchoring themselves in the presence of other groups. Mayat does not paint a one-dimensional racial picture but an intricate web of inter-relationships. There are broad categories of difference; at the same time the categories are shifting, overlapping. There are changing alignments as the racial groups encounter one another, and show different ways of looking at themselves and others. There is both mutual help through work and good-neighbourliness as well as varying degrees of prejudice among the racial groups in Potchefstroom. We see complicity with apartheid, where its scripts become internalised and re-enacted in daily life; yet there is a certain acceptance of other racial groups and a striving for a peaceful co-existence. Mayat's memoir shows that the different race groups live cheek by jowl, and there are inevitable and "necessary intimacies", to use Whitlock's description of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed (Whitlock 2000:4-5), resulting in a complex variety of racially and culturally configured groups.

While there is movement towards understanding and mixing with one another, there is also a tendency to demarcate, distinguish, separate, sometimes on rather spurious grounds. For example, one of the Afrikaners, in musing about the origin of Coloureds, concludes that he has more of a bond with groups assured of their origins than with Coloureds: "Abdul tell me, we come from Europe, the Kaffirs are from here, you come from India, but where did these come from?" (Mayat 1990:142). Abdul's response is that they are the result of the "white man's sin". It is ironic that a definite place of origin is used to rate 'authenticity', a notion that has re-surfaced in a different form in the current debates about "Who is an African?" Natasha Vaubel makes a general point about the lingering effects of colonialism, which is relevant here, when she observes that the "system of colonialism was founded and is maintained by myths of rigidly-boxed identities defined in strict distinctions of white versus black...This Manichean definition of identities labels individuals who do not fit within its confines as aberrations in themselves..."(Vaubel 1997:91).

Mayat's interaction with the various racial groups enables her to present them in their differences and diversity. This is clearly evident, for example, in her description of Coloureds working in a range of sectors: Dhownie, a skilled craftsman, working in leather; Skuitie, who learnt his blacksmith's trade from the Germans in the area; Sakie, in his painting jobs; Queen, with her distinctive laundry-work; and Carolus, the expert spin bowler. Mayat notes: "The colourful milieu of peoples amongst whom we lived, were the racially-mixed ones our country had labelled as coloureds" (Mayat 1990:141). For her they

epitomised a multifaceted cultural heritage:

Yes, we had all sorts of coloureds in the location across the shops. Some of them were so white they could easily pass off as such, but our town was much too small to contain such onerous secrets...at the other end of the coloured spectrum, were coloureds whose antecedents could be traced back to the Cape Colony. Their forebears had come down with the Voortrekkers, children of perhaps Khoisan mothers and fathers who had their roots in Europe, but who would forever remain anonymous. Only God and their mothers would really know who they were. (143)

Mayat records the many different responses to Indians, from suspicion to acceptance to hostility, as the decades passed. She shows, for example the gradual change in attitude as regards the way her grandfather was accepted: "He, the Arabier, as they referred to him, was a respected person and Dada could never pinpoint when that term had been replaced with the derogatory Koelie which was a label his sons and grandsons would have to cope with" (51). And it seems that the term "coolie" spread from Natal, and was deployed in general usage against Indians. It was used for all Indians, as Agnes Sam and Goonam show, though it had originated in reference to indentured labourers only. The term "Arab" or "Arabier" seems to have been appropriated to distinguish oneself from the more lowly "coolie" or indentured labourer. This would have been probably taken over from the Arab traders who had travelled in caravans from Zanzibar and the East Coast of Africa. Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie notes that the group referred to as Arabs in South Africa were Muslims, who wore long, flowing robes, and mainly came from Surat and Kathiawar (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:12). Bhana points out that the "'Arab' traders as they were mistakenly called, linked up with white wholesale business to develop trade networks in the hinterland. Their customers were Africans, other Indians, and even whites" (Bhana, Surendra 1997:4).

Some Afrikaners are presented as being unashamedly prejudiced, as with the predikant who "urged their flock not to support the Indian shopkeepers" (Mayat 1990:88). Yet Ouma Petersen, the town midwife, goes on her rounds with good cheer to Indian families; on one occasion, she looks after Mayat's mother and sister (Bibi) during a period of confinement, and is assisted by Mrs Labuschagne, an English woman married to an Afrikaner:

The fact remains that for three weeks Bibi stayed in a white home from 10 am till 5 pm. 'I am her *peet moeder*,' said Aunty Marie, and so we came to understand the Christian concept of god-parenthood. Aunty Marie in turn began to understand our traditions and beliefs.(91)

Anxiety over racial identity is linked to privileges and opportunities that groups aspire to, since they are racially based. While in Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight* Indians are shown to choose a Coloured identity (as a strategy for acceptance in apartheid schools), in Mayat's book Coloureds desire closer links with Whites:

One could only conclude that it was not the white blood that the so-called coloured hankered after, it was the white tag which made a world of difference to a citizen in a country like ours...The humiliation did not end with the documentation. It entailed different job opportunities, different living

areas, different schools, different churches and different burial places, so that one wondered whether they would be resurrected in different areas in heaven and hell...How the coloureds ached to be accepted as whites and how proud they were of the tiniest bit of white blood in their bodies. (151,144)

The impact of racial deprivation and discrimination is particularly felt over the question of education. Mayat points to the irony of living in Potchefstroom, where Indians find it difficult to find proper schooling, yet Potchefstroom is an educational centre, seen as the "Cambridge and Oxford" of South Africa. The Afrikaner school, the trade and special school, the ultra-Calvinist university are all for whites, and the barriers are felt keenly. As Mayat writes, "One had a sense of feeling that the racial barriers that existed could easily be crossed via the educational route. If only we were allowed to share the facilities that were there for the benefit of our white citizens" (77). The Group Areas Act ensures that the old schools that are built to fill in this vacuum will be destroyed. Indians are affected by these drastic measures, but Africans are worse hit, as they lose the benefit of mission school education. At the same time Mayat and her siblings are fortunate to have tutors from different race groups. A Coloured teacher is hired to teach Mayat and her family English, Arithmetic and History, while an Indian teacher teaches Gujerati. An African teacher trained at the University of Fort Hare assists the young members of Mayat's family to learn Mathematics. Such secular education runs parallel with attempts to ensure that the Bismillah children receive a good, traditional, religious education.

Mayat points out that there are differences within different groups: "Our *lokasie* was already ethnically divided. Among the various African tribes, some were labelled *Kabukais* and some *Oorlams*. Then we had Coloureds and Cape Coloureds, but when, under the apartheid laws the races began to be officially classified, many more categories were discovered" (138). There were clear class differences among them, with the *Kabukais* keeping more to their traditional Sotho culture, and the *Oorlams* becoming more Christianised and educated. There were differences among Coloured groups as well, with the Cape Coloureds being closest to the *Oorlams*. This group had trekked into the interior with the Voortrekkers, and later lived with Sotho groups, but retained their white surnames strategically in order to obtain more privileges.

Indians were not homogenous either, and also showed all the signs of sectarianism. There is no intermarriage between Gujerati and non-Gujerati Muslims for example. Different dialects and languages, different faiths and persuasions - Gujerati Hindus, Tamil Hindus, Tamil Christians - and occupations, cultures and lifestyles separate people, as each group views life through a different window - as Mayat writes: "Each *laagering* itself within the circle of its own community values" (79). In depicting the prejudices within and between groups, Mayat clearly avoids a sanitised, nostalgic picture of the past in Potchefstroom.

Mayat observes that racial prejudice is not uniformly practised among all peoples; it is expressed ambivalently and co-exists with expressions of racial unity and understanding. Mayat sees this as a struggle between racism and a sense of 'humanity' that lingers just below the surface, a struggle between the will towards social justice and the drive to pursue selfish ends:

...the traditional attitude of white superiority vis-a-vis all persons with darker skins, was always there. Humanity, however, was also always there, under the skins of people as we would discover time and again when humans reached out to each other across the colour lines. (92)

The colourful co-existence and racial interaction among the people of Potchefstroom is to be destroyed by the harsh apartheid laws from the 50's onwards, and different groups were to be seen as "perils" - red, "koelie" and yellow. By the end of the Second World War, there is a hardening of attitudes, and the 'battle lines' are drawn far more stringently between the different population groups in South Africa; the ground is prepared for increasing repression as well as violent resistance. Mayat points out that as time passes the Afrikaners in Potchefstroom become an embattled group, fearing the Jews, Coolies, Japanese, Blacks, Russians and Chinese. This is the time of the strengthening of the Ossewa Brandwag, with its elite corps, the Stormjaers (the storm troopers), and the Broederbond. There is a concerted effort among Afrikaners to unite against all the different groups, who are seen as enemies. Mayat records that racial prejudice among Afrikaners surfaces due to fear:

When they saw black people, their inner fears surfaced and the nightmare of the so-called Kaffir Wars overwhelmed them. Mentally, they circled their wagons in self-defence and from within the security of that laager, they attempted to keep all people of colour in a subordinate position. The Indians must be sent back from whence they had come, the coloured accommodated someplace in the white man's conscience and the Natives retained as permanent hewers of wood and drawers of water. (202)

To counter this rising wave of oppression, the Defiance and Resistance Campaigns gain ground, and Mayat, like Singh, Goonam and Meer, recalls the names of some of those who struggle for the freedom of South Africa in these years: Monty Naicker, Cissy Gool, Yusuf Dadoo, Amina Pahad, Saloojee, and Cachalia.

It is with a sense of loss that Mayat describes the gradual erosion of the old community, even in its precariousness. This is the time when the lure to the bigger cities becomes even greater and the construction and consolidation of the apartheid city defines identity in spatial terms more pointedly. The effect on the lives of those in Potchefstroom is significant, leaving them without a sense of community and without customers:

With the Africans gone and the Coloureds going next to the area allocated to them, we were bereft of half our customers. There were no longer sounds of tolling bells and voices of school children. Even the birds seemed to have abandoned the tall eucalyptus trees that stood across our shops on the edge of the lokasie. The willow tree under which our fahfee players and washerwomen had held animated talks, stood there with its branches stretched out as if begging someone to come and seek shelter under its shadows. At

nights, there was a spooky silence. The owls, at least, were still around.
(248)

This motif of being bereft and of dislocation due to the calculated effects of apartheid runs through the writings selected in this study; a deep longing for 'home' is expressed in different ways. It is not only the condition of the exiles who are forced to leave the country; it is also very much a part of the 'internal' exiles' life as well, where peoples are wrenched from their familiar home ground. There is a longing for lost homes, whether in far-off India, or those from which they were removed when they lived in Potchefstroom. There is a common experience of being uprooted, whether they come as immigrants and settlers from another country, or are forcibly resettled in the land of their birth.

Treasure trove of memories or creative amnesia?

In Mayat's narrative, published at a particular junction in our history, we see the need to recall a suppressed past, and the need to re-create a world in the context of, and yet against, apartheid. Memory, and the construction of memory, a *memory against forgetting*, is important. Mayat's work is particularly significant at this present time in the history of South Africa, where there is the space to consider the lives of communities which developed a mode different from that of living under apartheid. The writing of these memoirs at this particular time reflects more on the present, and our hopes and desires for the present and future, than on the past history that is recalled. It is directly linked to the need to create a sense of (alternative) history, nationhood and of community beyond the legacy of the past.

Bhabha projects a similar view, with an larger canvas in mind:

Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (Bhabha 1994:7)

A unusual perspective on memory is suggested by David Dabydeen, of West Indian background and living in the United Kingdom, who speaks of the need for "*creative amnesia*", to forget history. Although with this comes the risk of a "permanent sense of being deracinated", with the vagabond imagination not finding a home (in Harting and Doring 1995:41), Dabydeen offers an alternative view when he sees the trope of memory in writing and the obsession with roots and origins as quite oppressive. Rather, he suggests that

...it is best just to envelope yourself in a kind of forgetfulness out of which something might emerge. It is a desire for invisibility....You blink and you forget it. It no longer exists but then what do you write after that? If you don't write out of history, if you don't write out of memory, what do you write about? I think these things, memory, the recovery of history, are now oppressive in black writing. (42)

Dabydeen prompts the debate in an interesting direction, where identity is not necessarily recovered and sought in the reconstructed past. There is need, as Dabydeen suggests, to move beyond memory. Writing in South Africa, as I see it, is caught between a "refusal of amnesia" and "creative amnesia", between a preoccupation with "memory against forget-

ting" and a need to move beyond memory. We see both these impulses driving creative efforts at the present moment in South African literary writing, and specifically in relation to Mayat's text.

The new century will tell how the inter-ethnic and inter-racial realities in relation to apartheid history will play themselves out in the development of the new democracy, and whether there will be attempts to rearrange the past in new ways, or ignore apartheid history altogether. The contemporary moment provides a space for excavating the past against apartheid's master-narrative, and in telling different truths about the past. There is also the need to simply recall the past, to linger over the "treasure trove of memories", as one way of dealing with that past. Mayat's book, published in this protracted transitional period, straddling the desire to assert difference as well as to depict a lost integrated community, speaks to this particular tendency and need. Andre Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* (1990), published in the same year as *A Treasure Trove of Memories*, offers interesting comparisons. Both writers, in their own ways, the one fictional, the other semi-autobiographical, express the need to find their historical backgrounds, to re-trace emotional and physical confrontations with the new land that they, representing different groups of settlers, experienced.

In Mayat's writing various elements - race and gender, ethnicity, cultures and representations of cultures - historically merge and intermingle. Although a writer such as Mayat is defined by discourses of patriarchy, religion and ethnic identity in the larger context of apartheid's 'logic', she attempts in her unique way to seek out the liberatory potential in her life and that of her family's and re-negotiate and unlearn ethnocentricity, sexism and racism. Interestingly, Mayat does not look at the different peoples of Potchefstroom as belonging to "minority" or "majority" groups. Nuttall and Michael observe that although "[c]ontemporary analyses assume that South Africa before 1994 was bound to a narrative of political liberation and that from the mid-1990's, new configurations were allowed to emerge... complex configurations were always there" (Nuttall and Michael 2000b:1). Mayat's depiction of life in Potchefstroom shows this to be true.

While Mayat's book might be read by some as indicating a desire to assert difference, as well as a nostalgia for a sense of integrated community, it actually shows the impact of the contradictory impulses emerging from our apartheid past. Mayat's "*reflection on the experiences of the people of Potchefstroom*", contributes in its own way to an elucidation of the complex social and cultural realities of the present, as she re-creates a complex multicultural/cross-cultural world that existed a long time ago. Her book makes a valuable contribution to this moment in history when ethnic groups wish to be recognised and not obliterated, in the very process of building a common nation; yet it does not pander to any narrow, ethnocentric construction of identity. While the book is written simply, and captures as honestly as possible the life of the people of Potchestroom at a particular period in history, it may also be read as a rich, multi-layered text.

CHAPTER 7

NARRATIVES OF DISABLEMENT AND ENABLEMENT: JAYAPRAGA REDDY'S *THE UNBENDING REED* AND *ON THE FRINGE OF DREAMTIME AND OTHER STORIES.*

"...we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death." (Rushdie 1991:12)

In this chapter I consider Jayapraga Reddy's unpublished autobiography, *The Unbending Reed*, and her short stories collected in the volume *On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories* (1989). I read the two texts contrapuntally, drawing attention to the complex connections between the double narratives of disablement and enablement at work in these two examples of her writings, the one autobiographical and the other fictional. I explore issues of identity, self-representation and representation, drawing attention to differences in spatial configurations in the two writings.

Background to Reddy's career as a writer

Reddy was born in 1947, and until her death in August 1996 lived in Durban, Kwa-Zulu-Natal. She began writing from the time she was twelve years old, when she published her first story, "The Lost Tube of Toothpaste". When she was in Std 4 she wrote a short story which she sent to the local magazine, *The 1860 Settler*, where it was published without acknowledgement. Her first play, "The Balloon Seller", was also written at this time.

Reddy was fortunate to enjoy a prominent career as a writer, and the story of her publication success is unique among Indian women writers in South Africa. A chronological survey of her achievements shows a slow but steady incorporation of her work into the mainstream of South African writing. In 1975 the BBC broadcast her short stories, "The Love Beads" and "The Stricken Land". "Nandi's Secret Friend", a short story for children, was also accepted by the BBC. In the 1980's these stories were published by *Staffrider*, as well as new ones, such as the "The Slumbering Spirit", "Market Days", and "A Gift for Rajendra". This last story was later broadcast by the BBC.

Reddy's short story, "Web of Persuasion", was adapted for radio and television by Franz Marx in 1984, and was hailed as a success, although Reddy complained that the script had been changed considerably. In the same year *The Reader's Digest* published "The Slumbering Spirit" under the title "The Awakening Spirit". The story was translated by *The Readers' Digest* for its international editions in several languages, including Hindi for its readership on the Indian sub-continent. In 1987 her short story collection, *On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*, was published by Skotaville. In 1988 the retrospective edition of Staffrider, *Ten Years of Staffrider*, included her short story, "The Spirit of Two Worlds". In 1989 Reddy also presented a further script to the SABC, entitled "Release to the Wind". In 1991 Annemarie van Niekerk's anthology of South African women's short stories, *Raising the Blinds*, included her short story, "Two Friends", which had appeared in the collection *On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*.

All these publications were by well-known local and international publishers, and were aimed at a wide reading public. It is noteworthy that the short stories that were selected for anthologising were those that provided a variety of South African contexts, dealing with race relations ("The Slumbering Spirit"), experiences in an Indian extended family ("The Spirit of Two Worlds"), and domestic tension related to race, class and gender ("Two Friends"). Reddy notes, in her introduction to her collection of short stories, that writing is determined inevitably by living in a particular place: "One derives one's creative spirit from this land of a myriad contrasts. There is no 'typical' South African way of life" (Reddy, Jayapraga 1987:Foreword). It would seem that her work has been included in various anthologies for its very contribution to the "myriad contrasts" that constitute South African life. While the short stories are not directly autobiographical they do draw on some of the experiences that she records in her autobiography. Some of these are experiences of being uprooted through the Group Areas Act ("On the Fringe of Dreamtime") and of being confined to a wheelchair ("A Gift for Rajendra").

Reddy's autobiography, *The Unbending Reed*, was submitted for publication to Skotaville. Later, it was also sent to two overseas publishers, but she had yet to hear from them when she died in 1996. A publisher had actually requested that she write the autobiography, presumably anticipating a great deal of interest in her story on the strength of her creative work. A short extract from the autobiography was published in the COSAW collection of writings, *Like A House On Fire - Contemporary Women's Writing, Art and Photography* (Horn, Mabie et al 1994), in which the autobiography was described as "forthcoming", but to date it has not been published. The autobiography, a simple, linear account of her life, with a great amount of detail concerning her illness, may not have been considered as interesting as her short stories. What seems to have been ignored is that the very act of writing, rather than the content itself, was the real achievement.

Unlike Goonam's *Coolie Doctor*, in her autobiography Reddy presents a narrow, almost

self-absorbed, personal narrative. She recounts her early childhood, and events of her life as she grew older, up to a few years before she died. The physical disease she suffered from - muscular dystrophy - is centrally placed in her life story. In some ways the autobiography might be seen as a one-dimensional text, in which her disability and her concern for her physical condition are central pre-occupations. A parallel and related strand is that of her development as a writer, of the difficulties and successes she experienced in getting herself into print. It is her desire to overcome the restrictions imposed on her by her infirmity, her physical bondage, that influences her intention to become a writer.

Although Reddy asserts in the Foreword to her short stories that she is not readily disposed to speaking of herself, in the autobiography she does give important personal details about her life, details that would have otherwise remained unknown. In the Foreword to the short story collection she speaks of her inclination as a writer to be "a very private person"(Reddy, Jayapraga 1989:1). She observes that "solitude teaches one the beauty of silences, those long silences that deepen and stretch into eternity"(1). There are large tracts of her emotional and psychological life about which she remains silent, but she does focus on the physical details of her diseased condition with almost obsessive concern. Her ambivalence about telling her story and being reticent about it is perhaps best captured in the anecdote of photo-taking that she recounts early in the autobiography in which she quotes her grandfather's caution against capturing "an image of oneself"(2).

Her story begins with an account of Kesa, her elder brother, and herself growing up apparently normally. She then describes how the family gradually confront the truth that Kesa has muscular dystrophy. His death is movingly described, and Reddy tells how the finality of the separation is brought home to her when Kesa's pet cat walks away, never to return again:

Then Prill walked in. Through the front door he came, tail erect and marched with a purpose towards the coffin. He put his front paws on the coffin and peered in. The mourners were sufficiently roused out of themselves to stop weeping, and watched as he turned and walked out the way he came in. We never saw him again. If anything...succeeded in bringing home to me the finality of death and the rending pain of loss, it was that. (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:15)

Reddy and her younger brother, Mags, are also stricken with the disease, and spend their entire lives valiantly coping with it. Her physical disability is the controlling element in Reddy's identity; it determines how she is accepted and what life experiences she will enjoy. If there is a "preoccupation with self", as there usually is in black woman's autobiography (Watts 1989:108) due to the systematic diminishing of a sense of self, in *The Unbending Reed* it is particularly so because of Reddy's having to live with muscular dystrophy as a black person and as a woman in South Africa. She is conscious that she is positioned peripherally because of her physical disability. She constantly observes, with amusement and sadness the attitudes of those around her towards her disease: "Over the

years I have become used to being treated as some kind of curiosity specimen" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:17). She writes of the prejudices towards her, conscious that she is a spoken subject, and treated as if she were totally ignorant and lacking an independent self. These attitudes, she constantly reiterates, are only due to the lack of awareness and education on the part of others on how to respond to her condition. Reddy is all too aware of the ambivalent attitudes of those around her to her handicapped condition. In her autobiography she writes:

In different societies, people react to the disabled in different ways. In the Indian community, the reaction is usually one of sincere concern and sympathy. When discussing the disabled child in his presence, it seldom occurs to people that he is perfectly capable of understanding every word and that he has feelings. For instance, a typical reaction from visitors would be, after scrutinising me thoroughly, and tut-tutting in sympathy, 'Shame! What can you do, it's God's will'. (16)

Reddy refuses the image of victim, and in this she is supported by her grandparents and parents, who were strong adherents of the Jehovah's Witnesses church. The door-to-door evangelising approach of this church would have appealed to Reddy in her confined condition. There is strong family support for Reddy, as she is loved and affirmed by her immediate as well as extended family. From her side there is deep admiration and love for her parents, her aunts and uncles, who provide her with the emotional and psychological nurturing to develop a positive sense of self. In this respect her story is reminiscent of that of Noni Jabavu who, in *The Ochre People*, also speaks of the moral support of family, although in her case her problems were social rather than physical (see Watts 1987:115). A strong sense of family is also evident in the writings of Mayat, Sam and Goonam, with different members of the family being decisive influences in the authors' lives. These writers speak of their mothers in particular as having been influential. Reddy constantly refers to her mother as a "pillar"; her image of her mother as a strong woman is captured in the epigraph, "A woman is like the reed, though she bends with the wind, she does not break", from which the title of her autobiography, "*The Unbending Reed*" is drawn. She notes in the "Dedication" that the autobiography is "To the memory of my Mother, Esperie (Bommie) whose dedication, discipline, far-sightedness, courage and endurance made life a lesson in grit". Reddy also claims a nurturing role for herself, and this is seen particularly in her relationship with Mags, as she assists him in coping with his own muscular dystrophy.

Her parents and grandparents, who believed strongly in the liberating power of education, and of education for girls in spite of much prejudice against this, encouraged her in her striving to be independent. They saw 'education' as a means of her attaining independence. Her mother's moralising tone has a familiar ring about it: "If you have wealth, you can lose it. Fine things can be stolen. But nobody can take your education from you" (47). It is the need to improve, to develop, to cope with her handicap, that makes it imperative for Reddy to gain an education.

Reddy describes how she experienced great difficulties in securing an education owing to her physically disabled state, and how this was exacerbated by her being black and female. Her disability made going to school difficult, and there are graphic accounts in her autobiography of her seeking admission to a school. It was the time of the 'platoon school system', deployed to cater for the lack of adequate schooling facilities for black children. The principal's refusal to admit her, shows the extent to which prejudice against handicapped individuals went unquestioned. The efforts of an African nurse from "Cripple Care" paid off as she insisted that the principal admit the new pupil. Reddy describes the attitudes of people towards her, and the unsuitability of the school for children like her - there were "stairs everywhere", and the toilets were far away. Further, there were forty pupils in a class; and the teacher had been teaching from the age of fifteen, with no suitable teaching qualifications. In spite of all the 'inconveniences' she endured, she managed to be at the top of her class, and enjoyed many friendships while at school. When completing her education at the normal schools proved difficult, she continued with her studying through correspondence courses. She used this educational background to develop self-sustaining careers, such as part-time teaching at her home and free-lance journalism.

More importantly, 'education', in whatever form it took, is seen as a pre-requisite for writing books, and this is for Reddy a way of asserting an identity that is undermined by the prejudices of those around her, and a way of claiming her freedom (van Niekerk 1994:70). The lack of education has presented black women writers in South Africa with significant hurdles, as Daymond points out: "For black women who chose to write stories (as against telling them) and to write in English, questions of education and opportunity are what would have first controlled their activity; attaining literacy and a general education was even more difficult for them than it was for black men" (Daymond 1996a:193). In Reddy's case, education provides the route to writing, which in turn provides a way of overcoming the debilitating effects of muscular dystrophy.

Reddy's strong urge to read whatever she could lay her hands on was an important part of her preparation in becoming a writer. In reading voraciously she responded to the available colonial education of the time. Shirley Chew and Anna Rutherford, in their book, *The Unbecoming Daughters of Empire* (1993), shows the ubiquitous nature of colonial education in different contexts. Ironically, such an education is usually a Eurocentric one, and this was true for Reddy as well. Unlike Zoe Wicomb, in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), and Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1991), Reddy does not develop a critical attitude towards the language and culture of the coloniser. Indian women writers, such as Mayat and Goonam, try to find a balance between an English, colonial education and an Indian, traditional one where the family languages, cultural values and, in Mayat's case, religion, are assiduously learnt and assimilated. Sam, in the short story, "Jesus is Indian", describes the need to assert non-western cultural values and reinterpret the kind of

Christianity that is transmitted to her. Reddy, however, embraced and assimilated her colonial education with alacrity and in an uncomplicated way, and this English cultural affiliation shaped her identity almost entirely. English Literature provided her with an alternative world; in the autobiography Reddy, who describes herself as "an incorrigible book lover", writes:

Reading was a road to discovery. I discovered the great English writers, Jane Austen, Dickens, D H Lawrence, Graham Greene, H E Bates, Hardy, Noel Coward and Bernard Shaw and Somerset Maugham. I have read every one of Shaw's plays and love them all. I remember the day I first saw a picture of him on the back of a paperback. I studied it for a long while. Why, it resembled exactly my childhood image of God! (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:41)

She recalls that the close identification she enjoyed with the English language and its literature instilled in her a desire to visit England:

My favourite subject was English. I loved words and always waited for a suitable opportunity to use the new words I'd learnt. I loved the English language and for this reason I could never get enough of the great English writers...Reading Dickens brought London alive to me. I could feel the harsh cold of the English winters, taste the Christmas dinners, feel the warmth of the wood fires. How I longed to visit London, Dickens' London and experience the beauty of the English countryside! For years I had a recurring dream in which I would find myself roaming the streets of London. I would be gripped by wonder and incredulity and then I would awake, frustrated. How I yearned to make that dream a reality! (43)

Reddy did make a trip to England with members of her family and ten others, as part of a special sponsored tour for handicapped persons. Her journey made her all too aware of the differences between Britain and South Africa, especially for disabled persons. Although the arrangements for the tour were poor, Reddy speaks of a dream come true as she visited all the familiar sights that she had known from her reading of English Literature - Oxford, Stratford-on-Avon, the Lake District, Abbotsford (the home of Sir Walter Scott). She even managed to visit the BBC for an interview.

In her critical reading of selected South African black women's autobiographies, Sarah Nuttall writes of "recognition" in reading, whereby identities are constructed outside the framework of apartheid through exposure to the world of English literature. Phyllis Ntantala, for example, Nuttall points out, records in her autobiography, *A Life's Mosaic* (1992), that when she was in England she visited familiar sites from her reading of English Literature. In living in the world of mainstream English Literature Reddy, like Ntantala, was presumably enjoying escape not only from "South African social realities" (Nuttall 1996:6) and her own physical handicap, but was expanding her imaginative world, as "books and reading [are] adopted by the narrating self as signs of an 'intellectual' identity" (9). This world provided Reddy with "other shells for living in", to use Doris Lessing's words as pointed out by Nuttall.

"Writing the body"

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the tendency among some people to be inured to a handicap such as hers, in her autobiography Reddy constantly draws attention to it. She frequently gives many factual details concerning her illness, almost to counter any denial of or ignorance about it. As part of her natural curiosity about everything around her, she learnt a great deal about her muscular dystrophy. It was also a way of coping with her illness:

But I tried to live with it all and did everything I wanted to. All this took years. It was a time of self discovery too. I was learning about my abilities and my limitations...I became my own physician. I understood my body better than any doctor. (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:70)

At a stylistic level, in Reddy's autobiography, writing about her body is more evident than "writing the body", where the latter is a "distinctively feminine kind of writing", referred to as "écriture féminine" by Helene Cixous. In this type of writing the "sexual, psychic and physical identity of the female gender is given voice" (Gray 1992:97). However, I am using the term to suggest that in Reddy's writing there is an attempt to "write the body" in another sense, where a body which is scripted with a certain negative identity in society is re-scripted wilfully and deliberately, and given a new and alternative identity, value and 'voice'.

In order to overcome her constricted reality, and the identity associated with such a condition, Reddy created an alternative identity through writing. "Writing the body" is indeed a way of transcending the body's 'infirmity'. In an interview with Annemarie Van Niekerk, Reddy states: "I especially enjoy creating a whole world of my own which outreaches any possible confinements" (in van Niekerk 1994:74). Ironically, writing, in her condition, she points out, was a "profession that was highly suited to me" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:10). (And given her frailty she writes short sustainable pieces. The autobiography follows the style of her short story writing in that it comprises vignettes of various incidents in her life.) Writing gave her the satisfaction of "putting down your thoughts on paper and seeing a whole new world taking shape. A world you created" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:10). Not able to participate more actively in that world, she was able to observe it, comment on it, and develop an imagined fictional world out of it. It was by watching the world around her, as her family moved from place to place, that prepared Reddy to eventually create fictions. In her autobiography she records that this predisposition started at a very early age:

Hampson Grove, Warwick Avenue, Ajax Land, Wills Road, I knew it all. Sometimes Mother would place me on the balcony, seated on high pillows so that I could see the passing life on the street below. I was just four, but even then people fascinated me. I would watch the people moving up and down and wonder about them. Where did they go to and what did they do? Did they have children? Did they go to work? These were some of the questions that intrigued me and I would provide my own imaginary answers. (18)

Her personal condition did indeed enable her to become an acute observer of events and

persons around her. As she writes in her autobiography: "Memories, impressions and thoughts all form part of the process. Then there is the observer in you, the observer that sees too much, whose perceptions are sharper than normal, whose heightened awareness enables him to sense things beyond the obvious" (10). Kathleen Komar states that many women writers "exploit an interior space that is not biological but psychological, a space that is eventually re-exteriorized in the form of the literary text itself" (Komar 1994:97). The limitations that women generally experience make them use the literary text as a public space.

While very different from other women writers in respect of her physical disability, there is still an interesting resemblance between Reddy and the other South African black women autobiographers that have emerged of late. These writers validate their experiences through writing and, gaining narrative control and discursive power, write of the very experiences that were marginalised by apartheid history. The political role of autobiography for South African women writers that Jane Watts describes is, I believe, a view that has direct bearing on Reddy's writings:

Autobiography is the South African writers' answer to ...interference with their consciousness - they use it to try to reverse the conditioning process in order to free themselves, through reassessment of their entire growth and development, of their mental subjugation, to remake their consciousness...Writing becomes a request for reassurance that they in fact have an identity, that they have rescued the fragments and shards of a personality from the systematic official attempt to eradicate it. (Watts 1987:115)

South African black women writers have used the genre of autobiography to recreate identity. We see this explicit political purpose through 'life-writing' in black women's autobiographies such as Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* (1991), Emma Mashinini's *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* (1989), and Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1985). Jane Watts sees the autobiography as a "self-making process" for the South African black writer. She points out that it is "a means by which they can find the balance between themselves and the outside world and investigate that tension between the subjective and objective that orders our whole life" (114). We notice in Reddy's case a very specific version of this identity-creation: it is through her defining her identity as a writer, an identity that is part of and an extension of her 'life-writing' that she is able to transcend the circumscribed spaces that she as a black woman with a physical disability is forced to endure. She is able to accept her physical condition with great equanimity, and make others do so as well. She goes even a step further, in making her physical disability the very reason for her attempts to create an important literary space for herself. To achieve her ambition to become a writer, besides valuing her education, she bought a typewriter, assisted by her mother, took a course in journalism, joined a writing school, tried her hand at writing on a variety of issues and in several genres, and was not daunted by initial publishing disappointments. Accordingly, Reddy encourages others who are disabled to work hard to suc-

ceed: "If independence and dignity matter to you, then you'll surely work your fingers to the bone to achieve and retain it" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:58).

Reddy's attempt to "write the body" then has two main facets. One is a narrative of bodily disability, exacerbated by the fact that she is black and a woman; the other is a narrative of enablement. Her increasing disablement as a person, the unfortunate bodily inconvenience she experienced, is juxtaposed with her increasing enablement as a writer. Writing affords her imaginative compensation and affirmation at the same time that she is enduring increasing physical deterioration.

There is a contrast between the confined world that she has to inhabit as a person, and the imaginative world that she is able to portray in her fictional writing. The physically straitened space which she inhabits is quite different from the unconstrained spaces of her imagination. She fashions an alternative self through her writing: in extending her sense of self, she is able to realise her social being in a measure that is quite remarkable - because of and in spite of her illness. Reddy transcends the limitations of her physical body to inhabit diverse racial, gendered, social, religious and cultural bodies.

At times Reddy uses experiences that surrounded her illness as grist for her fictional writing. Some of her short stories depict confinement that is similar to her own. In the short story, "Celebration", an old woman is confined to her room. In "A Gift for Rajendra" we encounter an itinerant barber who despairs because modernised services have now made him redundant. However he soon discovers a mother wanting to give her son, named Rajendra, a gift of regular haircuts. Rajendra is confined to a wheelchair and the barber's itinerancy is seen as a blessing. The character of the barber is based on a real-life person Reddy knew in Clare Estate. Other short stories are set in hospitals; it is evident from her autobiography that, owing to her condition, she was taken to hospital on several occasions. Conversely, she develops the silences in her autobiography into fictional accounts in her short stories. For example, private, emotional longings or experiences of love, marriage and childbirth, which are not alluded to in the autobiography, are dealt with in her short fiction. Ironically, in her autobiography, which foregrounds her body, she presents a "bodiless woman", to use Whitlock's phrase in another context (Whitlock 2000:171), where sexual desire is not spoken of. Reddy probes this, however, vicariously in her fictional writing.

Spatial restrictions and apartheid society

While the dominant trope that determines her narrative self-construction in the autobiography is that of her disability, her story is also located in the context of the racial divisions of the apartheid state. Alongside her physical constriction, Reddy is also restricted to the separate spaces dictated by apartheid.

The space that is depicted in Reddy's writings is a racially hierarchised one, and high-

lights the "spatial politics of difference" (Blunt and Rose 1994b:19) in South Africa, with the personal and the public being interwoven. The spaces in her narratives are to be seen in the context of the socio-political economy of apartheid and the Group Areas Act. Durban was the site of the original Group Areas legislation, designed specifically to keep the movement of Indians in urban areas in check, and to separate Africans, Whites, Coloureds and Indians from one another. Reddy recalls the previously integrated living that was destroyed: her aunt, Mutha, had a farm in New Germany, now an African township (Clermont); and an African woman with a large family - who owned a cow and supplied milk to the neighbourhood - lived in the neighbourhood in Clare Estate but had to sell her house and move out of the area.

The attempt to separate racial groups on the basis of cultural differences influences identity construction. Robert Thornton's observation in this respect shows the calculated severity of apartheid. He states that South Africa was

known for its apparent totalising system of social engineering in which the vision of 'apartness', apartheid, was implemented through massive and violent spatial dislocation of much of its population in terms of a rationalised bureaucratic master-plan of a total differentiation of spheres of life based on race and (what was the name for its architects) culture. (Thornton 1996:142)

The places that one could call 'home' and that shaped one's identity were not mere accidents or the result of personal choice and means. The autobiography shows Reddy and her family confined to separate areas set aside for Indians. The existence of separate schools, separate libraries, and other facilities are well documented in the writings by Indian women. Ela Gandhi recounts a similar story in an interview with Diana Russell:

Ever since I could remember, I was aware of living in the apartheid system. I travelled to school by train, and I always had to use the nonwhite compartments. Often I would see that the white compartments were empty, while ours were full, sometimes necessitating my standing all the way from Phoenix to Durban, which is about a forty-five minute journey. The amusement parks were only open to whites, the beaches were separate, and so on. These things made me bitter and aware that the whole system is inhuman. And the Africans suffered more than the Indians. (In Russell 1989:135)

The tendency to "collapse space" began in the early indentured years, where Indians of different languages and castes, were forced to live together. In the "new leavening process" that inevitably evolved, a pan-Indian culture began to emerge, alongside internal differences (see Haraksingh 1990:8). With this kind of segregated and compartmentalised living during the apartheid era, what occurred was a consolidation of this constructed communal life, where 'community' was developed and reified on essentialist notions of race and ethnicity.

Is Reddy, then, constructing an "ethnic autobiography", to use a phrase of Visweswaran's, where the story of a separate community is presented (Viswesaran 1994:8)? And is this kind of writing, with its own demography of 'Indian areas', peculiar to

Indian writing in South Africa, and in this study, to that of Indian women writers? Linda Warley (1993) points out that spatial location is a crucial dimension in autobiographical self-representation in postcolonial writing, that self and identity are intimately tied up with where one lives in relation to other groups, especially since separated living is mapped out by the authorities. While the residential boundaries are becoming blurred in the new South Africa, it is still possible to think of different areas as being racially marked: Soweto, Chatsworth, Grey Street, Clermont, to name just a few, immediately conjure up racial territorialisations, and provide textual identity. This is clearly evident in Reddy's autobiographical writing, where she writes of the confined apartheid areas in which she and her family were forced to live.

Reddy may not strive to be overtly political, but her work is situated within the larger questions of race and apartheid. In conversations about her writing, she states quite simply that she writes, and does not reflect on her identity as a writer in any self-conscious way in terms of gender, race or class, or political affiliation. She does point out, though, that "if you are reflecting life in this country and the effect change and restrictive legislation has had on its people, then your work inevitably becomes political" (in van Niekerk 1994:71). Encountering some of the evils of apartheid personally, she writes: "Not for the first time, I seethed at the idiotic laws that strangled life in this country" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:108). At the time of her growing up - the 1950's - 'separate development' became entrenched. Black Consciousness was to become more firmly established by the '70's, when a younger generation of Indians would identify with a larger black identity (Reddy's cousin, Saths Cooper, referred to earlier, became a stalwart in the Black Consciousness movement and an ardent anti-apartheid activist, and was imprisoned on Robben Island).

Alongside her personal story of her physical trauma, Reddy recounts a wider story of socio-political constraint. She herself is poised on the "fringe of dreamtime" as she recalls in the autobiography a lost world that she enjoyed with her extended family, and the anguish of being uprooted from it. In this the autobiography may be seen as documenting both a personal as well as a collective history. In the autobiography there is a strong sense of communal memory, intertwined with personal memory. With constant control of individuals by apartheid policies, many communal memories were scripted as personal memories. Memory is especially potent in Reddy, who writes: "So many things stand out sharply in my mind, as sharply as peaks against a winter sky" (11).

Reddy's story traces the family's continual movement from one place to another. She writes of the constant removal and relocation that they were subjected to as a result of the Group Areas legislation. Reddy's family moved to different places in Durban and its surrounding areas. Her story begins with her growing up in the 60's in Briardene, a semi-rural area then outside Durban. Her father was born in Briardene, and worked for Bakers Limited as a "van boy", delivering bread by horse cart. This place, where she spent the first

four years of her life, has a strong hold on her imagination. She remembers that Briardene "was a place full of rugged hills and valleys with deep mysterious shadows", with an irreality about it: "Today Briardene is no longer an Indian area but it still retains that haunted quality reminiscent of Wuthering Heights"(11). In addition to literary references she also occasionally claims a wider world of the cosmic and infinite through her writing. Her love of storms, the wilderness, and hills becomes evident and shows a desire to reach beyond the ephemeral, mundane, and local.

From Briardene the family then moves to the city, to live with her "granny". Reddy writes of life here - the hustle and bustle of life in this urban area - Hampson Grove, Warwick Avenue, Ajax Lane, Wills Road, where many Indians lived in the 50's. She notes that the "area in which we lived no longer exists as I remember it. A freeway runs right through it, flattening the quaint, interesting roads. Long before that however, people were forced out of the area through the Group Areas Act" (18). These are the same places that Phyllis Naidoo recalls in her writings, although Naidoo gives a different feel to these places through her experiences of shebeen life there and its vibrant multi-racial character.

Because of the uprooting, a sense of loss, and the memory of that loss, become inevitable motifs in Reddy's writing. Hints of the ancestral motherland from which they are uprooted, and of a "lamenting for their motherland" (Rooke 1953/1990:10), are particularly evident among the first generation of Indians who set foot in South Africa. While Reddy's father was born in South Africa, her grandfather came from "farming stock...in India" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:22). This general sense of loss was then exacerbated by colonialism and apartheid, or at times, by personal tragedy. Her grandmother, Mungamma Reddy, for instance, had to move from their farm at Roosfontein, which was situated beyond the city in the suburban spaces of Westville, to the city on the death of her husband. She was an emotionally strong woman who earned her keep by selling her wares at a stall in the Indian market, and the account of her having to leave her old family home is heart-rending:

Mungamma returned to Roosfontein, the day the old wood and iron house was pulled down. An old tree grew on the road, a silent witness to events. She stood under its familiar comfort and wept. For a home is more than brick and mortar, it's laughter and memories, pain and joy, warmth and sharing, living and being born, growing and developing. It's togetherness. It's a place to return to when everywhere else has palled, an eternal truth so poignantly made in the parable of the Prodigal Son.(23)

Memory in Reddy's writing is often linked to a sense of place, particularly those places from which her family are removed. There is a longing for the lost countryside. Flora and fauna are an intrinsic part of Reddy's story. There is regret that the quality of existence they knew has to make way for inevitable, creeping change: "The beautiful wilderness was carved up and sold...Everyone lauded the changing environment, labelling it progress and improvement"(29). The wilderness and the bushes gradually recede, and Reddy recalls:

"We no longer see that many birds and butterflies. Fireflies used to be so common but I no longer see them. Spiders, frogs and snakes have all become rare" (29). It was the time when an iguana would come to bask on a neighbour's front lawn. What emerges through the descriptions in the autobiography is a strong sense of violation of the idyllic countryside.

The experiences of dislocation due to apartheid policies and practices are not peculiar to Reddy, but are a common theme that runs through many examples of South African literature by black writers. Ronnie Govender in the Epilogue to his collection of short stories set in Cato Manor, *At the Edge and other Cato Manor Stories*, writes of the loss that so many Indians experienced when they had to move from Cato Manor to Chatworth:

CATO MANOR
silence now and bush
no more Discovery Road
no more Trimborne Road
no more hopscotch
no more ripe mangoes from Thumba's yard
Cato Manor, you have done your penance
amid crumpled eviction notices.
(Govender, Ronnie 1996:159)

This "death of Cato Manor", as recorded in literature, is similar to that of Sophiatown described by Bloke Modisane and Can Themba, or of District Six by writers such as Alex La Guma and Richard Rive (see Ehmeir 1995:27-28). As pointed out already, these separate places become symbolic of the spatial location of apartheid society. These scenarios are also taken up in Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight*, and in Goonam's autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*. The recent memoir of Pushpam Murugan, *The Lotus Blossoms on the Eastern Vlei* (1997), referred to already, documents the history of Indian families living in Magazine Barracks in Durban before the removals between 1964 and 1966. While Ronnie Govender depicts the effects that Cato Manor had on men, Reddy and Karodia show the loss that both men and women experienced through such relocations. Similarly, in her autobiography *Call me Woman*, Ellen Kuzwayo tells of the world that was lost by her family when they were forced to move in 1974 from their freehold farm which they had owned from the 1880's. And Pippa Green (1998) speaks of the "bulldozers and jackhammers of apartheid" that destroyed Ozzie Docrat's home in Pageview around 1978, a story that is recorded by David Goldblatt in *South Africa the Structure of Things Then*, referred to already.

A range of subject positions

In her short stories Reddy attempts to transgress the ethnically and racially constricted spatial world that she depicts in her autobiography. While Reddy does not present a wide regional landscape, as do Sam and Karodia, she moves from crowded city sites ("Market Days"), to peri-urban and suburban settings ("The Spirit of Two Worlds"), to rural ones in

Natal ("A Gift for Rajendra" and "A Dream at Sunset").

Although she is generally the omniscient narrator in the short stories, Reddy does develop her plots around protagonists from different racial and gender positions, and moves into "Group Areas" quite different from those she is personally accustomed to. The short stories show a range of subject positions and identifications in her attempt to constitute a new ethical whole as she recreates and restores a sense of community destroyed by apartheid. Drawing from the peculiar socio-political aspects of life in South Africa as a rich narrative resource, she presents situations confronting persons of all population groups.

The short story "The Slumbering Spirit" is about a young Coloured boy named Terry who grows in confidence and self-awareness through the love and attention of a surrogate mother. It is set in the period before the Group Areas Act in a neighbourhood where Coloureds, Indians, Whites and Chinese live together. Terry's family are sceptical of his friendship with a White woman, but Terry appreciates that the woman has time for a young person such as he, lost in a large family of ten:

Miss Anderson had given him something, something more precious than anything material. Years later, he was to recognise it for what it really was. But standing there in the cool night air, with a lift of the heart, he remembered a gentle old woman on a sun-warmed stoep. She had given him time and friendship, and something else which his fourteen-year-old mind was too young to analyse. It was awakening, an awakening of the slumbering spirit to mutual sharing and communication and sympathetic understanding. and that was something he would carry with him for a lifetime. (Reddy, Jayapraga 1987:120)

The picture of a caring woman in "The Slumbering Spirit" is similar to the kind of neighbours Reddy herself had when her family lived in Hampson Grove. In her autobiography Reddy notes that "the woman of the house, a plump motherly woman, loved children, even though she had four of her own" (Reddy, Jayapraga undated:19). As pointed out earlier, Reddy was also loved and affirmed by the women in her family - her grandmother, aunts and her mother. She understands well the transfiguring effect that such love can have on an individual.

Reddy takes a critical view of those who show race and class prejudice, and portrays complex inter-race relationships, as in the short story, "Two Friends". In this short story, the 'madam', Sadhana, who has been married for eleven years, is trapped in a boring marriage. She watches films on television to pass the time. Her domestic employee, Bessie, brings her little daughter, Phumza, to work, and Sadhana's daughter, Asha, and Phumza become "two friends". Asha, who seems angry at being neglected by her mother, tramples her doll, while Phumza looks on with horror, especially since she nurtures a secret desire to own a golden-haired doll of her own. Phumza nurses the doll, putting it on her back "in the manner of generations of African mothers" (Reddy, Jayapraga 1987:110). She is bonding with the 'child' in a way that Sadhana does not seem capable of in relation to her daughter. When Asha sees this she demands her doll back, and Bessie, all too aware of the

limits of a 'friendship' tempered by class and race differences, tells her daughter to return the doll. Sadhana, in the meantime, watches the scene with amused detachment and is unable to see that she is caught in a conflict in which she is both estranged and estranging. She is oblivious to the dynamic between madam and servant, self and other, and the way this is played out between herself and Bessie and their children. Bessie's silence and acquiescence show her in the role of non-person or subaltern, and Reddy is suggesting a racial and class polarity that prevents a sisterhood across these divisions.

The short story, "The Stolen Hours", also depicts the experiences of a domestic employee, who dreams of wearing a much-coveted dress owned by her employer. The employee wears the dress when the family are away on holiday, and spends a few glorious hours imagining herself in another world. Domestic employees, mainly African women, with no institutionalised other to oppress, are a permanent underclass, and Reddy is conscious of their plight. In her autobiography, she speaks a great deal about her relationship with her domestic employees, as she is dependent on them. She also describes her own reservations and prejudices, although in her short stories she transcends them (It is worth noting that Rosemary, mentioned in the autobiography, still works in Reddy's home in Clare Estate, and is the housekeeper for her brother Mags).

Reddy does not confine her short stories to experiences peculiar to Indians (as is generally true of her autobiography), but is also able to write imaginatively and empathically of relationships among Africans themselves. In her short story, "The Love Beads", the typical love triangle is given a new twist. Jacob, a rickshaw driver, is involved in an accident and taken to hospital, where he meets Mandy, a nurse. In a world of hardship and impoverishment, and separated from his wife by apartheid laws, he feels a strong attraction to the nurse - "her sweetness reminded him of the sweetness of swiftly flowing streams. Her warmth was like the warmth of the sun in winter, gentle and welcome" (22). He luxuriates in the attention he receives at the hospital, and imagines fleetingly that he is falling in love with Mandy. He soon comes to realise that the nurse is going to get married, and that he has to live his own life, and value what he has. He begins to appreciate his wife's faithfulness and gentleness towards him, symbolised by the love beads, of red, yellow and black, given to him by her: "He fingered the beads absently. Then he realised what an important link the beads were between his life in the city and his life in the Transkei. It was a link that was umbilical" (23).

At the same time as Reddy writes of other race groups, her personal experiences make her sensitive to the experiences of other Indians, especially in relation to dislocation and loss. In the title short story, "On The Fringe of Dreamtime", Reddy shows how the strong bonds between people and the places they have cultivated are severed. She tells the story of an Indian man (it is significant that he is nameless) who returns to his old homestead, now turned into a "Group Area" for whites:

He ran his hand along the arm of the branch which was still as strong as ever. Here his father had hung a makeshift swing, by tying two ends of a rope to the branches and placing a sack over it for a seat...To him it had been more than an ordinary tree. He had come to love it in all its moods and it became a symbol of safety, a source of strength like a sturdy and reliable friend. (61)

The tree stands as a link to a lost life, as it conjures up memories of the past: The mistiness of memory cleared and he became aware that everything else about the place was strange and unfamiliar. Only the tree remained, a silent witness to time and its pain. There, on the fringe of dreamtime, he could hear echoes of past laughter and knew once more the searing pain of heart-break. (62)

The evocative description shows the extent to which it was possible to dream unhindered of a time when there was a tacit connectedness with all things:

Down at the stream, he imagined he heard his mother slapping the washing on the stones and singing the folk songs of her youth...The crabs would crawl out of the water...He and his brother would sit on the rocks and watch them, fascinated...They were at one with all of creation...(65)

The description also heightens the dereliction of the present, and the alienation is further exacerbated by the new White occupants who see the Indian man as an intruder. Narratives such as these show how the Group Areas legislation and subsequent disruptions in its living arrangements were to directly influence the creation of identities: Zoe Wicomb has argued, referring to District Six, that "ethnicity was constructed within a politics of nostalgia that sentimentalised the loss" (Wicomb 1998:95), where such "loss" was directly related to "group areas" from which groups and communities were removed.

Undergirding all her short stories is the unmistakable reality of apartheid life in South Africa, and all that comes with it: racial tension and conflict, bigotry, dislocation, a yearning and desire to be accepted in an alien world. Highlighting the "ordinary" rather than "spectacle", Reddy writes of quotidian reality rather than of the macro-political world. She shows the effects of racism at an individual, domestic and personal level. There are both fissures in racially-defined relationships as well as courageous attempts to bridge such schisms. We see a tension between acceptance of conventional racialised thinking - of white dominance as part of the order of things - and of incipient resistance to it. Like Sam and Karodia, there are instances of prejudice and discrimination among oppressed groups themselves, and also empathy with other oppressed race groups.

Gendered spaces and identity: living in the yard

In Reddy's writings, identity is spatially defined not only in terms of race, but also of gender. In her autobiography there are descriptions of racially separate spaces, but in many instances these are also gendered spaces, with their own 'female subculture'. When the family moved to Clare Estate, Reddy describes a striking picture of communal life, of "living in the yard", a common space between homes that is usually used for social interaction. "The yard" is at once a private and public space - private, as it is peripheral to

dominant White places, and public, as it provides interaction for those who are marginalised. It is also a gendered space, where women gather together to converse or pursue domestic tasks traditionally assigned to them. Reddy describes the daily, ordinary routine and rituals of Indian women who are juxtaposed in such communal spaces.

In the autobiography there are vivid scenes of women working at daily, ordinary, gendered chores - winnowing rice, cooking on open fires, cleaning vegetables or preparing sheep heads for consumption (Reddy regrets the fact that a scene of the singeing of a sheep's head was left out of her script, *Web of Persuasion*, when it was sent for publication. It is likely that this was seen as too culturally idiosyncratic for Western readers). Life revolves around food, and with this, the sharing of taboos, such as those pertaining to the eating of pork and beef. We read of an itinerant seamstress, with her treadle sewing machine, who periodically becomes the focus of attention. Modern luxuries are sparse, with all the neighbours using the only fridge in the yard. In the need to survive, women play a central role and act, as usual, as stabilisers of communal living. During their time together they share gossip, but also details of their own personal lives, of abuse or disappointment.

In relation to the yard-space, Brinda Mehta ponders on a "reconfiguring of the politics of the household" in her interesting analysis of the Indo-Caribbean home. Mehta argues that "serving as community space, the yard also provides the necessary space to establish a centre for political and social advising for women, resembling a village panchayat or council...Female power is thus located in the dual capacity to negotiate one's way through the inner machinations of the home as well as through life's forces, represented by the yard and its capacity to function as a microcosm of a more global, external exchange" (Mehta 1997b:10).

These liminal, communal spaces, then, help women create, shape, modify and claim identity. Are these recuperative spaces as Kathleen Komar suggests, enclosed female spaces, reminiscent of the womb? Are they seen as places of confinement in which women are contained and separated from male social space (Komar 1994:91)? In Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight*, the kitchen becomes the space where the women meet and strategise about dealing with the world. While recuperative in terms of gender and class, it also provides community in the face of a dehumanising public life in terms of race. Dorothy Driver notes that the "search for a self-constituting community is important because of the damage done to black South Africans in an apartheid culture" (Driver 1990:232). This is particularly so for black women, given their marginalisation at several levels. In Reddy's own case these intimate communal spaces provide the security she requires in an alienating world; they also symbolise the doubly constricted world to which she is confined by apartheid as well as by her handicap. These spaces play a complex, contradictory role in the formation of her career as a writer: she is nurtured in these familial spaces to become confident enough in herself to be a writer; at the same time she is able to transcend these very

confined spaces in and through her writing.

In the closed communal context we see a preclusion of any introspective, psychological probing of living in a segregated society. Dr Goonam, for example, is only able to claim a critical, interpretive voice against alienation from the wider South African community when she has moved out of the false security of a confined, racially-constructed, communal space. And paradoxically Phyllis Naidoo appropriates an apartheid gaol as the liberatory space for the creation and celebration of racial solidarity and a sense of community with persons of different racial groups.

It is this implicit critique of racialised and gendered spaces that makes Reddy in her short stories, in contrast to her autobiography, depict a wider and more intricate canvas of social relations in the context of racial and gender divisions. The women in Reddy's autobiography are resilient and assertive, supporting their men in decisions that have to be made. In her short stories a more complex picture of women in domestic spaces emerges; they are found in varying and diverse social relationships, some stifling and others liberating. The women may be seen as struggling between individualistic inclinations to be free and independent, and traditional, conservative influences that pin them down. There is a negotiation and appropriation of private, gendered spaces, or an attempt to transcend their confines to recreate female identity. For example, in "Celebration", Shamala resolves to leave a suffocating marriage and start a new life with her young son; however, in "A Time to Yield" a young bride, Zainab, acquiesces, as the title suggests, to the pressure from her family into entering a marriage about which she has grave doubts.

The dire effects for women of the changing times on family and communal relationships are alluded to constantly in the short stories. In "The Spirit of Two Worlds", seething conflict between an older, conservative mother-in-law and a younger, modern, daughter-in-law develops. Reddy draws on the narrow conformity and claustrophobic atmosphere of the extended family, or *kutum*, the gendered roles that are usually assumed in these domestic contexts, and the pressures, both internal and external, that come to bear upon it. The story takes us into the world of South Africa's cramped council-house and tenement living. Sharda, the daughter-in-law, longs to be independent, to live on her own, and to go out to work. She wishes to claim an alternative space, both literally and metaphorically.

In this short story family life is centred around the domineering figure of the mother-in-law, who expects compliance. This matriarch works hard to keep the family together, running a market stall in the city, and resisting any threat to a carefully constructed and 'stable' sense of family. Her own work outside the home is based on sheer survival; she cannot understand why her daughter-in-law should choose to work to escape "boredom". A state of boredom, the mother-in-law reflects, is surely a modern disease: "Her mind went back over the years searching for something which remotely resembled this malady, but there was nothing. There had been hardships, countless sacrifices which had been made

willingly, much pain and heart-break and some rare and memorable moments of joy and happiness, but never boredom" (Reddy, Jayapraga 1987:11). After the son and daughter-in-law leave to make an independent home, and their first child arrives, the mother relents, thereby preserving the ritual bonds of the extended family.

In her TV drama, *The Web of Persuasion* (1984), written especially to present a South African Indian setting (there were other scripts in the series that were written by other writers presenting "English, Afrikaans, Coloured and black" settings), Reddy explores this question of women's independence in the face of traditional constraints. The play, deftly juxtaposing the old world and a new emerging one, begins with several conversations among guests at the scene of an Indian wedding. There is a stark contrast between the conversations of the adults and those of their children. The women talk of the way children behave "these days"; they recall how weddings were conducted previously, and of the times when there was more land for the joint family system. They are conscious of differences in linguistic preferences, wealth and even complexion - "best to marry your own kind" (Reddy 1984:4).

Mrs Singh wishes for an arranged marriage for her daughter Indira, while Indira prefers instead to go to university to study law. The mother asserts, "I know what is best for you and my plans are made" (7). Indira sees the way her sister-in-law is trapped in an unhappy marriage. When the two families meet and the ritual of serving the tea is endured, Indira begins to realise that Anil, the "arranged" suitor, feels just as uncomfortable as she does about the whole affair. The two resist their family's overtures, and find that they could be friends by fighting a tradition that is mindlessly perpetuated. "My mother is doing what her mother did, and her mother. Daughters must be married off. I wish I were a man" (18).

Indira wishes to assert her independence: "I'm not a parcel to be wrapped up and handed over as a gift, Ma. I have a mind. I have feelings and I have a right to choose...If you wanted to sell me for the best offer you should have kept me in purdah"(25). The mother is the voice of tradition, sectarianism and patriarchy: "Rights, rights. You talk about rights. You are a child. You are a girl, and you are a Hindu"(25). Indira tries to run away, but is resigned in the end to her marriage, when she is presented with two options only: accepting the partner that has been chosen for her, or being abandoned to a life of loneliness, thereby bringing "disgrace" to the family. The play ends with the prospect of the two, Indira and her husband, beginning to understand each other, and accommodating each other's ambitions.

In the short story "A Time to Yield" (referred to already) in the collection *On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*, however, a woman's resistance is not accommodated but transformed into acquiescence. We witness a domestic scene before a wedding day, mainly involving the chief women players of the occasion - a bride, her mother, sister, and grandmother. Zainab, the young bride, is experiencing doubt, anger, reluctance, bitterness

and dread at the prospect of being forced into a marriage against her wishes. The rest of the women around her play ambiguous roles, forcing her to be submissive, to endure, and accept her lot, in the hope that she will be happy and that love will grow during the marriage. An inverted sisterhood is evident as pressure is exerted on the bride to adapt and acquiesce. For women caught between tradition and modernity, and seen as the pillars in social relations, conformity and compliance is the expedient route. Here Reddy writes of the restlessness, the conflict and anxiety that women experience over traditional roles, but does not depict outright revolt. However, in the short story, "Celebration", referred to above, Shamala the female protagonist, trapped in a restrictive marriage, realises that she can give the story of her life a different ending if she wills it. Beginning a new life by leaving her marriage and transforming the gender roles imposed on her is her "celebration".

Conclusion : Infirmary, Identity, Writing, Voice and Power

In her autobiography Reddy constantly returns to the problem of her helplessness. Yet hers is also a powerful story of the overcoming of the body's infirmity, of claiming power through carving out an identity as a writer. Constantly interspersed with the accounts of her muscular dystrophy is a detailed chronological account of her progress as a writer. She describes her early successes and failures, her sustained effort to continue writing and to get her work published. In this it is important to note that the power and influence that she claims is not social (her passing away in 1996 went almost unnoticed), economic or political, but moral. Visweswaran argues that identities are constructed by power:

Autobiographies are, of course, fictions of the self, but in my view, this emphasis on pluralism leads to a notion of "trying on identities", which obscures the fact that identities, no matter how strategically deployed, are not always chosen, but are in fact constituted by relations of power always historically constituted. (Visweswaran 1994:8)

Reddy claims the power of the word and power and agency through the word because of and in spite of her physical privations. Her life shows a struggle against any such deterministic, "historically constituted" identities that might have been conferred on her, especially in view of her physical condition and her racialised and gendered experiences. She engages in a powerful and persuasive "politics of articulation" - to use the term coined by Pratima Parmar in writing about the empowerment of black women in Britain - both in her life and in her writing, and in representing elements of the 'self', which are considered 'other' by dominant systems of representation she reclaims, empowers and defines (and redefines) herself (see Parmar 1990:116). In spite of her physical handicap, Reddy is able to traverse different worlds, and wield immense power especially in "the world of the imagination".

As she writes in her autobiography:

I live in three different worlds at once. The real world in which I live and move, the world of the imagination peopled by characters of my choice, where I play god the creator, retainer, disposer and destroyer, and the world to come which the Bible promises as the second Eden. (Reddy, Jayapraga)

undated:76)

She has extended the "autobiographical pact" by creating an "autobiographical space" that also includes her fiction, prompting us to read the one in relation to the other (see Lejeune 1989). Reddy's muscular dystrophy directly determines the assertion of her identity through writing, the need to inscribe a 'self' contrary to the one ascribed to her. In most South African black women's writings - Bessie Head, Zoe Wicomb, Gcina Mhlophe - the body, gendered and racialised, plays a significant part in the formation of subjectivity. Sidonie Smith's cogent observation from the point of view of the politics of the body has particular relevance to questions of identity in these autobiographical writings. Smith notes that "...those positioned peripherally to the dominant group, those claiming and/or assigned marginalised identities, find themselves partitioned in their bodies..." (Smith, Sidonie 1993:10). But the "double jeopardy" (through race and gender) that feminists have usually talked about in relation to these "partitioned" bodies is extended to a *multiple* one in Reddy's case, making her work a unique and classic study in the "politics of otherness" among autobiographical writings by black women in South Africa.

CHAPTER 8

"SIMULTANEITY OF DISCOURSE" IN AGNES SAM'S *JESUS IS INDIAN AND OTHER STORIES*

Introduction

While white writers, such as Sheila Fugard and J M Coetzee, who were experimenting with new forms, were being published (Fugard's *Castaways* in 1972; Coetzee's *Dusklands* in 1975), Agnes Sam was finding it difficult, even a decade later, to get her work into print. She notes that *What Passing Bells*, described as an experimental novel, was rejected by the publisher because there was an expectation that she would write "autobiographically", like other black women. Sam states that the impression she received from publishers was that "a black woman experimenting with language and form has no business writing" (Ngcobo 1988:75). Against the background of a spate of autobiographical writings by black women after Soweto Sam, like Zoe Wicomb, resolutely counters what was emerging as a stereotype and works in a variety of genres. Sam's short story cycle, *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989), which nevertheless has autobiographical elements, was published by Heinemann in the *African Writers Series*, and this has assured her a place in the gallery of African writers.

In this chapter, I engage in a critical reading of Sam's collection, *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*, in terms of a politics of identity. Taken together, the stories in the collection correspond to aspects of Sam's own life. Sam was born in 1942 in Port Elizabeth and attended Catholic schools. She studied at universities in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, and taught science in Zambia. She went into exile in 1973, and studied at the University of York in England. She returned to South Africa after the first democratic elections, but after a short stay in this country she went back to live in England.

Jesus is Indian and Other Stories as a Short Story Cycle

In her illuminating discussion of Ivan Vladislavic's short story collection, *Missing Persons*, Sue Marais, drawing from theoretical discussions on the short story as a genre, argues that generally in the short story cycle we are likely to see a "conflict between the exigencies of unity and diversity" (Marais 1992:41). She points out that theorists have suggested that in short story cycles there are both 'atomistic' or 'centrifugal' forces" as well as 'integrative or centripetal strategies'. These latter strategies may consist of a framing device, such as a prologue or epilogue, working either externally or internally with subtle linking devices (42). Marais argues that some short story cycles in South Africa are characterised by divi-

siveness instead of unity, and that this is in keeping with the political experience of life under apartheid. Citing Watson, Marais states that "instead of establishing an aura of collective consciousness and connectedness", the stories may depict alienation, dislocation and fragmentation - "separate ghettos of separate cultures" (45).

In Sam's short story cycle, *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*, I believe that both centripetal and centrifugal features are at work. There is overall structural and thematic unity in that the stories all deal with estrangement and displacement in colonial and apartheid society, in spite of the fact that some individual stories are in themselves fragmented structurally, or lightly and impressionistically drawn.

Among the framing, unifying devices are discursive historical pieces that set the context for the examination of a variety of inter-related social, cultural and political themes in the collection. The narrative trajectory of the short stories moves from South Africa to other places in Africa and then to the United Kingdom. There is also a broad developmental sequence, beginning with the experiences of a young girl growing up in the apartheid-ridden and colonial context of South Africa, and then turning into those of an older woman as she tries to set up house as a single parent in the United Kingdom. A pattern is thus evident as the cycle traces a route from childhood to adulthood, a relay of protagonists trying to make sense of a world that is divisive and divided.

The early stories are narrated from the vantage point of a naive, sensitive young girl, growing up in the bewildering world of South Africa - very much the kind of life Sam herself would have been exposed to in her younger days. Sam is the narrating 'I' in the Introduction, but the rest of the short stories have different narrators, mainly female, who bear some resemblance to Sam's own position. The narrators move from being bewildered teenagers in the earlier short stories, to mothers in the later ones; from living in South Africa, to settling in Britain. Sam seems to be writing as both an insider and an outsider in relation to the world of her stories. Through such distancing she is able to achieve the intersection of personal and communal history. The combination of the narrating 'I' of the Introduction, with its unambiguous authorial identity, and the narrating 'I' of the rest of the stories, taken together, make the collection Sam's story, but also Everywoman's story.

Miki Flockemann draws attention, on the other hand, to the lack of cohesiveness in "*Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*", stating that it is

not perhaps typical of the South African short story cycle with its emphasis on cohesive region, community and identity in the face of apartheid dislocations. Unlike these 'composed cycles', Sam's stories, a number of which were previously published elsewhere, are set in different locations, sometimes undefined, and use a variety of narrative voices and fictional styles, ranging from realism to parable and story-telling traditions. (Flockemann 1997:8)

I nevertheless believe that there is cohesion, but that this is obliquely rather than directly evident. The stories do reveal a wide diversity in style: myth, fiction, socio-political com-

mentary, allegory, cultural parable, history, historiography, and realism are combined, providing a mixture of autobiographical reminiscences and narrative fragments. There is a dialogue between history and fiction in the work, with no tight generic boundaries between them. The different narrating voices may be heard in polyphony in the collection.

Sam's short story collection might be described as a fragmented *bildungsroman*, in which we have the contours or stages of a constructed life-story. The first two short stories deal with growing up, the next few with love and the choosing of husbands in different types of situations, and then the rest deal with leaving the country and settling in Britain. Sam's observations in relation to *What Passing Bells* - that it was consciously "impressionistic, its form suggestive of a fractured society, of people in an apartheid system isolated from each other" (Ngcobo 1988:74) - are pertinent to this collection as well. Sam depicts through the form of her writing and not only through the content - both in the collection as a whole and with some of the individual stories - a racially dysfunctional society. The form of the cycle mirrors a fragmented apartheid world, giving glimpses into different aspects of living in South Africa. A particular short story in the cycle that suggests this fragmentation is "Sunflowers": the impassioned critique of oppression and its hideous effects in South Africa are unmistakable, yet it is difficult to decipher the slender narrative.

The impressionistic style of some of her stories creates an indeterminate location and an open-endedness and diffuseness. But in reading them intertextually, one begins to appreciate the way Sam works with recurring motifs and themes. Marais highlights the fact that a "dynamic pattern of recurrent development" may be encountered in some short story cycles, and this is a "pattern which has the effect of modifying the reader's experience of each consecutive story as the cycle progresses and of establishing a spatial or contrapuntal resonance" (Marais 1992:42). We see such a "spatial or contrapuntal resonance" in the stories of *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*, with each story, while being discrete, adding to the cumulative effect. The paradigmatic story in this respect is the title one, "Jesus is Indian", but its themes and concerns may be seen to resonate in different ways in the other short stories, across changes in relationships, and in other places and times.

There are other elements as well in the collection that point to a structural unity. Although Sam follows a circuitous journey, amplifying her theme in various contexts, the short stories are linked thematically. Taken together they deal with issues of prejudice in various forms, and with cultural translation, syncretism and assimilation. She explores racist, sexist and religious bigotry, showing that racial or gendered identities are complex and varied. The larger themes - of ethnocentricity, racial discrimination, social prejudice, religious intolerance and xenophobia - are played out in micro-relationships, with most of her stories being encounters between two or three persons. The stories are similar to Miriam Tlali's collection of short stories, *Footprints in the Quag - Stories from Soweto*, in that they illustrate the effects of apartheid on personal relationships. Sam's critical interest

is in subjectivity - how it is constructed, and the choices that are available or that one makes. She moves away from the overtly political, and dwells rather on the more intimate processes of subject-formation in her writing.

In Sam's short story cycle we find many permutations of the notions of identity and difference, as she foregrounds particularly the lives of women. Most of the stories have woman-protagonists, and deal with women in relationships of various kinds. Working consistently with her theme of the far-reaching effects of apartheid and social alienation, Sam foregrounds the voices of females of different age groups, races and classes, in diverse situations of complicity with or resistance to gendered stereotypes, prejudice and oppression. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson places particular emphasis on women's voices and experiences: drawing from feminist thought and from Bakhtin and Gadamer, she states that we should engage in a holistic reading of black women's texts to guard against the "strategies of containment" that Frederic Jameson has described, whereby different or alternative readings are restricted or repressed (Henderson 1990:117). In the reading of black women's texts Henderson criticises any "blindness" to the gender subtext when the racial subtext is foregrounded, and vice versa. She proposes a theory of interpretation based on a notion of the "*simultaneity of discourse*", an approach which "is intended to acknowledge and overcome the limitations imposed by assumptions of internal identity (homogeneity) and the repression of internal differences (heterogeneity) in racial and gendered readings of works by black women writers". In this way Henderson hopes that critical readings of black women's texts will account "for racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity" (117). Such critical readings will highlight a "dialogic of differences", where black women engage in an internal dialogue with themselves and a dialogue with others from either the dominant or oppressed groups. They will also take cognisance of a "dialectic of identity", as black women experience aspects of self that they share with others.

Consequently, Henderson argues, readers are steered away from what John Carlos Rowe calls "a simple and reductive paradigm of 'otherness'" (117). Similarly in *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories*, we should read the cycle for its multiple representations of "otherness" in varying networks of power and discourse. If, as Henderson points out, "black women speak from a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionality, which, in effect constitutes black female subjectivity" (119), Sam shows in her short stories very specific and particular varieties of this multiplicity and complexity. And reading the short stories dialogically and dialectically helps in an exploration of this multiplicity and complexity.

Reclaiming history

Sam begins her collection with an "Introduction" in which she reclaims in a small way the

suppressed history of her great-grandfather who came to South Africa from India. On her grandfather's death she discovers that her great-grandfather "was shanghaied as a child from India" (Sam 1989:1); this prompts her to find out more about the history of her extended family. Perusing personal papers, she is able to work out that her great-grandfather arrived in Durban on the *Lord George Bentinck II*, on 24 December 1860. This ship left India before the first ship with indentured Indians, the *Truro*, but arrived on South African shores after it. Sam deplors the general exclusion of Indians from the history books, and the historical consciousness that is suppressed in the process:

It seemed reasonable to question this omission; to wonder if the presence of Indians on African soil was simply too insignificant for inclusion in South Africa's history; to query its irrelevance in a country where cheap labour is the foundation of the economy; and to pursue the significance of the Indian presence in South Africa, and its exclusion from the history books. (2)

In the "Introduction" Sam writes of the general history of indentured Indians from the vantage point of her grandfather's experiences. She gives an historical overview of the chief events at the turn of the century, pointing out that "[p]rior to the end of indentureship in 1911, South Africans experienced the Anglo-Boer wars, concentration camps, Gandhi's protest movement, the formation of the Indian National Congress, publication of *The Indian Opinion*, and the unification of the four republics into a Union of South Africa" (8).

However, in calling for a retrieval of Indian history, she avoids reifying it and valorising it in absolute terms. She focuses on Indian history as a paradigm case of exclusion, and asserts that it is necessary that similar questions be asked of African, Chinese, Coloured, and Malay history: "Because it is essential for all South Africans, if we are to recuperate from the disease which apartheid spread amongst us"(2). Sam argues that the arrival of Indian indentured labourers must be seen against the background of the marginalised African workers. Though briefly sketched, Sam suggests a nuanced, integrated view of this history:

We know that in the mines today African men are not allowed to have their families live with them; women working in service have to sleep on the premises whilst their families live in the townships....Indentureship may be seen as the first form of migrant labour in South Africa....

The right of settlement and the right to purchase land, both denied to Indians in the nineteenth century, are part of the intricacies of the Bantustan policy now in operation in South Africa. Except for a period in the nineteenth century when Africans could own land, the rights to purchase land has always been denied to South Africa's African people....

Indentured labour replaced slavery. Migrant labour replaced indentured labour. The Bantustans will replace migrant labour. The difference between these four forms of labour may have been only in the letter of the law. The labourers - slaves, indentured labourers, migrant workers and people in the Bantustans - shared the status of foreigners in South Africa. (6,8,9)

The history of migrants, whether they are indentured labourers, or internal migrants or refugees, shows similar patterns of marginalisation. Sam points to the common experiences that subjugated peoples endure, seeing them as part of a chain in history. South African Indians, among others, continue to be alienated in the land of their adoption and, as pointed

out in an earlier chapter, Sam draws attention to the isolation that they feel. The sense of alienation is exacerbated by the spread of Christianity, which undermines other religions and cultures, seeing them as 'non-western' and therefore inferior. Sam writes that "[b]oth Africans and Indians, by speaking English, wearing western clothes, even accepting conversion to Christianity, adapted to the language, religion and customs of the colonisers" (10). The effect of such colonial dominance on interpersonal relationships is evident in the short stories "High Heels", "Jesus is Indian" and "Maths". This colonial dominance, however, does not go unchallenged, and contains the very seeds of resistance.

Accordingly, in the "Introduction" Sam invokes the Biblical story of Ruth, described as "the epitome of the migrant wife". Ruth embraces assimilation and appropriation to end her predicament of being the outsider. Her story mirrors the history of South Africa, which is one of migrancy, in different forms, and is synonymous with dispossession. Although extolled for her selflessness in Biblical exegesis, in effect the burden of reconciliation and adaptation is upon her. Ruth's plight is similar to that of the migrant woman, feminised into subjection by her colonial lord and master:

I have often wondered, are Ruth's words murmured in the ear of every girl child at birth? For I can find no other way to explain the way women throughout history act out Ruth's specific commitment to follow someone to a foreign country. Expressing her commitment whilst voicing uncertainty about a new place, people and religion, Ruth, the epitome of the migrant wife, is still willing to adapt. 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people will be my people, and thy God my God'.
Ruth 1:16. (12-13)

J Hillis Miller sees the story of Ruth as an interesting parable of the translatability of culture (and of the way theory travels from one context to another), where an original language and culture crosses a border and is translated into the "idiom of the new culture" (Miller 1996:219). However, as Miller argues, while translation and assimilation take place, there is still some residue that resists complete submerging within the new cultural context. The analogy with Ruth's story underlines Sam's short story cycle as a whole; the title story "Jesus is Indian", for one, shows that these problems of cultural translation for those who are dislocated are exacerbated in a context of power relationships.

The themes of migrant experience that Meena Alexander (Alexander, Meena 1993:2,3,4) identifies - the "fragments of a broken geography", of being "cracked by multiple migrations" and "writing in search of a homeland" - are found in all the writings in this study, and are relevant to Sam's short story collection as well. K Padayachee points out that "[i]n depicting and focussing on the abject isolation and alienation of the condition of exile, Sam is, in a sense, telling her own story" (Padayachee 1995:31). A few of her short stories in the collection in which we see a "portrayal of communities and individuals in the throes of dislocation and disconnection" demonstrate aspects of Sam's "exilic imagining" (Padayachee 1995:26). Sam prompts a subversive re-writing of the archetypal Ruth story,

by countering the image of the stereotypically submissive and conciliatory migrant woman. In the short story, "Maths", the immigrant mother is assertive, and resists the image of what Alund refers to in another context as "stigmatised 'Otherness'" (Alund 1999:150).

Interestingly enough, although Sam begins the "Introduction" with the story of her grandfather she ends it by alluding to the wandering Ruth. In the reclamation of marginalised histories the first inclination is to concentrate on the stories of men. As Andre Brink points out: "Male historiography... tends to take genealogy both as its starting point and its justification" (Brink 1998:24). And in the attempt to correct this we tend to engage in female historiography, as some of the women selected for this study, including myself in my story of my grandmother, do. After the "Introduction" Sam overturns the convention of recording history from a male point of view and chooses to write of the experiences of women at many different and diverse points in their lives, their past not always known, their future not always assured. As the following discussion will reveal, Sam's approach seems more in line with that of Brink, who points out the challenge for a new history-making for our time: "A re-imagining of South African history in this changed and still changing context may well depart quite radically...to present its flow as being of another kind altogether - determined not by who-begat-whom but by more subliminal rhythms and contingencies" (24).

The "Introduction" and the concluding piece of the collection, "And They Christened It Indenture", invoke the history of dispossession, specifically through indenture, and provide an overarching framework, or 'discursive continuum' (Rooney 1990:6), for the reading of the rest of the stories. The genealogy provides the background to the short stories, and weaves itself in different ways through the entire collection. There is a sequential or temporal design, yet the correspondence to history is lightly sketched. The initial uprooting caused by indenture is compounded by apartheid and discrimination in different forms, including self-alienation. The 'discursive continuum', linking history and literature, suggests relationships among the short stories, as they explore in various contexts, issues of community and of separation, both in South Africa and beyond. The geographical movement that links the stories - from Port Elizabeth across Africa, to the United Kingdom, invokes the "migrating subjectivity" of black women, as Boyce Davies has drawn attention to in the writings of black women generally. This "migrating subjectivity" is reflected in spatial terms, as Sam develops a different "critical geography" from that of Jayaprada Reddy, for example. Like Reddy's, Sam's stories move away from confined "group areas", but they cover a wider regional landscape. Linked to this is a much larger discursive canvas that Sam deploys as she explores a range of subjectivities from colonial to apartheid and post-colonial contexts.

"High Heels"

Against the hierarchical tyranny of imperialism and colonisation and, then, apartheid, with which the collection begins, Sam depicts various contexts in which horizontal or internal forms of subjugation persist. In the first short story, "High Heels", a little girl, Ruthie, who is also the narrator, is caught in a web of cross-cultural conflict. She is unaware of the larger dilemmas of acculturation and the lack of dialogue and acceptance across cultures. Conflict between two cultural traditions, one Christian and the other Hindu, is evident: Ruthie is Christian, but does not appreciate immediately that anything connected with Hinduism is considered alien or 'pagan' by the Christian priest and nuns who are her family's religious mentors.

The story begins with Ruthie caught up in a boys' world of cricket, playing "first man", when she sees her friend, Lindiwe, wearing high heels (Sam provides no racial clues about Lindiwe's identity, except her name, and one is left guessing, as well as interrogating one's own assumptions). Lindi loves teasing Ruthie, and presents herself as being more knowledgeable about the world. Ruthie longs to have a pair of high heels herself in order to look like her mother: "I look just like Hama. I can walk in Hama's shoes" (Sam 1989:18). Lindiwe offers Ruthie the shoes if she (Ruthie) is able to go through a secret door in her house. Lindiwe knows that Ruthie has just discovered the existence of this door, and is dying to cross the threshold into it:

I see it for the first time. There's a door behind the curtains at the end of the passage. I never knew there's a door behind the curtain. And Hama's sandals are by the door. I knock and listen. 'Hama?...Hama?' It's quiet. Like someone's waiting for me to go away. I try the handle. It's locked. (16)

Sam skilfully links this desire for the "high heels" with Ruthie's desire to enter the secret room; Ruthie expends all her energy trying to find out what lies behind the secret door. She hears intriguing and tangled tales from those around her: "Paul says behind the secret door is a dark, dark room. In the dark room is a dark, dark bed. In the dark, dark bed is an old, old lady..." (19-20). She is determined to find out for herself, especially since Lindi gives her only three days for her quest, in return for the much-coveted high heels as a birthday present.

The mystery of the secret room deepens as Ruthie finally enters its hallowed precincts, helped by her sympathetic grandfather who decides to relieve her curiosity. The room is sparsely furnished and different in ambience from the rest of the house. Ruthie soon realises that all the room has are brass, gold and silver trays and vases, an oil lamp with a red chimney, and an innocuous picture of Jesus from popular Christian iconography: "I look around the room. In one corner is a picture of Jesus with a bleeding heart and a statue of his Hama" (22). She refers to the Virgin Mary as Hama (Mother), which extends the cultural boundaries in which the Virgin is venerated; it is another way of prompting the reader into realising the nature of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. (In using the word

"Hama" naturally and unselfconsciously, Sam prepares the ground for the succeeding story, "Jesus is Indian", where the use of "Hama" has to be vigorously fought for in a school setting that lays down stringent rules on English usage and propriety.)

The grandfather settles down to pray, and as he burns "*saamberani*", there is the aura of another world:

The room begins to smell of strange flowers. Then Tata sits cross-legged on a red cushion. He taps the cushion next to him. I kneel on the cushion looking up at him. He joins his hands and he begins to sing softly. I can't understand what he says. I can only make out the word, Hama. But I like his singing. It's not like the singing in Church. (22)

Ruthie tries anxiously to make sense of the prayer-room and of why it is prohibited from view. Prodded by Lindi, Ruthie ventures cautiously: "I only know there's a secret prayer room in our house"(23). Lindi, parading her 'superior' understanding, pronounces the unmentionable: "Your Hama is a Christian and that's a Hindu prayer room" (23). For many Christians such syncretistic practices, where elements of Indian culture are combined with Christian ones, are considered unacceptable. It is for this reason that Ruthie is kept away from knowing about the prayer room. The attitude of the Church in these matters shows not just ignorance but racism, although it is not generally recognised as such. Customs and religious practices outside the Christian world are seen with scepticism or downright disapproval. While the short story is ostensibly of secret, forbidden doors familiar to readers of Western children's stories, Sam skilfully places hers in the context of living in a diverse community, where racial, cultural and religious discrimination occurs insidiously. The short story dramatises Ruthie's movement from the threshold of innocence to experience. Ruthie's passing through the dark door into the dark room becomes a metaphor for exploring the secrets and mysteries of life and those constructed fictions that are held so tenaciously. In the short story two different epistemologies and cultural worlds co-exist, but separated, it would seem, by the locked door. Sam is able to weave together a uniquely refreshing, syncretistic world of "*saamberani*" and "*tokoloshe*", and the "signing of the cross".

Sam sets the scene for the succeeding stories, where she intertwines questions of faith, power and identity, culture and tradition, and alienation in ordinary, everyday contexts. There is an interesting collocation of young people's play, of teasing and rivalry, with anxieties over living in a confusing and perplexing 'cross-cultural' home becoming increasingly apparent. Ruthie - prefigured by Ruth, "the migrant wife" - and her family, in trying to straddle the old and the new ways, have to cope with the fear of rejection on the one hand and suppression of their identity on the other, with the burden of assimilation and negotiation weighing on them. The onus is on the paradigmatic "migrant Ruth" to adapt to the alien culture, faith and language - not the other way round.

Being a South African Indian from a Catholic background herself, Sam in her fiction

shows the effects of a "double colonisation". Immigrants, as displaced peoples, constantly experience religious ambivalence. Christian Indians face confusion between their religious and cultural identities, which is compounded by colonialist attitudes and ignorance. Undergirding all these experiences is a deep existential loss, an anxiety of being bereft in a country that one finds difficult to call 'home'. Ruthie notices that Hama's prayers reflect her forlorn state: "Hama says she's scolding God for not looking after us in a strange country" (20). As Michael Gorra points out in his general critical discussion of resettled immigrants, "although these characters have the values of one land, they must live in another, estranged from their origins, in an ever more restless world of conflicting and interpenetrating cultures. They will never quite get over it" (Gorra 1997:70). Here, Ruthie sees her mother weeping, weighed down, it would seem, with an indescribable yearning to be accepted, not in a foreign land as the Biblical Ruth had wished, but in the very land of her birth. What is interesting in relation to Sam's purposes is the way in which this short story (and others in the collection) may be seen against the backdrop of the larger landscape of history that she has painted in the Introduction. She takes us to intimate contexts, to interior places, where one's difference is confronted, struggled with, accepted or rejected.

The lure of Western influences that young people are subjected to exacerbates the conflict of identities. Long hair, for example, is seen as being typically 'Indian' by Ruthie in "High Heels", and the desire to imitate Western styles comes from Western popular culture:

From the day me and Honey can talk we begging Hama to cut our hair. I don't know why Hama must ask the big people what to do. They say Indian girls must keep hair long. Me and Honey ask, Why? Indian girls must keep hair long like a monkey's tail? First the big people say little girls must listen to their elders...We not Hindu girls. Why we must keep our hair long. (Sam 1989:27)

When Ruthie's hair is finally cut, there is much talk from the "busybodies" in the neighbourhood:

Every busybody's shocked! Shame! Such beautiful hair! Behind Hama's back they saying, 'These Christian girls! They got no shame!' But Honey and me, we showing off. In front of all those one-plait Indian girls. Swinging our heads. Page boy style. Like Veronica Lake. (28)

In a later story in the cycle, "Maths", we note that the mother in the story, now transported to England, grows her hair long as a mark of resistance against Western culture. Throughout "High Heels", and especially in the next story, the conscious presentation of a distinctively hybridised linguistic style shows the intersection of different identities and the way differences are accepted, asserted and lived out.

"Jesus is Indian"

The short story "High Heels" anticipates the germinal piece of the collection, "Jesus is In-

dian". In the latter story Sam presents a young adolescent growing up in a bewildering world, beset by racial prejudice. There are no certainties of faith and culture, only feelings of dislocation. As with "High Heels", in "Jesus is Indian" there are two different ideologies, two competing discourses: the monolithic culture of Europe represented by Sister, the Catholic nun, and the other, an alternative, evolving syncretised culture, represented by Hama. The short story is set in Port Elizabeth and describes the experiences of a young girl named Angelina, from an Indian background, who attends the local Catholic school. As with Ruthie in the previous story, the narrative effectively captures aspects of Angelina's adolescent development through her relationships with members of her family, especially her mother (Hama), and those at her school. Sister talks in Standard English and is not able to enter into the world of Angelina. Hama, on the other hand, presents to Angelina a totally different world through her use of 'Indian English' and her history and experience. The sub-text of Angelina's musings disrupts the dominant discourse of Sister's instruction. Sister appears arrogantly oblivious to the ideological underpinnings of her perspectives, and Sam highlights the discursivity of prejudice and oppression. Drawing from Henderson's analysis (see Henderson 1990:120), I believe that both a dialogic of differences and a dialectic of identity is evident simultaneously in this short story, where Angelina engages in an adversarial and competitive dialogue with Sister and, at times, with herself and Hama, and where she also articulates a relationship marked by consensus and mutuality with Hama, with whom she shares a common history, language and culture. Angelina engages both the hegemonic discourses of Sister and the non-hegemonic discourses of Hama, Honey and her own.

The collision between the two worlds is precipitated when Angelina (obviously an assumed Western 'school' name, as it is not used at home), submits an essay to Sister which is rejected for the Indian words she uses, and because Angelina has written about the escapades of herself and her sister, Honey (a distortion of the Tamilian term 'Aunnie' for sister), in trying to find boyfriends. Angelina has to fight against the suffocation of her creativity. She is not free to write of her experiences truthfully; the experiences that she has in her Indian family context are not considered valid by her Western-educated teacher nor acceptable to the convent's puritanical ethos. The red pen of the Sister is a symbol of censure, and is the reason Angelina complains: "Writing at home is better. There's no stopping every five minutes for Sister's red pen" (Sam 1989:29).

Sam presents an indictment on living in South Africa - there is no place for the free play of the imagination; there are only dread and regimentation. This collusion between a colonial education and the repressive laws of apartheid society is often overlooked. Its long-term effects, even in contemplated inter-racial relationships, are suggested again in the short story, "Poppy", where there is fear of embracing the unknown, the unfamiliar, the alien. Sister's behaviour is symptomatic of the larger oppression of body and spirit by the

colonial and apartheid machinery. It also finds an echo in the kind of life that Faith has to endure in a convent in Mozambique in Karodia's story, *A Shattering of Silence* (see the following chapter).

To expiate for her apparent waywardness, Angelina prays: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, rather send me a book for Christmas with all the Christian names so I don't give my children a Hindu name by mistake. I don't want my poor children must die and go to hell for damn nation" (31). Angelina then realises that her Hama has a "Hindu" name, Kamatchee, and is faced with the prospect of her exclusion at the gates of heaven. So she prays:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, forgive me for being so selfish. Thinking about my children going to heaven and forgetting about my poor Hama. Rather don't give me that book for Christmas. Rather tell me how my poor Hama will go to heaven if she got a Hindu name? Must I give up chocolates for Lent? Or boyfriends? (31)

Shashi Deshpande recalls a similar experience in her own education, where Indian names were unacceptable:

...to speak English (and not the way we did), to wear English clothes...to be large, white and Christian was somehow to be superior. To be Indian, to be brown and to be Hindu was wrong...Even our names, it sometimes seemed in moments of despair, were wrong. Why were we Suresh and Ramesh and Shanta and Kanta and not Mary and Jane and Tom and John... (Deshpande 1993:105)

In "Jesus is Indian" we see a callous attempt to erase Indian identity by the nuns' teaching of racial inferiority and submissiveness. There are other instances in the story where Indian cultural practices are seen ambivalently or derisively. When a bride is bathed in turmeric before a *thali* is tied around her neck, for example, this is done surreptitiously, to avoid Father O'Malley's disapproval. And on another occasion, Angelina complains: "We can't eat curry and rice in the convent, Hama! What's the use you teach us cooking?"

The differences between the two worlds are dramatised through the language used in the short story. Sam left South Africa during the 'Soweto decade', when the enforcement of Afrikaans in education was fiercely fought. Raiskin points out that "language is the central metaphor for the tangled histories and relationships among the different groups in South Africa and the complex negotiations of power and assertions of identity" (Raiskin 1996:218). The short story, "Jesus is Indian", is written in a way that shows a robust orality, especially in the exchanges between the grandmother and grand-daughter. In emphasising the texture of a "writerly text" naturally, merging a range of registers and usages, Sam provides one example of the representation of the speaking voice among Indians. There is a natural tendency on the part of Hama to engage in transgression from the western norm epitomised by Sister and Father O'Malley, and thereby acknowledging and embracing her alterity.

Sam questions the domination of English, and the politics of identity that accompanies it. By altering the received syntax and grammar of the English language, she also tries to

capture a spontaneity that is repressed by the demand for formal usage, which for the Sister is the 'correct' way to use English, but in effect is stilted. The Sister sees Angelina's writing as a deviant variety of English. Creativity in Angelina's mother-tongue is discouraged, and the schooling she receives undervalues her own traditions and linguistic expression. She is not allowed, either, to speak any Indian languages, or even use words from Indian languages:

On Sunday when Hama's washing the rice and I'm stamping garlic and ginger I ask Hama, 'Why we didn't stay in India, Hama?' Why Hama want us to speak our language, but Sister Bonaventura want I must leave out Indian words? Now Hama say she don't want us to go to school anymore. Hama thought Sister Bonaventura is teaching us our language. (Sam 1989:30)

The backdrop to the conversation between Hama and Angelina shows a gendered division of domestic labour, and a natural and unquestioning acquiescence to it. The movement from tradition to modernity is hardly a linear one. There is a hankering to fulfil customary roles in a gendered world, and Angelina is frustrated too by her mother's conservatism: "Hama want Honey must get a husband and I must stay at home till I'm a old maid" (29). Yet, ironically, the women are aware of the larger cultural mutilation that they are subjected to historically. A triumphant "stubborn-as-a-mule" effort is mustered by Angelina, for instance, when she stands up to Sister Bonaventura:

So I stand up in front of the whole class and I tell Sister I never going to call Hama 'mother'. Even when I'm writing English in my book. Sister can say mother for Sister's mother. I say Hama for my Hama. Because Hama say Jesus is Indian because Jesus wear a dhoti and Jesus can understand our language. (33)

Both mother and daughter are able to resist the hegemonic weight of colonial influences epitomised by Sister, and assert their own independence in thought and action.

Angelica's Hama wants her to conform to the tradition of the Catholic Church, yet she (Hama) rightly rejects its distorted understanding of Indian culture and encourages Angelina to assert her beliefs and convictions and challenge the economy of the colonial curriculum, where Jesus is definitely not Indian:

She (Hama) say. "What that Sister know? hey? Don't Jesus wear a dhoti like Ghandi? Don't Hama talk to Jesus in our language? Don't Jesus answer all Hama's prayers? Don't Honey get a rich husband? You so clever, what you think that means? Hey? You electric light children and you don't know? Jesus is Indian. You go to school and tell that Sister. (Sam 1989:33)

And Hama's example of invoking Jesus as well as Gandhi is a strategic one. Deshpande speaks of the way the life and example of Gandhi helped colonised folk to claim their own cultural identity. Her observations show that one had to fight off feelings of denigration, and Gandhi's example helped one to assert pride in one's culture and faith:

It was Gandhi who chalked out this place for us where we belonged. He gave us not only a physical area but a moral territory as well. When we stood in this space, it seemed right, not inferior, to speak our own language, to dress the way we did, to go to the temple and pray to our gods. It was necessary to straddle two worlds; one could stand in one and reach out to the other. (Deshpande 1993:106)

In a perceptive article, Flockemann compares the writing of Sam with that of Olive Senior, the Caribbean writer. She argues that "'Indianness' is constructed as unsettling dominant discourses of identity" in "Jesus is Indian", and she compares it with Senior's "Arrival of the Snake-Woman". She also points to a movement away from the twilight zone of "in-betweenness" to the vibrant assertion of difference:

While Senior's story emphasises pragmatic cultural creolization in the Caribbean, South Africa's infamous Population Registration Act (1950) catered for a separate 'Indian' racial classification as distinct from 'Cape' and 'Other Coloureds'. In the South African context, there is a shift from representing Asian women as 'in-between', perceived as not-quite White, and not-quite Black, to an affirmation of difference which offers a challenge to the totalising systems of both apartheid and patriarchy. (Flockemann 1997:4)

There is complexity and richness as well as contradiction in the expression of identity, as is evident in the influence of Western popular culture on the young children. It might seem paradoxical that Angelina wishes to assert a Western identity influenced by popular culture at the same time that she feels a reluctance to succumb to the pressures to deny her Indian background. She experiences no sense of contradiction in identifying in this selective way with Western popular culture, which is seen as universal and "natural" (and inevitable), and shows a different kind of syncretism here. The young Angelina in Sam's story is trying to work through the conflicting and confusing messages she is being perplexed by in the world in which she lives.

The Rest of the Cycle

The "Introduction" and the first two short stories open up several possibilities for the development of the themes that the collection begins with. Sam writes of love across religious and racial lines, of religious sectarianism, racism and sexism. She is consistent in setting up cultural markers as she exposes prejudice and bigotry in a variety of situations. While the earlier short stories prefigure deep feelings of self-entitlement, of her protagonists' right to name themselves, the later short stories are set outside South Africa and continue, among others, the themes of racial segregation. In critiquing the colonial, apartheid and post-colonial worlds Sam moves away from predictable and simplistic oppositions and binarisms to produce diverse configurations of prejudice and oppression both from outside forces and from within communities and families, and between individuals.

In the short story, "Poppy", Sam takes us into the world of an "incongruous mating" (Sam 1989:35) between a black woman and a white man. The central figure is that of an African girl who loves a white man. Her love is unusual, outside normal expectations: "He was surprised that she was able to love him without any sense of their differences" (37). Yet she constantly experiences a feeling of dread about their relationship. At fifteen she had not known fear, but at sixteen, she recalls the experience of travelling in a train, and being in the same compartment as a white man, and feeling dread and apprehension

throughout the trip. She experiences a sense of separation from herself. From a youthful carefree existence, she is socialised into creating an Other, and developing a fear of it. As alluded to earlier, apartheid is not able to encourage and foster the adoption of new possibilities, new imaginings; it does not allow one to move out of one's customary and habitual frame of reference:

The imagination that thrived on romance, heroic myths and horror stories, was like a nonentity in this experience of fear. They were in South Africa. She was black. The man was white. There was nothing else for the imagination to build on - there was nothing to see of the man. This was the kind of fear from which she could not get up and run away. It was the kind of fear from which no-one could rescue her...(37)

Sam might be suggesting, allegorically, through the motif of the train journey, the kind of journey that all South Africans must make in order to confront their colour consciousness. As argued earlier, in this, as with some of the other stories in the collection, the narratives are lightly sketched, giving an impressionistic feel, and suggesting the general exilic, detached condition under apartheid, whether one has physically left the country or not. Life under apartheid is lived surreptitiously, superficially, fearfully, with a reluctance to probe too explicitly and too deeply below the surface. The short stories, in their form and content, seem to me to depict this kind of disjunctive, tentative living.

There is a stark contrast between a life that is predictable, in enclosed circles of familiarity, and that which is new and strange. In a world of prescriptive racial behaviour the young girl realises that even her dreams are determined:

The farm below described a circle of welcoming homes, and generations of families farming the land; of love for the land and for seasonal growth; and of love between those who shared the experience. But she was outside that welcoming circle. When she had thought about experiencing love it had been in the unromantic sense. She knew there would be more than one man in her life, but that with one man there would remain a connecting thread that would outlast even separation. In those dreams she had pictured every description of man, but this one.(35)

The overarching metaphors of the story are those of a red-petalled flower and a greenish-white butterfly poised in a dramatic union; it has echoes, the narrator points out, of the classical story of Leda and the Swan. Sam conjures up a world of fusion and interconnectedness. She alludes to the fragility and delicacy of relationships across the racial divide. The lovers are like a flower, teased in the breeze; they are vulnerable, and yet like the flower, are inclined to resist the "wantonness of the breeze" (34). They realise that any relationship across the colour divide will be destroyed. Looking at the flower and the butterfly the man says, "Like these two," he said, "vulnerable, sharing an act in life, we'll be crushed"(38). The two lovers hover over the possibility of joy and freedom, as fear envelops them.

If relationships across the colour line are viewed with apprehension, those across religious barriers are also deemed unnatural and deviant. In "A Bag of Sweets", we see the re-

religious divisions of "Jesus is Indian" turning in on themselves. The collision between the worlds of the coloniser and colonised takes a different turn in this later story where, in a narrow familial context, marriage across the religious divide tears families apart. Sam does not provide a resolution, but merely exposes the way in which people view the world through totally different lenses due to religious prejudices.

The narrator, Kaltoum, finds it difficult to forgive her sister, Khatija, for turning against Islam, the family religion, and marrying a Christian. The sisters confront each other after many years, but Kaltoum still feels the disgrace the family endured hard to forgive. Khatija comes to meet her in the family shop; Kaltoum is relieved to see her sister showing some vestige of allegiance to her Muslim culture - she is dressed traditionally. Kaltoum concedes that "it isn't as if she turned Christian. She just married one" (43), but she still cannot bring herself to forgive her sister. Ironically, the practices of Christian faith are not in gross violation of Muslim teaching, but are disregarded because they emanate from a different centre of belief:

But Khadija was married into a Christian family that was involved in voluntary work, fasting during Lent, eating fish on Fridays and everything else Christian. My Christian friends said that on Fridays we should be more for giving! That was why she was coming on Fridays. (42)

The family see Khadija's Friday visits as a gross intrusion on their day of worship. The effect of the prejudice of the parents, who are now dead, is far-reaching, preventing the children from being free to make decisions of their own. The brother, for instance, is hard and unrelenting. Kaltoum says: "I knew he would have forgiven Khadija the very day she ran away to marry the Christian boy. But he has to take his cue from our parents" (43). Kaltoum is touched that Khadija, the errant daughter, remembers all the family events, which the others take for granted; she feels a "homesickness" for the past family life that they all enjoyed together. While Kaltoum rebuffs her, she cannot help being moved by the resemblance between Khadija and their mother. Whatever feelings Kaltoum might have for her sister are suppressed, and the family are scandalised that she gives Khatija a bag of sweets on her weekly visits: "Adbul would not believe me. 'A bag of sweets?' he kept repeating. 'You're sure about that, Kaltoum? A bag of sweets?'"(42). Kaltoum is apologetic, evasive, pointing out to her incredulous brother that it is merely a cheap bag of sweets. Kaltoum adamantly disowns her sister, ironically as a show of her strength of character, and denies the feelings that she has for her: "Instead of reaching out to hold her, of sharing my grief with her, I reached up and pulled down the blinds in the windows, switched off the lights and moved to the door with the keys in my hand" (41).

Kaltoum compares her sister's insistent visits to the behaviour of an abused woman who cannot retreat from her abuser:

She doesn't take the insult. She knows I want her not to come back. But she wants to come back. Like a woman when she loves a man who beats her up. After each beating they make us. She forgives him. She makes excuses for

why he beats her up. She says he is possessive... (43)

Kaltoum is unable to see this as an indictment on her own behaviour. Ironically, it is she who is trapped as she cannot defy the "Law of the Father", and assume the "burden of reconciliation".

Prejudice against marrying an African man is equally strong, even if he were a Muslim. In "The Well-loved Woman" Sam depicts the extent to which racism is normalised in the popular imagination, and how it becomes impossible to raise questions about the ethics or injustice of racial, ethnic or religious discrimination. Chantal, as a child, is not preoccupied with her sex and sexuality, but as she grows up she becomes conscious of boys and begins "watching them with the furtive fascination of a forbidden book"(44). We note a childish sensibility and naivete similar to that of Ruthie in "High Heels" and Angelina in "Jesus is Indian". Here Chantal is asking questions, and finding out about the real world. She is beginning to piece together life and its expectations; she slowly realises that growing up means growing up into the expectations and prejudices of her family, and accepting them as her own. She is particularly attracted to an African boy (and presumably a Muslim, since he wears a round, crocheted white cap on Fridays), but the "community" is shattered that an Indian girl should be seen talking to an African boy. The family are adamant that she should not think of marrying an African, and attempt to justify their racist attitudes on the basis of practical considerations such as "Where will you live if you marry an African" (51).

Kamilla, her sister, on holiday at home from overseas, is outspoken and wants equal rights for women. She encourages the young women to question the stereotypes that they are subjected to, and presents to them the possibility of an alternative world:

The young people now looked up to her. They hung around her; told her their hidden ambitions; whom they secretly loved. Kamilla pursued their interests. She suggested the unmarried girls in the family should have a chance to go to university. College, run the family business, be mechanics - whatever the goal - they should pursue it. (49)

She also asserts that girls should be free to choose their own husbands and direct the course of their lives. It is not surprising that Kamilla is seen as an unsettling influence, and there is resistance to an education that might turn girls away from their tradition.

"The Child and the Dove" is another impressionistic piece, touching lightly on the opposites that make up life. The short story, almost in the form of an interlude or mood piece, begins with the scene of a child seeking shelter in the rain. It is night, and the child is hiding under the car, while men are hovering around her waiting. She hears agonised screams and, fainting and waking throughout the night, loses touch with reality. It is a desolate place - of dustbins, abandoned cars, empty bottles. In this setting she catches sight of little feet in ballet shoes. It is a "most incongruous sight":

Imprisoned in the cage formed by the child's fingers she sees a dove. The child's face, piquant and sweet, nestling close to the dove. The dove quiescent against her breast. All grey like to morning sky. The dove, the dress

and the dancing shoes. (55)

This image brings a glimmer of hope, of softness perhaps, to the otherwise desperate situation. The story is brief and cryptic, with no closure, just feelings of danger and the dream of a new and changed life. It encapsulates the feelings of the characters in the stories so far in the collection - a longing for something beyond themselves and the world that is imposed on them.

Racial prejudice and bigotry have a damaging effect on close friendships, as is seen in the next story, "Nana and Devi". Nana, an African woman, and her little daughter Leloba, are sitting on a deserted beach, when Devi, an Indian woman and a very close friend of Nana's, comes to meet her. Devi had murdered her husband, an Indian man, when she discovered he was having an affair. Now grey-haired, Devi has been released from prison after fifteen years, and is seeking information about her daughter. She finds out that her child was adopted and taken to live overseas. She also realises now that it was Nana who had betrayed her. Nana and Devi had been very good friends - like "blood sisters" - but Devi had unknowingly entered into an arranged marriage with her (Nana's) lover. Devi did not know at the time that it was Nana whom her husband really loved. Nana feels that Devi should have encouraged her suitor to marry his real lover (herself), and that he, in turn, should not have bowed to pressure from his family:

No Devi. I wanted him to marry me, before your marriage was arranged. He was a terrible coward, he was afraid. Afraid of his community, afraid our cultures were too different. Afraid how we'd be torn when our communities were in conflict. (62)

Leloba intuitively knows that the two women are connected in a love-hate relationship that cannot easily be severed. Like a love-child between the two women, she longs for them to come together:

Leloba looked from one to the other. The two women were sitting like strangers, one consistently making loving overtures, the other instinctively rebuffing her, yet the girl, through her confusion, felt strangely happy to see them together....

She instinctively felt the two would overcome their inhibitions if she left them alone. But even with waiting outside the rondavel, where they were staying, watching the tide come in, to give them more time alone, she heard no words exchanged between them, and found them sitting in meditative silence when she came tentatively back inside. (58)

It is only at the end of the day that Nana and Devi come together in acceptance of each other: "It was dusk when the girl Leloba walked up the hill to the rondavel and found Nana and Devi huddled together with a blanket around their shoulders, and going up to them, kissed each in turn" (63). The two friends had become entrammelled in a destructive course caused ultimately by racial antipathy. Through a rather tangled, complex and unlikely, but not implausible, plot, Sam shows in this short story the domino-effect that racial prejudice has. Nana and Devi, two close friends who found each other across the racial divide, had been torn apart, and had their lives destroyed by the racist behaviour of others.

The short story "Sunflowers", though in a totally different world, shows that political consciousness and blind adherence to power, as much as custom and tradition, imprison people. It is in the form of a letter to a person named Seodi and is signed "Amandla". It is written from a place called "The Island", and seems to be suggestive of Robben Island. The island is seen as a symbol of apartheid: "The island is yet another homeland: fixed, insular, dependent - and remote from the traffic in ideas" (64). In this "homeland" people are "unambiguous prisoners"; here on the island their entrapment is stark. The speaker/writer, is a freedom fighter, and has endured incarceration for twenty years, together with three others who were tried. The theme of dispossession in the place of one's birth is evident again, as the writer stresses that she is robbed of her natural birthright: "Our home - their fatherland, our people - their chattels, like prisoners magnetised to the granite, powerless to weaken their force. Would you deny this is their island, this their time? Its characteristics are theirs. We? We are still the chain gangs - perhaps forever - forced to work where they will send us" (64-65).

Through a monological device such as that of the letter, which places the reader in the position of interlocuter, we gradually piece together occurrences that seem enigmatic. The woman arrogantly accepts her key position on the island because of her 'struggle' credentials: "For years I tolerated the isolation - with a kind of egotism - seeing myself - redeemer - martyr - heroine of my people" (64). In her letter, she begins to recount the happenings of the past eight days, when a strange young boy was put ashore on the island. She is confused about the boy's intentions, and finds her own interpretations of him difficult to reconcile. On the one hand she thinks he is looking to her for a sign, to know that she is the leader of the group. She, however, does not want to give the impression that she is any different from the others.

The simile that runs through her letter and that might provide a clue as to the state of her mind is that of the oyster and the formation of a pearl. Her own life is like an oyster and her thoughts are either lustrous pearls or irritants that are deformed. Either good or ill is possible in such a situation. It seems that her life and identity and her actions are out of her control, a consequence of being imprisoned on the island and caught up in a certain trajectory of events:

It's the solitude. All day and all night. Day in and day out. I churn over in my mind a prized thought, like a grain of sand destined to become a pearl, my mind soft, muscular, like the interior of an oyster forced to harbour the intrusion, adding to it layer by layer to protect itself, yet instinctively shutting it off from thieves until it is whole, distinct from me, with an identity of its own. Then, having lost control over it I must watch it assert its own reality, its independence from me. And should I try to prevent its escape, I am taken along with it. (65)

The boy roams freely around the island during the first three days, then pairs off with another islander, and stalks her. Two days later her husband Ngoma visits her, but instead of

bringing her four sunflowers as he usually does, one for each of their children and one from him, he comes with three.

On the day when she writes the letter, she could not tolerate the boy's strange behaviour towards her and she, together with others around her, begins to stone him. She realises later that it is her son she had stoned, and that God had done nothing to prevent her: He was just standing there, with "ah bright wings" (69). She slowly begins to appreciate the significance of the three sunflowers: her son had left home, but her husband did not know that he was actually on the island. She does not know how her son had come to be on the island, and feels the responsibility and anguish for his death: "Now my mind without a single thought has become like a sunflower on a stretch of desert sand straining for the sun, the sky covered over with brass and iron" (69). Her desolation is complete - she is now a person with no identity, alienated from, and an outsider to, herself.

Like "Nana and Devi" this evocative story shows the bizarre entrapment of individuals in events that are not entirely of their own making. Yet the actions of these individuals, out of the need to subscribe to the liberation struggle or an image of themselves as liberation heroes and heroines causes them to act in ways that are not unlike those of their oppressors. The woman's actions, even though reactive, result in the killing of her own son. In "Nana and Devi" it is beloved friends who turn against each other. The moral universe in which these individuals wish to live and have their being, and for which they are even prepared to suffer, is distorted and reversed, and they themselves have blood on their hands. As in all these short stories Sam shows that both oppressor and oppressed are locked in combat, but that the oppressed have also created their own Others. Again, the plot of this short story seems to be strained to serve Sam's larger purposes - an indictment against an unjust and immoral order in South Africa wherever it may be found. One of the compelling consequences of living in such an imprisoning world is flight...

Translation

Gender and racial politics continue to dominate the lives of people, however, even as they move beyond the borders of South Africa. This theme underlies "The Two Women", where one white and one black woman are "handcuffed to each other", finding themselves "somewhere in Africa" (70). There is no precise delineation of location. The black woman, skipping the country, is caught by the white woman, an English-speaking South African, across whose farm the escape is being effected. The white woman handcuffs her captive, takes her in her car to turn her in, but on the way, her car has a mechanical failure. The usual assumptions are made about black people, and the black woman plays along, pretending to know nothing about repairing a car:

I did not flinch. I wore the expression of the black woman stereotyped in film and fiction: I stood looking as if I could not tell the thermostat housing from the bleed screws. And this was where the idea on which separate edu-

cation is based could not encompass that I could know about the engine of a car. She dismissed the idea from her mind like you can drain the cooling system of every drop of coolant. And I felt pity for her. (73)

They are overtaken by a black man who seems to have appeared from nowhere. The white woman appears to be familiar with his dialect, and the two converse with each other for over an hour. After a while the captor realises that she and her captive are not safe on the desolate road, that they are both vulnerable. She then tries to make a deal with her captive. She offers to free her, if the black woman returns the radiator cap that she earlier took. At this point the captive realises that she has miscalculated her captor, and that she has lost the opportunity to develop a sisterhood with a white woman in the face of a common male enemy. Apartheid has prevented these solidarities, and had made both of them see each other through racial stereotypes. The black woman now reflects: "I was young and cocksure about every damn thing. Separate education had a stranglehold on me too. I had never imagined she would offer me the keys. But immediately I assessed her - wrongly" (77). Sam shows how relationships between women of different race groups become defined by impersonal political forces. In a period of intense political conflict "loyalties to state and race were encouraged to come to the fore, numbing our sensitivity to each other's character" (70).

The short story entitled "Innocents" develops, extends and complicates the context of the short story, "The Two Women". The former centres around three women, Marya, Beauty and the narrator, Letschmi, drinking sundowners at a hotel. There is subdued racial hostility among them - Afrikaner, African and Indian - but they decide, together with other guests from the hotel, to climb the mountain of Thabo Bosigo, the historical place where Moshoeshoe had fled from Shaka's reign and fought off the British. Together with a group of tourists, they climb the mountain, and meet a man cooking a chicken. They have never socialised together before, and this has been a journey of discovery for each. They are offered a drink by the man, and the group settle down on the slope to enjoy the drink. This racially-mixed group is able to flaunt custom by drinking from the same tin cups, yet back in South Africa, some of them are the very ones who make and uphold the apartheid laws.

One of the other women, Wethu, sits apart, and they try to find out her story. Beauty relates the story of Wethu, of her desolation since her son had been killed by the chief because her son was feared to be the heir to a tribal inheritance. Wethu's story follows the pattern of the Biblical one of Mary and Joseph in an African tribal setting, in relating the killing of innocent children by one of the chiefs.

As the travellers move through the rugged terrain, the crucial question of identity is evaded by the other two women, but Beauty insists on raising it. Beauty states that she feels at home in Africa, observing that Letschmi, the Indian woman, could pass for an Italian and Marya, the Afrikaner woman, for Norwegian. Letschmi observes that this denial of identity is typically South African: "The expression embarrassed us. There was

something uniquely South African about it" (87). Marya believes that they could be friends without the baggage of their history, their past. She feels that they are weighed down by the past history that each represents: "She was secretly convinced... that friendship between us was possible without bringing each other's history or politics into it" (88).

However, Beauty asks: "Should we work towards one culture, African, Indian and Afrikaner?" (89). She poses the pivotal question, "Where does African history begin?" She recalls the effect that the missionaries had on this part of Africa, Lesotho, where they are at the moment. Lesotho is a good example of the legacy of missionary activity in Africa. But Beauty points out: "Education is what they brought, the Christian missionaries. Not Christianity...Christianity belongs in Africa" (90). Beauty proceeds to give them a lecture on the early beginnings of Christianity in Africa:

The popes in the early Christian church were from Africa when the Christians were being persecuted...Augustine was an African...Africa was an integral part of the early Christian church, before it was moved from Carthage to Rome. All colonies were ruled from Europe...so the Romans moved the church to Rome from Carthage, once Christianity became popular. (90, 91)

Beauty's mission is similar to that of so many African writers and thinkers who have striven to show that Africa does have a great and worthy heritage.

Beauty's exposition is a tacit critique of the myopic Christianity that is practised by Sister in the short story "Jesus is Indian". Jesus is Indian. Jesus is African. However, making the conceptual and political change is difficult, given the deeply embedded prejudices and the very belief and knowledge systems that make whites assume they are superior. Marya shows the difficulty of making a shift in her thinking: "Back at the inn that night we were silent and uneasy. Marya seemed to yearn for the company of the European guests, glancing listlessly in their direction. The incident reminded me uneasily of how little we understood each other" (85).

It is significant that in these short stories Sam crosses over into other subject positions, exploring notions of identity and difference from various vantage points. She is particularly concerned with the effects of racist and sexist attitudes imbibed from the over-riding apartheid system and the way personal relationships are distorted in the process.

"The Burden of Reconciliation"

The barriers of race and gender are further illustrated in the next three short stories which are located in the United Kingdom. The stories show a mother and her child (or children, as the case may be) from South Africa settling in England and the problems that they encounter there. As pointed out earlier, the stories follow aspects of Sam's own life, which include her moving as a single parent from the Southern African region to England. Taken together, they portray several themes in post-colonial contexts, as immigrants from the former colonies have moved to the old metropolitan centres. As John Clement Ball ob-

serves: "Where once London reached out expansively into 'the world' now the world began to shrink in upon London" (Ball 1996:8). Although the immigrants are linked to the history of the Empire, as the indentured labourers are dislodged from their original homeland by imperial design, they are seen as intruders, and have to deal with the "new racism" and alienation in the metropolis. The immigrant is designated as a "stranger" and alien very much in the way that Ruth experienced.

Sam's short stories on this theme are an important part of the trajectory of the stories in the collection that begins with the history of indenture and of living in a racially divisive society such as South Africa. The short story, "Seed", develops evocatively, in a stylised, almost surreal manner, with little hint that this is a tacit critique of life in England. A group gathers around a fire and tell a story of an old woman planting seeds over entire days, but becoming frustrated as none of the seeds germinates. The woman grasps the last remaining seed in her palm, and uses it to tell a little child a story while they sit around the communal fire. She tells of a seed that was buried with other seeds, but failed to grow. As the narrator says: "The seed should have been planted along with the rest in the arid, rust red soil. Instead it lay gleaming on the toughened skin of the old woman's palm like a hardened black tear drop" (Sam 1989:93).

The conversation around the fire is compelling, with each member of the group contributing to the shape of the story. The place is indeterminate, but has an African, dream-world quality about it, a world of magic and make-believe. A world of stories. The participants give the name, Moleah, to the planter, and the name, Jelani, to the boy. The boy is enthralled by the stories of the old woman, and is not really interested in those of his mother who told him about fairies, witches and magicians. The old woman tells him that they tried everything to make the seed grow. The planter in the story, an old man, is anxious, and sleeps alongside the seed to nurture it into growth. Soon the seed becomes transformed into a jewel.

Like "Sunflowers", the short story "Seed" moves cryptically, until we come to the end, where a new understanding occurs. It is only then that we realise that the story of the seed is an allegory for a woman who has to study at a university in England where there are no facilities for children. Hiding her son is like hiding the seed. It turns out that the boy is being hidden by the mother from the residence inspector, who enforces the university rules that women may not have their children with them in university residences. The sight of the inspector reminds the boy of Group Areas surveillance in South Africa, showing how apartheid is entrenched in his memory. The mother is made to feel like a thief for hiding the boy. By juxtaposing and confounding stark reality and myth and imagination, secrecy and revelation, Sam suggests a distortion and reversal of values in the real world. The end is not readily anticipated or foreshadowed, and one wonders if the mythic elements were not part of the woman's subconscious. Brink's suggestion that magic realism offers a

worthwhile connection between the surreal and social and political commentary might be relevant here. In the transition from the fantastic to the ordinary and vice versa, Brink suggests that in displaying such "licentious genius of language" (he uses George Steiner's phrase), there might lie many possibilities for the "extraordinary powers of South African literature" (Brink 1998:27). Sam does seem to be experimenting here with a new approach to convey her rejection of a bureaucracy that prevents people from enjoying familial support structures.

In the short story, "Jellymouse", Sam expands on the difficulties experienced by the woman in the short story, "Seed". A family - a mother and her three sons, Lusani, Sinowa and Wande - are trying to set up home as immigrants in the United Kingdom, and are faced with many challenges. As the mother notes, "I was attempting to hold my own as a single mother, alienated from extended family and friends, while safeguarding the imaginative world my children were living in" (Sam 1989:106). The sons are blamed for all the misdemeanours of the neighbourhood. As victims of numerous incidents of harassment and accusations in a "crass neighbourhood...the carefree spirit they brought with them to this place was as if slapped away" (108). The mother realises that racism and bigotry are ubiquitous, and their effect on the developing imagination of her children perilous. Her need to develop a sense of belonging and to find a 'home' is thwarted even in an ostensibly democratic society. She finds that she is still Other. Sam paints a grim picture of cultural racism in England with its stereotypes. She shows the effect of prejudice on children who have to cope in an alien and alienating society.

In the economy of the entire cycle, these stories of life in England might be seen as an elaboration of the earlier themes of alienation in South Africa, as the mother and children confront racism in England. They are similar to Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which Ball points out, recounts the lonely life of immigrants in London. Many had come from former British colonies - "Britain's imperial chickens [come] home to roost" - and were actually helping with postwar reconstruction (Ball 1996:8). As the demographics of the metropolitan centre change with this "re-invasion of the centre", racism is intensified, and the mother in Sam's short story finds that South Africa and the United Kingdom become mirror images of each other. The mother is caught between two worlds, and in some ways replicates the female figures of Hama and Ruthie of the earlier stories. She wants to protect her children from the prejudice around them, but finds she is not quite ready herself for such treatment: "I wanted to delay each child's progress into the real world for as long as possible, only to discover I was unready for it myself" (Sam 1989:107).

The mother tries to create a world of honesty and fun within the confines of their home: she shuts the door to the outside world and tries to protect her children from the intolerance and aggression around them. Ironically, this is another ghettoised "homeland", but in a supposedly free society. The mother has to provide emotional and psychological security

for the children in an environment where their self-esteem is eroded; at the same time she has to resort to various 'tactics' to discipline them. In shutting the world out, she shows that in fact it is the outside world that is cramped and limited.

Sam points to the multiple isolations that a South African Indian experiences as an exile. As pointed out earlier, in South Africa she was doubly marginalised. In England, she is further marginalised because of her immigrant status and her perceived racial classification:

Before we moved here, I made excuses for them, whether they were colonial, or English. They were not to blame. They were conditioned by stereotypes. Dishonest Arab. Dirty Indian. Loose women. Sly. Cunning. Shady deals. Illegal anything. I made excuses for them. What chance did we have to trust? Leave it to the young generation. They will not have our hang ups. It will be easier for them. Wait for this generation to die out. But that day something happened. I gave up on them. Perhaps I hoped - a Black South African family would never be treated like this, anywhere else in England. It said something for England. From that day I refused to behave as if South Africa had never happened. For that was where they were at. Colonials and English expected me to transplant from South Africa and to meet them as if the burden of reconciliation was not on them (113).

Unlike Ruth, the "migrant wife" invoked in the "Introduction", the mother here refuses to be the one to be constantly submitting to the assertions of cultural superiority of the dominant group. Confronted with the prejudice of those around her she takes a long hard look at her own 'philosophy' of life. She also grows dubious about Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence when confronted with such insult and injury. Gandhi's name was invoked by Hama in "Jesus is Indian" as a way of asserting her worth; now it provides cold comfort. As Goonam, an arch Passive Resister herself, states in *Coolie Doctor* when her home is appropriated: "I am no Gandhi to give the other cheek" (Goonam 1991:71).

The short story "Maths", also set in England, may be read intertextually with "Jelly-mouse". Through the depiction of a mother-daughter relationship in a dislodged post-colonial context, Sam explores multiple strands of identity and difference. The story also recalls the earlier contest between mother and daughter in "High Heels" and "Jesus is Indian", but with interesting parallels in a new context. As with "Jesus is Indian" Sam skilfully weaves a range of critical issues into a simple story: a critique of the politics of gender within a familial context, the trials of immigrant-life, generational conflict, mimicry in the face of the dominance of metropolitan influence, shared subordination and power differentials among women, even in the same family. The short story moves away from simplistic formulations of the 'multicultural', and brings into focus issues of power and the overwhelming influence of history in the private domain of family relationships.

In this short story, Selverani, a "nonconformist Indian" mother, is compared with her daughter, Prem, and son who are being brought up in England. The children are ashamed of their Indian background: "They come home speaking posh. They copy, they feel shame about your dance, your music, your food even" (Sam 1989:116). The mother wears a sarie

and grows her hair long, as a marker of difference, of cultural continuity and of resistance; she thereby counters the perception that England is not part of the Indian diaspora. In the earlier stories in the collection the young girls had wanted to cut their hair and look more Westernised. Hama in the earlier stories was resistant to the influence of pop culture in South Africa, and saw her children as products of a "modern" way of living - "electric light children".

Here the mother asserts her Indianness, not in an ethnocentric way, but as a mark of resistance to Western culture. This is done to contend with the effacement of cultural and ethnic identity and the pressures of assimilation. As pointed out earlier, Stuart Hall explains that "new ethnicities" have become important in the contemporary post-colonial world (Hall 2000). The children, however, are embarrassed with the ways and habits of their mother, who seems to look so "Indian". They are self-deprecating about their Indian identity, and prefer to mimic a western, Anglicised culture. The values of Sister Bonaventura rather than those of Hama in "Jesus is Indian" seem to have won the day.

The children's attitude is all the more alarming as it replicates the racist behaviour of the English towards them as Indians and as immigrants. Identifying with Western pop culture makes them feel superior to their mother. Their inclinations illustrate the truth of Ball's views that "[t]he dynamics of difference that in contexts of colonisation and post-colonial migrancy hinge on matters of race, hegemony, culture, and capital shrink down in metropolitan space to the ephemeral realms of fashion and style, of pop culture, image-making, and the abstractions of what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic capital'" (Ball 1996:22). The children's behaviour recalls, in a post-colonial context, Fanon's account in *Black Skins, White Masks*, of appropriation of the identity of the dominant. Although this is due to their impressionable youth and the inevitable process of acculturation in these contexts, their mindless mimicry does show the psychic scars of a mental slavery, as Fanon would have argued, that persists from earlier times. The daughter's (and son's) attitude is a good example of internalised racism and sexism. Colonialism is played out in their consciousness of themselves and in relation to one another. The daughter sees her mother as a different, inferior breed of person; she is not the equal of white, Westernised women.

The mother has to resist being a mere object of imperial subject formation, being viewed as Other by European values internalised by her own children. She refuses to be cast in a subservient role, and castigates her children: "Oh. Because I come from the Third World hey?... You're not Indian, hey?...to live in Britain? Your mother's deprived, hey? Disadvantaged, hey?" (Sam 1989:120). She refuses to be a helpless and passive victim and tries to live in a manner undistracted by prejudice. She has to resist the imposition of larger historical values - "Because it is essential for all South Africans, if we are to recuperate from the disease which apartheid spread amongst us, to appreciate that our history was not one of conquest..."(2) - as well as its encroachment in subtle forms in her very home. The

ambivalences and contradictions of their hybridised position become all too evident when she sees the effect Western society has on her son and daughter. The mother has to fend off the effect of white, colonial hegemony over her own daughter, a hegemony which the daughter does not realise attempts to "manufacture colonial subjects who are 'almost the same, but not quite'" (Baucom 1997:147).

This new, younger Hama in "Maths" has to contend with the views of her daughter and finds it necessary to assert herself against the diminishing of her identity and self-worth. She is similar, and yet different, to the old Hama of "Jesus is Indian", and has to display confidence in her cultural traditions and their value in a post-colonial context in Britain. She has to contend with being viewed as both the "Other" of English colonialism and the "other" of internalised racism and sexism as exhibited by her daughter's behaviour.

Selvarani has to establish her authority not only in the public sphere, but also in the private. She is unremitting as she gets on with the nurture and support of her children, and settles down to teach them maths herself as she knows that they need to succeed in a competitive world. The children resist as they feel that she is not competent. Prem slowly relents as she finds that she and her brother are in fact learning some maths from their mother. Finding them taking her for granted, Selvarani also teaches them practical lessons on the equality of the sexes. While her daughter champions the equality of the sexes, she does not practise this in relation to her mother at home:

She wanted more than to be equal with men. She wanted no woman, whether because she was young, educated, with money, opportunity or whatever, to feel superior to her. Yet Prem was the younger, educated, opportunist woman, defending her equality with men, and discarding her mother as another category of woman. And women, up and down the country, do they not still wait hand and foot on able-bodied teenagers? (Sam 1989:119)

The mother is despised because she belongs to a generation outside that of the younger set; she is also seen as inferior because she is Indian.

Selvarani is also critical of the kind of sexist curriculum that her daughter is studying, in which the dominance of masculine values goes unquestioned: "...Prem came to have no concept of woman's intelligence. Who can blame the girl? The men are teaching the hard subjects. The women teach English. What can the girls do but idolise the men, despise the women and do badly in Science and Maths? To be equal with men, a girl had to be good at men's subjects" (116-117). She has to contend with the distortions of gender and racial identity and the undermining of difference. The values that her daughter appropriates are those of a popular, Western, masculinist world, a world that implicitly carries with it its own contradictions. Ironically, this popular approach disguises itself as a mark of liberation for the modern, Western woman, but is quite sexist and conservative: "The jokes about motherhood were a mistake. They made Prem clamour for leather, for metal objects, for cigarettes, everything symbolising the man's world. To be equal, Prem refused to think of

herself as a woman" (117). Prem gradually claims her identity, not through denying and rejecting her mother's "voice", as in most feminist writing, but by accepting and growing to a greater appreciation of it. Her mother has been implicitly trying to teach her, by example, to seek a self-affirming, self-defining identity.

This short story, "Maths", tacitly subverts the notion of "Third World Women" as monolithic and one-dimensional, with Selvarani being resistant to the pressures of the metropolis, but Prem acquiescing. Sam implicitly criticises an identity politics based on essentialist notions of identity, notions that reify women from the Third World. Selvarani is seen as part of the larger conglomerate of Indian immigrants in Britain. She contests this conception of difference as perceived in the English cultural and social space, where they are lumped together with all other ethnic minorities of Indian origin, regardless of place of origin, historical and other differences. As pointed out earlier, the family in exile from South Africa had experienced a double migration and double marginalisation, in South Africa itself - through indenture, and then through the Group Areas legislation. Already identified as 'hyphenated' South Africans, they encounter discrimination and racism in the metropolitan centre when they attempt to strike new roots there.

In reading these short stories, it is necessary to consider the complex interaction of the different categories of oppression. One cannot hold race, for example, at the centre, and subordinate the experiences of gender, class, or sexuality; Anne McClintock sees gender, race and class as "articulated categories" that should not be "simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego" (McClintock 1995:5). In reading these short stories one is made aware of the "simultaneity of discourse", where different hegemonic discourses intersect with one another and with non-hegemonic discourses. Sam develops the freedom to explore multiple identities and differences not only between oppressor and oppressed but also among the oppressed themselves. Our attention is consequently drawn to the "relationality of subalternity" (Visweswaran 1994:89-93) in Sam's short stories and her refusal to reify or valorise one aspect of identity or difference at the expense of another.

Full Circle

In the short piece, "The Storyteller", the narrative cycle consciously turns back on itself, linking end and beginning. The exile comes to terms with the exilic condition, and identity is far more complicated and problematic. The subject position of the woman as storyteller, is emphasised. The oral narrative provides a metafictional framework for the short story cycle: it is a story telling of all those stories and myths of translation from one place to another. There is no closure to the short stories as Sam brings us back to the overarching and pervasive effects of colonialism and apartheid. Sam seems to suggest that, in Whitlock's formulation, "reader and writer are both recognised to be subject predicaments rather than fixed positions that occupy known spaces within history and culture" (Whitlock

2000:143). Calling attention to the textuality of the collection as a whole and the production of subjectivity Sam shows the interconnection between history (and historiography) and textuality, and the tentativeness of historical memory. She provides an implicit critique of the domination of official history, a theme with which the collection began, by destabilising it. As Brink points out: "History is not a series of events but a narrated (and manipulated) series of events" (Brink 1998:21). Indeed, the constructedness of all our readings, even a study such as this, is a point worth remembering. The way in which the tropes of 'Indian' history recur in the writings in this study - in the story of my grandmother, Mayat's memoir, Goonam's struggle autobiography, for example - shows how this history has come to be narrated. Gabriel Garcia Marquez has very recently reflected on the role nostalgia and the mythologising of our histories play in the way we narrate our stories; accordingly, he writes: "What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it" (in Thorpe 2001:5).

Sam points out that these are "handed down" stories, constructions of family and community origins, directly impinging on the ordinary, day-to-day lives of people in a variety of situations. The short historical narrative, "And They Christened it Indenture", rounds off the cycle by taking us back to the beginning and acting as a concluding coda. It takes us back to the story of Sam's ancestral past, to her origins, and the grandfather's translation from India to South Africa. Discursive in nature, it provides a connection with the Introduction, framing the collection of discrete, yet connected, stories with a macro-narrative of exploitation, injustice, dislocation, and appropriation of cultural identity. Sam writes with trenchant irony of the way Indian indentured labourers were seduced and deceived into accepting Christianity to legitimise their bondage and slavery and make them acquiescent citizens. Stories of the stories they were told: there is no history only histories...(Of course, all is not constructedness and fantasy, as Sam states that one could go to passenger lists of Lloyds shipping for verification.)

Sam has set her short stories in the social and historical dynamics of colonialism and apartheid. She shows the combination of ethnic, psychological and cultural factors that is replicated in numerous situations: apartheid with its excesses was in fact a decadent form of imperialism (see Lenta 1996:114). It is evident that the "politics of location" influences the writers in this study differently. Unlike writers such as Jayapruga Reddy and Dr Goonam in their autobiographies we do not see a defined socio-cultural locatedness in the writing of Sam. The stories in the collection each reflect an aspect of identity but, as Caroline Rooney suggests, are developed in such a way that suggests "counterpoint":

As the stories are predicated according to a shifting pattern, the collection as a whole is carefully orchestrated. To an extent, the stories follow a chronology from childhood to young adulthood to motherhood and this serves to set up a reversible interrogation between the different generations. The uninhibited children of the opening stories serve to interrogate the necessity of adult taboos and the whole process of socialisation...One is left with the

sense that Agnes Sam is a writer with many telling questions to put to us as she continues to test her own experimental, or innovative, means of telling. (Rooney 1990:6)

By avoiding a one-to-one correspondence between herself and her narrators, Sam moves away from the individualist 'master discourses' of identity of traditional autobiographical practices. Although there are some similarities thematically with Karodia and Reddy in respect of their short stories, Sam is unique in this study in stretching the possibilities of the genre. She creates a polyphonic world both dialogically and dialectically, with an interplay between the different voices, and provides variations on a single theme. In choosing different narrative personae and a fragmented narrative, Sam shows that representation of the stable self is not automatically assured, given the historical context of apartheid and colonialism.

The concluding piece is not a resolution but a portrayal of the destructiveness of history at once from the same, and not quite the same, perspective. There is no synthesis, reconciliation or closure, and we are back to the place where we began. Yet the cycle does insist that the forces of colonialism are not inexorable: Sam's very writing of *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* is one act of defiance, even as she is self-conscious about the very writing process. As Marina Warner argues, the paradox of the story of Ruth is that women do have a choice: they can use the "ultimate freedom which is to be free of the past" (in Harting and Doring 1995:42-43). And as Dabydeen would prefer, the ultimate freedom is to be free also of the stories of the past...

CHAPTER 9

VOICE AND SILENCE IN THE WRITINGS OF FARIDA KARODIA

Introduction

Farida Karodia's oeuvre is directly influenced by her experiences of living in South Africa and in exile. Her writing career developed as a way of coping with exile; as she notes: "I wrote to overcome the loneliness of exile" (Cowling 1994:5). Her literary output is a reflection of the measure of freedom that she felt as a black woman writer living outside South Africa and claiming her voice. Karodia observes: "I never thought of writing when I lived in South Africa. That was something white people did" (5). And in an interview with Rajendra Chetty she states,

If I hadn't gone into exile, I might never have written...I was so homesick. It is reflected in *Other Secrets*. It took me about 10 years to get over my despair with living abroad and being away from South Africa. You need strong feelings for writing. I find solace and comfort in my writing. You never lose those images of the landscape, they are always with you. If I shut my eyes I can see the landscape of the Eastern Cape where I grew up. I have not been back there, yet I still conjure images of the area. (Chetty 2000:5)

Exile seems to have provided Karodia with a particular consciousness. She began by writing of experiences close to her own; she then moved outwards to depict other worlds and contexts. While the experiences of living in South Africa are deeply etched in her psyche, Karodia is able to imagine worlds beyond the confines of those determined by apartheid. In her first work, *Daughters of the Twilight*, published in 1986 and dealing with life in South Africa in the 50's, she draws on her own experience as a black person growing up in the apartheid world of a small Eastern Cape town. As Woodward expresses it: "In *Daughters of the Twilight* Meena's narrative is pre-scripted by the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, and the Immorality Act" (Woodward 1993:39). In her collection of short stories, *Coming Home and Other Stories*, two years later, Karodia evokes a larger South African landscape. She depicts various geographical and racially diverse locations, and her ear is attuned to different South African identities, voices and accents. Karodia moves to an even wider canvas for her next work, the novel, *A Shattering of Silence*. Published in 1993, the novel is set in Mozambique during the pre-Independence years, and is actually aimed at depicting a global problem of brutality towards children.

In *Against an African Sky*, a collection of short stories published in 1995, Karodia asserts the imaginative freedom to develop her stories in a variety of contexts, and through a number of different personae. Most of the stories are set in the post-1994 period in South Africa. Exile and return to a changed country seem to provide distance, enabling her to move through, and beyond, her formative experiences in the country of her birth and come to terms with them. In *Against an African Sky*, Karodia re-imagines South Africa in purely

fictional terms, and explores a wide range of subject positions in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and political affiliation, attempting through her characters and plots to read the South African political situation from different perspectives. Like Reddy in *On the Fringe of Dreamtime and Other Stories*, she is clearly trying to move out of being confined to literary "Group Areas".

In this chapter I consider in particular *Daughters of the Twilight* and *A Shattering of Silence* to show how Karodia moves from an identity that is strongly influenced (perhaps over-determined) by apartheid experience to one which moves in worlds beyond a localised South African context or that are less immediately personal. As Karodia herself points out in describing the transition from writing *Daughters of the Twilight* to its companion novel *Other Secrets* (2000): "So the setting is quite authentic. However, while I gave the town the name of Sterkstroom, I became bogged down psychologically, emotionally and intellectually in that setting, but then as soon as I changed the name to Soetstroom it released me" (Chetty 2000:5). Memory of the place of her childhood days is important to her, but she also wanted to allow herself imaginative freedom. A theme that links the two works, *Daughters of the Twilight* and *A Shattering of Silence*, however, is that identity, neither homogeneous nor monolithic, but heterogeneous, is determined by political factors rather than by ancestry and race.

***Daughters of the Twilight* - Writing about Apartheid**

Karodia's novel, *Daughters of the Twilight*, draws from her own childhood and adolescent experiences in Sterkstroom in the Eastern Cape. Karodia was born in South Africa, and left the country in 1966, living first in Zambia and then emigrating to Canada in 1969. Like Sam, after years in exile, she returned to South Africa in 1994 during the time of the first democratic elections. Primarily a work of fiction, *Daughters of the Twilight* reveals not exact correspondences with Karodia's own life, but rather autobiographical undertones. As Karodia states, "I did use some of my personal experiences in Meena's and Yasmin's characters, although I never had a sister myself" (Chetty 2000:5). The novel describes experiences similar to Karodia's own, of a family living in Sterkstroom, and in interaction with a wider community. In the story the father is Indian, of the Muslim faith, and the mother and grandmother, Coloured and Christian. They have to contend with racial prejudice in various forms in Sterkstroom, encountering problems of racial classification, sexual harassment, and uprooting and relocation through Group Areas legislation. Their personal experiences provide the focus for Karodia's main purpose: an exploration of the shaping of identity in a peculiarly South African milieu, where it is conditioned and constructed by apartheid ideology and practice.

The narrative foregrounds two adolescent sisters, Meena and Yasmin, who are growing up in the South Africa of the '50's. The theme is a typical 'rites of passage' one, dealing

with important and familiar experiences of any two young girls: schooling, family and adolescent relationships, ambitions and dreams for the future. The only difference is that this normal development occurs in a grossly abnormal society. Private and personal experiences interlock with racial injustice in a deterministic way and identity is directly and strongly influenced by race and gender. Life in Sterkstroom is similar in some ways to that of the community of Potchefstroom in Mayat's work, although Karodia's narrative is of a much later period, when apartheid was being consolidated.

Central to the work is the story of the elder sister, Yasmin, which is narrated by the younger Meena, an astute observer of people and events around her, and acting as a mouthpiece for the author. Meena is dominated by her sister, Yasmin, who is two years older than her, and considered to be more beautiful. Yasmin positions herself as the worldly-wise, confident sister: " 'Don't worry, Meena, some day you'll emerge from your chrysalis,' she said, whenever she found me peering into the mirror. 'Believe me, little sister, you'll unfold just like a butterfly'" (Karodia 1986:3). But as a narrator/sister, Meena enjoys the vantage point of looking at herself and her sister dispassionately, yet maintaining a strong, empathetic relationship throughout. Through Meena's reflective role, we see her own consciousness developing. Apart from being a conventionally realistic piece of writing, in which external events are depicted in familiar detail, *Daughters of the Twilight* also provides glimpses of inner states of mind. Through Meena we have an introspective response to the experiences of growing up in an apartheid world. Karodia also takes a clear feminist position (although she states that she does not wish to be categorised as 'feminist') in relation to discrimination against women, and engages in a subtle analysis of issues of gender and sexuality.

The narrative follows, to some extent, the traditional linear *bildungsroman*, showing the developing independence and autonomy of the sisters as they grow to maturity in the stifling context of apartheid. It is different, however, in that it shows the emerging subjectivity and consciousness of two central characters in relation to each other, with Meena speaking for herself and also mediating her sister's voice. Feminist critics in the field of autobiographical writing as a genre have drawn attention to the emergence of collective identity in the writing of self-narratives by women, particularly women in diasporic contexts (This is evident in some ways in Mayat's presentation of the story of the community at Potchefstroom). For the women in *The Daughters of the Twilight* self-determination involves both individual and communal dimensions, with an emerging solidarity developing among the women.

Women writers in general depict woman-centred relationships in a way that is often absent from men's writings. Elaine Showalter points out that women writers invariably invoke a "female subculture" (see Showalter 1986a:125-143), and this is especially true of this novel, as well as the other writings in this study. Karodia's text begins with a clear em-

phasis on the role and influence of women, and of the inter-relationships among them. In this it is similar to the writing of Mayat, who also depicts the influence of women in varying ways. But Karodia goes further in developing the collective strength and solidarity of the women, as they challenge patriarchal and racist custom, religion and ideology, and in their *bildung*, gradually begin to peel off layers of false consciousness.

In *Daughters of the Twilight* we notice not only a close relationship between the two sisters, but a bond between them and their mother (Ma) and grandmother (Nana) as well. They are all strong women who make decisions and who have minds and wills of their own. An understanding of these relationships is mediated by Meena, both observer and participant, as she realises that Nana and Ma understand her and her sister much better than the men do. The women often spend time together when the father is away on business, and become close to one another during these times. As Meena observes: "I loved these occasions. It meant that we women could congregate in the kitchen. With Papa away there was always a feeling of camaraderie amongst us. I think he sensed it, and at times he must have felt left out" (Karodia 1986:9). Karodia, drawing from her experiences of her own family, notes: "Women held the family together at home. The kitchen was a site of comfort; it created a feeling of being at ease and it was a familiar site. Their power was in the house like that" (Chetty 2000:5). Such "sisterhood" may be seen as occurring in what Boyce Davies calls "sites of compulsory domesticity and the enforcement of specific gendered relations" (Davies, Carol Boyce 1994:65).

It is this familial inter-dependence that provides the supportive structure for any collective resistance the women might muster against the apartheid system. The close bonds among the four women show a nascent sisterhood among them as they also provide support for one another in a hegemonic patriarchal world. In this the writing is similar to that of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Buchi Emecheta, who all create woman-centred worlds to fight the "double yoke" that black women bear. Such sisterhood does not extend in Karodia's story to the white women, who are racist and domineering in their attitudes to their black counterparts, and who show complicity with the apartheid system.

The juxtaposition of similar yet different women in constant conversation with one another provides the space for a variety of discourses and shows a resistance on Karodia's part to presenting essentialist, one-dimensional portraits of black women. Among the women in *Daughters of the Twilight* we see both a desire to obey and a desire to rebel, the repression of socially unacceptable responses and yet a resistance to patriarchal control. This is clearly a situation where the "Law of the Father" obtains, but is contested. The tentative questioning of the father's "law" also suggests the beginning of political awakening, which becomes increasingly evident in Meena as she grows older. Further, a critical reading would illuminate the sexual politics of a heterosexual world, where relationships are not necessarily fulfilling. While lesbianism is not a direct theme in Karodia's writings,

it may be seen as a "trope of concealment" (Wicomb 1990:41), inviting deeper and alternative readings of the texts. In *Daughters of the Twilight* and *A Shattering of Silence* we do see an oblique critical portrayal of heterosexuality in the context of apartheid, and we do see a close and affectionate bond between women, with even the hint of sexual desire (as that between Faith and Sister Angelique in *A Shattering of Silence*).

The close relationship among the sisters and the mother and grandmother in *Daughters of the Twilight* is developed in the context of a desire for something beyond themselves. Yasmin, especially, feels a "sense of being trapped in Sterkstroom" (Karodia 1986:15), and refers to the town as a "one-horse dorp" (83). Although Sterkstroom is home to Meena and Yasmin - "For us... it was home, the only one that my sister, Yasmin, and I had ever known"(1) - the town provides no more than a claustrophobic setting for the sensitive young girls. As Meena records: "Nana once remarked that Yasmin inhabited a world quite different from ours. I suspected it was Yasmin's way of escaping from an environment she found so completely inhibiting" (32). Yasmin feels restricted by her parents and the ambitions they have for her. Her father wants to protect her from the wider world; he is, for example, reluctant to send her to the private school which is in East London. Her father's reservations are prompted by the need for propriety and the maintenance of religious tradition: "There were too many pitfalls awaiting a young girl like her. Then of course there was the equally important consideration of whether such a school would provide halal food, prepared in terms prescribed by ritualistic Moslem laws" (33).

Ma also displays signs of being exasperated with her boring daily routine; she feels circumscribed by the domesticity expected of her. In this both Ma and Yasmin are alike. They want something more from life, with the older woman being more restrained by a sense of decorum and conventionality. Meena is acutely conscious of this: "I had long ago made the startling discovery that Ma, like Yasmin, had a soft underbelly of vulnerability which was rarely exposed"(9).

With the women sharing close bonds, their separation from the men is more sharply etched. In the narrative there is a lack of real communication and deep communion between the men and women; grim concentration on survival in a hostile environment leaves no time for emotional rapport between the two groups. Domestic alienation between husband and wife, exacerbated by apartheid society, prevents the development of solidarity among black men and women in a strong womanist vein. Of the novel in this respect Karodia notes: "It is just not a male story, because you couldn't be a strong male in that apartheid society" (Chetty 2000:5). The trope in apartheid and colonial criticism of the emasculation of the black male is evident here. And this is pitted against the white male chauvinist dominance that they have to contend with in Sterkstroom, as I indicate below.

Fearful of what these experiences might portend, the women use silence to hide their

real, innermost feelings and anxieties. That restrictive living under apartheid has been internalised is the real malignancy of apartheid: "Our lives..are so small and so limited, each day exactly like the next" (Karodia 1986:37). Meena observes that her grandmother, Nana, is aware of this emotional stunting, but is concerned about the repercussions of such longings. She "watched in silence, her brow furrowed" (37).

Nana senses her daughter's and grand-daughters' unease, and lovingly chides them. Meena notes that her mother is described by Nana in sensual terms, as "full-busted with a slight waist that curved out to rounded hips... [she was] as voluptuous as one of the maidens in Hindu mythology" (9). She is learning the meaning of words like "voluptuous", and also trying to understand the connotations of this language of desire. In understanding language, Meena is actually trying to understand her own body, recalling a cultural context that is not immediately familiar to her as a Muslim: "I thought about this word voluptuous and tried to conjure up an image of a Hindu maiden. The only one that came to mind was the picture of the multi-armed goddess, Laxmi, which hung in Mrs Gopal's bedroom in East London" (10). There is a sense in which the women themselves are exoticising female sexuality, seeing it as an expression of Hindu religious iconography, rather than embracing it unselfconsciously.

When Yasmin behaves in a seductive way towards Cobus Steyn, a young white man in the neighbourhood, her grandmother disapproves. Yasmin is fully aware of why this is so: "She was afraid that there is too much of Ma coming out in me and she's not happy about it" (34). Meena notes that Ma is also self-conscious in the presence of Mr Hermanus Steyn, the father of Cobus, and refers to her mother as a butterfly. Nana is an astute observer and criticises the mother for her behaviour when Hermanus Steyn seems to fancy her: "Why didn't you tell him to bugger off? Instead you were smiling, simpering like a schoolgirl" (30). It is predictable that constructed identities of degeneracy and sexuality attributed to black women are generally internalised, and feelings of shame develop. These are resolutely shaken off by Yasmin only after she is raped by Cobus Steyn, although even then she initially succumbs to a victim-image.

The pressures on black women in apartheid society to be accepted by white males are great; the women are therefore unable to criticise the manipulation of their sexuality. While Meena displays a strong-willed character, Yasmin succumbs to the effects of living in a racially divisive society and yearns for social acceptability, defined in racial and gendered terms. In Yasmin's, and the mother's, case this might well be related to a general phenomenon of identity politics in apartheid society, where "internalised racial contempt, a self-hatred which intensifies a female tendency towards low esteem, generated by a society which favours the male in terms of prestige and social potency" (Clayton 1989:5) makes women sexually vulnerable or prone to exploitation.

Karodia interweaves the different strands of racial and sexual exploitation skilfully as

the women find it difficult to totally relinquish the violence of the patriarchal society and project a vision of the world free from racism, sexism and class oppression. The women's lives, complicated by their Coloured identity, show the suppressed rage and rebellion of those struggling in a society of white/male prerogatives. The mother, for example, is caught in a web of traditional expectations of women in Indian homes, the patriarchal oppression of apartheid society and her own desires. She finds conforming to the religious and cultural customs of the Islamic faith, and living in a communal family set-up tedious and suffocating. She despairs at one point: "Sometimes I think that in this day and age this whole business of a joint family is an anachronism" (Karodia 1986:12).

The mother sacrifices her inner feelings, and this is both cause and symptom of the parent's constant bickering, described with explicitness and candour by Meena. Even the grandmother, who tries to be the strong, impartial observer, wishes, it seems to Meena, for something larger than their own circumscribed lives. As Meena observes: "I wondered if Nana too might be bored. Perhaps this was why she became so cantankerous at times"(104). She records the efforts the father makes to keep them occupied:

To keep us from going completely insane Papa brought home a box full of books bought at an auction in Queenstown. Most of these were old romances, as irrelevant to present-day life as those Dick and Jane readers were to our lives in Sterkstroom... Some of the better ones, like *Fountainhead* and two of Lawrence Green's books, I read twice. (104-105)

The kind of books they read shows the gendered society into which the young women are being unwittingly schooled; the father is unaware that he brings home sexist texts that fashion their lives; yet he objects to any expressions of sexuality. Apart from the texts chosen by the father Meena and Yasmin are exposed in school to Western literature such as *Dick and Jane*. The full tragedy of apartheid schooling, which engendered rigidity and intellectual and emotional sterility for black women, is evident. Their world of vicarious experiences through reading was just as stifling as the real one. It is this type of colonial indoctrination that resulted in a denial of the identity of the colonised.

The over-riding concern for the impressionable Yasmin is that of exploring her sexuality:

Before returning to school Yasmin confided that she had kissed a boy. She described in detail how his lips had lingered on hers, gently forcing her mouth open so that their tongues met...I believed her, because Yasmin knew a great deal more than anyone else. As she spoke her face glowed with a radiance that seemed to illuminate her eyes, softening them with a sensuality that I had not observed before. I wondered who the boy was, for he had obviously made a big impression on her. (52)

Meena wonders about the adult world, and is trying to understand her own awakening sexuality in the process:

Although the whole concept of lovemaking was still too complicated for me, I did on occasion find my thoughts wandering in that direction, grappling with the intricacies of adult relationships and, in particular, love-making. I was mortified when these thoughts brought with them a

strange fluttering in my thighs and I was left with an uncomfortable moist feeling. (98)

Karodia writes with a candour about sexual matters that is unique among the writers in this study, and she is similar in this respect to the Durban novelist, Fayiza Khan, mentioned in the Survey chapter.

Karodia's attempt, in *Daughters of the Twilight*, to focus on growing up under apartheid inevitably includes the problems the family encounters in the pursuit of education. The efforts of the family to get a proper education for the two sisters make them confront the discrimination of the apartheid laws. The family are always on the look-out for a good school, travelling from East London to Coronationville in this quest. Meena's father notes with dismay the plight of a younger male relative who was not able to secure a good education: "Look what happened to Baboo. No education and now he's working like a slave for his cousin, dreaming of some day becoming a famous cricketer" (38).

When they do find a place at a school, they are then confronted with racial prejudice. On the very first day at school, Meena and Yasmin encounter the full malevolence of the system. Meena opens a text-book only to read the words: "Coolie, Coolie, ring the bell; Coolie, Coolie, go to hell" (20). Meena tears off the page in fury and is reprimanded by the teacher. When Yasmin tries to defend her sister she is punished instead; her teacher, Mrs Durant, callously carries out her threat to give her the lashing of her life.

On another occasion the parents go to Stutterheim to arrange for schooling for Yasmin. Here they meet the principal, Miss Jones, who speaks with a somewhat superior air: "The education of the girls is not entirely academic...there are several courses for their physical development too, as you can see from our playing-fields and stables" (39). The father has negative feelings about this foreign environment; he wishes, furthermore, for an education that would be more utilitarian. If he is dubious about the value of the kinds of extra-curricular activities offered at the school it is because he is not sure that his daughters will be able to use them to advantage in the social settings to which they are accustomed. The daughters are circumscribed in their social choices, and this is why, for the father, "an education involved reading, writing and arithmetic, not any of this other nonsense" (40). This is why he objects to Yasmin's riding lessons; yet for Yasmin they give her a sense of freedom and power. The world that Miss Jones inhabits is clearly different from his, as she speaks patronisingly to them: "I regard education as the promotion of a delicate balance between the mind and the body. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. A healthy mind in a healthy body. Don't you agree?" (40).

The father is also reluctant to commit himself to an education that is expensive, protesting that with the kind of expenses incurred "they should be eating biryani every day"! (42). He sees the school ritual of the "coming-out ball" as unnecessary, and protests: "I have no intention of allowing my daughter to parade herself"(68). It is an "old English custom", he

is told: "the occasion...will serve to present the eligible girls to the society in which they'll be making their contributions. Many important families from your community are expected"(68). The question of who the "eligible girls" really are is overlooked. The irony is that all the girls are not given the same opportunities, and the community itself is defined differently by apartheid society. Miss Jones says patronisingly that her education has transformed Yasmin from "a country bumpkin into a sophisticated young lady" (68). As can be seen in a number of texts discussed in this study, education is clearly meant to make the young women "daughters of the empire" (see Chew and Rutherford 1993). Identity-formation through education is evident in Reddy's autobiography; Reddy embraces a Western education as this is seen as a means to coping in the world. In Sam's short story, "Jesus is Indian", colonial education is presented as the norm, but is contested and resisted.

When Meena graduates from the local primary school (Sterkstroom Apostolic Primary School for Coloureds) and prepares for her junior school career they face outright segregation laws:

In the cities the Africans, the Coloureds and the Indians all have their own schools, and they're not allowed to mix. I've heard that the Coloured affairs department will make no exceptions. They say the Indians have to attend their own schools. (Karodia 1986:71)

In order to 'qualify' to attend the nearby Coloured school the mother and grandmother decide that the expedient thing to do would be to claim that she is a Coloured. This is possible because they are aware that "Ma and Nana belonged to that nebulous group generally referred to as Coloured"(11). The grandmother, Nana, and the rest of the women begin conspiring together to beat the system: "The best thing to do...is to have you reclassified Coloured so that you can attend the Coloured school. All you have to do is tell them a little lie when they ask you if you associate with Indians" (72). Reflecting on the initiative that the women assume in this story, Woodward states: "The female initiative here suggests the patriarchal tenor of the family:the father, politically impotent and passive, lacks knowledge of realpolitik" (Woodward 1993:44).

Going through the ordeal at the registry office in Pretoria to be re-classified Coloured is an experience that Meena finds degrading and humiliating. She is forced to deny her Indian background: "We don't associate with Indians. She's Coloured. All our friends are Coloured" (Karodia 1986:77). In order to pass the test, she has to demonstrate that she can speak "flawless" Afrikaans. This is taken as a means of checking one's identity as a Coloured; the 'authorities' make the erroneous and simplistic assumption that Indians do not speak Afrikaans. She feels the degradation of such denial keenly: "Outwardly I remained calm, but inwardly I was in a turmoil. I felt debased and degraded by what had happened in that office" (78). She cannot be Indian and Coloured at the same time. She is forced to deny a part of her identity and maintain the fiction of separate and absolute identities.

Apartheid, and separatist, discriminatory societies create the grounds for such feelings of treachery and compromise. In *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* Zoe Wicomb shows the sense of betrayal and denial among Coloureds, in their desire to be white. Wicomb argues that in the politics of representation in the apartheid system it is ironical that 'coloured' takes on a fixed meaning, and is not seen as part of interacting identities in the larger framework of South African citizenship. Gloria Anzaldua, a Mexican feminist critic, reflecting on the complex and contradictory nature of life on the margins, writes: "What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other" (Anzaldua 1987:19). Her writing on the "borderland" has direct relevance to the question of identity and subjectivity in South Africa where we have been programmed into imbibing the ideology of the "border", and denying the existence of "borderlands".

In giving the title, "*Daughters of the Twilight*", to her novel, Karodia is suggesting that categories of classification are to be only lightly appropriated; at the same time, she is drawing attention to the exclusion and in-between status of these "daughters" in South African society. Woodward observes that the title suggests that the female characters in this story "inhabit neither night nor day, but are displaced into a zone somewhere in between, as a result of their classification along 'racial' lines" (Woodward 1993:43). Although the Population Classification Act of 1952, one of the pillars of apartheid, had listed Whites, blacks, Indians and Coloureds as "self-evident, autonomous populations" (Thornton 1997:144), the women expose the arbitrariness of these classifications.

In South African history where identities are conferred in racist ways, it is understandable that a desire should be expressed to shed all racialised identities: "I just want to be what I am" (Karodia 1986:73), states Meena, who wishes not to be encumbered with any ethnic or racial identity. This might seem like a naive wish in a country that uses race as the primary marker of identity, but it is not an unusual desire. In Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, Elisabeth also yearns to escape the strict race classification of apartheid. As Head writes: "She had been rigidly classified Coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with personality. There wasn't any escape like that for anyone in South Africa. They were races not people" (Head 1973:44). Meena, in Karodia's novel, begins to realise that it is difficult to live outside the categories of race, and the grandmother advises her to set aside her idealistic views and be pragmatic in a country that denies one the rights of citizenship:

What you are is a South African, and since you can't be that in your own country the next best thing is to be something that will at least give you an advantage. We're not trying to deny your birthright. The government has already done that. What we are trying to do is make the best out of a bad situation...I told you you're a South African. That's the only thing that matters. The government's little tricks to keep us locked into our own corners won't make a damn difference when the time comes. What'll count then is who we are. Being black, green or blue will be an insignificant factor. (Karodia 1986:73-74)

In spite of the rigidity of apartheid society identities are fluid positions within a complicated nexus of oppressions. The women use the arbitrary way in which racial and ethnic identity is determined in apartheid society against the system itself. In assuming a Coloured identity as a strategy to gain access to privileges otherwise denied, the women in Karodia's story ironise and subvert the power of the discourse of apartheid and its material effects at the very moment when they mimic it - as indeed is true of post-colonial subjects generally (see Griffiths 1994:78).

Identity and "community" are indeed racialised in complex ways in South Africa. In *Daughters of the Twilight* we realise that we are dealing with a farming community and with small-town conservatism, where the hub of life is the town square, and the Dutch Reformed Church is an "all-white domain" (Karodia 1986:15). The town comprises 25,000 people, but what is revealing about this figure is that it does not include blacks because there is no census figure available for them. In this setting - the time when Sunday shopping was still illegal - the rigid and narrow morality of apartheid disguises the gross human rights violations that occur.

As in Mayat's text, the family store is also the centre of the community in *Daughters of the Twilight*. The Indian shop is a trope in many writings, with the "Paki Shop" described as a "national institution" in Britain (Kumar 1998). Karodia depicts the selective business practices, with Afrikaner employers dropping off their servants at Afrikaner shops. None of the Afrikaner railway workers sets foot in Karodia's family store, and this is in sharp contrast to Mayat's description of her family store in Potchefstroom. The shop specialises in dry goods, catering "specifically for the African trade" (Karodia 1986:35), dispensing blankets, billy cans, cast iron pots, beads, bangles, cotton prints, and the like. With race classifications dominating the lives of the community, it is to be expected that separate cubicles are used for the different race groups. Notwithstanding such segregation and humiliation, shopping is a major social event in the small town, and many of the relationships across the colour line take place around the theme of trade. Relationships among black groups are more cordial than between blacks and Whites; there is, for example, a friendship between Baboo, Moses Dlamini, who attends the African school in the "location", and Willie Arendse, who lives seventeen miles away, on Oubaas Nel's farm where his father is a labourer. The effect of creeping change with urbanisation and progress is soon evident; more business is expected when it is announced that the mines are to be opened, and Sterkstroom will change its status into that of a railway junction.

The implementation of the Group Areas Act (of 1950) has a devastating impact on Karodia's family. We see the effect of racist capitalism where Indians are subject to relocation because their economic status is seen as a threat to white business interests (Woodward 1993:44). The family are traumatised by the Group Areas Act, being offered a mere twelve hundred rand for their home in Sterkstroom, and forced to move to McBain, a des-

ignated Indian area, which is a little less than halfway to Queenstown. The agents of the regime refuse any culpability, saying in unsympathetic tones: "I'm sorry Mrs Mohammed. I'm only doing my job" (Karodia 1986:88). Meena's father is not able to deal with the trauma of removal and suffers a heart attack.

One wonders if events such as these should not have been recounted at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings? Several of the writers in this study show the effects of the "Groups Areas" legislation in their lives. Critics have argued that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission focused mainly on gross human rights violations and neglected to turn its gaze on some of the day-to-day injustices such as pass laws, the Bantustan policies, group areas removals and racial discrimination in health, education, housing and sport. Many of the effects of these injustices dealt by a bureaucratic system persist to this day, but a consideration of these has been sidelined in this period of "dealing with our past". In writing about their lives under apartheid many of the writers in this study invariably recount experiences related to acts of discrimination in some of these spheres, and this is one way of exposing other violations of human rights.

Apart from state-sanctioned violation of rights, relationships in the community are further undermined by the racist behaviour of individuals. From the beginning we are confronted with the aggressive presence of Cobus Steyn, the young white schoolboy who shows all the prejudices of the white adults and is "rotten to the core" (3). Early in the story, the family hear a shattering of glass and realise that Cobus had thrown a stone against their window pane. Meena recalls the terrible incident when Cobus harasses her on her fifth birthday. She is given a large celluloid doll, and he strides over to her and plucks the doll from her, insisting that she address him as "Baas Cobus" and taunting her with "I am your baas and I can have anything I want" (5). Both Yasmin and her second cousin, Baboo, beat up Cobus, who now harbours a grudge against them for this. "I'll get you for this, Coolie!" (6). He feels the need to exert power over them, and this is to take a horrible and devastating turn when he later rapes Yasmin. In the light of the calamities they experience, Nana observes: "There's always something sent to torment you, whether you're a good Christian or not. Here in this country it's the white man, the heat and the snakes" (96).

The family tries hard to keep its distance from the whites: "Familiarity bred contempt, Nana often said, adding that it was best to keep one's distance with *these people*"(14). When Yasmin's father complains to Hermanus Steyn about his son's behaviour, he is faced with a disdainful retort: "You remember your place or one of these days you will end up in the bush, where you belong" (27). Yet Steyn is quick to view the mother as a sexual object. She herself is flattered by his attentions, as Meena observes: "Hermanus' frank and admiring gaze elicited a dark flush which crept upwards from Ma's neck"(27). As alluded to already, black females are at times depicted as being vulnerable in the face of dominant, overpowering white males. These gendered and racialised images show the way in which

subjectivity is assumed by white males, and how apartheid patriarchal ideology supports a superior attitude in intimate spheres of life. Meena's father, on the other hand, feels quite weak and ineffectual in the face of the strong women in his household and against the brute force of the white males.

Issues of sexuality are inextricably intertwined with apartheid ideology. In a racially divisive world black women "represent the extremes of glamour and squalor, the exotic woman, the pampered idol of orientalist fantasy, and the eternal victim, the oppressed third world female doomed to poverty and ignorance..." (Karamcheti 1993:277). It is also important to note that "the settlers' fear of the stereotypical lustful, vengeful black man" that Doris Lessing writes about (see Hunter 1989:157) is reversed here. Sharpe has also drawn attention to the trope in colonial literature of the "fearful image of the dark-skinned rapist" (Sharpe 1993:3). The irrational fear of black men as repositories of dangerous sexual energy is tacitly questioned and overturned, as Karodia shows that it is the blacks who are victimised.

The poor relationships in the small community are severely exacerbated when Yasmin is raped by Cobus. Although the rape might have been anticipated it comes as a terrible shock to Yasmin. The rape itself is an ugly expression of the racist and patriarchal violence of apartheid, of its violence against black women. All the encounters with white men at Sterkstroom show an ideology that legitimates the assumption of control and domination - of land and territory, possessions and the body. Rape of black women is a heinous and extreme form of this domination. Kathleen Komar points out in relation to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, the "two internal female spaces - the womb and the female mind - are invaded by a patriarchal dominator" (Komar 1994:92). Karodia illustrates further the conflation of race and sexuality in apartheid discrimination. When bodies are clearly demarcated in political and social systems on the basis of race or ethnicity or gender, as Foucault has pointed out, they are particularly vulnerable (see also Holloway 1992:4).

Inevitably, there are fleeting feelings that Yasmin's own disposition might have made her vulnerable. The grandmother expresses some of these feelings, where no one else would articulate them: "Because of all her fancy ideas I feared for her. Lord, how I feared for her" (Karodia 1986:135). It is indeed seductive to blame the victim, to be blind to the extent of women's sexual oppression. Karodia offers a sensitive description which puts the conventional morality and ideology linked with female sexuality in the balance, especially in this case where Yasmin gradually asserts herself after the vicious act, knowing that she will have to re-define her life and start afresh. As she says to her sister, "I'll survive, Meena" (121).

Ironically, it is the rape that shows Yasmin and Meena that they cannot accommodate the apartheid system; Meena resolves to commit herself to revolutionary change and Yasmin decides to leave the country. Yasmin refuses to carry the burden of victimhood of

rape, and refuses, thereby, to acquiesce to the domineering will of apartheid. Similar in some ways to Frieda in Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Yasmin decides to leave to find a new life, and extricates herself from her home and her child (conceived as a result of the rape) and all that they stand for in her former life. And again Nana understands full well, when she says: "There is nothing here for Yasmin...this place is like a desert" (150). Yasmin is sustained by the healing presence of the sister, Meena, who helps her to overcome her isolation of spirit.

The mother comes to realise that the protective and secure life she had planned for Yasmin will not occur: "I thought that together we could provide a small oasis of happiness" (150). Nana is realistic about what is achievable in South Africa. She realises the perilous nature of the times that they are living in: "It won't be long before they'll be back with their dogs and their guns" (150). Exile will bring with it further displacement, but while the emotional consequences of apartheid are far-reaching, the prospect of exile does open up new possibilities, and new ways of re-imagining 'home' and identity.

Yasmin wishes to find her individual career, to be "rich some day, even if it means leaving this country and going elsewhere" (70). If there is a hint of a materialistic consciousness here as opposed to Meena's altruistic one, it is perhaps due to the unfulfilled life of a thwarted young woman, unable to discover any integrated meaning to her existence. The physical exile completes the picture of internal exile that Yasmin is subjected to in the land of her birth, and she moves into a transnational space very much as Karodia herself did. And if Meena is the alter ego of Yasmin, as Woodward suggests, then I think Yasmin both goes and stays; and their dilemma recalls Gordimer's comment on Maureen Smales's attachment to her country in *July's People* (1981): "South Africa, to which she cannot belong and from which she cannot escape".

Meena leaves the confines of the little town and encounters a more critical view of 'the South African way of life'. Karodia also anticipates the debates around education and liberation when Meena moves beyond the circumscribed life of Sterkstroom and heads for the big city. When she is in Johannesburg she notices that the whites and blacks are secretly huddled together into the small bioscope hall. She is also exposed to the more revolutionary thinking of the cities during this period. The young men that Meena befriends in Johannesburg come to the realisation that violence is the only way to eradicate apartheid (this is in sharp contrast to Srenika in *Behold the Earth Mourns*, who sees non-violence as a means of protest. The two political options – passive resistance and violent opposition – were in tension at this time in our history). As one of them says: "I keep telling you that the time has come to return fire with fire. Guns will do the trick. We need friends who can supply us with arms. You have to meet violence with violence, passivity won't get you anywhere with these people. They don't understand subtleties. You've got to speak their language" (83).

For her part, Meena is discovering her sexuality and emerging subjectivity at the same time that she realises that she has to dislodge herself from a politically naive disposition to a more responsive and committed one. She forms a friendship with a young activist in Johannesburg: "My arms automatically slipped behind his head, our bodies knitting together, locked like two pieces of a jigsaw..."(84). With a quickening political consciousness Meena begins to appreciate a wider world of political responsibility beyond the little confines of Sterkstroom: "I was too far removed from the political reality of life in the big cities" (85). When she hears that one of the young activists, Solly, has died in police custody, she weighs up the options for her own life: "Solly's death brought with it thoughts about the transience of life and my own vulnerability" (85); and we see in Meena a determination to work for political change. She refuses to be a passive female victim, and instead of repressing female desire with a narrow morality, celebrates it in the context of her emerging political self.

Unlike Yasmin, Meena tries to find her identity in the political challenges confronting her in South Africa, to fight the abusive patriarchal and racist world she and Yasmin have both known. These are the pre-Sharpeville days, with a growing tenacity and militancy among Black youth. Meena's going to Johannesburg may be seen as a variant on the "Jim-Goes-to Jo'burg" theme that we find in the many writings in South Africa, where the movement to the big city is part of the *bildung* of many characters in South African fiction. For example, Gordimer, in *The Lying Days* (1953), which is also autobiographical in some ways, shows how Helen Shaw has to break free from small town bigotry and sectarianism by moving to Johannesburg.

Meena and Yasmin leave the security and comfort of 'home' in search of new possibilities in the bigger world. In similar ways Karodia herself chose political exile in real life, to escape the confining and constricting nature of life in her home country, South Africa, yet never escaping the memory of home, and the responsibilities of changing the system. One of the characters in her short story, "Against an African Sky", leaves South Africa but the memory of the country remains with him: "Somewhere, embedded deep down in my consciousness, had always been the feeling that some day I would return to South Africa. Images of the veld and the colour of the African Sky had haunted me throughout the years I was abroad" (Karodia 1995:1).

In Meena's attempting to "find herself" in the struggle for liberation in the big city, Karodia points to the changing nature of political protest at the time when her writing is set, and the gradual emergence of a strident urban-based revolutionary movement. In Leila Khaled's autobiography *My People Shall Live* (1973), described as an "autobiography of conscientization", we see a process of increasing involvement in political change. This is a process that involves "both a coming to an awareness of the past that has shaped...reality and a designing of a future that can transform that reality" (see Gunn 1992:69). Similarly,

Meena begins a process of political awakening and conscientisation, emerging from the "chrysalis". The trajectory of the journey to full awareness continues beyond the end of the novel, with the "daughters of twilight" moving out of the zone of liminality in more ways than one. Gordimer's well-known assertions in relation to "living in the interregnum" are pertinent to private lives as well, with Meena positioned between the old and the new order, between two identities, one known and disliked, and other unknown and still unfolding.

A Shattering of Silence - A Vision of Freedom

One of the important freedoms that Karodia herself experienced in exile was as a writer, when she began her writing career. The world of *The Daughters of the Twilight*, with its preoccupation with the problems of living in South Africa's racist society, makes way for a different one in Karodia's next work, *A Shattering of Silence* (1993). She moves from drawing on her personal life to contexts that are broader in scope and setting. Writers who went into exile from South Africa or who lived outside the country invariably command a wider geographical canvas in their writings. Set in Mozambique, rather than Natal or other parts of South Africa, *A Shattering of Silence* develops a still more nuanced response to the questions of identity in comparison with the earlier fiction.

In both texts a young woman leaves the land of her birth, traumatised by the cumulative events of her childhood and adolescence, events that are the direct result of repression and institutionalised racism. Exile, however affords no respite from the brutality and injury sustained from living in South Africa. Like the characters in "Jellymouse" and "Maths" in Sam's collection, the exile encounters other instances of hegemony and dominance, expressed in all their malevolence either in personal relationships or in larger, historical events. The spirit of apartheid is indeed ubiquitous.

In the larger canvas of *A Shattering of Silence* Karodia points out that this work, though fiction, represents the "reality of hundreds of thousands of children, all over the world, who are brutalised by war, hunger and political corruption" (Author's note). The story is set in the pre-Independence days of Mozambican history (Mozambique became independent in 1975), when the repression and institutionalised racism of the Portuguese government was unrelenting despite its official policy of assimilation. The prolonged War of Liberation that Frelimo waged against the regime provides the background to this story. Karodia wishes particularly to draw attention to the plight of children in the conflict, to the hundreds of street children, to conditions in many orphanages and "places of safety", and the illegal trafficking in children between Mozambique and countries in the Middle East, such as Bahrain and Kuwait.

The novel follows a complicated temporal sequence, juxtaposing the present and immediate and more remote pasts in the life of the narrator, Faith. The Prologue sets out the

details of Faith's return to Mozambique after twenty years, having left the country to live in London in 1972. In order to cope with the trauma of her life in Mozambique, Faith has written five notebooks of her experiences, as a form of therapy. What prompts her return is an article on the death of a close friend, Lodiya Chidekunda, who died after escaping from a prison camp run by Mozambican rebels. The article brings back a flood of memories for Faith, and she has a strong desire to return to the land of her birth.

Faith returns to an independent Mozambique, but realises that much has to be done to develop the country. She experiences a feeling of desolation, as "Independence had not fulfilled the dreams and aspirations of the Mozambican people" (Karodia 1993:3). Faith feels the strangeness of the place that was once her home, wondering "who was left now to help [her] connect with the past" (4). Images of persons from her childhood come flashing through her mind: her parents, Mama, Kirina, Mamaria, Rita, Dona Maria, Rhonica. Faith hopes that in returning to Mozambique she will be able to recapture the past, to gain some new understanding of her past life. Confronted with the present scene of poverty and desolation, she realises that a "total collapse of the social order" (5) has occurred. The devastation of the violence of the past decades has left people with a sense of exhaustion, and there is need for time to rebuild the country.

A Shattering of Silence is developed as the remembered experiences of Faith. Faith's parents were white Protestant missionaries from Canada who had arrived and settled in a remote northern Mozambique village three years before she was born. Her mother ran a clinic and dispensary and her father a school. Her parents were like other well-meaning colonials who worked in a benevolent manner, believing that "indigenous peoples ought not to be pushed to develop too rapidly" (13). The father, a teacher, wanted to foreground African history, and documented many stories from the oral tradition.

When Faith was eight years old, her parents were ruthlessly gunned down in the regime's attempt to round up suspected dissidents. She witnessed the whole incident, and this had a devastating effect on her, robbing her instantly of her memory and the power of speech:

It was as if I had been emptied of all thought and emotion. I could barely move...The enormous sense of loss and confusion about the events of the past few days paralysed me. I had lost everything: my parents, my home, my memory and my ability to speak. The shock left me numbed, unable to cry. (20,21)

Faith's return to the country is a journey back in time, to relive the horrible tragedy that befell her parents. The whole story is narrated as an act of "the recovery of memory" (1), of the recovery of her voice. Faith is writing to regain her voice, to remember. *Re-membering* is a necessary defence against annihilation. Faith's act of retelling her story is for her a way of coming to terms with the past, of understanding with new eyes "the apocalyptic events" of her younger days. For years afterwards these images were to haunt

her: "Images came to my mind of burning huts, faces and scorpion-like creatures entangled amongst vines in the dark, silent jungle" (77). And the irony is that these very images of terror are what she has held onto, as she has been afraid of losing them, and thereby, her past. The deep longing for the past has been too great for her to contain: "I felt not only the dreadful emptiness of a past I could not remember, or one which I wanted to forget, but also a physical emptiness which had spread like a gaping hole inside me" (85).

Writing her silence - acquiring a narrative voice - is a way of expressing this very silence, of gaining her voice metaphorically; it is also the means to gaining her voice literally at the end. In spite of the inconveniences of being mute Faith realises that her loss of voice enables her to appreciate the repression of the voice and will of the indigenous population by the Portuguese government. As she reflects: "when it came to the rights of the Mozambicans they were as voiceless as I" (50). Jaspal Singh points out that Faith's "nervous condition" may be seen as an inevitable resistance to the brutality of colonialism (Singh 2000:4). The familiar motif in feminist writing of 'finding a voice' is given a new twist here. Karodia shows the ways in which silence may be an escape, a way of coping with trauma; it may also be deployed by women as a form of resistance against injustice, and identification with those who suffer, as much as claiming a voice is.

For Faith, writing is the one recourse she has. Writing is a way of coping with the silence, and of moving beyond it, of *shattering the silence*. Annette Horn, in an insightful article, points to the difficulties and complexities of Faith's position:

Even in the silence of writing, however, Faith cannot confront her original trauma directly. As the memoirs of holocaust survivors demonstrate, it is impossible to recreate extreme brutality in writing. At best one can look at the debris of the carnage, a few clay pots lying shattered, the shards covered in dust, a large calabash riddled with holes, its leaking water glistening like teardrops. Yet these broken claypots also signify Faith's attempt to come to terms with her trauma, thus shattering her silence and triggering the twin processes of remembering and mourning, so that she shakes off her role as victim and redefines her own identity and destiny. (Horn 1994:5)

In a powerful way for Faith representation of identity is involved with creation of identity. Writing of the events is for her, as for Karodia, a way of bearing testimony to the horrors of a repressive regime. Horn argues: "Memory and writing, Karodia suggests, play a central role in breaking the silence which engulfs the victim of a trauma caused by wars and violence. Writing is therapy" (5).

The bulk of the story is about the young Faith's attempt to cope with life in Mozambique after the murder of her parents. She is forced to move from one location to another facing, like Yasmin and Meena in *Daughters of the Twilight*, her dislocation. From childhood through to adolescence, Faith is in constant search for a home and place of refuge - from mission station, to school, to orphanage, to convent. The search for a stable home - an important trope in the writings in this study - is given a totally different perspective here. "Home" is not just about the land of one's ancestry or of adoption but also about a safe

physical, psychological and political space.

The dominant and immediate influence on Faith's life in her childhood and adolescent days is the church, which is to hover over her in largely negative ways. Faith observes that the church is at the "spiritual crossroads of Mozambique" (Karodia 1993:30); it could choose to be a reactionary or resistant force. Her earliest experience, when she is orphaned, is of the convent at Sao Lucas, which is run by a Catholic community of sisters. The sub-culture of the convent provides an interesting contrast to that of the political reality in which Faith's life is embroiled. Her own physical handicap makes her sensitive to the sufferings of others: "I seemed to gravitate more towards those who possessed physical or emotional handicaps like my own" (23). The church is not the emotional sanctuary it could have been, and Lodiya, one of the inmates, is her only comfort.

Black Mozambicans are converted and are used to teach in the mission school, where a strong colonial ethos prevails. Faith recalls that at the school the medium of instruction in the classroom was Portuguese and children were discouraged from speaking any of the African languages. Those who come to Sao Lucas had to "forsake their 'heathen' beliefs and traditions. Children who wore ritual amulets or charms are punished severely" (25). This situation recalls the atmosphere at the Catholic school in Sam's short story, "Jesus is Indian". Colonialism glosses over questions of identity and cultural heritage. The texture of an African heritage is created by Faith's reference to the stories of the past - battles of good and evil spirits lurking in the forests; the ancestor, Mwena Mutapa, who was a rich and powerful king who ruled over the land long before the arrival of the Portuguese; and the DZimbabwe empire which was in existence five hundred years before the formation of 'Rhodesia'. Faith insists on developing an independent mind in spite of the pressure to conform at the convent school.

What is imprinted in Faith's memory is the treatment she receives at the hand of one of the sisters, Luisa. Sister Luisa, unable to respond to the inscrutable disposition that Faith displays reveals a sadistic streak, beating her with intense ferocity. The sister's brutality only serves to 'anaesthetise' Faith, as she connects the Sister's behaviour with grim universal malevolence: "I gazed up into her face with almost weary resignation and in a horrifying moment saw that her expression was the same as the ones carved into demon masks" (27).

Faith then moves to the care of sisters in an orphanage in the city. It is here that she appreciates that there is nothing unique about her condition. There are so many others who are suffering, including the scores of destitute and abandoned children who have been brought here from off the streets. It seems appropriate that a large statue of Christ at the orphanage shows the identification of Christ with the children's suffering: "One of the statue's hands, extended in supplication was missing, as was a chunk of the left foot". In this setting, as Faith points out, "the image of a crippled Christ seemed quite fitting" (34),

as Christ identifies with those who suffer. Ironically, the sisters themselves do not notice the connection.

From the orphanage Faith is taken to Mamaria's home in the township. She is discouraged by the sisters from forming friendships with local Mozambicans, and Mamaria, a black woman, is only accepted as a guardian for Faith because she is a Catholic. Faith is allowed to go to the township because the sisters are not altogether sure of her parentage, and cannot establish beyond doubt that Faith is European. Faith's stay with Mamaria is in stark contrast to life in the Church's institutions. Mamaria shows her the love and physical contact she is deprived of. Her home is also an orphanage, mainly for township children, where "despite their hardship, [they] still retained a sense of humour and could laugh and tease each other" (43). The sense of community, of support and laughter, that is shared is a source of much contentment to Faith. Mamaria knows that such comfort could influence the recovery of Faith's speech. However Mamaria's hospitality does not last for long as she dies suddenly, and Faith has to go back to the convent.

When Faith returns to the city orphanage she is then sent to the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy at St Teresa, and is assisted by a benefactress, Dona Maria, a Portuguese woman who is sympathetic towards the struggle for self-determination in Mozambique. After the initial appeal of the life of the convent, Faith begins to see in it a suffocating and alienating atmosphere. The "veil of mystique" is "ripped" away (64), and she is critical of the oppressive mould of convent life:

All I saw now was the way the nuns were oppressed by the Church. A church dominated by priests whose power was absolute...How could human beings be deprived of human companionship and friendship, I wondered. How was it possible to live in isolation? (64-65)

The Sisters diagnose Faith's condition as "a hysterical paralysis of the vocal cords" (56), but do not see that she is affected in body, soul and spirit. The callousness of the Mother Superior at the convent is illustrated when she notes that the silence required of the contemplative life would be easy for Faith as she is dumb: "Fortunately you don't need your voice here at the convent. Our rule of silence will be well suited to you" (56). The Mother is not sensitive to the difference between a silent world that is imposed on one through hideous brutality and a meditative silence chosen by contemplatives as part of spiritual discipline.

The convent is only safer than the world beyond because it is out of touch with reality: "Being at the convent was like being marooned on a sheltered island in a stormy sea" (66). Outside of the convent the police brutality and repression by the Portuguese regime continue. The history she learns at the convent portrays the colonialists as messiahs; this narrow, patronising perspective supplements the psychological colonisation of the convent life. Faced with the reality of oppression around her she feels compelled to act, to change the situation. She cannot help feeling that life at the convent deliberately prevents a com-

passionate response to a suffering world.

It is not surprising then that the convent's moralistic attitude has an unintended effect on Faith. When Faith finally leaves the institution she deliberately goes against the grain of convent life: "With no voice to cry out, there was a slow build-up of rage and resentment which manifested itself in my rebellious attitude towards the Church and its omniscient, invasive control which dictated its own brand of morality" (75). Faith only modifies her negative view of the convent when the sisters later come to the assistance of her and her "comrades". The sisters then take dangerous risks in the cause of liberation, and Faith sees the convent sisters breaking through the walls that they had built around themselves.

Faith needs love and a human touch, and not the emotional austerity that the sisters decide convent life is about. She recalls the embrace that she received from Sister Angelique (Angie), and the way it "displaced all the misery and unhappiness" (57); it is a much-needed embrace that "violated the strictest rule of contact in the convent" (57). As Faith writes: "I craved human contact" (57). Sister Angie seems to respond empathetically towards Faith; she comes to her room in secret one night, touches her face with a gentle caress, kisses her and lies down beside her. The convent's austere attitude towards the body and sexuality is contrasted with the suppressed sexual desires of Sister Angelique, and what are seen as her "transgressions". It is not surprising, as Faith learns later, that Sister Angelique commits suicide.

Karodia foregrounds the experiences of the body in all its variety and diversity. She deftly juxtaposes scenes of physical brutality with scenes of love and sexuality. There are times when Faith gazes at her naked body in a mirror and finds that she becomes conscious of her body and of sexual desire. She realises that "desire had shrivelled even before it had had a chance to blossom...I needed to be held, to be cherished, even if only for a short while. I wanted to feel safe, to feel loved no matter how fleeting the moment" (185). Karodia shows the intimate connection between - indeed merging of - the personal and the political: the connection between the body as physical, sexual and emotional being and the body as requiring justice and freedom. Freedom and democracy are indeed very corporeal; they are about the body, as much as they are about the mind and the spirit.

For Faith, the many years in the Church's institutions have resulted in the repression of identity, rather than the claiming of identity. She has to work against the effects of such suffocation:

My years at the convent, where I had been schooled in the art of sacrifice, self-denial and endurance, had been quite ineffective. It was the kind of education which equipped one to suffer in silence, a form of passive endurance. But for me it was more like self-immolation which in a way relieved one of the responsibility to change things. (133)

After her schooling Faith goes to work at a Clinic for the Deaf and at a hospital. She meets David, a young English expatriate, who becomes her lover, and she shares a home with

him. Ironically, although David is inclined to a hedonistic life (quite unlike that of the convent), he is similar to 'convent mentality' in his attitude to political change. David is unlike her temperamentally and does not share in her commitment to the country and to the rest of Africa.

Through the depiction of these experiences our attention is drawn to a major theme in Karodia's writing, that of relationships among women. In this work Karodia shows opposing poles - both good and bad, both nurturing and destructive - independent of location, race, class or religious affiliation. On the one hand Faith's relationship with the Catholic nuns is varied, while on the other hand in her relationships with the black Mozambican women, of different ages and backgrounds, there is evidence of strong identification and of empathy, commitment and loyalty.

Karodia is exploring, from a post-colonial perspective, the question of identity in a colonial setting in complex ways. Faith is not race-conscious - she does not see herself as a white, European colonial. She identifies completely with the local indigenous groups, seeing herself as one of them. Apart from her parents the only white people she knows are those who converted people to Christianity. Occasionally the question of Faith's white identity crops up. She receives preferential treatment, for example, because of the colour of her skin. It is interesting that concern is expressed about her, as a white person, living in the squalor of the orphanage; yet this is not pursued further when it is discovered that she is mute.

Faith does not see herself as a colonial but as a Mozambican. For her there is a direct relationship between identity and place and political commitment. Interestingly, she begins to look like her black compatriots - through years of exposure in the sun she has actually become darkened and burnished in complexion, and she does not look very different from the "mulattos". While David, her lover, yearns for England, for her Mozambique is "in her blood". She records that the country "pulsed through my veins with a rhythm of its own even when I grew weary of it and when it sapped my strength" (76). When one of her black friends, Rita, speaks of her anxiety about Faith's being accepted in the townships because she is white, Faith experiences an awkwardness and a political naivete. As she notes: "I was only just beginning to understand the significance of my skin colour and I didn't want to be categorised because of it" (58). In this she is similar to Meena in *Daughters of the Twilight* who wishes to depoliticise colour, and longs to live outside racial categories. If anything, Faith wishes to see herself as black, based on her identification with the liberation struggle.

Faith's identity might be best reflected in the character of the apartment that she shares with David when she leaves convent life and begins working. Her room is an "earthy one with straw mats, African artifacts and brass-ornaments", and is for her an expression of something deep in her subconscious. She cannot decide whether this is linked to dream or

reality - it is as if it recalls another time and another life:

The room was an eclectic mixture of baskets which hung like grapes from the ceiling, wooden masks with grotesque expression leering down from the walls, Indian silks, and cushions which were strewn on the floor. Nothing matched. Like my own life, here, too. Bits and pieces had been thrown together. (78)

Faith is expressing metaphorically not an eclectic identity but one that shows a critical solidarity with African experiences and challenges. While her room may show a mix of cultures, politically Faith does not live in the in-between spaces that migrants or colonials are prone to do. Many white Mozambicans felt that Portugal was their ancestral home, yet it was a "world as remote to them as it was to the black Mozambicans" (155). Faith, however, is very clearly on the side of the oppressed Mozambicans, and is unequivocal in her decision to protest against the Portuguese government.

She is different from David who reflects the homelessness of a colonial living "outside his body" in the tropics. For Faith 'Africa' is not the theatre of the quest for self, as in the classic example of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; it is the place of living, of being, of suffering. While David exists as a cog in the colonial machinery, Faith, on the other hand, is constantly re-negotiating her identity, crossing boundaries and re-inscribing it in the different relationships she enjoys. Identity and difference are directly linked to political imperatives, to solidarity in the liberation struggle.

Faith's commitment to Mozambique is in stark contrast to that of David who wants to rescue her from the squalor of life there. While David is weary of the climate of war in the country and wants to go 'home', for Faith Mozambique is her home. David dreams about the "English breezes" (184), especially in the torrid climate of the sub-tropics. She recalls that he had observed, with uncreative "foresight", that "Africa would always be vulnerable to the vagaries of political ambition. He had predicted that once weakened by poverty and disease, Africa would eventually be re-colonised by new masters" (3).

David offers formulaic analyses of 'Africa', and accuses Faith of being idealistic when she tells him that she is in "the front line"(91) of the political struggle for the liberation of Mozambique. He believes that no matter how much she may identify with Mozambicans she is still an outsider: "When it comes to the crunch and they have to choose between you and one of their own, you'll find yourself on the outside" (91). He posits a simplistic opposition based on stereotypes, and does not see beyond the binaries produced by notions of skin colour and race. He fails to see that, in the context of rampant oppression, solidarity and alliances are forged out of resistance, commitment and courage. For Faith it is not a question of choice. She sees no alternative to remaining in the country: "I am Mozambican. I was born here. This is where I wanted to be" (101). She has a sense that David wants to take over her life because she has no voice. She cannot help comparing David with Juan, another friend/lover, who was as passionate and committed to the cause of liberation as

she.

Faith's relationship with David also provides an important contrast with her relationships with women. With David she sees "giving" as part of a woman's mission - a sacrifice. When her relationship with David turns sour she recalls all the fulfilling relationships she has enjoyed, and realises that they have all been with women. There are both black and white women who have meant a great deal to her. All of them are great women, and she tries to understand them in their complexity. Karodia has expanded on the role that women, resourceful as they were, played in *Daughters of the Twilight* and shows in *A Shattering of Silence* a movement outwards and towards greater political maturity. While in the earlier work Meena's political consciousness was only beginning to emerge at the end of the narrative, in the later work Faith has developed a clear and unambiguous political stance early in life, and shows her commitment towards political change by taking risks as she grows older. In fact, the narrative is a long and unrelenting struggle to the very end on the part of Faith to serve the cause of justice.

* * * * *

Through the production of her novel, *A Shattering of Silence*, Karodia seems to be following the tradition of *assimilado* writing in Mozambique (and Angola) since the 1950's, writing that was needed, as Chapman points out, for the development of an international perspective in the literary expression of the region. In the present divisive climate Chapman sees a more idealistic and critical role for literature and literary commentary to play, as it moves in the direction of increasing re-Africanisation and de-Europeanisation (see Chapman 1996:292). The question of Faith, a white woman, being cast in the mould of a revolutionary figure, cannot be avoided. Is this evidence still of the hegemony of the colonial, or is Karodia questioning the old binaries where whites are seen as supporters of the reactionary regime and blacks resistant? Although Karodia does not problematise white identity in the same way that J M Coetzee, for example, does, her narrative technique does raise these questions related to representation. Ironically, it is Faith's voicelessness that installs her at the centre of her narrative world. In her voicelessness, she is given voice, and is ascribed identity by her 'Others'. She does not speak for the oppressed, as colonials are accustomed to - she is unable to do so literally - nor does she usurp the places of the other freedom-fighters. She is not a voyeuristic observer, but collaborates with them, whether they are black or white, in order to respond to human suffering. In a thought-provoking study on the motif of silence in selected Southern African novels in English, Myrtle Hooper (1992) has shown that the "authority of silence" may be best focalised in the character of the black woman, who stands for the "double other". However in depicting Faith as silent Karodia has also ascribed alterity to a white woman, similar to

that of black men and women.

In *A Shattering of Silence*, then, Karodia is able to broaden the canvas in her interrogation of monolithic constructions of identity in a diverse continent of peoples, cultures, nations, experiences and political commitments. While there is generally in post-colonial contexts a historical convergence between race and identity, Faith, a young white woman, dedicated to the cause of black liberation, upsets these neat categories.

As intimated in *Daughters of the Twilight*, Karodia shows that "imagined communities" need to be re-visioned, and the meaning of racial, cultural and national identities continually explored. In *A Shattering of Silence*, Karodia views the issues of racial and ethnic identity as being contingent on the issues of justice, freedom, and survival in Africa; rather than constructing a model of cultural identity based on race, she shows that there are no absolute or essentialist distinctions between whites and blacks. Identities are so often fashioned through the "intimacies" and "contiguities" that one confronts in the context of imperial history (see Whitlock 2000:16). Faith is not the typical "settler woman" whose identity is usually overdetermined in relation to racial Others; Faith's identity is nurtured in the context of close relations with black women. She moves from a "filial" identity, to one of "affiliation", to use Edward Said's terms (Said 1983).

A double impulse is evident in Karodia's exilic consciousness, where 'home' is problematised and doubly defined. Exile gives Karodia a long-range perspective on experiences embedded in the South African apartheid context. Karodia's identification with Southern Africa, her home, shows a movement from ambivalence to resistance. Karodia moves from notions of home that indicate a nostalgia, a home country frozen in time, in *Daughters of the Twilight*, to her later writings, such as *A Shattering of Silence*, where she is able to move beyond fixity in the past to imagine other worlds than the ones circumscribed by apartheid.

(If Karodia returns to fiction with autobiographical undertones, as she does in the most recent work, *Other Secrets*, referred to earlier, it would seem that her return from exile prompts her to draw once again from her personal history. *Other Secrets* is a reworking of *Daughters of the Twilight*, and is now turned into a three-part novel, where Karodia writes of Yasmin's life away from South Africa and her resuming a relationship with her daughter whom she had abandoned earlier. This is a time of new freedom, renewed "re-membering": Karodia now traces her steps back in time, not as an exile, but as one who has come "home". *Other Secrets* is a new "time of memory", of new and "other" truths. As Boehmer notes, "With the possible shrinking of its international, politically attuned audience, the terms of reference in the South African novel may become more internal, more domestic" (Boehmer 1998b:53).)

What is evident is that an exiled, activist writer such as Karodia embraces an identity that is not limited or confined to ethnocentric notions. While it is generally true that "set-

bled notions of territory, community, geography, and history" are contested by migrants (see Mohanty 1993:352), this is particularly true of political exiles, or of activist writers who remain, as the writings of Goonam, Sam, Karodia, Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer in this study show.

Karodia moves outside the discourses on cultural hybridity in respect of identity prompted by post-colonial writers such as Homi Bhabha who, as Shaobo Xie in a review of *location of culture* points out, has expounded on the "third space" of the "forever-exiled, ambivalent, subaltern subject of cultural difference", which is created out of the historical necessity of the migrant condition (Xie 1996:155). Such cultural mixings and crossovers are being seen at present as quite "routine" in the context of globalising trends (Werbner 1997:1). Going beyond the distinction of the colonised and the coloniser, and the multi-positionality of the subject in terms of race, gender, or class, Karodia unequivocally puts the challenge of political agency and activism in the foreground of identity politics. In different ways this is arguably the sub-text of the writings of Dr Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer.

CHAPTER 10

STRUGGLE AUTOBIOGRAPHY :COOLIE DOCTOR BY DR GOONAM

I was born in May Street, in Durban, in 1906 on the southern part of the East African coast. That made me African, but not quite, for my father had immigrated from India and my mother from Mauritius. I would be identified as a South African Indian or Indian South African. (Goonam 1991:11)

It is with these lines that Dr K Goonam begins her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor* (1991). Goonam's assertion of her identity as an African, her seeing Durban as part of the East African coast and not just of South Africa, her awareness of her straddling an Indian background and the way this complicates who she is and how she would be designated, all become the signature of her life-writing. It was a long walk, however, before Goonam actually possessed the history that would give her the freedom to engage in defining who she is and how she wishes to be identified.

Coolie Doctor spans the better part of the century and is a wide-ranging document of personal, social and cultural history. Goonam was born in 1906, some fifty years after the first indentured settlers had been "shanghaied" to South Africa, to use Sam's description (Sam 1989:1). In spite of threats of repatriation during these years, the presence of Indians in South Africa was entrenched. In 1860 there were 500 Indians in the cane-fields and by 1911, when Goonam was five years old and indentured labour had come to an end officially, there were 11,000, working "from sunrise to sunset" (Munsamy 1997:24).

At the beginning of the century, just before Goonam was born, the Anglo-Boer War had been concluded and the movement towards the "Union" of South Africa - a union between British and Afrikaner - ushered in a new amalgamation between the white tribes of South Africa. This movement consolidated itself under the British Crown and provided a bulwark against an emerging African struggle for democracy which constituted itself into the African National Congress in 1913.

Goonam lived through a century-long history of repression as well as the resistance into which her life was inexorably drawn. She saw the erosion of privileges that Indians had enjoyed, with the franchise being removed in the early years of this century, and growing anti-Indian legislation at different stages of the ensuing period. She lived through two World Wars, as well as through the struggles for emancipation from apartheid restrictions after 1948. She played a key role in the Passive Resistance Campaign of the 50's and was imprisoned during this time. In the late 70's she left the country to live in exile in the United Kingdom, Australia and Zimbabwe. Goonam, like Karodia and Phyllis Naidoo, returned to South Africa when Nelson Mandela was released in 1990. She died in Durban in 1998.

In this chapter I consider the life history of Goonam as recorded in her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, and point to the correspondences that Goonam presents between her story and the larger narrative of Indian resistance to apartheid in South Africa. I show how the construction of her autobiography, referred to as a 'struggle autobiography', and her representation of her identity were influenced primarily by her need to present a narrative of resistance. I consider the way in which her many identities were framed by her political identity.

'Struggle Autobiography'

Goonam had set about writing her autobiography many years ago, with even the promise of a Foreword from Mrs Vijaylaxmi Pandit (sister of India's first prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru) in 1979. At first she experienced frustrations in the writing process: she felt disempowered and overwhelmed by the sheer weight of socio-political problems. She was encouraged to write her story by Fatima Meer who obviously saw its value in the larger historical picture. When the book was finally completed, it was published and launched by the Institute of Black Research, of which Meer is the Director. Goonam notes that "without Fatima, this writing would still be left in cold storage" (9).

In narrating herself Goonam selects those aspects that are pertinent to the construction of her political identity. Her autobiography, as do the autobiographies of other political activists in South Africa (and elsewhere generally), raises questions about the relationship between history and autobiography. Sarah Nuttall, in writing about the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, argues that memory is selective as far as personal issues go and that there is "memory distortion" (Nuttall 1996:63). Referring in particular to the autobiographies of Nelson Mandela and Mamphela Ramphele, which may be seen as struggle autobiographies similar to Goonam's, Nuttall argues that "the political appears to set a framework for personal remembering" (64). Nuttall observes that this may have interesting implications for how memory has been made in South Africa. If political events set a framework for memory, do we still see memory and agency as proceeding from the inside out, as structured by an internal set of needs and desires? What about memory that is structured from the outside in? And if memory is structured in this way, does this mean that a private self is ignored, or seen as 'unpolitical'? (64)

With Goonam's autobiography, it seems that her memory is being structured largely from the "outside in", with the larger framework for her self-narrative being a political one. In narrating her life Goonam locates herself in the subject position of 'political activist' from which to speak. Even when she tells her personal history, as she does largely in the first half of the autobiography, those aspects of her personal narrative that she presents are constructed in such a way as to show their influence on the development of her political identity. It becomes evident that the early stages of her life that she describes are all connected in some way to showing how her political consciousness emerged. In telling the story of

her growing up, of her family life, her struggle for a good education, her studies overseas to become a medical doctor and the early years of her medical practice, Goonam is clearly underlining the cumulative impact these experiences all had on the development and evolution of her political career.

Of course, all autobiographical writing does not necessarily provide 'objective truth'; it is usually selective. It is for this reason that some critics do not speak of autobiography but of autobiographical writing. But 'struggle autobiography' is particularly selective as a very specific political persona is constructed. The view that writing is an "impersonal symbolic ordering...and that the self is in fact erased rather than expressed in writing, that narrative form, usually used to structure autobiography, is a kind of strait-jacket preventing certain important aspects and ideas of the self from being expressed" (Peim 1993:139) is true for all autobiographies, but relevant in specific ways to black women's autobiographies in South Africa which are constructed in the main as struggle autobiographies. In the example of *Coolie Doctor* and those of other black women autobiographers in South Africa, autobiographical writing becomes a form of ideological practice serving a political intention. As with all autobiographies, though in differing degrees, we see in Goonam's text "a constructed coherence, imposed by an external pattern, a symbolic ordering, an instance of a particular kind of cultural technology, imposing its identity over the identity of the writing and reading subject" (140-141). Goonam's autobiography constructs a particular type of self-narrative to show primarily a life in the struggle.

Once Goonam's political genealogy is foregrounded, by the second half of the autobiography, with the descriptions of the history of defiance and resistance, there is little of her personal, private narrative coming through and the narrative seems to be constructed almost solely from the "outside in". Here Goonam tells a largely public story as she participates in it and shapes it, intertwined with a slender and selective history of her own personal life. She records only those personal experiences that are related to her experiences as a public political figure, such as her days on the NIC platform of political rallies, her imprisonment or her going into exile. Personal memories interact with the general, official narrative of Indian resistance that is usually recorded and we get a view of this from the vantage point of Goonam's involvement. It is in this very specific sense that Goonam's autobiography bears out Lejeune's (1989:27) view that the identity of the writer and the subject of the writing come together in an 'autobiographic pact', that there is a metonymic relationship between the author and community. Goonam is depending on the authority of her political self rather than simply on the textual "I" to carry the weight of her self-narrative. And one wonders too what role Fatima Meer, a political activist herself, played in this particular "pact" as the credit page records that *Coolie Doctor* was "written in collaboration with Fatima Meer for Madiba Publishers".

Representing herself primarily as a political activist has interesting consequences in the

way Goonam constructs her life-narrative. Goonam is selective in what she chooses to speak of and what to be silent about. For example, narratives of her family which predominate in the earlier chapters are only interspersed intermittently and when necessary to provide connectives in the second half of the autobiography. We do not read much of her mother or father and of their role, if any, in her later life. Further, Goonam does not write much about her private life as she grows older and only recounts an early and short-lived romance when she lived in Scotland. In the second half of her autobiography it seems that her identity as a sexual being is masked and that a public and political persona predominates.

Goonam does not write of certain personal relationships and there are many gaps in her story. She refers fleetingly to her daughter Vanitha, and includes a photograph of her, but there are no details relating to her birth and growing up, or of Goonam's own role as a mother. She also refers to her adopted children Kanya and Bob, but there is very little information about them in the autobiography. By the stage of her self-narrative when her political life dominates her existence it seems that Goonam does not see the need to write about conventional gender roles, or desists from writing about them intentionally to concentrate on her public role which in fact came to typify her life. Yet, ironically, Goonam repeatedly refers to her own mother being a crucial influence in her life.

Of course one enters into public discourse through the act of writing, and with the writing of an autobiography one is particularly vulnerable. What social conventions obtain when one tells one's story? How does a self-consciousness about the conventions of autobiographical writing (something that Goonam obviously did not have) influence the way one writes one's self-narrative (J M Coetzee's *Boyhood* is a case in point here)? With Goonam was it that some aspects of her personal life were deliberately suppressed as they were considered less important or, to use Nuttall's phrase, "unpolitical"? Certainly by the stage of her advanced political involvement Goonam gives the impression in her autobiography that she was pursuing her political, public agenda with a singlemindedness of purpose. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's observations on black women's autobiographies are perhaps especially pertinent to Goonam's writing:

Much of the autobiographical writing of black women eschews the confessional mode...Black women's autobiographies seem torn between exhibitionism and secrecy, between self-display and self-concealment. (Fox-Genovese 1987:166)

The question that Nuttall and Michael raise is also worth pondering in relation to Goonam's approach to narrating herself: whether the "presentation of the autobiographical self as a more distanced biographical self" is not the result of claiming of space for privacy (Nuttall and Michael 2000d:306)? It is not as if Goonam was deliberately secretive. She was aware that she was flaunting convention and could be brazen about it. An example of this occurs later in her autobiography when she goes to meet the Indian Prime Minister,

Jawaharlal Nehru himself. The following conversation that Goonam recalls shows she had no qualms about dismissing the Prime Minister's suggestion that her being an unmarried mother was a social anomaly (even though she was deferential at the same time, as in seen by her use of the suffix to his name):

"How many children do you have?"

"Three."

"Is their father with you?"

"No Panditjee, I haven't a husband."

"I thought you said you have three children."

"Can't I have three or more without a husband."

"How did they let a dynamic person like you out of your country?" he laughed. (Goonam 1991:145)

In referring to this incident only fleetingly is Goonam then maintaining a decorous silence or is she making a conscious choice to include only those elements that are essential to her struggle autobiography? Although Goonam is similar in some ways to Mamphela Ramphele who describes herself as a "transgressor" in her autobiography, *A Life* (1995), there are still areas of her (Goonam's) life that seem to remain 'unspeakable'. In this respect it is interesting to compare Goonam with Ramphele who does not mask details of her private life, for example, her personal relationship with Steve Biko, and his fathering of her son; Ramphele constructs her self-narrative at one stage very much in relation to Biko. Or does the inclusion of Ramphele's love-relationship with an important Black Consciousness icon constitute an important part of her own struggle autobiography? Nuttall and Michael remind us, however, that "the need to separate the individual from the collective voice assumes an unprecedented personal and generic urgency" in Ramphele's *A Life* (Nuttall and Michael 2000d:299).

In writing her autobiography Goonam was entering uncharted waters; she had no precedents to fall back on. There was no previous example of Indian women's struggle self-narratives in South Africa that Goonam could have read as a possible model on which to base her own writing. Goonam's autobiography is in fact the first struggle autobiography by an Indian woman to be published (Mayat's autobiographical writing, discussed in an earlier chapter, published the year before hers is not in this category). Goonam seems to be alluding to the problems of writing her self-narrative when she states that she was initially reluctant to tell her story. In the Preface she notes: "The outmoded traditions of the Indian people, their life-style, the social structure with its insurmountable barriers, the evils of apartheid, all compounded to make me feel helpless. In sheer despair, I put aside my writing, wanting to forget about it completely" (Goonam 1991:9). This is related, though in a totally different context, to the questions that Virginia Woolf raised in *A Room of One's Own* in 1929 when she analysed the disadvantages of being a woman writer in a patriarchal society. Goonam's possible struggle with writing and not just the writing of struggle needs to be borne in mind when reading her self-narrative.

Notwithstanding, Goonam clearly feels that she has earned the right to speak, to write her autobiography given her role in the liberation history of South Africa and that she has a story that needs to be told. The story she tells is indeed a vindication of this as she delineates her unambiguous place in the liberation struggle in South Africa. In writing her autobiography Goonam confirms the pivotal position attributed to her by the regime when it accused her of being a "ringleader" of political protesters. This is her story, even though there are times, as alluded to above and as we shall see, when she writes of herself almost biographically.

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Goonam begins her autobiography by stating that she was named after a "well-learned woman" in India, Gonarathnam. She notes that she later shed her surname, Naidoo, because she considered that it had clannish and caste connotations. As Ronnie Govender writes in *At the Edge* (1996): "If your father's name was not Pillay, Reddy, Singh, Maharaj or even Mohammed, you didn't feature much in the consciousness of people, except perhaps when they strenuously avoided social contact with you" (Govender, Ronnie 1996:25). Ironically, Goonam became widely and popularly known as "Dr Goonam" when she qualified as a doctor, with her first name standing as a surname. It is unusual for an Indian woman in South Africa (though not unusual in India) to be known solely by her first name and is a reflection of unique public identity. Interestingly enough, Goonam records in the very first paragraph of her autobiography that she initially did not like her name because it "didn't sound feminine enough". But she notes that "later in life, the name suited me because I became strong like it" (Goonam 1991:11). Already in the opening sentences of her autobiography Goonam is gesturing towards the fundamental change that she would undergo in the way she would wish to be defined.

May Street, where Goonam was born, is in the business centre of Grey Street, one of the designated areas that Indians lived in. Grey Street has remained to this day the heart of the Indian commercial area in Durban; as Goonam notes: "the main artery of my childhood world was Grey Street"(13). Like Reddy, Mayat and Karodia, she tells how she encountered racial segregation from an early age, being forced to live in Indian ghettos. Goonam's family, comprising her mother and father and six children, moved to different homes when she was growing up. She recalls that they moved from May Street to their "humble" home in Victoria Street, and then to a "grand" home in Leopold Street, becoming in the process fully integrated into the social fabric of this close but closed-off inner-city neighbourhood.

In a divided society, the Indian neighbourhood provide what Adam and Moodley call "psychic shelter" (Adam and Moodley 1986:42), an insular protective space in an alienat-

ing world. It is only later that Goonam began to see that this segregated living provided her with a false sense of security, and exoticised her difference. Nuttall and Michael note that childhood is "an important signifier" in South African autobiography, and is often presented as a state in which "racial discrimination was not known or little understood" (Nuttall and Michael 2000d:301). It is ironic that segregation gave Goonam a feeling of worth and pride, necessary in an apartheid society but only because she was not being compared with any other group. Goonam appreciated later, when she encountered the wider world and thought of the places she lived in in Durban and the surrounding area, that she was actually "closeted in the Grey Street complex, and sheltered on [her] idyllic Umgeni bank where [she] had rarely come face to face with the indignities of racism..."(Goonam 1991:44). As Mohanty and Martin point out in relation to "people of colour" in the United States, "home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself" (in Davies, Carol Boyce 1994:65). It is for this reason that Goonam's transformation is all the more remarkable. From her early beginnings within the confines of South Africa's separate group areas, Goonam developed outwards, moving well beyond this narrow and sheltered world.

She observes that when she returned to Durban as a qualified doctor years later racial segregation had not abated and that she was still personally affected by it. As she notes: "Grey Street was familiar, secure, but once one entered the white world of West Street, one had to steel oneself against the race prejudice that intermingled with the service" (Goonam 1991:58). She was aware of racial segregation everywhere she went in West Street: "The lifts said: 'Whites Only', and so did the toilets and the change rooms and no blacks were allowed anywhere near the refreshment sections" (58). She was caught between boycotting this "white world" and succumbing to its many shopping temptations. But through this all her uneasiness towards the racial prejudice and discrimination deepened and prepared her to work actively to cross racial barriers.

Goonam points out that it was her supportive family and community background that contributed to the development of a strong and assertive personality and that helped her counter the calculated denigration designed by colonialism and apartheid. The narrative that Goonam presents of her early life shows clearly the effect of living in a discriminatory society. It is a story of humble beginnings, hard work and determination - what might be seen as a trope in the writings in this study. Goonam's father arrived from India at the age of sixteen and initially went to work in the Transvaal as a simple messenger boy. But Goonam writes that a close friend of her father, a P K Naidoo, had "all the right contacts to send him climbing on the Indian social ladder" (11-12). Her father was introduced to Gandhi and this association was to influence the course that Goonam's own life would take.

Goonam explains how her family were subjected, like Indians in general, to discrimina-

tory practices especially during the 1920's when the whole country, in Joshi's words, "throbbed with diabolic anti-Indianism" (in Bhana 1997:34). In her autobiography she describes the general debilitating atmosphere that Indians experienced and notes that the history of Indians in Natal since the date of their arrival had always been a struggle socially, economically, politically and culturally.

Goonam's father came to Durban where he began as a market gardener and established himself in this sector. When the farm was sold and the family moved to the city, the father started an import business, selling Indian groceries, ceremonial goods, fireworks, traditional Indian pots and pans, elephant, tiger and mongoose ornaments and wooden dolls. After the Second World War, the years of economic depression affected Goonam's father and he faced eviction from his business premises; he then tried to develop further business interests in India.

What comes through in Goonam's construction of her early domestic life is the important influence her parents' home had on the formation of her strong political views. Although she was cut off from the mainstream world of whites Goonam shows that she enjoyed a rich alternative social and cultural existence centred around her family home. Goonam's home was the venue for a number of social get-togethers - "my parents were very hospitable, what with my father's business interests and my mother's social contacts, we were entertaining people all the time. Our home was on the Indian roster of important events" (Goonam 1991:17). Goonam was exposed to a wider world of thinking and experience that was largely oppositional to the apartheid one. Among the family guests were Sarojini Naidu and Dr Abdulrahman, the renowned freedom fighters. Sarojini Naidu, as noted in the story of my own grandmother, had been an inspiration to many Indian men and women and was to exert an important influence on Goonam's own political development. And, of course, a most decided influence on Goonam was none other than Gandhi himself. Goonam records the frequent visits that Gandhi would make to their home in Durban when she was a little girl. A group photograph of her father and Gandhi appears in the autobiography.

Like Reddy and Mayat, Goonam speaks of her mother and father as strong and influential persons. As pointed out earlier in this study, mothers in particular played an important role in the development of their children. Goonam notes in the Preface that her "mentors, guides and friends have always been women" (9). Adrienne Rich draws attention especially to the empowering that women can give and receive:

I am talking here about a kind of strength which can only be one woman's gift to another, the bloodstream of our inheritance. Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from women to women across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness. (In Morris and Dunn 1992:235)

Goonam's mother was able, like most Indian women of her time, to accept with dignity the

private world of the home as the focal point of her existence; and she tried to influence her daughter to do likewise. Goonam writes: "In 1925, I moved about almost involuntarily, submerged in this Indian world of high domesticity and profound ritual, internalising above all, the example set by my mother" (Goonam 1991:21). Although the mother played the role of dutiful wife she was still a strong-willed woman, using the domestic context to develop a strong-willed daughter, with Goonam apparently discarding much of the image of "high domesticity" later in her career. Goonam's mother was secretary of the Indian Women's Association, an organisation which Gandhi helped to form in the first decade of the 20th century and which naturally came under his influence. Like Gandhi, her mother was influenced by the suffragette movement in Britain. It is very likely that Goonam's mother was a member of the Indian Women's Association at the time when the petition, "Domestic Unhappiness", referred to in an earlier chapter, was sent to the Natal Legislature.

Goonam's mother played an important part in Goonam's own education. As she notes: "My mother was a remarkable woman, well educated for those times in English and Tamil"(12). Her mother had attended the Anglican missionary school, St Aidans, and had also been schooled informally in Tamil literature and Tamil philosophy and this was passed on to the children: "Through her, we learnt to think beyond our surroundings for she transported us to ancient times in India, and introduced us to current thoughts in the world we lived in" (12). Goonam's descriptions of these years suggest a rich life steeped in Indian traditions and religious observances. She vividly describes celebrations around Indian festivals such as Deepavali and Pongal. Goonam was imbibing from an early age a respect and understanding of Indian culture, ritual, religion and language and this was to remain with her for the rest of her life. The example of Goonam's mother, whose family originally came from India and Mauritius, bears out Sam's point, referred to earlier, that the burden of cultural survival in a strange land rested with women. What was to distinguish Goonam's character in the years to come and mark her as a political activist of no mean stature was her inclination to evolve an identity based on political commitment rather than on cultural peculiarity or difference; yet she did not suppress her rich cultural heritage. Her political career and her significant cultural role were clearly against the grain of the ideological conditioning and propaganda of the apartheid regime.

The other important influence on Goonam was that of the "English school", where she was "drawn to Christianity" (Goonam 1991:15). She writes of the influence of Christianity on herself and on her brothers and sisters:

At English school we were drawn into Christianity; we learnt about Good Friday, Easter Monday, Palm Sunday and Christmas. We enjoyed singing hymns and were fascinated by the scripture lessons, and saddened that a holy man like Jesus Christ should be nailed to the cross with blood dripping from his hands and feet.(15)

Goonam shows the importance that was attached to acquiring an education. She displayed singular mettle in her striving for an education in spite of the deliberate impediments that she faced, though not in the same way as Jayaprada Reddy. The struggle for education is a familiar theme in writings by all black women and men in South Africa. Although there are differences in group and personal experiences, echoes of Goonam's difficulties may be found in the writings of Ellen Kuzwayo and Zoe Wicomb or Peter Abrahams and Es'kia Mphahlele, to name a few familiar examples.

Teachers were solicited for private tuition; among them were English school teachers, Pauline Morel, and Doris Yuill, who became legendary figures in the history of the education of Indian girls in Durban. Goonam also mentions another English teacher, Miss Muggleton, who she notes had "an important influence on me and introduced me to *Ivanhoe* and *Wuthering Heights*" (16). Like her mother Goonam also attended St Aidans school. She was able to straddle two cultures, one Indian and the other English, with ease: "Our homes and schools, Tamil and English traversed it" (13). Cultural dualism was appropriated from an early age and was to open her to the variety of human experience. Like Mayat, who studied Arabic and Urdu, Goonam followed a dual educational routine religiously. She notes,

We began with Tamil school at 7 am, singing hymns and practising reading and writing. We hurried from Tamil school within the hour to reach English school by 8 am where we exercised the three r's and learnt needlework... We returned to Tamil school at 3.30 pm and stayed there till 5.30 pm. learning grammar and poetry. We went back to Tamil school on Sundays when we learnt to pray and sing in a room submerged in a vapour of incense and camphor. (15)

The support and influence of both her parents is seen particularly when Goonam began to develop ideas about going overseas to study medicine. Goonam records that her mother in particular wanted her daughter to enjoy the privileges that she herself had been denied: "She had waited to realise her own dreams through one of her children, and it seemed to her that moment that she would do so through me" (23). It was around 1926 that Goonam began to consider the prospect of a medical career, and her parents were not averse to it, although at this time it was not common to have Indian girls even at school:

No Indian girl remained at school once puberty set in, and the idea of sending a girl abroad was outrageous...It flouted the prevailing morals, and a wall of resistance built up against the revolutionary step contemplated by my parents. Their friends expressed anger and then pity. 'The poor girl will be leaving the shelter of her home and exposed to a strange environment, among strange people, with no friends or relatives to protect her. It was madness, even cruelty to send her in the full blossoming of her womanhood'.(25)

In a dramatic moment of decision-making that was to change the course of Goonam's entire life, her father refused to bow to pressure from conservative people around him and decided that his "Pappah" (little girl) would leave for Scotland to study medicine:

I got fed up with all their mumblings today about Pappah being exposed to

temptations. Pappah getting sick, Pappah marrying a white man, and it occurred to me that's my business, not theirs. If my daughter hitches her wagon to a star today, it is because I encouraged her to do so yesterday, and now I am going to help her to ride the skies. (27)

Both Goonam and her mother were ecstatic at the father's decision:

My mother went off to the temple to offer prayers of thanks for such a rapid granting of her wishes. As for me, I was prepared to go anywhere, temple, church, mosque, supplicate myself before any deity if that was what it took to reach my goal. (24)

What comes through in this personal narrative of her early years are interesting strands in the construction of her struggle autobiography. The remembering of her formative years does not signal a nostalgic longing for a lost world; it is a crucial part of the trajectory of her life in the struggle. Goonam's early upbringing in a social world bounded by aspects of Indianness confirms in her a pride in who she is, in her rich Indian cultural heritage and background. This makes her confident enough in later years to fight colonial and apartheid denigration of her Indian identity and that of others like her. From an early age, and throughout her life, even when in prison and she is disparagingly referred to as a "witch-doctor", Goonam is confident in her background, ability, intelligence and dignity as a black woman, unlike the kind of gender- or race-inflected view of identity that was common currency in an apartheid-driven world. This implicitly prepares the ground for a life of resistance rather than of acquiescence.

It is the same assertiveness that made Goonam later gladly appropriate the derogatory term "coolie", as does Jay Naidoo in his autobiography, *Coolie Location* (1990). She was overturning in an ironic vein the very designations spawned by colonialist and apartheid thinking and asserting her identity and dignity, as pointed out already. Gandhi noted in his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, that the original meaning of the word 'coolie' (indentured labourer) was forgotten and was used to denote all Indians. He, for example, was referred to a "coolie barrister" (Gandhi 1927:90), although he, like Goonam's parents, was of Passenger Indian stock. The term became naturalised through usage and in time was not even seen as derogatory by those who used it. Goonam's patients, for example, who were railway workers, Afrikaners and English, would all seek out her services, asking, "Is the Coolie Doctor in?" (Goonam 1991:92).

Goonam shows that in these years, in spite of the relative privilege she enjoyed, she was treated as a pariah because of the colour of her skin. In depictions of this early developmental period Goonam suggests that her privileged background actually sowed the seeds of her political awareness and prepared her for her life in the struggle by providing her with the intellectual and political backbone she would require in later years. For this background Goonam was always grateful. But as did Ansuyah Singh, Fatima Meer, Phyllis Naidoo and Zuleikha Mayat, Goonam engaged in the "unlearning of her privilege", in Spivak's well-known phrase, as she identified with those unlike herself.

It was her parents' dedication to her career as well as the alternative non-sectarian world of ideas that she absorbed in her parents' home that made her want to return to South Africa after her studies in Scotland. She was to feel that she owed it to her family and to her 'community', a 'community' she was already re-defining and extending to make sure it was racially and ethnically inclusive as she was growing up.

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Goonam shows how the next stage of her life also prepared her in no inconsiderable way for her role in the struggle. In travelling overseas Goonam was catapulted out of the parochial world of South Africa into a wider world of democracy and freedom. Her encounter with life in a free society is filtered through the experiences she had known in race-bound South Africa. Her first experiences in London, for example, left her quite excited:

I marvelled at the well manicured green lawns - free for people to walk or lie upon. I had not experienced such freedom in a public park before - free to ducks and swans and the people: white, black, white, black, brown. There were no signs anywhere warning us to, 'keep off the grass' or 'Europeans Only'. (38)

When she arrived in Edinburgh to commence her preliminary study towards her medical career she was exposed to the cross-winds of Empire. Goonam befriended a Scottish woman, referred to as Aunt Mary, with whom she later took up lodgings as a student. A life-long friendship was to develop between the two, with Goonam dedicating her autobiography to her. Goonam writes that she enjoyed the status of daughter in her adoptive home "which radiated such warmth and comfort" (41). The cosmopolitan aura of Aunt Mary's home was especially inviting when Goonam arrived in Scotland:

I visited her home to enjoy the Scottish cuisine, my favourite foreign food in those days was Egyptian, an exotic mixture of French and Middle East cuisine - chicken casserole with cream, stuffed marrow and meat and rice, kebab on skewers and Turkish coffee. (44)

She soon realised that it was South Africa that was on the fringe, and that the British Isles constituted the metropolitan centre. As she notes:

It was everything I had dreamt of. I was absorbed in the great melee of young people from all parts of the world, every tinge of black, brown, yellow and white; Indians from India, Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, Ceylon, Africans from the vast number of African States, Egyptians, Arabs, Chinese and Japanese. The world came to Scotland. (38)

Goonam could not help feeling that Durban now seemed a "veritable desert" (41). Her experiences abroad and the cultural expansion she underwent made her far more critical of British Imperialism and produced in her a rising political consciousness and a growing resolve to fight injustice:

Eighteen months in Britain had opened my eyes to the inequalities of the white Raj. It had torn through the innocence of my childhood. Life was not a pongal to be celebrated, it was cruelty to be challenged and destroyed. (41)

Ironically, it was in Scotland that Goonam's links with India were strengthened as she was exposed to the story of India's struggle for Independence. In Scotland she was viewed as an Indian linked to Sarojini Naidu and Gandhi. She was reminded forcefully in Scotland of the illustrious example of Gandhi, whose fame had obviously spread to the different parts of the British world. Goonam recalls that Aunt Mary once said to her: "You are his compatriot and you come from South Africa where he practised his soul force. You share his honour" (43). These impressions enhanced those she already had of Gandhi and were to contribute to inspiring her to follow in his footsteps.

For Goonam, becoming more cosmopolitan included realising her Indian identity. This was not claimed in the separatist mould of apartheid, but was claimed for the rich civilisation and cultural heritage that India embodied; most significantly, India's fine example in its struggle for freedom "made a deep political impression" on her:

Most important to me was the Edinburgh international student community which made a deep political impression on me, the most compelling being that of Indian students. They were intensely patriotic, highly critical of the British and passionately supportive of Gandhi. It was very easy to feel a kindred spirit with them for I too was Indian...and responded wholeheartedly to their arguments against Empire, and their commitment to freedom. Winds from the world blew around me and ideas of justice, injustice, freedom and exploitation began to excite my imagination and awaken my political consciousness. I was attracted to the firebrands in the college and came to feel a strong affiliation with India. I attended political meetings and applauded the rhetoric against tyranny and empire. (44)

Goonam realised the extent of her political and socio-cultural isolation and alienation in apartheid South Africa even though her parents' home had provided some respite. Goonam's links with India had been well established through her father's own background there. Mayavarum, the village in Tangore in the south of India from which her father had come, she says "clung to him like the well-worn dhoti he put on at home to relax in" (11). She was able to develop these ties more firmly in the years that followed her stay in Edinburgh and her return to South Africa.

As far as her political awakening went, Goonam was similar to her compatriots, Monty Naicker and Yusuf Dadoo, whose opportunities for study outside South Africa also exposed them to strident critiques of colonialism and imperialism and decidedly shaped their future political careers. As it happened, when Goonam had left by ship for the United Kingdom it was a coincidence that Monty Naicker was also on board, a young seventeen year old at the time, on his way to Edinburgh and Dublin to study medicine. Goonam and Naicker were to become firm friends and close comrades in the resistance movement in ensuing decades. They both returned to Durban in the 30's, Goonam as the first Indian woman doctor in South Africa, and both become important political leaders in Durban. (Dadoo was stationed in Johannesburg when he returned to South Africa.)

Goonam's narrative shows that she returned from the United Kingdom with a stronger

political commitment than ever. It would merely be a question of time and circumstance that would unleash her burning will to join the progressive political forces of her day. The memory of her sojourn overseas remained close to her on her return to South Africa (two paintings of landscapes of Edinburgh adorned the walls of her surgery) but she was soon drawn into the realities of living in her mother country.

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Goonam's experiences as a doctor were to directly propel her into a life of solidarity with the oppressed. They showed her that there was a common thread that connected peoples in spite of the official separations on the basis of race and culture. Goonam writes that her work as a doctor took her beyond the race divisions of the society. Her work gave her opportunities to get to know a wide spectrum of peoples in situations of dire need and it opened her eyes to "the depth of Indian poverty" (60). She was appalled at the incidence of tuberculosis and the prejudices around it. She writes of a "white" family who had to be classified Coloured and registers the trauma that the different members of the family experienced due to the Population Registration Act. Her medical rounds took her to African communities. She recalls treating an African child living in a "back yard hovel" (155), a child she diagnosed as suffering from kwashiorkor. The mother had contacted syphilis from her partner, who was infected through a life style that was forced upon him due to the working conditions he endured at the hands of white employers. In reflecting on her patients from different racial groups Goonam observed that they were basically the same: "Soon I discovered that Indians had the "spirit" complex, Africans the "tagaati (witchcraft) complex", Europeans the "neurosis complex", and Coloureds a mixture of all three under the spell of black magic" (66). On a daily basis Goonam was encountering in all communities superstition, prejudice, poverty, ignorance and "idiosyncracies that accompanied orthodoxy" (61), and she became involved in a range of community institutions and organisations to alleviate the plight of underprivileged groups.

Goonam and her family faced the indignities of the apartheid system when their home in Umgeni was expropriated by the Durban City Council. It was to challenge this that Goonam records that she made her "maiden speech" (70) and engaged in a march down Grey Street in protest against the City Council. Goonam remembers that she was very bitter:

We were being robbed of our birthright, our happiness, our peace of mind. I felt I could take it no longer. I had not realised the full scope of calamities that could overtake a people simply on account of their blackness. I wondered why I had returned at all. (70)

It was at this desperate time that Goonam was urged by her mother to make a trip to India. Her mother obviously realised that such a trip would divert her attention, and rather than

dissipate her interest in the affairs of the world, would rekindle it. As Goonam writes of her mother at this time: "She was a woman of infinite strength and courage and she understood me" (71).

Goonam's father was already in India and provided her with the welcome she required. This journey to India was an important one in her life, marking a high point in her "Indian education" (75). She suggests that it was significant in her development as a political activist. As she writes in her autobiography:

I was beginning my Indian education. England, Scotland, Ireland and South Africa had made their contributions, and now this ancient land of saints, sadhus and pundits would make its input. It was up to me to open my heart and mind, to be receptive. (75)

She had gone to India as a child, but this second trip was seen as the real visit to the "land of Gandhi and Tagore"(72). She recalls the ready acceptance she felt on arrival: "My father and I were soon munching away in peasant-like abandonment, but not my mother and sister, the stuff was not hygienically handled, cellophane-wrapped and hermetically sealed for them. I was loving India, loving every sound, loving every chick pea, every black face, every Tamil nuance - I had such a sense of 'my country'"(76). The ancestral links that she felt were all the more sharp, given that she felt "disowned" in South Africa. She writes: "There was a tranquility about the place. I was at peace, freed from the indignities I had suffered in Durban" (78).

Goonam noticed the ubiquitous and dominant influence of 'Empire' - the architecture was similar to that in South Africa: "Sir Herbert Baker and Edward Lutyens were commissioned to design the official buildings in both centres, the secretariat in Delhi and the Union Buildings in Pretoria"(88). While in India she practised as a doctor but she was also soaking in the political climate of this pre-Independence period. She gave several political speeches to captive audiences, recounting the life of Gandhi in South Africa, the politics of the Natal Indian Congress, and the opposition to the strategies of Passive Resistance. She got into hot water through her public speeches in India when she criticised the Indian Agent Generals in South Africa as "a waste of time".

In Madras, Goonam appreciated the extent of resistance against the government. What she also noticed in India was the political involvement of the women. In this time of ferment against colonial rule many supported Subhas Chandra Bose's militarism, and rejected Passive Resistance. As she recalls in her autobiography:

I attended student meetings and found women students as vociferous in their condemnation of the British Raj as the men. They also condemned Passive Resistance as a waste of time and supported Subas Chandra Bose's militarism as the only answer. (85)

All these experiences in India prepared her for her involvement in politics in South Africa, particularly through the work of the NIC. Already in India she was stating the need to purge the NIC back home of reactionary groups and focus more singlemindedly on strong

opposition: "My generation...was critical of the existing leadership and would gain control and restore Congress to its original purpose, to serve the oppressed people" (87). At the same time Goonam was enticed by the prospect of living in India, as it was a country that "had opened out" (89) to her in a way that her own South Africa had not. She wanted to remain in India but was forced to return to South Africa at her mother's insistence when they received news that one of Goonam's sisters was very ill. Goonam shows at different places in her autobiography that she straddled the divide between transgressiveness and conformity. She writes that she changed her mind after "gruelling soul-searching" (89) and returned to South Africa: "I owed my mother a debt, and I was repaying it" (89). But as Aunt Mary had observed when Goonam suddenly changed her mind about going ahead with her proposed marriage to an Egyptian student in Scotland and decided to return to her family in South Africa: "There is an unseen hand guiding our destiny. Perhaps it is meant for you to return home" (50). Goonam was to return from India to be drawn into a vortex of local politics that would change her life completely.

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Goonam's story of her life in the struggle reaches its climax in the next section of her autobiography where a political itinerary is foreground. It is clear that it is from these chapters that the authority of her life-narrative stems. The chapters are almost exclusively about Goonam's participation in the resistance movement that gathered momentum from the mid-forties in South Africa. What we do get in this section of the autobiography is the presentation of a public persona, a consciously-assumed political identity, which fuels her narration. As pointed out already there is very little information about her family and private life here but instead an account of most of her time and energy being devoted to various strategies of resistance. The persons who feature frequently and prominently are mainly the public figures in the Defiance Campaigns and the Passive Resistance movement of the time or those whom Goonam encounters through her medical practice. It is as though Goonam had found a new and demanding home in the struggle which entailed sacrificing her personal life. The narrating subject in these chapters constantly moves from 'I' to 'we'. Split by the grammar of identity, the self-writing takes on the form not of an individual autobiography but of a cultural autobiography, and this is borne out by the portraits she presents of characters in the penultimate chapter. Here her own story becomes de-personalised in favour of biographical fragments about other people that she has met or incidents that she deems important. These sketches are entitled "Kasturie", "Papiah Vengetiah", "A White Family is classified Coloured", "Guess who came to our Christmas Dinner - Breaking a banning order", and they reflect an alternative, personal self, identifying closely with and subordinated to the "community". In this Goonam anticipates the

auto/biographical writings of Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer which will be considered in the next two chapters. Goonam's approach may also be seen, in this respect, to be similar to that of Mashinini and Kuzwayo whose writings, as Nuttall and Michael suggest, foreground representivity as they explore "self-in-community" (Nuttall and Michael 2000d:299).

Goonam tells of her leading role in the politics of the 40's and 50's through her work in the NIC. The freedom struggle in South Africa had received new power and impetus under Gandhi with the NIC having been formed by him at the turn of the century. Goonam notes that it was controlled mainly by elite groups; she was opposed to the ethnocentric stance of some members of the NIC, which she described as "claustrophobic":

This class had accumulated some property and some privileges within the segregatory framework and their main concern was to protect those privileges, and preserve what the 'community' had accumulated rather than protest race laws on principle. (Goonam 1991:99)

Goonam was to be one of the most active members of the Natal Indian Congress executive after 1945 (Bhana, Surendra 1997:63), and engaged in its reform. She was among those who formed the Liberal Study Group, feeling a "social and intellectual void" after she returned from Edinburgh. The Liberal Study Group articulated alternative political approaches, and among their ranks a Nationalist Bloc and a Nationalist Group emerged, strongly influenced by trade union politics. She records in her autobiography that the Group also denounced the imperialist objectives of the Second World War and India's participation in it, and formed the Anti-Segregation Council to fight the leadership of the Natal Indian Congress. Goonam writes that the "old guard" included A I Kajee and P R Patheer who, it was alleged, had made a secret deal with the South African government that there would be no further "penetration" of Indians into white areas. Goonam was part of the "young Turks" who were against this compliance with segregation. This was also the time of the influence of the Communist Party in South Africa, and the work of this group ensured that there would be a vociferous presence against the regime of the day.

Goonam admired Cissy Gool, the daughter of Abdulrahman, who was among those who made impassioned appeals for solidarity between Indians and other oppressed groups. Abdulrahman had formed the Non-European Unity Front in 1927, which resisted ghettoising oppositional politics and formed the basis of new alliances between the ANC and a revived NIC, signalling the beginnings of the broad-based opposition of all blacks. At the time of the conclusion of the Second World War, however, the situation for Indians had worsened, with growing anti-Indian sentiments. Goonam notes the irony of the increasing segregation of Indians at the time:

While the victory bells rang in Europe declaring peace, the SA Parliament declared war on Indians and introduced the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Bill, which proposed the segregation of Indians into ghettos. (Goonam 1991:102)

Goonam and the rest of the leadership of the NIC were compelled to mobilise against the government of the day. She was part of an inner circle of the Movement that drew local and international attention to South Africa's race policies: "We were making South Africa's racism an international issue with the help of the Indian National Congress in India. We were making an impact beyond the Indian community and Whites, Coloureds and Africans began coming to our office, offering support and encouragement" (103). Goonam, together with the rest of the leadership of the NIC, achieved singular successes in drawing attention to the situation in South Africa, and this was to contribute to the eventual demise of apartheid. Goonam writes:

Our campaign captured the imagination of everybody nationally and internationally. We received messages of support from all over the world. Mahatma Gandhi sent us his blessings, so did Pandit Nehru and heads of state of British Guiana, Jakarta, Singapore, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Black American leaders sent their messages of support. (106)

Goonam notes that it was the leadership of the NIC that was also responsible for putting the treatment of Indians in South Africa "high on the UN agenda" (126). She records that they sent Ashwin Chowdry (husband of Ansuyah Singh), Sorabjee Rustomjee, A I Meer, and H A Naidoo to advise Vijayaluxmi Pandit at the United Nations on the South African situation. With the world taking notice of the plight of Indians in South Africa, Goonam records that it was efforts like these that prevented the implementation of the repatriation scheme for Indians.

As the situation became more and more untenable, Goonam records that there was no alternative but to "follow Mahatma Gandhi's example of Satyagraha...and go to jail" (105). She went to prison eighteen times and recounts the way she was humiliated there. On one occasion when she arrived in prison the matron was curious to 'place' this protester in some sort of category. The matron could not believe that she was a medical doctor, as the following conversation between her and a prison warder indicates:

"What work do you do?"

"I am a medical practitioner. I do gynaecology and obstetrics."

"You what?"

"I am a doctor."

"A witchdoctor."

"They don't teach witchcraft in Scotland."

"Shut up. Don't be cheeky." Her powerful fist struck the table with a resounding bang. (114)

Goonam's accounts of her imprisonment are most vividly drawn, with details of the depths of despair and irreality of such an experience:

Life stood still...My work, my personal and political life, my home, my dogs, my family, friends all seemed so far away. Yet that life lay just outside those walls. It seemed years since I had been free. I had been free, yet it was only a few days ago. (119)

Although Goonam was seen as "the ring leader", she remained defiant and issued a statement to the magistrate at the time of their arrest:

We who are arrested today are facing the charges before you knowing full well the penalty that the law carries with it. We court imprisonment and ask

you to impose the maximum sentence for the crime.

We are using the only weapon we have left, that Mahatma Gandhi is using to achieve freedom for his people. We will not submit to the Ghetto Act as it has wrenched from us, the last vestige of human right that we possessed...we feel that this legislation of the SA government is a negation of the principles for which thousands gave their lives in World War 2. We shall be betraying the cause of truth and justice if we accept this law. Posterity will point an accusing finger at us.(111)

Like Fatima Meer, through her statements (and public speeches) Goonam was asserting the right to claim her identity not only through her actions, but also through her words. Goonam was hailed as a heroine after one of her periods in prison. She realised that the urgency of the times was propelling her into the role of a popular leader, and she had to accept this in order to encourage others to join in the resistance agenda of the movement:

I took a grip of myself and accepted the welcome and thanked the people for their support. I told them that the human spirit could overcome the bleakest of physical conditions and they should never be afraid to face imprisonment. (125)

Goonam's writing of her imprisonment may be read in the wider context of prison writing in South Africa. Prison memoirs are the most revelatory of the injustices of the apartheid system; they have also been the most repressed, and are now increasingly being published in South Africa. As Nixon states:

The strength of the memoir relative to fiction is one signal development of this new literary order. Arguably, the revelatory role of fiction was accentuated by the paranoia and secrecy of apartheid society...Perhaps more writers now feel there is less reason for the protective refractions of fiction. (Nixon 1997:77)

Goonam experienced a strong bond with men who were committed to the liberation struggle. In this she was similar to Phyllis Naidoo, Fatima Meer, and other women who rallied together with men to fight against apartheid. Ellen Kuzwayo speaks of such unified resistance in her autobiography *Call me Woman*:

The commitment of the women of my community is my commitment - to stand side by side with our menfolk and our children in this long struggle to liberate ourselves and to bring about peace and justice for all in a country we love so deeply. (Kuzwayo 1985:263)

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With such a strong commitment to solidarity with men in the struggle how do we read Goonam's gender politics? Does Goonam depict in her struggle autobiography an understanding of the struggles of women? What were some of the attributes of Goonam's identity as a woman activist (as opposed to those who were male) and were there any feminist impulses in her strategies of resistance? Goonam's narrative shows a self that is complex and contradictory. There are often times when issues of race take precedence over those of gender, but this does not mean that gender discrimination is ignored. The writing evokes links naturally with writings by women in the Indian and African diasporas.

Goonam became the first woman to be elected to office in the NIC (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:23). Her participation in the Passive Resistance movement undoubtedly helped to provide a context for her growth and empowerment and for the legitimisation of her public activity. If there was a possibility that she assumed merely an honorary male role, this was to change when she began mobilising women for the male-dominated NIC. It is true that she mounted resistance mainly against racial oppression, but she also worked for women's causes. In democratising the Congress structure the NIC established branches in areas outside Durban and expanded its base into other provinces. Goonam was responsible for recruiting large numbers of Indian women in this process. Her role and presence among the male leaders provided a role model for other Indian women. During campaign meetings to enlist support for the Passive Resistance Movement, she found women offering themselves to be recruited: "We learnt later that we had unwittingly set the pace for a woman's liberatory movement and there were wives who had defied their husbands and recruited" (Goonam 1991:109).

It was at this time that Goonam raised women's issues in a male-dominated Natal Indian Congress (Bhana 1997) and became involved in the Women's Liberal Group. She pointed to the anomaly of the Anti-Segregation Council, a radical grouping designed to shake up the old image of the NIC. At a mass meeting of the Anti-Segregation Council, where there was a large turnout of women, Goonam realised that they were not able to vote as the NIC constitution denied voting rights to women:

At the very first meeting of the new executive, an urgent amendment was made to the archaic constitution, whereby women were given full membership on equal basis with men. I then paid my subscription fee of one shilling and went on a campaign to enlist women leaders to our Congress. (Goonam 1991:101)

Gradually, in claiming her voice she contributed to the recasting of the images of other Indian women, as is evidenced by the numbers of women she was able to recruit for the movement. She became well-known for her speech-making and outspokenness at mass gatherings and her example as a public figure obviously provided other women with the confidence to emerge from the private female space of domesticity. She mobilised women by reminding them of the example of women in Britain, although appealing to their (female) roles as wives and mothers and saviours of their homes and families:

Britain is an example where women sacrificed their hearth and home, giving their services for the war. Women in India are in the vanguard of the freedom struggle and their achievements are remarkable. Nearer home our African women took a militant stand in the ICU (Industrial Council of Workers) under the leadership of Clements Kadalie. The time has come for our women to throw in our lot with our men to save our homes and families. (102)

A fair number of Indian women took part in political protest, despite the view, expressed by Cheryl Walker (and endorsed by Daymond), that there was no widespread political activism amongst Indian women. For example there were several women among the group

of resisters who were imprisoned during the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1946. Goonam notes that there were 259 men and 16 women who had been imprisoned around 1946. Women mentioned by Goonam in her autobiography were among those who were "saluted" by Latha Reddy in a commemorative event to mark the 1996 National Women's Day in South Africa. Together with Goonam, singled out for their commendable participation in the Defiance Campaign of 1946 were Dr Gadija Christopher, Dr Zainab Asvat, Mrs A K M (Rabiba) Docrat, Mrs P K Naidoo, Mrs Ellapen Naicker, Mrs Suriakala Patel, Mrs Amina Pahad, Dr Ansuyah Singh, Mrs Violet Solly and Mrs Cissie Gool (see Reddy, Latha 1996:9). In some ways Goonam, through her autobiography, implicitly represents the stories of these other Indian women activists. The far-reaching effects of their efforts are noted by Latha Reddy:

In the years since then, the Indian movement in South Africa became an integral part of the struggle of all the oppressed people and opponents of apartheid. Among those who built the mass democratic movement, among those who suffered and sacrificed, were many other Indian women... (9)

These women, together with women such as Helen Joseph, Mary Benson, Winnie Mandela, Gertrude Fester, Lilian Ngoyi, Emma Mashinini and Ellen Kuzwayo all contributed to the non-racial struggle for democracy in South Africa. It must be pointed out that Goonam was not simply inserting herself into the alternative historical narrative. Like Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer and the women activists from other race groups, Goonam played an important role in shaping that very history. Even though it is true that these were all exceptional women, they did form a critical mass to effect change in South African history. What is necessary, as Daymond rightly points out, is the need to develop a feminist history of women in politics (Daymond 1996c:xxix), which will show continuities and fissures in the women's movement in South Africa, as well as bring to light the participation of all groups in varying ways.

Although Goonam was a key participant in the Passive Resistance Movement and questioned the NIC's discrimination against women, there is, however, no evidence of any questioning of the gender politics and ideology of Passive Resistance from a feminist perspective. Any critique of Goonam in this respect must invariably invoke a critique of Gandhi and of the gender politics of Satyagraha. Ania Loomba draws attention to the ways in which Gandhian principles of resistance reveal many cross-currents of colonialism and emasculation and feminine agency among oppressed groups. She points out that according to some critics, political mass movements

such as Gandhi's non-co-operation movement were feminist in nature, not only because they mobilised enormous numbers of women, but also because they adopted attributes (such as passivity) and activities (such as spinning) that are traditionally considered female. But one may question whether such attributes are really 'female' and recall that Gandhi's movement censored women's militancy, and adhered to entirely patriarchal conceptions of the family and society. (Loomba 1998b:223)

There are complex and contradictory strands that might be considered here. The critics Loomba refers to seem to be conflating feminist and female. Adopting female or feminine attributes such as passivity and engaging in female activities such as spinning does not necessarily indicate a feminist consciousness, and this is shown by Gandhi's attitude to patriarchy. Perhaps it was the encompassing of feminine values in the public space in Passive Resistance - apart from the fact that it seemed a peculiarly 'Indian' strategy of protest - that gave Indian women's activism in South Africa ready acceptability and approval in the Indian community. One must not dismiss the importance of the semiotics of dress, as the many sari-clad images of Goonam (and other Indian women) appearing in the mass marches would have contributed in no small measure to the acceptance of Indian women who 'transgressed' into the public space. (In the autobiography there are several photographs of Goonam and other women in saris.)

Madhu Kishwar points to the complicated nature of Gandhi's position in relation to women. She argues, as pointed out above, that Gandhi "succeeded in galvanising the traditional housebound woman as a powerful instrument of political action", giving her respectability and prestige in public and political life; however he tried "changing women's position without either transforming their relation to the outer world of production or the inner world of family, sexuality and reproduction" (Kishwar 1985:1697, 1699). Yet, at the same time, by promoting women's participation in the public sphere, Gandhi was indirectly breaking the "shackles of domesticity" (Kishwar 1985:1701).

What complicates a critique of the gender politics of Passive Resistance even further is the view that sees Gandhi, by positing Satyagraha, as deliberately engaging in a critique of the "hyper-masculinity" of the modern world with its Western male rationality and scientific technicism (see Nandy 1983). Gandhi was positing an "Eastern" response, albeit one that amalgamated alternative thinking from the West as well. Yet, as Loomba points out, there was no criticism of the patriarchy within the ranks of those who practised Satyagraha. Loomba argues that Gandhi was mainly focusing on the instrumental function that women could play in the movement, and to some extent this is also true of Goonam, a woman of her time.

However Goonam did draw attention to aspects of discrimination that women were experiencing in a pervasively patriarchal culture, showing how her political subversiveness enhanced a gendered vision, however partial, of the world around her. Apart from contesting the sexual politics of the NIC she criticised the way Indian men generally manipulated power in order to keep Indian women subordinate, a principle that Kate Millett was to stress in the general resistance that women would mount against patriarchy.

Goonam was aware that initially her demeanour did not find favour among traditional Indian men and women. She recounts that when she was a young and enthusiastic doctor eager to apply her medical knowledge there were many obstacles to her setting up her

practice; and some of these were clearly linked to prejudice against her as a woman. In some ways her experiences are similar to those of Phyllis Naidoo's who was also criticised for being independent and outspoken. Goonam notes that the "difficulties seemed insurmountable and I felt impotent, frustrated and disillusioned. I suffered a sense of failure as a doctor; politically and socially I was an outcast" (Goonam 1991:57). She was regarded by Indians as a "modern", rebellious woman, flouting decorum and tradition: "I had a tough time making my practice work. There was prejudice against a woman doctor - I didn't look like one"(57). And she had the temerity to champion women's causes in the face of persistent traditionalism:

My appearance and my forthright behaviour upset many. There was objection to my western style of dressing, my outrageous habit of smoking in public, my carefree manner - I was too breezy, too bright - there was objection to my support for women who wanted to be employed outside the home, and my open exhortation to parents to educate their daughters. I criticised the large sums of money spent on betrothals, weddings and ceremonial rites. What a waste, what a colossal waste I thought, and did not hesitate to say so in public.(57)

In spite of resistance to her forthright views Goonam actively campaigned, for example, that girls be given the opportunity to go to school and she was able to see a measure of success for her efforts:

I was also succeeding in getting parents to send their daughters to high schools. There were only six pupils at the Indian Girls High when I started out and the headmistress, Mrs Morel called me in to discuss what could be done to remedy the situation. It needed diplomacy, tact and patience. I visited parents, drank numerous cups of syrupy tea and talked persuasively, pointing to India as the respectable reference point. Attitudes relaxed slowly and enrollment improved. Then two girls fell pregnant and I was in the dog box, but two girls or a hundred, could not hold back the process. (93)

Goonam also observed the way women themselves internalised a patriarchal ideology: "The orthodox women at the clinics would not utter their husbands' names and I teased them to tell me the names, but they never caught on that I was playing games with them....While it was near blasphemy for the Indian woman to utter her husband's name, the husband mentioned his wife's name with impunity" (62-63). Her medical practice made her see how so many women were trapped in cycles of poverty, abuse or superstition.

Goonam had to contend with problems within her own family about her free and out-going life-style. Her political activities made her live an independent social life, much to the chagrin of members of her household, especially her mother:

I lived with my family but moved with my friends. It caused tension...I was out late many evenings...I would creep into our Argyle Road house stealthily, taking off my shoes so as not to disturb others, but more importantly, not to provoke my mother's ire, who for all her broadmindedness, has definite ideas about the time an unmarried woman went to bed, regardless of her age and status. (93)

Ironically, Goonam's mother who was responsible in some way for nurturing Goonam into independence was now unwittingly perpetuating her infantilisation. Goonam resisted, re-

alised that she needed "to have [her] own space" (93), and decided to buy a new home and live on her own.

It is necessary to note then that the "technologies of gender" were intersecting in complex ways in Goonam's life, and to point again to the fact that there are no monolithic categories of Indian, black or "third world women". While direct forms of feminist consciousness were absent from her political strategising, she does re-negotiate her public image and her personal relations in the light of her political identity and personality. It would seem that her political career authorised her claims to greater autonomy in her personal life and influenced her gradual acceptability in the social sphere. Goonam exploited the gap between public and political identities on the one hand and individual identities on the other. The reputation she enjoyed from her frequent speaking out against the injustices that Indians sustained enabled her to enjoy a degree of social impunity, as pointed out earlier in her conversation with the Indian Prime Minister, and undoubtedly encouraged a process of transition from tradition to modernity for many other Indian women. It is therefore difficult to assert, as Daymond does, that feminism did not play a significant role in the lives of Indian women such as Goonam (see Daymond 1996c:xxviii). Feminism as we generally know it, namely Western feminism, seems to be a submerged category in Goonam's life and although we do not see an overt feminist consciousness at work, there is ample evidence, as I have pointed out, of Goonam's sensitivity to issues that concern women, with gender acting as one variable in the resistance. The point is that Goonam's life in the struggle was to contribute to some degree to the long process of re-imagining citizenship, to the development of a critical feminisation of discourses about rights (which have matured in the present decade) and the radicalisation of sexual politics in the South African context, as has been achieved by activist women elsewhere (see Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999).

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Goonam's producing a struggle autobiography in an era when "autobiographical acts", to use the phrase by Nuttall and Michael, are especially important, reflects a view of the past from the vantage point of the present. It shows the need to construct an identity that over-rides the divisions of the past in the hope of creating a new nation in South Africa, and is similar in this respect to the writings of Phyllis Naidoo and Fatima Meer, considered in the following chapters. Goonam appropriately concludes her autobiography, as she began, with the hope that a new era will be realised in South Africa in which an expansive identity may be claimed: "And now I await, with all freedom loving South Africans, for negotiations to proceed, the violence to end, and the new non-racial, non-sexist democracy to be born. Nkosi Sikeleli Africa!" (Goonam 1991:173). Goonam lived her life on the basis of such a secular eschatology - that one day freedom would dawn on South Africa, and

that she herself had contributed to its realisation. And she has told her story in such a way that captures this.

Anthony Kwame Appiah's reflections on his father's all-embracing Pan-Africanism may be read in relation to Goonam's sense of her identity. Appiah describes his father as being as Pan-Africanist as Du Bois and Nkrumah, yet he taught his family to "be completely untempted by racism as he was" (Appiah 1992:ix). Appiah was inspired by his father's anti-racism and "complete unracism", and asserts: "My father is my model for the possibility of a Pan-Africanism without racism, both in Africa and in its diaspora" (ix). Appiah also commends his father for "his multiple attachment to his identities...as an Asante, as a Ghanaian, as an African, and as a Christian and a Methodist" (ix).

Similarly, Goonam asserts variously her Hindu, South African, Indian, Tamil, feminist or womanist identities - choosing her own individual expression within these categories as well. She was shaped, like Appiah's father, morally, aesthetically, politically and religiously (ix) by all the influences that have made up her life. When asked her religion, when she was in prison, she stated, "Religion of humanity", showing that her adherence to human rights and welfare came before religious dogma and doctrine. Goonam's political activism made her open to the influences of all faiths. As in *Behold the Earth Mourns*, Srenika says to Serete, his African friend, who is angry and bitter because of the gross injustices around him: "The search for truth - you can call it Godliness, the way of Christ, of Buddha, of Gandhi, of men who have served and will serve for the good of mankind till the end of time" (Singh 1960:66).

Is Goonam, then, a "cosmopolitan subject", the model hybrid subject, whose chief aim is the construction of a political identity? Padmini Mongia has cogently highlighted criticisms of notions such as hybridity, which she argues is a seductive response to "fractured subjectivities" (Mongia 1996:7). She points out that postcolonial critics such as Ania Loomba and Aijaz Ahmad question the notion of a generalised hybridity, celebrated by writers such as Homi Bhabha. While the concept liberates us out of the old binary oppositions, it tends to privilege the migrant intellectual, and does not allow for a proper exploration of lives of specific and historic subjects under particular gender, class or race constraints (7).

Aijaz Ahmed in particular questions the notion of hybridity, pointing to the "aspecificity and ahistoricity of a hybrid subject remarkably free of any gender, class or race constraints" (7). In my opinion, Goonam does not luxuriate in any accidental hybridity she might have enjoyed. She is anything but free of the constraints of gender, class and race; she constantly re-interprets them, especially race and ethnicity, and is as militantly "specific" and "historical" as one might be.

Goonam's autobiography shows through her life experiences that she was engaged not in the "rhetoric of alterity, which often meant evacuation of specificity" (Appiah 1992:72),

but in a life of 'witness' and praxis in a specific place and time. She embraced a multi-faceted identity, rooted in her South African anti-apartheid experience. She was proud to be Indian, and wanted to discover her Indian roots on the sub-continent, yet rested lightly on narrow, ethnocentric representations, claiming rather an overarching South African identity.

As with Meer, she was acutely aware of the history of Indians in Africa and, in particular, in South Africa, and of the narrative of struggle among Indian women in this history. From the time of their arrival in South Africa, many Indian immigrants, including women, were involved in different ways in resistance to their oppression. In this they were similar to Indian women in England, Fiji, the Caribbean, and South America. There was no conflict between their Indian identity and the political ones they chose in their adopted countries. As Chandra Mohanty notes:

Home was not a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space, but instead an imaginative, politically charged space where the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social justice, as well as a vision of radical transformation. Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively to create a strategic place I could call 'home'. (Mohanty 1993:352)

Exiled or activist writers, such as Goonam, Sam, Karodia, Phyllis Naidoo and Meer, have much in common in embracing an identity that does not reflect an ethnic absolutism. While it is generally true that "settled notions of territory, community, geography, and history" are contested by migrants (352), as pointed out earlier, this is also true of political exiles, as the writings of Goonam, Sam, Karodia and Phyllis Naidoo in this study show.

In many ways this was Goonam's experience. But just as Appiah's father claimed an all-inclusive identity that was still under the umbrella of Africanism, in Goonam's case, her identity was an all-embracing South Africanism, in all its multiplicity and fluidity, an identity showing at once retention (of her Indian identity) and extension (as did Bram Fischer in relation to his Afrikaner and South African identity; see Clingman 1998:456). She travelled to different parts of the world, was shaped by these expansive experiences, but always felt a hankering after South Africa. By the end of the 1970's, Goonam writes, "the political climate had heated up" (Goonam 1991:167). She left very quickly for England, and worked as a doctor among refugees, mainly Pakistanis and Indians from Uganda and Kenya. Goonam records that she "felt a kindred spirit with them", dislocated as they all were from their homeland. But when she found that she could not renew her passport she felt "trapped in London" (168).

Through the help of Colin Winter, the well-known anti-apartheid campaigner who managed to arrange travel documents for her, Goonam spent a short term in Australia. But while she was there, she found that "Africa called [her]. [She] had an intense feeling to return to [her] home town after being away for five and a half years" (171). She settled in Zimbabwe for a short period, where she was seen as "an aboriginal from Australia" (172).

While she accomplished much during her sojourn in Zimbabwe - she founded the Zimbabwe Tamil Sangam, and organised Indian classical dancing - she writes that "there was always that hankering to return to South Africa" (173). It is almost as if she was afraid, like exiles generally, of losing her identity and her sense of history if she remained as a perpetual exile (see Gurr 1989). When she finally returned to South Africa when the ANC was unbanned and Nelson Mandela released, Goonam writes that she was "drunk with joy and in sheer ecstasy. I am sure all exiles felt the same. Personally I didn't feel I would be alive to see that day, to experience that incredible feeling of happiness...And so here I am, at home I will stay in my country till death do us part" (173). "Home" for Goonam was clearly the land of her birth.

Goonam was able to participate in the first democratic elections in South Africa before passing away four years later. But the world into which Goonam was born in the first decade of the 20th century and that propelled her into a political life was quite different from that to which she returned in the 1990's. A new "interregnum" was emerging where both proactive and reactive forces would reside side by side. We witness today many-sided discussions on 'culture' and 'nation' with ambiguities in these discourses operating in South African society. At the same time, it is good to be reminded of the example of Goonam who cut through monolithic and fixed views on these issues and whose life was resolutely marked by a strong sense of social responsibility and openness. In this Goonam is part of a rich and impressive tradition of women's participation in social change movements globally, but combining a unique blend of national, cultural and political identities rooted in South African soil.

CHAPTER 11

AUTO/BIOGRAPHY AS IDENTITY IN THE WRITINGS OF PHYLLIS NAIDOO

"As we approached the land of my birth, it seemed that my love and I were racing towards each other for an eternal embrace." (Leila Ahmed 1973:138-139)

Introduction: Auto/Biography

The history of apartheid, the memory of exile, biographies of activists, all coalesce in the wide array of writings by Phyllis Naidoo. Intimate personal letters and those from the world of officialdom; documentation on crucial public happenings; photographs of children and of comrades: the "Phyllis Naidoo Collection" in The Documentation Centre at the University of Durban-Westville might be read as comprising a South African woman's story. In this chapter I attempt to construct Naidoo's story from a sample of her writings. I consider the obliteration of her identity through apartheid, and the construction of identity - of others as well as her own - in her writings and in her life.

Moving through the Collection, I realise again and again that for Naidoo collective memory and personal memory are closely intertwined, with numerous autobiographical strands weaving themselves in different directions through her writings. Many of them give factual accounts of events and information about the lives of others who fought for freedom in South Africa. The descriptions, for example, of the South African Defence Force raid on Lesotho in 1982, her statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the piece entitled "Who Killed Rick?" all show Naidoo bearing witness. Many of these accounts have not enjoyed wide currency in South Africa, or were prevented during the apartheid years from general circulation. Some of her writings were not published formally but circulated among the members of the exile community outside South Africa.

Naidoo does not set out to write a single, linear autobiography, in the way some of the other women in this study do. Nor does she engage in reflection on the formation of her identity. As an activist, Naidoo expresses her identity through what she did rather than through self-definition and self-discovery. She does not depict what Mongia describes as an "interiorized private self unceasingly reaching out for an audience" (Mongia 1996:232); rather, we find that Naidoo spends a lot of her time documenting the lives of others and keeping their memories alive. It is as if her own identity and sense of self are affirmed vicariously. What is interesting is to see Naidoo, rather than introspectively pondering over her own identity, merging with that of her 'comrades'. Naidoo thus presents what Judith Coullie refers to as a "relational self", where the boundaries between self and other are

"smudged" (Coullie 1996a:133). A "dispersal of self" (141), a displaced identity, is characteristic of Naidoo's life as well as her writing.

The inclination for those writing struggle autobiography to write 'biographically' has been noted in the case of Goonam. It was seen that the presentation of the autobiographical self more impersonally at a distance is linked to asserting a political identity and perhaps claiming a space for privacy. The reason for removing the self from centre-stage is also to identify with a sense of community rather than present an individual self. Nuttall and Michael observe that one of the elements of black women's writing generally is the "notion of writing being not for the self but as a collective space" (Nuttall and Michael 2000d:306). This is true of Naidoo's writings where a "collective space" is constantly claimed. She has been meticulous about keeping records of political events and experiences, and in writing of the lives of others, their stories have become her story. Even in "Ten Days", which is an account of her own short period in prison, Naidoo acts as a conduit for the voices of others and foregrounds their stories. One may consider whether this is another example of the "monstrous detachment" of the activist writer who is preoccupied with the lives of others that Gordimer drew our attention to (Gordimer 1975:12). In this chapter I consider the way in which one may read Naidoo's narrative of herself obliquely by considering a selection of her writings; in so doing I am deliberately extending the enterprise of this study to excavate a submerged self.

Coullie's observation about the autobiographical/biographical writings of Kuzwayo, Griessel and Gordon, that they move away from Western humanistic conventions of asserting an autonomous sense of self in their writing, is relevant to my reading of Naidoo's writing in "Ten Days" in particular and in her writings as a whole. Naidoo is similar to these other women writers who "refuse such conventions precisely because their strengths lie in the acknowledgement of mutuality. Autobiography in the Western tradition, with the strong authorising 'I' gives way in these texts to the more fluid forms of auto/biography - forms which more fruitfully can fathom the nuances of reciprocity" (Coullie 1996a:145-146). "Mutuality" and "reciprocity" do indeed underline Naidoo's short piece, "Ten Days", as well as, as I argue here, her other writings.

Barbara Harlow has written of the way in which repressive regimes use mechanisms to control "the borders of dissent":

Immigration, deportation, prison and exile - each differently, but nonetheless complicitously, indicates what might be called 'extradiscursive formations', institutions and mechanisms initiated by state bureaucracies to control the borders of dissent within their territorial domain. As such, they serve too to manipulate a 'discourse of boundaries' from within the sites of hegemonic power. (Harlow 1994:109)

In deliberately writing about exile, Death Row and her own prison experiences, Naidoo, as is seen from the examples selected above, contests repressive mechanisms of the regime and overturns them. As Harlow, quoting Cornel West, points out:

If prisons, deportations, immigration control, and enforced exile indicate a nexus of bureaucratic power and its deployment in the service of the state, functioning as 'structural constraints [that] impose limits upon historically constituted agents', they also provide at the same time 'conjunctural opportunities [that] can be enacted by these agents'. (109)

Naidoo transfigures "constraints" imposed upon the lives of victims by using them as "opportunities" to expose injustice and to celebrate resistance. She rescues the victims, herself included, from erasure by institutional forms of repression, and in identifying each one of them, she has obliquely asserted her own identity. In the light of this perspective it is therefore ironic that in a letter from Nelson Mandela, written on 1st March 1971, from Robben Island, to Tim Maharaj, Mac Maharaj's ex-wife, Mandela notes that Naidoo presents herself as "the centre of the universe":

Regards to Phyl and kids. I really admire her ability to handle the situation by remote control. She sent 2 family photos, the first homely and lovely, brought M D to his feet again. But it is more the second that did the trick. It is the prettiest one I have seen of her. Its message is clear and unambiguous: "Darling, I am the centre of the universe, sheet, anchor and all round me". (Phyllis Naidoo Collection, Correspondence, Box 1, File 1)

Mandela's excessive interpretation of the photographic image is an accurate one - (although Naidoo herself would have disavowed it) - but in a way he himself does not realise. For Naidoo, as well as for Meer, considered in the next chapter, writing is, to use the words of Trinh T Minh'ha in relation to women's writing generally, "an act of solidarity" (Trinh 1989:20). As she holds up a mirror, reflecting and constructing others through her writing, she is in turn reflected back in the very writing.

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With Naidoo focusing on the lives of others, information concerning her own background has to be pieced together from her different writings and from her descriptions of other events or people.

Naidoo belonged to a family of ten children, and although her parents found it difficult to maintain a large family, they insisted that she continue with her studies up to Standard Ten. From an early age she was inspired by leaders such as Dadoo and became a member of the Natal Indian Congress and the Human Rights Group. She spent a great part of her time in "welfare work" dealing with pensions, grants, care for detainees, and Defence and Aid. She pursued a variety of jobs, such as working for The Friends of the Sick Association (FOSA) and teaching, but gave up teaching as it expected conformity from her.

Studying part-time, Naidoo trained as a lawyer. Phyllis Naidoo's legal background was to stand her in good stead in the years to follow. With Archie Gumede, she set up one of the first cross-cultural practices in South Africa, and her work involved helping ordinary people who were disadvantaged by the justice system of the day (see The Phyllis Naidoo

Collection, Correspondence, Box 2, File 54). Her husband, M D Naidoo (known as M D), was a prominent human rights activist in the 50's and 60's in Natal. M D spent a term on Robben Island during the time that Nelson Mandela was there, and is referred to in Mandela's autobiography as well as that of Ismail Meer's, *A Fortunate Man* (2002), among others. Phyllis Naidoo acted as legal counsel for her colleagues on Robben Island, and also worked in this field from exile. She herself was served with two restriction orders of five years each, and was placed under house arrest from between 31 March 1966 to 31st March 1976. These banning orders, under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, restricted her to the magisterial area of Durban, and to her place of work. Naidoo records that there was no specific charge: "Why, you may ask, since our statute books are capacity-packed with laws that criminalise us, could they find none to charge us with?" (Naidoo, Phyllis 1992:86). She was also imprisoned for ten days during this period - ten days that, as Naidoo wrote, "shook my world".

Naidoo lived in designated "group areas" in Durban but in her writings rescripts the "geography of race". Her accounts of her living in different parts of Durban - in Percy Osborne Street, Stamford Hill, and Scala Flats near the old Centenary Road bus rank - show her soaking in their multi-racial character. She recalls shebeen life in Durban, around Fountain Lane and Warwick Avenue, and of her encounters with Ma Liz, the shebeen queen: "Boozers sat on the old ragged lounge suite. There was music and quiet laughter, a happy atmosphere. In the kitchen was a large pot of soup made of juicy dog bones, carrots, potatoes, and kidney beans, hovering at the bottom of the pot while dumplings slogged around at the top" (Phyllis Naidoo Collection, 1977-1989). (These robust descriptions recall playwright Kessie Govender's shebeen scenes in his play, *Stablexpense*.)

As she became increasingly involved in work for political detainees Naidoo found that she was a target of the apartheid regime. When she became aware that her movements were being tracked by the government she decided to leave the country. Although there was the perception that she was in "self-imposed exile", Naidoo counters this by stating that exile is never "self-imposed". Recalling the incident that made her resolve to leave the country in a statement to a reporter later, she pointed out:

It was absolutely necessary for me to go. There was always the threat of police action against me because of the welfare work I had been doing for politically involved people and for my role as an instructing attorney in the Maritzburg terrorism trial. There was also the possibility that I could be detained, because of my work. It was not easy for me to walk out of my office which was very dependent on me. (Naidoo, G R 1997)

Naidoo left the country in a clandestine manner, travelling across the border to Lesotho. She received political asylum in neighbouring states, and much support from sections of the international community. Naidoo tells of the incredible hospitality of poor countries like Lesotho, which she describes as a "gracious host" in the "belly of the beast", South Africa.

Like numerous other political exiles - Breytenbach, Mphahlele, Goonam, to name just a few - she was to know the friendship of so many committed to the struggle for freedom outside South Africa. To counter the present xenophobia in South Africa Naidoo, constantly reminds South Africans of the hospitality that political exiles enjoyed in the past, she asks for some "reparation" for those who supported South Africa so willingly: "But Basothos who suffered because of us should be given whatever we can afford. We should do this in Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho" (Submission to the TRC, 1996).

Naidoo was to spend nearly thirteen years in exile, from 23 July 1977 to 26 June 1990. She lived in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, the United Kingdom, Cuba, Hungary, and Russia, and returned to South Africa, like many exiles, after the release of Nelson Mandela. Crossing apartheid frontiers, literally and metaphorically, Naidoo entered a world with much wider geographical, political and cultural points of reference than she had ever been accustomed to in South Africa. Exile opened up to her a wider world beyond the confines of apartheid life. Her writings on her experiences in the rest of Africa and in Communist countries are particularly informative; she evokes an intimacy with different African states that is generally not known by South Africans. Many of the pieces she wrote were circulated informally within the exile community helping to keep those who lived outside South Africa informed of events within the country. Her writings also show the great friendships she enjoyed with fellow exiles and the vast company of political activists from around the world whom she knew. Her experiences of exile and her encounter with a wider community within and beyond South Africa's borders gave Naidoo a particular sense of family and of belonging. Her own role as mother emerges in relation to her descriptions of her sons, who were political activists like herself. But it is apparent from her writings that she was seen as a mother-figure to an extended family of exiles and refugees, being referred to as "Mother" or "Ma Phyl". What is evident in the details of her development as a political activist was her concern for victims of apartheid and her equipping herself adequately, in spite of difficulties, to fight the system from a solid and informed base. As Chandra Mohanty reflects on her own story, living and working in the United States: "Home, community and identity all fall somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities and friendships" (Mohanty 1993:357).

One of Naidoo's close comrades in exile was Fr John Osmers, an Anglican priest from New Zealand, working at the Community at Masite in Lesotho, and with South African refugees. It was at this time, when she was Chief Counsel for the Lesotho Government's Legal Aid facility in Maseru, that on 5 July 1979 Naidoo and Fr Osmers were the victims of a parcel bomb, sent by South African agents. Pieces of shrapnel are still lodged in Naidoo's body; the parcel bomb had been intended for her, but she found difficulty in opening

it, however, and was helped by Fr Osmer, who then took the full impact of the blast.

The motif of 'home' is an important one for most of the women in this study, but it takes on a different meaning in the writings of Naidoo due to her exile experience. Of all her experiences Naidoo finds those of exile and the separation from 'home' the most difficult to forget. She writes that for many of her colleagues the experience of exile is the most indelible; while some may not remember the exact date when a death penalty was served, or when they were released from prison, or their children's birthdays, the memory of exile "sticks in your mind like nothing else does" (Submission to the TRC, 1996). Exile created a longing for 'home', and 'home' for Naidoo was the land of her birth, South Africa. She felt that exiles, dislocated from South Africa, understood the meaning of 'home' better than anybody else:

No one, but exiles know the meaning of that. When someone new arrived it soon got around from what area they had come. Comrades would gravitate there. Maybe news from home - their own home? As I say only exiles know the meaning of this. Comrades returning to South Africa as guerillas were mostly apprehended going to visit their homes, contrary to orders. The court records will confirm this. We all missed HOME with a poignance. (Naidoo 1992:59)

Naidoo's elder son, Sahdhan, also in exile, was killed by security agents in Lusaka. Naidoo made a detailed submission to the TRC on the killing. Her second son, Sharadh, died in March 1995 from "medical causes", after returning to South Africa in 1991 from exile in Cuba, Tanzania, Zambia and Angola.

These biographical details of Naidoo's life show the formation of her identity in the crucible of apartheid and resistance to it. In this Naidoo shares a similar background to those of the other women in this study. But her particular pre-occupations, concerns and experiences resulted in a different trajectory. For example, her life in exile brought her into contact with a vast array of freedom fighters whose names she records.

We also find different motifs from the ones that occur in the writings of other women in this study. For example, Naidoo writes not of indenture but of xenophobia, not of her relocation through the Group Areas Act but of her desperate flight across the borders of South Africa. There seems to be no account by Naidoo in all her diverse writings of her childhood days, although she has preserved correspondence and photographs of these early years. She has written a short autobiographical piece which includes information on her grandfather and parents, entitled "At Alexander's insistence". In it she tells of the background of her grandfather and father, and of her family life (see Phyllis Naidoo Collection, Biographies, Box 8, File 112). Her grandfather worked as a gardener when he came from India, and spent most of his money educating his children. Naidoo's father, Simon David, began teaching from the time he was a teenager, and eventually became one of the first Indian Inspectors of schools. We do not find, however, extensive information on her grandparents and parents, as we find with some of the other women in this study who have written their

autobiographies and memoirs. The theme of beginnings in indenture or any other aspect of Indian history is absent from her writing, with Naidoo preferring to write about "our political ancestry" (Naidoo, Phyllis 2000:vi).

Although she, like Goonam and Meer, also worked within the structures of the NIC, these experiences do not feature prominently in her writings. She does not extol the example of Gandhi as do Ansuyah Singh, Goonam and Meer; her heroes, instead, were Che Guevara of Latin America, Amilcar Cabral of Guinea Bissau, Agostino Neto of Angola, Eduardo Mondlane of Mozambique. And while, like Goonam, Naidoo writes of her brief prison experience, she conveys a different sense of the experience from the one found in Goonam. In exile Naidoo's eyes were opened to the full impact of colonial domination. She is particularly critical of the role of Western powers in the history of Africa's liberation, and of their attempts to crush some of the greatest intellectuals on the continent. She criticises the Portuguese, for example, for their treatment of the great liberation leaders of this century.

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Naidoo concentrated on recording some of the injustices perpetrated during the apartheid regime and the experiences of those who engaged in resistance against them. Like Fatima Meer, she was able to draw attention to information that was deliberately being suppressed for ideological reasons. She was a prolific writer, producing a host of short pieces and short books on many themes connected with apartheid history. Writing became one way of maintaining her sanity, of holding on to the truth, as she documented her numerous experiences in detail, and preserved meticulously every shred of documentation on matters relating to her life or of those connected with her. She has written scores of cameo pieces, and hundreds of letters to various persons. She has a natural inclination to probe experiences, and assert her views, in spite of repression during the apartheid years. The person who emerges from her writings is one who is both relentless and fearless in her quest for truth, one who knows her rights and those of others and is determined to speak up for herself and for others. Most of her writings are short and deal with different aspects of apartheid history. An evocative example is "Who killed Rick?" in which she asked critical questions related to the manner of Rick Turner's death at the time when there is a shroud of secrecy over his killing. And in her piece, "Who determines what you read?" she criticised the ideology that legalised separation:

Look - after 20 years of Bantu Education intended to tribalise us, the children in June 1976 told the Nationalists in no uncertain terms that they wanted no part of Bantu education. The dead bodies of those children tell so eloquently to what extent our racist rulers will go to ensure that they and they alone are the Godfathers of our minds. (Phyllis Naidoo Collection, Box 11, File 182, 1977-1989)

The Collection includes a wide range of personal correspondence. There are letters seeking permission to visit her husband on Robben Island; to attend a friend's funeral when she was under house arrest; letters from caring political pen-friends (who soon become familiar to the reader through their handwriting and distinctive writing paper). There are letters of complaint to landlords about poor deals for tenants, and a memorable telegram of commiseration from Harare to her brother, Paul David, who was among the "Famous Six" who occupied the British Council Buildings in Durban in 1984. The prison letters from her late ex-husband, M D, are among the most moving in her personal correspondence. The years when he was incarcerated on Robben Island were difficult and painful for the family. What is striking about this collection is the scrupulous way in which Naidoo preserved everything: every shred of correspondence, every greeting card or telegram - all was valued and respected, with each item telling a story.

Naidoo's writing provides information about the killing of her son, Sahdhan, by security agents in Lusaka on 15 April 1989. She records that the killing happened eleven days after his 28th birthday. Sahdhan, together with his colleague, Moss Mthunzi, worked at the ANC farm, "Chongella", near Lusaka. In her written submission to the TRC she asks:

Who ordered the killing of Moss and Sahdhan - two senior comrades responsible for feeding the ANC community in Zambia and for a while in Angola. If the fellow can be identified and the Commission has dealt with him, I ask that I be given a chance to talk to him to tell him about the 'Terrorists' he killed. (Submission to the TRC, 24 October 1996.)

Naidoo is still waiting for answers since the "confession" about Sahdhan's assassination made during the trial and amnesty hearings of former Vlakplaas death squad commander, Eugene De Kock, provides conflicting and unsatisfactory versions of her son's death. De Kock stated that a former Rhodesian Selous Scout and assassin, Chris Kentane, had claimed to have killed Naidoo's son, whereas she believes that the murder was carried out by Tex Tlhothalemajoe, a "suspicious" exile who arrived in Livingstone in 1979. Her writing is an attempt to correct the official versions of events, versions which often concealed information and perpetuated the misinformation about apartheid atrocities.

I believe that in writing so conscientiously about others, Naidoo was in effect constructing identities that were erased by apartheid, her own as well as those of others. About herself she was effacing, preferring to be in the background. Her own identity is interpellated throughout the writings when taken as a whole, and emerges almost as 'marginalia'. She readily assumed that it was natural for her to participate in the liberation struggle, and that she was just one among many freedom fighters. She was dedicated to the cause of liberation, and even accepted her sons' deaths stoically. Avoiding public platforms and preferring to work in the background, she says in an interview with Hilda Bernstein: "Always, I wasn't on the stage - no speaking. I was just doing things" (Bernstein 1994:226). Yet, in "doing things", which included writing, Naidoo was also salvaging her

identity threatened with obliteration in the face of apartheid ideology. The harrassment to which she was subjected, aimed at silencing her, only served to make her more determined "to claim her voice", and in doing this she has made her mark in the history of liberation in South Africa.

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In writing about others, of foregrounding the biographical rather than the autobiographical, Naidoo shows a strong interest in and concern for women, women's rights and causes. Like Ellen Kuzwayo, in her autobiography, *Call Me Woman*, she writes of some of the great heroines of the freedom struggle, highlighting the important role that women played in liberation history.

In her correspondence and writings, the names of Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Hilda Bernstein, Albertina Sisulu, Ruth Mompati, Lillian Ngoyi, Florence Matomela and Florence Baard, among others, frequently appear. She also celebrates the lives of women by recording some of their defining actions in the political struggle. Naidoo records that Annie Silinga, who died in the early 80's, refused the paltry apartheid "privileges" of the "dompaas" and a Transkeian government passport, right up to the time she died at the age of 82, even though this cost her her pension. She writes that Poomoney Moodley, who died in 1982, was detained twice in the 60's and supported nurses in their strike against injustices they experienced. We learn that Moodley, on her meagre wage, sent money to Robben Island prisoners. Naidoo describes the contribution of Ida Mntwana, the first president of the SA Women's League, who worked fearlessly to get the South African Women's Charter adopted at a time when the apartheid regime was most repressive. She tells how Dorothy Nyembe, one of the founding members of the Federation of South African Women, was arrested with the other Treason Trial comrades; Nyembe had played an important role in the anti-pass demonstrations, led by the women at Cato Manor. She was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for MK activities. Naidoo writes that Thandi Modise, one of the younger Soweto generation, was incarcerated in "racist jails" to serve an eight-year sentence. Other women that Naidoo speaks of are Barbara Hogan, Winnie Mandela, Florence Mkhize. She shows each in her individual and particular set of circumstances braving the wrath of the apartheid regime, which could not "kill the spirit" (Schreiner 1992:13). Describing Ruth First's 117 days in detention Naidoo writes that "detention was no picnic", and that it was particularly demeaning to women, for whom the possibility of rape and violence was real. She also writes of the horrendous rape of children by detaining officers during the time of the Soweto Riots, shedding light on another suppressed story.

In her recent *Millennium Diary* (1999) Naidoo has drawn attention to the names of many women who contributed to the struggle, among them those of several Indian women who

participated in the liberation struggle: Mrs Marie Naicker, Radhi Singh, Naseema Badsha, Mrs Manilal Gandhi, Urmilla Singh, Nagamma Naidoo, Ragani Govender, Ansuyah Chetty, Saroj Pillay, Patsy Pillay, Mrs Lily Naicker, Shamin Marie, Shanti Naidoo, Prema Naidoo, Theresa Nannin, Poomoney Moodley, Fatima Seedat, Janub Gool, Dr K Ginwala, Amah Naidoo, and Mrs Asha Bibi Dawood (Treason trialist). I have intentionally highlighted the names of these women to show the number of Indian women who were involved in resistance many of them not well-known. However, Naidoo herself was presenting them not as Indian women, but as South African women who, together with many others, should be remembered for their contribution to the liberation history of South Africa. Although Naidoo did not write on Indian history in the way Fatima Meer does, she does not exclude the role that Indians played in the history of change in South Africa, but includes them naturally along with a host of others. In her writings the separate spaces of apartheid are overturned together with its compartmentalised identities.

In the short piece entitled, "Notobeko", Naidoo records the way in which apartheid classification worked insidiously to keep women in separate camps. She writes of the time her secretary, Cynthia, became ill and was taken to hospital, and notes that all the African nurses were shocked that she, an Indian, cared for an African: "They saw you crying yesterday when I was in the theatre. They saw you bring the flowers. They don't understand you, Phyl. They don't understand that you're South African just like us" (Phyllis Naidoo Collection 1977-1989, Box 11, File 182).

Naidoo objects to being referred to as 'Indian' because apartheid manipulated racial and ethnic difference to imply racial stratification. She mentions in passing that her grandfather came from India at the turn of the century. She does not hanker after a lost 'Indian' communal past, but is engaged resolutely in dealing with the present:

Here we are grouped as Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites. Not satisfied with these divisions the Nats are set on a path to tribalise the Africans into thirteen tribes. Cynthia is 'African' - but so am I. I know no other home. This is my birthplace and the birthplace of my father. My grandfather was brought here by the British colonialists so that he might work in the Natal sugar canefields for ten shillings a month. Because my grandfather was brought from India, the white racists call me 'Indian', and I am accorded certain 'Indian' rights, distinct and different from those accorded to Cynthia. (Phyllis Naidoo Collection 1977-1989, Box 11, File 182)

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Naidoo's need to write about others than herself, and about the casualties of apartheid is also evident in her account of the SADF (South African Defence Force) raid on ANC targets in Lesotho. She bears witness to the events that took place while she was in exile in Lesotho. As Wolfgang Lauer notes, "She has chosen to speak for those who cannot or can no longer speak for themselves" (Lauer 1992:3). Naidoo wrote *Le Rona Re Batho* ("We are

also People"), which was published in December 1992, to mark the 10th Anniversary of the Massacre of 12 Basotho and 30 South Africans by the SADF in 1982 in Maseru. She recorded these experiences to "stamp them into our national memory" (Naidoo, Phyllis 1992:10). She reflects on the horrendous violence of the massacre and criticises its distortion by the apartheid regime. Lauer points out that Naidoo is intent on setting the record straight on the events that surrounded this vicious attack, of making sure that history is not manipulated for ideological reasons, or the past forgotten in the exigencies of living in the present:

The 'New South Africa' is being built on constantly shifting ground where today sees yesterday's wisdom turned on its head. Fast moving times sometimes pressurise us to forget the past and neglect its lessons. Will this be at the cost of the comrades who had to pay the ultimate price so that we, are where we are today? (Lauer 1992:3)

Writing of these events was also a way of coming to terms with them, so traumatised was Naidoo by the attack:

After the raid into Lesotho on Thursday, 9 December 1982, I started writing about my comrades and the raid generally. When we sought help for our traumatised comrades, we found minimal medical help that would suit politicians. One medico, in need of therapeutic help himself, advised me at 5am one morning that the patient had to externalise his/her trauma. Until some of us could be sent out of Lesotho, we amateurs engaged in this 'externalising' exercise. (Naidoo, Phyllis 1992:4)

There are portions of the text that are directly addressed to the then Chief of the SADF, General Constand Viljoen, and in her relentless interrogation of him, Naidoo criticises the misinformation that was issued by him through statements made after the Lesotho raid.

Naidoo describes the gruesome massacre in sombre detail. A moonlit night aided the accomplishment of the "killing spree" when "innocent women and children" were also targeted. Although the South African government justified its action by claiming that it was dealing with "trained terrorists", the actual responses of the innocent victims contradicts this. Naidoo shows how the propaganda of the apartheid regime was intent on demonising its victims. The statement issued by General Viljoen pointed out that

[a]ccording to information received recently the ANC was planning to carry out deeds of terror in South Africa, Transkei and Ciskei during the festive season. A number of well-trained terrorists were moved from the other Southern African states to Lesotho during the past months to execute these plans. (12)

Naidoo points out that it was not "a crossfire killing"; that the victims, many of them innocent children and women, were helpless and caught totally unawares. Naidoo counters General Viljoen's view with an alternative argument:

Even the most elementary of warnings, barking dogs to announce strangers, did not exist. No one was on guard duty but all engaged in entertaining two girlfriends. Why did Jo not grab his weapon and do what he was trained to do? Where is this well trained guerilla [terrorist], the General speaks of? Why did he jump out of the window and watch the carnage from a safe distance? Why did he not warn anyone? Why is there such a lack of military acumen? If this was the calibre of MK then surely the SADF was misin-

formed? Or were these 'trained MK', recently arrived refugees?(12)

While the apartheid regime saw them as faceless terrorists, Naidoo paints evocative pictures of those who were killed: Jasenta Mapuleng Mafisa, a 17 year old student; Motlatsi and Anna Hlalele and their 14 year old son Pondo; Sefata and Mateboho Jafeta and their four year daughter, Teboho; Matumo Ralebitso, a librarian from the University of Roma; Peter T'Senoli, a building contractor; Mapoloko Sehlabaka, a neighbour who went to her window on the fateful night; Florence Mateseliso, a visiting salesperson from South Africa; and Naphtali Tsimile, another curious observer of the raid. Naidoo describes them as "some of the best advocates of democracy" in that their lives were sacrificed for the cause of freedom.

In writing about them Naidoo expresses empathy with the victims' families. She understands their sorrow, as she has experienced a similar loss:

The loss of your child is an immeasurable pain that encompasses your whole being constantly. Three years later I live with this undiminished grief. It is stuck in throat and from time to time breaks into tears. So, Moekane and Mateboho I hold your hands...I share your pain. (27)

She also wishes to ensure that the events of the raid are not distorted and the memory of those who had been killed not erased from history. It is for this reason that names are important in all her accounts:

I make no apology for the many NAMES. Some reading this account were confused by the names. Blacks even in the new 'South Africa' are a nameless phenomenon. They are statistics. Some statistics leave out the majority of our people...blacks are ghosts in our society. I tried in a small way to remedy that. (6)

Naidoo gives specific details of each person, providing a human face to the bald numbers that were given by General Viljoen at the time. She points out that some were visiting friends, others were harmless newcomers to Lesotho, having fled the violence of South Africa during the Sharpeville massacre, still others had merely rushed to their windows out of sheer curiosity when the firing began. One of the most moving stories is that of Zakes (Liqwa Graham Mdlankomo), whose daughter had been born just three days before he was killed in the Lesotho Massacre. Zakes had come to see his daughter, Le Rona Re Batho ("We are also people", and which Naidoo uses as the title of her book on the bombing), and wife, Limakatso. He left just before the massacre, but was caught in the sudden cross-fire. Naidoo records that heard on his dying lips were the words:

Ndi Fela Abantu Bakuthi
I am dying for my people.
Ndi Fela Isizwe Sakuthi
I am dying for my nation. (52)

"We are also people." These words sum up Naidoo's own understanding of the importance of the lives of others who were denied an identity by the apartheid system.

Naidoo also records that the last word spoken by Zakes was "nation". The idea of nation recurs in this study. Naidoo has clearly written of the Lesotho raid in order to help build a

future nation. The raid on Lesotho has been relegated to the margins of history, and Naidoo is intent on setting down a record of the events as she pieces together eye-witness accounts. Naidoo's point is that too many people have died for a non-racist democracy in our country, and she hopes that their sacrifices will not be squandered as the new nation is formed. As she says: "I hope with their lives I have penetrated yours and made you think" (87). She is anxious that the new democracy that is being formed in South Africa should vindicate the actions of those who had gone before in the service of creating it:

We owe it to our comrades who were massacred in Lesotho, to dead and dying comrades everywhere. We owe it to our young men who were led to believe that apartheid had to be protected, with all their fire-power at your disposal and who died in its pursuit. We owe it to the people of Lesotho whose lives are so intimately linked with ours. We must succeed now. (88)

She records that one comrade in exile summed up their commitment by requesting that she report on her return to South Africa: "When you go home tell them of us and say, 'For your tomorrow we gave our today'" (Submission to the TRC, 1996). This is precisely what she was doing in the publication of the Lesotho massacre. The words, "For your tomorrow we gave our today", became the moving spirit of Naidoo's later writings as well where she recalls the lives of others who died in the freedom struggle; she uses them, for example, on the dedication page of her recent *Millenium Diary*.

Another group of people to whom she draws attention are those who were waiting on South Africa's infamous Death Row before the death penalty was abolished. This was one group that was removed from public view and knowledge, many of them black political prisoners. Naidoo deliberately advertised their plight, and her abhorrence of the death penalty itself is shown through the production of the book, *Waiting to Die in Pretoria*, which reads like a sympathetic guide to the Death Row experience. The book was published in Harare in 1990, and was part of a vigorous campaign against the death penalty in which Naidoo played an important part. Again Naidoo's writing is auto/biographical as she exposes her own concerns and priorities by writing about those on Death Row. By writing about it Naidoo demystifies this gruesome phenomenon which is otherwise shrouded in secrecy and officialdom. She shows the experience in all its starkness and calculated brutality, asserting that "[t]he violence of apartheid is played out in Death Row as in no other aspect of South African life" (Naidoo, Phyllis 1990a:8).

In *Waiting to Die in Pretoria* she addresses her comrades waiting on Death Row directly, investing them with identity and dignity. She writes with compassion, as inmates prepare for the last days of their lives. She describes the clinical, deathly atmosphere in the prison confines in Pretoria:

The sign that greets you as you enter is STILTE, which translated means silence. You may ask why? Why are you asked to keep silent when eternal silence awaits you?... You are given a number. Remember it. Once you have the number, you lose your name. You have already lost the blue skies. (4)

Naidoo deliberately sets out to emphasise, and so restore, the humanity of those awaiting

execution:

You are still a person, albeit on Death Row. Speak for yourself. Ask the chaplain questions about himself. You should not be the only one at the receiving end. Tell him about your family, about your work, about your children, about your love, everything. (11)

In giving practical, 'inside' information, Naidoo exposes the palpable lies and questions the impregnability of the State; she counters the oppressive and sinister language of apartheid whose ability to obscure and distort is deployed so readily, especially in official versions of prison detentions (see Tiffin and Lawson 1994:4-5).

* * * * *

Many of the different strands of auto/biography suggested in Naidoo's writings are epitomised in the short prison account entitled "Ten Days". The short piece is a good example of her attempt to foreground the voices of others who are hidden from view and to endorse and strengthen their sense of self.

"Ten Days" was written by Naidoo while she was in Harare and at the time when she was planning to return to South Africa. This short autobiographical account was published in *A Snake with Ice Water - Prison Writings by South African Women*, edited by Barbara Schreiner. The anthology is a compilation of the experiences of many women who have been in South African prisons at different times in our history, political women prisoners such as Barbara Hogan, Jenny Schreiner, Jessie Duarte, Rose Zwi, and Joyce Molo. Naidoo's short memoir, together with that of Goonam forms part of the large body of prison writing in South Africa that includes, among others, the autobiographies of Nelson Mandela, Frank Chikane, Emma Mashinini, Indres Naidoo, Ruth First and Caesarina Makhore.

Naidoo was sentenced to spend ten days in prison when, during her house arrest, she failed to report on a Monday at the police station. Her husband was on Robben Island at the time and she was struggling to take care of her young children as well as complete her law studies. She explained to the police and magistrate that on the day that she failed to report at the station her son, Sha, sustained an asthmatic attack. But her pleadings were in vain. The prison staff were told that she had been arrested because she had stolen 700 rand! To this day, Naidoo is waiting for answers as to why she was restricted: "I want to know why these orders were imposed on me? What was I doing that necessitated this awful punishment?...I want the police to return all my stuff they removed from my home, especially my short stories" (Submission to the TRC, 1996).

She was put into the women's section of the gaol where she experienced first hand the terrible treatment that was meted out especially to black women prisoners:

There were black and white wardresses taking particulars of several women prisoners. I was ordered to strip. 'Trek jou kleres uit!' they screamed. It was

freezing cold but I removed my clothes, shoes and socks included, and was soon having my particulars taken in shivering nudity and in the full gaze of so many strange women. (Naidoo, Phyllis 1990b:89)

Naidoo's account of the ten-day incarceration represents the prison experience in concentrated form. It follows the "identifiable contours" of detention as outlined by J U Jacobs in his analysis of South African prison memoirs, where stripping a prisoner naked may be seen as part of the attempt to strip away his/her humanity (Jacobs 1991:117). Everything is done in prison to demoralise and dehumanise a prisoner. The atmosphere is epitomised for Naidoo by "the clangour of keys" :

Always and always it was the noise of those keys that you heard while washing, while eating, and sometimes while sleeping. You were awakened with those keys, you were locked with those keys, they protruded into your thoughts, into your work, into your sleep. Keys. Keys. Keys. (Naidoo, Phyllis 1990b:86)

The prison memoir shows the barbarity of a repressive system. The practice of placing both political and non-political "offenders" together is designed to made the former seem like common criminals. Barbara Hogan speaks of the ways in which prison life is calculated to destroy one's sense of 'cause':

You come perilously close to the point where you become totally cynical about human nature and the capacity of human society to produce something better than what we've all seen. You come perilously close to losing your faith in human beings, not because they are inherently bad, but because of the way a social system operates. One can lose one's faith. For a political prisoner that would probably be the most destructive things: To lose your faith and your belief in what you are doing. That was my big struggle on a philosophical level in prison. (Hogan 1992:33)

Naidoo understood implicitly the ploys of the apartheid system to make the political prisoners lose their sense of purpose.

In the world outside, persons were separated by South Africa's pernicious race laws; yet ironically, they were brought together in the very prison system that was designed to crush their struggle against racism and injustice. Naidoo observes that their being juxtaposed in this way brought the separation in the world outside into even sharper relief:

Watch how apartheid manifests itself. Here, in this cell, are three South Africans. We have a common country, we are born here, our children were born here, we were married here, but there are different sets of laws governing Lydia's marriage, residence, work, education etc, and mine. But most importantly, we do not speak a common language. The authorities call me an 'Indian', while Jane and Lydia are 'Bantus', or certainly were at the time we were in prison. (Naidoo, Phyllis 1990b:91)

David Schalkwyk points out that Naidoo also had to overcome her own prejudice:

Naidoo also clung to threadbare prejudices of her own; she was 'terrified of using the same loo as the hookers', imagining that she would pick up some unspeakable disease. But gradually the mutual suspicions were allayed, and Naidoo's brief chronicle is remarkable for the space it gives her cellmates, the very 'hookers' that she initially ostracized, to tell their stories, at night in the cell and in the pages of her narrative. (Schalkwyk 2000:294).

Naidoo fought against the isolation and dehumanisation of prison life with remarkable

ingenuity. As J U Jacobs points out, "a recurrent motif in the prison book is the need for the prisoner, in order to survive in such a system, to cultivate a particular frame of mind" (Jacobs 1991:121). Naidoo used the 'opportunity' to create a new sense of community, and changed the "immense social and emotional deprivation" (Hogan 1992:30) that prison life constituted. The women began to appreciate the value of human conversation, and ironically created a 'sisterhood' that would have eluded them outside the prison walls: "In prison everyone talks about their experiences. You've got time. And I think for people it's often therapeutic to just talk about what's happened to them. So everyone becomes a confidante"(25).

Naidoo soon got to know the women as individuals, each with a story of her own: It is not intended to glamorise the lives of the women I met there. There was no glamour. It is simply intended to tell of the people I found within the walls, the bars, the hustle and endless clangour of keys. A rare kind of humanity. A humanity that beggars that description. (Naidoo, Phyllis 1990b:85)

In narrating her prison experiences Naidoo uses the story of "Ten Green Bottles", which serves as a count-down to her release from prison. A similar device of keeping count of the passing days in incarceration is used by Amy Reitstein and Susan Jobson, whose prison diaries are also included in the Schreiner anthology.

Naidoo's memoir gradually becomes a record of individual and group identity formation. Each day, each inmate told her story, and they began to appreciate one another beyond the stereotypes that they initially saw. Their nightly 'chat shows' became the way not only of passing the time in prison and fighting loneliness, but of combating cultural and racial stereotypes. Although prison life was designed to set different race groups in antagonism with one another, yet they begin slowly to develop a sense of community, realising that they share much in common in the apartheid world outside, as well as in their experiences in prison together. Naidoo was aware of the way racial integration was deliberately enforced among certain prisoners to show up those who claimed to be sympathetic to the blacks:

The wardress that locked me up with a black murderess had hoped to frighten me. She would fix the 'kaffir boetie' types..those politicians who wanted a democratic, non-racial South Africa. She believed, perhaps, that the enforced separation legally inflicted on all South Africans was enjoyed by all its victims and we would fight to maintain our different identities. Some do. I thanked the minuscule Lydia then, the system that had sent me there. I thank them today. I saw what racism did and was intended to do. It was a tool in the hands of our rulers that nurtured an economic system for the benefit of a few. In South Africa that few were the whites, and a few blacks, 'coloured' and 'indians' who supported the apartheid system, albeit the latter three without a vote or with a restricted vote. (92-93)

Lydia, Naidoo's cellmate, was one of the thousands of "migrant wives" in rural Ixopo. One day when she was digging in the garden, with her baby on her back, her husband returned to her home with his city girlfriend, and they began to taunt her. She struck her husband

over the head with her hoe and killed him. This story has interesting resonances with other narratives depicting black women who violently resist their oppression, and take justice into their own hands. Francoise Lionnet considers fictional narratives in which black women are forced to murder (for example, Bessie Head's Dikeledi in *The Collector of Treasures*) as a way of showing women claiming their 'agency':

Though victimised by patriarchal social structures that perpetuate their invisibility and dehumanisation, black female characters actively resist their objectification, to the point of committing murder. (Lionnet 1997:206)

Naidoo highlights the context in which Lydia committed the murder, and the extenuating circumstances that were suppressed by the state. Similarly, Thandi, another woman in prison with Naidoo, was the victim of rape by a white man, who had lured her into his flat and given her drinks. Both were arrested, but the man was let off the hook while she was sentenced under the Immorality Act. Another woman, whom Naidoo calls "Gogo" (grandmother in Sesotho), claimed that she was a "pure Coloured", and that she spoke English and not Afrikaans, and wore a hat and not a doek. Gogo believed that an anglicised identity would give her greater status. Then there was the domestic employee who stole a dress similar to the one that her "madam" used to wear. Naidoo tries to understand the plight of this woman, concluding that "only the rich are wealthy enough to make harsh judgements!" (Naidoo, Phyllis 1990b:109). In the microcosm of the prison world we see a good example of the "technologies of gender" that are prevalent in the society as a whole. The different life experiences of the black women show the ways in which race, class and gender discrimination intersect and that, again, we may not look at black women as a homogenous category. Naidoo's account is not analytical, judgemental or patronising. She presents the women as they are, and is sensitive to their entrapment in a racist, patriarchal and class-based society.

In her prison experiences we thus see Naidoo taking the initiative to encourage self-disclosure, not in the aggressive, interrogative style of the police torturers, but by creating a compassionate company of fellow confessors. I believe that this occurrence within the prison walls is similar to the "restoration of voice" that, as J U Jacobs points out, Emma Mashinini experienced when she spoke of her prison experiences after her release: "The former victim of a relationship in which he or she was forced into compliance - to see eye-to eye with an oppressor - now engages intersubjectively with a sympathetic hearer in a relationship of I-to-I (Jacobs 1991:124).

In Naidoo's writing the voices of the inmates are foregrounded - the subalterns do speak, mediated by Naidoo. Naidoo's "ten days" in prison is as much the story of the other women who shared the prison cells with her as it is of her own detention. Vilified by the system, denied a fair hearing, and made invisible by their incarceration, the women, through their narratives are given voice and visibility. Each woman becomes the protagonist of the story she tells rather than an anonymous 'inmate'. This experience is no different, in the

end, from Breyten Breytenbach's, for example, when he writes in *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*: "You want to shout to identify yourself, to pin yourself down. What is this? Where am I? Am I awake? Your silence is sucked through the bars. You fight for sense...your mind lives outside you. The whole world has burned down" (Breytenbach 1984:220). There is a common need to assert and affirm oneself in the soul-destroying world of prison, although the form and expression may be different.

Naidoo, like women who have recounted their prison experiences elsewhere, stretches the parameters of traditional autobiographical writing. She acts as a conduit for the voices of the women in prison, and foregrounds their stories as they offer an implicit critique of apartheid, abuse, class and racial divisions through their own narratives. In naturally sharing the authorial role with her fellow prisoners, Naidoo demonstrates her usual identification with other oppressed persons. This is more effective than her expounding on their victimhood. Of Naidoo's role in "Ten Days" Schalkwyk observes: "Such freeing of the voices of silenced common-law prisoners is in marked contrast to the narratives that simply speak of their conversion to a 'politically sound' cause through the lectures of the writer" (Schalkwyk 2000:294).

There is a special heroism in rising above the dehumanisation and acquiescence of prison life. This may be demonstrated in short periods of incarceration, as in "Ten Days", or in longer periods, as with Mandela or Bram Fischer. Of Fischer's experiences, Clingman notes the strength "to push back at the darkness" of prison life:

But day by day, as time stretches out, there is another world that closes in. New prisoners come, old prisoners go; in this world within the world one day comes after another, and it is hard to believe that it is not the same day. Here the task is to transform from within, to wage the struggle for dignity even here, a politics inside the prison, inside the self, not to succumb to the ultimate sentence which is acquiescence. And slowly this begins to happen: with one's friends and comrades a new life is made, meanings found, landmarks established in the indeterminate expanse. Prison, the most radical expression of confinement, can also create the most radical dimensions and moments of liberty. Words cannot mirror this time within another time, except to suggest its fragile truth: that even here there was an inner light that struggled to push back at the darkness. (Clingman 1998:418-419)

It is worth noting that in "Ten Days", Naidoo ends each day with lingering thoughts of her children. She asserts her role as mother, but with no regret for the decisions she had to make about her political career. That her children followed closely in her activist shoes shows that she was able to re-define her private role as a mother and integrate it with her public role as a political activist.

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Naidoo's disposition to document the lives of others is evident again in two recent publications, *Izinyanya - A Millennium Diary in celebration of the year of the older persons*

(1999) and *The African Millennium Diary 2000* (2000). The first was written by her while the second was compiled in association with John Daniels and Narissa Ramdhani. These books were produced to honour the "political ancestry" - "our Amadlozi or Izinyanya" - of the liberation movement in South Africa. An interesting feature is that they are a genre that is different from the other discursive and creative writings considered in this study. As Naidoo's over-riding impulses in composing the diaries are obviously those of remembrance and celebration, the medium is an appropriate one for the purpose of encouraging daily remembrance so that the activity of remembering becomes part of the rituals of living and a way of envisioning the future. The coalescence of past with present also transfigures the way the present is perceived: it is always seen from the vantage point of the struggles and sacrifices of those who have gone before.

Appropriately, the cover picture of *Izinyanya* is that of the baobab tree which has superimposed on it well-known freedom figures, such as Mandela, Joe Slovo, Oliver Tambo, Yusuf Dadoo and Dulcie September. Naidoo explains that the baobab tree lives for over six thousand years, and that "despite the poverty of our lives, these trees have been preserved by man and animals. They signify our long struggle to freedom and our determination to carry on despite the horrendous torture that accompanied that struggle" (Naidoo, Phyllis 1999:xii).

Both diaries include numerous names of well-known as well as of lesser-known heroes and heroines in the liberation struggle. Naidoo is meticulous in setting out the details of those who sacrificed their lives, and she counters a "culture of amnesia" and the selective writing of the history of the past with her on-going work to ensure a "culture of remembrance". In the general need to develop a "national heritage" Appiah draws attention to the selective remembering and forgetting of the past that undergirds group identity. And recent historiography has stressed again and again the ways in which the 'national heritage' is constructed through the invention of traditions; the careful filtering of the rough torrent of historical event into the fine stream of an official narrative; the creation of a homogenous legacy of values and experience. (Appiah 1992:59)

Through her writing and tireless work in "setting the record straight" in respect of the many who died in the years of struggle, Naidoo is attempting to avert the production of an "official narrative" of the past that could so easily "filter out" lesser known persons and events. As pointed out earlier, this is an attempt to write "history from below", to provide, as Ngugi suggests, "the real living history of the masses as opposed to the 'approved official history'" (in Ogude 1999:155). This preoccupation of Naidoo determines her own identity formation. Naidoo has been, and continues to be, resolute in her intention to tell the stories of those who gave their very lives for the cause of freedom in South Africa, and in telling their stories to highlight the "hallowed ancestry" (Naidoo, Phyllis 2000:ix) of the developing new nation, she is effectively telling her own story, even though, as intimated in the earlier discussion on Goonam, the notion of nation may now have become less co-

herent. The words she quotes of Nikolai Ostrovsky on the "dedication" page to th 1999 Di-ary are a good description of her own mission:

Man's dearest possession is life and it is given to him to live but once. He must live so as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose, never knowing the burning shame of a mean and petty past, so live that, dying he can say: 'All my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in the world - the fight for the liberation of Mankind!' (In Naidoo, Phyllis 1999)

Throughout her life, Naidoo was resolute in her work for justice and freedom and she saw her life and those of others as being inserted into a long history. In a short piece entitled, "Our Cause is Just and Shall Triumph" (Phyllis Naidoo Collection 1977-1989, Writings, Box 11, File 2), she states: "Our cause is just, for it seeks to give South Africans of all races, a quality of freedom and justice that has not been known since 1652".

CHAPTER 12

TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES: THE WRITINGS OF FATIMA MEER

"Borderlands...are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races, sexualities, classes, genders occupy the same territory. One can also think of borderlands as places where multiple identities collide and/or renegotiate space." (Anzaldua 1987)

"One cannot conceive of Gandhi without his writings which today speak to us through thousands of volumes. He has left us first hand a legacy which in turn has formed the basis of hundreds of interpretations. We continue to debate and argue with him, criticise him, evaluate and analyse him and are continuously challenged by him. Yet he said, 'My writings should be cremated with my body. What I have done will endure, not what I have said or written'." (Meer, Fatima 1997a:)

Introduction

In the citation for the conferment of an Honorary Degree by the University of Natal on Fatima Meer in 1998, it was asserted that she "was among the first South Africans to have ever existed, a dutiful citizen before citizenship was enfranchised for her" (University of Natal, Citation 1998:1). Meer has played a significant part in the history of political thought and action in South Africa. Her political activism has been closely tied up with her development as a prolific writer. Her various writings, together with other political acts in her life, constituted different strategies of struggle against apartheid.

The feminist disclaimers of "recovery", of "claiming a speaking voice" are re-defined in reading Meer's writings and observing her life. For Meer "claiming a voice" was a political act with dire consequences for her as attempts to gag her led to imprisonment and house arrest and ostracism by the apartheid regime. Meer claimed her role through speaking out, speaking against, speaking with, and speaking for. It is for this reason that her role as a speech-maker - for which she is well known - is particularly important. Her speeches, all recorded and available at the Institute of Black Research, chronicle important issues over the past decades. Meer was instrumental in articulating what people were thinking, as well as providing reflection on controversial questions at crucial moments in our history. As a leader and "opinion-maker" she was able to influence the thinking and actions of others by giving her considered views on a range of political questions and debates and to use writing as a powerful weapon. Accordingly, Meer's writings, as with Phyllis Naidoo's, might be seen as an implicit autobiography of her life. They show the development of her thinking, of her engagement with ideas-in-praxis. As J M Coetzee has said, "in a larger sense all

writing is autobiography: everything that you write...writes you as you write it" (in Attwell 1993a:117).

I have taken my cue from Coetzee here as a way of reading Meer's writings. As I suggested with Phyllis Naidoo (and Goonam to some extent) I believe that there are elements of auto/biography in Meer's writings, and I am reading them in this dual way, constructing her biography from them while also considering an implicit self-construction on Meer's part. Meer's writing spans a wide diversity of interests and concerns which include, among others, socio-cultural, political and historical aspects of Indian life in South Africa, resistance against apartheid, experiences of working-class black women or of black youth. Each reflects a different aspect of Meer's identity and contributes to a complex and heterogenous mix of forces interacting in her writing.

Meer's writings cover a variety of genres: biography, local history, essays, travelogue, short stories, speeches, polemical writing and letters. They combine large areas of political, social and cultural history, as well as sociological analysis. Certain themes receive priority in her writings and her activism, such as Indian history, and the relationship between Indians and Africans. Her writings are effectively a critique of the way racial identity was used under apartheid to rationalise the separation of groups.

The inclusion of Meer's writings in this study, as with those by Phyllis Naidoo, expands the traditional academic definitions of 'literature'. Contemporary critics have called for a broadening of the terms of reference of the academy and its purposes. In her analysis of stories by Chicana writers in the United States, Barbara Harlow, as pointed out already, shows how borders are transgressed and neat generic and disciplinary distinctions and conventions in the academy contested by those outside it (Harlow 1994). Meer herself, straddling the two worlds, produces cultural texts which show a political imagination at work.

The range of some of her larger, published and unpublished works (which includes research reports) may be gleaned from the following examples, of which she is either author, editor or associate author:

- Portrait of Indian South Africans* (1969),
- Apprenticeship of a Mahatma* (1970),
- Race and Suicide in South Africa*,
- Women without Men* (1974),
- Soweto- A People's Response* (1977),
- A Letter to Farzana* (with Omar Badsha, 1979),
- Documents of Indentured Labour - Natal, 1851-1917* (in collaboration) (1980),
- Apartheid - Our Picture* (1982),
- Black Women in Industry* (1983),
- Factory and Family* (1984),

Towards Understanding Iran (1986),
The Mis-Trial of Andrew Zondo (1987/1998),
Higher than Hope - The Official Biography of Nelson Mandela (1988/1990),
Treason Trial (ed.1989),
Resistance in the Townships (1989),
Black Woman Worker (in collaboration, 1990/1991),
Power of the Powerless (1991),
Power of the Powerless (in collaboration,1991),
Passive Resistance - 1946 (1996),
The Ghetto People,
The South African Gandhi:An Abstract of the Speeches and Writings of M K Gandhi, 1893-1914 (ed.1996).

In this chapter I shall consider a selected sample of her writings in order to illuminate aspects of her life, beliefs and values and the way they reflect her multi-faceted identity. Meer's writings deploy different modes of representation, and directly and indirectly explore questions of identity from several vantage points. In many ways Meer's thinking repeats, expands and modifies views on identity and difference that have been developed in relation to the other women writers in this study. In this last chapter I consider Meer as an interesting example of the tension between/among competing and multiple identities. A full and exhaustive analysis of all her varied writings is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Meer is currently writing her autobiography and we could well expect a struggle autobiography, a life story in which the personal and the public are intertwined. In anticipation of her autobiography I am constructing here a biography from a selection of her writings to date and also considering how a self-narrative emerges from them.

Some of the details of Meer's early life show a person who was influenced by various forces and attempted to chart a course through them. Meer was born in Durban in 1928 in Grey Street. Her father was editor of *Indian News*, an Indian weekly newspaper, which developed during Gandhi's stay in South Africa and continued up to 1965. As with Goonam, Meer's early association with Gandhi was to have a lasting influence. She completed her schooling in Durban and then studied at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Natal. Like Goonam, the political takes precedence over the personal in her writing. Meer does not write of her personal, private life, of her husband or family, or of her role as mother, but has so far devoted herself entirely to writing about issues of public concern.

Meer's political career developed early in life. She had been involved in political activity from her teenage years, when she founded the Students Passive Resistance Committee in 1946 to support the work of the Passive Resistance Campaign of that time. Harassment under the apartheid government also began early in her career and characterised the better

part of her life. She was banned in 1952, being one of the first South Africans to be banned. Her banning prevented her from having her writings published. She was banned again in 1954 for two years, with the banning prohibiting her from public speaking and from publishing, and from leaving the magisterial district of Durban. In an interview with Diana Russell, Meer observes that the action of the apartheid government was unexpected: "I was banned for two years in 1954 to 1956. I was surprised because I didn't think I had that political a profile, although I had been speaking at meetings since 1946 and was expelled from school for doing so" (Russell 1988:71). Meer was banned again in 1975 for a period of five years. In the middle of 1976, in the wake of the Soweto uprising, she spent four to five months in detention without trial. It was at this time that she met Winnie Mandela, with whom she formed a lasting friendship. Her descriptions of experiences in prison echo those of other political prisoners:

I was inside for five months. The first period was difficult because I was in solitary confinement in a little room about the size of a sofa. I had a narrow felt mat which took up most of the space. I was not allowed to know who was in the next cell, and the keyhole to the steel door was taped over so that I couldn't look out at all. Every time I was asked, 'Did anybody come for me?' I was told, 'No, nobody came.' Of course they were lying. This went on for three weeks and I really came to believe that the whole world and my family had forgotten me. (72)

A further banning order, for a period of five years, was served on Meer in 1981.

Meer was subjected over the years to various forms of harassment and intimidation by the police. In December 1976 she survived an assassination attempt. Goonam, in her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, describes this incident in vivid detail:

The vision of that ghastly morning flashed through my mind when I, with other friends, had rushed to the Meer home on hearing of the dastardly shooting that had taken place the night before. We had stepped on to a veritable carpet of fragmented glass glittering in the sun. The gunmen had shot at the door of the Meer home after throwing a petrol bomb which had set the cars alight. That was a ruse to get the occupants out of the house. Fatima had come rushing down the stairs, but Zwelinye, a friend who had been sleeping in the study had beaten her to the door and his shoulder received the full blast of the bullets. By the time Fatima reached him, he was lying on the floor, his arm ripped and bleeding. Had she preceded him, her head would have been blown off, and she would have been dead. It is obviously the work of the security police. We suspected it then...We know it now. (Goonam 1991:164)

In spite of the many restrictions placed on Meer through harassment, banning and imprisonment, she engaged in numerous community initiatives and in particular played a key role in organising women. She founded the Durban and District Women's League in 1950, and in 1975 was the founder and president of the Federation of Black Women in South Africa - a national body which campaigned for education and rural development. Meer also founded and developed several non-formal and informal educational initiatives for underprivileged students. Important among these were the Natal Education Trust formed in the early 70's which helped to build schools in African areas in Natal, the Institute of Black

Research inaugurated in 1972 to encourage research and publication on socio-political issues, and the Phambili High School in Durban started in 1986 to provide tuition to African matriculants. Meer has also been involved in numerous craft, skills, and literacy training projects for young people and women.

Meer realised that writing and publication were a powerful means of engaging the apartheid regime. Her own works, and those she promoted, provided a valuable exposure of the apartheid regime. She chose the modes of writing and activities - biography, discursive writing, empirical research - that would provide the public with information and so subvert the official propaganda machine of the apartheid state as well as the "liberal press". A vast amount of valuable documentary work has been accomplished by her and researchers under her wing. From an authoritative academic position she was able to wage a campaign against large-scale misinformation and distortion during the apartheid years. For example, of great political consequence was the political violence in Natal in the mid-eighties. In September 1985 she published the results of a survey which showed that the media tended to exaggerate and exacerbate the tension between Indians and Africans in KwaZulu-Natal:

The media focused sensationally on the attacks on Indian homes in Inanda, and played a vital role in inflating and creating public perceptions of the area and extent to which they occurred: the survey reports that of the Indians 28% read in the newspapers about it - giving a total of 75.4% who relied for their information of the media. Using the same statistics it can be deduced that 50% of Coloureds relied for their information on the same sources. Only 6% of Coloureds and 9.9% of Indians reported that they had seen the violence themselves. (Meer, Fatima 1985:9)

Through such writing Meer re-defined the role of the academic and the intellectual. Her work as a sociologist enabled her to investigate many socio-cultural and political problems from the vantage point of her discipline. She was greatly influenced by renowned mentors during her university years, among them Dr Leo Kuper and Dr Mabel Palmer. The citation for the honorary doctorate, mentioned already, noted in this respect that "hers is a world of Sociology that is inseparable from activism, of interpretation that is inseparable from respect - and fury" (University of Natal, Citation 1998:2).

Madiba Press, a subsidiary of the Institute of Black Research, was initiated by Meer to encourage aspirant writers, especially blacks. The launching of eight books in 1991 marked the "coming of age" of Madiba Press. The books that were published on this occasion to celebrate the release of Nelson Mandela were:

Coolie Doctor - An Autobiography by Dr K Goonam;

Luthuli - Speeches of Chief Albert John Luthuli - E S Reddy (ed);

Monty Speaks - Speeches of Dr GM Naicker - E S Reddy (ed);

Dr Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo - Articles, Statements and Speeches, including correspondence with Gandhi - Compiled by E S Reddy and edited by F Meer;

Black Methodists and White Supremacy - Daryl Balia;

A People on Trial - For Breaching Racism - D Bagwandeem;
Tuberculosis and the Aged - Sayo Skweyiya;
Power of the Powerless - F Meer, D Chetty, P. Zulu.

Meer has encouraged the efforts of others in writing and publishing. She was personally instrumental in getting many works published, among them Zuleikha Mayat's *Treasure Trove of Memories* and Dr Goonam's autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*. Meer also gave support to the recipe book, *Indian Delights*, compiled by the Women's Cultural Group, and was responsible for the sketches in it. In putting together his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela was given advice by Meer, together with Peter Magubane, Nadine Gordimer and Es'kia Mphahlele.

Biographies as Reflections of the Identity of the Biographer

Meer's belief in an over-arching South African identity and the pursuit of non-racial, democratic principles, is illustrated in the biographies that she produced. Meer's own views and values emerge in her biographies of Mahatma Gandhi, Yusuf Dadoo, Nelson Mandela and Andrew Zondo. As Isabel Hofmeyer notes: "Biographies can ventriloquise political interests in effective ways" (Hofmeyr 1992:112). And Liz Stanley has reminded us that the biographer is a "socially-located person...every bit as much as an autobiographer" (Stanley 1992:7). Meer has chosen key political heroes in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa as well as one lesser-known political activist: taken together they all represent her own political pre-occupations and convictions.

The fact that these figures are all male, and mainly well-known leaders, is worth noting. Meer herself, like Goonam, occupied an aggressive and dominant position alongside males in the public realm, this kind of tough-willed behaviour being generally necessary for survival in the world of resistance politics. Because of the suppression of eminent political figures in the apartheid era, Meer was intent on writing about these very heroes, as a way of paying homage to them, providing information about their lives and imbuing readers with their liberationist ideals and values. She always gave unqualified support to those who fought against injustice. In his autobiography, for example, Mandela corroborates this by noting that Meer, together with her husband, Ismail, were solicitous of his welfare during the time of his arrest in 1962. It is interesting to note, in contrast to biographies of black male figures, a "tradition" of biographical studies of black women by white women, such as those by Shula Marks, Belindo Bozzoli, Elsa Joubert, Carol Hermer, Hanlie Griesel, Beata Lipman and Diana Russell (see Lewis, Desiree 1999).

Gandhi was a cardinal influence in Meer's life. He has been an important element in the politics of identity considered in this study, providing a necessary and legitimating influence for Indian women activists such as Ansuayah Singh and Goonam. Meer has done much in South Africa to promote the ideals of Gandhi, providing documentation on his life and

keeping the example of Gandhi alive in South Africa. Her short biography of Gandhi, *Apprenticeship of a Mahatma* (1970), was written to commemorate the centenary of his birth, a gesture similar to the poem that was composed by Ansuayah Singh for the same occasion. Meer's biography on Gandhi was made in 1996 into a film, *Making of the Mahatma*, by Shyam Benegal, a film director from India. She wrote the script for the film and also participated, when the film was released, in a symbolic march across the Natal-Transvaal Border in memory of Gandhi's Defiance Campaign at the turn of the century. The most significant debate during the first fifty years in this country among the liberation groupings was around the question of non-violence. Most of the political leaders apart from Gandhi - Dadoo and Mandela, for example - all at some stage defined and redefined non-violence as an oppositional strategy against racial domination. The values that Gandhi displayed were to provide an important model in Meer's own life and work and she became a key figure in the Passive Resistance Movement from the 50's onwards.

Meer's biography of Gandhi is written with young readers in mind. In the Foreword to the book Alan Paton writes: "I hope that many of our boys and girls will read it, and that they will learn why the centenary of the birth of this man was honoured throughout the world" (Paton 1970:iii). Meer shows how Gandhi epitomises the struggle against colonialism and imperialism in South Africa and India, especially as his work and example were suppressed by the colonial and apartheid governments. She draws attention to South Africa's racial politics by stressing that Gandhi's political career was formed in South Africa. This portrait of Gandhi is also evident in the compilation of *The South African Gandhi - An Abstract of the Speeches and Writings of M K Gandhi 1893-1914* edited by Meer in 1996.

In reconstructing the life of Gandhi, Meer is aware of the legendary image that has been built around him. Tracing his development from adolescence to adulthood, Meer presents an individual who is quite ordinary in many ways. She suggests that the evolution to the role of "mahatma", wholly credible and predictable, occurred through a concatenation of events that propelled him towards an inescapable destiny once his political mission had become clear to him. She refers to Gandhi as Mohan for the better part of the biography and it is only at the end that he is venerated as an extraordinary personage who is "no longer Mohan, but Gandhiji, Bapuji and Mahatma" (Meer, Fatima 1970:105).

Another important aspect of Meer's construction of Gandhi's character is her emphasis on his cultural metamorphosis. She shows that Gandhi moved gradually away from dependence on Western values. In the *Apprenticeship of the Mahatma* she observes:

[b]ut Mohan's attitude to the culture of the west underwent a drastic change. Previously he had tended to consider practically everything western as superior and good; now he subjected it to careful scrutiny, beginning to view it as a system of superficial material forms, incapable of developing and sustaining a moral civilisation. (46)

In a recent paper she argues that Gandhi, although shaped by many influences, gradually

gave expression to his "Indianness":

Not only Gandhi's first seven years but the twelve years that followed were spent in the confines of Kathiawad, stamping him with a distinct Kathiawad ethos, which he never cast off and never intended to cast off. His upbringing was Hindu seeped in the Vaishnava cult and while he developed a universalism, he treasured his Hindu roots: language-wise his Gujarati roots. The Gandhi that emerged and strode the earth, and became immortalised in the influence he continues to exert was an Indian, culled in the tradition of the Vedas. He gave credit to European influences, particularly in his South African phase, but this was more a reflection of his generosity than the reality of his being....India, England and South Africa, all contributed to Gandhi's development - Kathiawad laid the basis of his abstinence and his impulse for Truth, London cultivated his cosmopolitanism and South Africa awakened him to his inner-self, roused him to his colonised subjugated state and challenged him to lead the twentieth century revolution against colonialism. But his activism in all these regards was urged by his inner-Indianism - the form it took, the passion it charged, the tempo and content was distinctly Indian. (Meer, Fatima 1997a:1-2)

Meer may be veering towards essentialist views of some "inner Indianness", similar to those of a writer such as Goonam who tended to assert a core 'Indianness', albeit in a context of diversity, but Meer's aim is mainly a political one in which she wishes to stress the evolution of Gandhi's character away from Western influences. She describes Gandhi from the vantage point of her own cultural identity as an Indian South African but also as a black person who questions the hegemony of Europe. It is important to remember that 'Indianness' meant different things in South Africa and in India. Claiming an Indian identity as part of the independence movement in India was in the same spirit as asserting an African identity during the time of resistance to colonialism and apartheid in Africa, and is also comparable to the present debates around the African Renaissance. It is worth remembering that Gandhi himself preached an Indian nationalism that was not narrowly nationalistic. Meer's own 'Indianness', like Gandhi's, was wide and all-embracing, open to the influences of other centres of thought and belief. Yet she also seems to suggest that Gandhi's identity, at its core, was still essentially 'Indian'. Ania Loomba argues that Gandhi actually melded Western political influences into a world view that was derived from his Indian religious and mythological background, showing an astuteness in dealing with the colonial power:

Anti-colonial movements and individuals often drew upon Western ideas and vocabularies to challenge colonial rule. Indeed, they often hybridised what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with indigenous ideas, reading it through their own interpretive lens, and using it to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between coloniser and colonised. Thus Gandhi's notion of non-violence was forged by reading Emerson, Thoreau and Tolstoy. Even though his vision of an ideal society evoked a specifically Hindu vision of 'ram rajya' or the legendary reign of Lord Rama. (Loomba 1998b:174)

Gandhi's identity, and Meer's by implication, may also be compared to Bram Fischer's (and Goonam's), in that all wished to assert a political objective rather than a cultural one, but without forsaking the latter for the former; and that all realised their cultural identity,

either Indian or Afrikaner, as the case may be, by retaining and extending it:

And yet - in the deepest sense of the word - Bram was a prototype. He came out of Afrikaner Nationalism; he died belonging to the whole of South Africa. He never saw this as a betrayal of Afrikaner identity, but rather as its fulfilment, its extension towards a true meaning of the name 'African'. He was a white man able to undertake, in the course of his life, the personal transformation that must accompany, if not herald, the political. At the time when it would have been almost unimaginable to say so, instinctively and by conviction he understood that if whites were to have a meaning and future in South Africa, this was the kind of change they would have to undergo. And so he took it on - a story of identity, its retention and extension, into the marrow of his own life. (Clingman 1998:456)

Meer's other important biographies were those of Nelson Mandela and Yusuf Dadoo. Meer's writing about these figures is similar to the work of Phyllis Naidoo in the present decade. The biographies of these eminent political figures foreground their important contributions to the making of the present-day South Africa. Meer believes firmly that autobiographies and biographies are "a people's essential heritage" (Meer 1988, Preface): each individual story gives substance to, reflects, modifies or deepens the interpretation of a collective history.

Meer's biography of Nelson Mandela, entitled *Higher than Hope - "Rolihlahla We Love You"* (1988), was published by Skotaville to commemorate Mandela's seventieth birthday. Meer began compiling information on Mandela's life at a time when there was every attempt to erase him from our public consciousness. Her biography of Nelson Mandela is an impressive achievement as it was written at a time when he was still incarcerated. It skillfully blends her own research, which included visits and interviews at Mandela's birthplace in the Eastern Cape, with the use of documents, historical speeches and letters, so that Mandela is presented more directly.

The biography traces Mandela's life from his 'roots' as a boy in Qunu, through his growing involvement in the "sweep of politics", to the Rivonia Trial, and to his life sentence on Robben Island. Also included in the biography is personal material such as Mandela's letters from prison that show the private rather than the political face of Mandela. As Winnie Mandela notes in the Foreword, "The picture that Professor Meer presents is that of an ordinary human being with natural emotions and desires and not an ancient myth..." (Mandela, Winnie 1988:Foreword). Similar to her portrait of Gandhi in relation to his Indian background, Meer constructs the character of Mandela to show a man who was deeply rooted in the values of African culture and tradition, the communal and nuclear family, and with an over-riding passion for justice.

In writing this book Meer was described by cynics at the time of its publication as Mandela's "authorised hagiographer" (see Barber 1990); however, subsequent portrayals of Mandela, and the very acceptance and adulation of Mandela nationally and internationally since his release from prison, have vindicated her biography of the man. The sheer volume

of writings about Mandela has also served to sideline her biography, however, with Mandela's own autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, becoming the definitive account of his life. This is understandable as Mandela's autobiography gives readers greater access to his personal voice and is seen as an important identity- and nation-building text (see Gallagher 1996).

The biography of Dadoo, *Dr Yusuf Dadoo - His speeches, articles and correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi - 1939-1983* (1991) was edited by Meer and compiled by E S Reddy. It was published by Madiba Publishers in collaboration with the University of the Western Cape Historical and Cultural Centre. Meer knew Dadoo personally, her association with him beginning with their participation in the Passive Resistance campaign in the late 40's. At the time when Meer was developing a political consciousness herself, Dadoo was playing a key role in politics among black groups in Natal, having signed "The Doctors' Pact" with Dr Xuma and Dr Naicker in the wake of the Riots in January 1949. Meer is aware that Dadoo's legendary status in the struggle for freedom in South Africa - that Dadoo was one of the architects of The Freedom Charter, for example, and that he was honoured with the Isitwalandwe Prize at the "Congress of the People" in 1955 - would not have been known by many ordinary South Africans.

Meer's own impassioned support for African and Indian solidarity comes through in her descriptions of Dadoo's life:

Dadoo's greatest significance, however, lies in the fact that he worked for a broad democratic front. He joined the South African Communist Party as the only organisation active at the time involved in the rights of African workers. As early as 1922, Africans had made up the bulk of the membership of the Communist Party. He was impressed by Moses Kotane and J B Marks who were both members of the Communist Party and the ANC. He drew close to Dr A B Zuma, the president-general of the ANC. He was moved by the deplorable living conditions of the African workers and their families. Above all, he was shattered by the crippling effect of the Pass Laws. (Meer, Fatima 1991b:389)

As with Gandhi, Dadoo represented for Meer not just somebody with whom she might have enjoyed a cultural affinity, but someone who fought against racism. In highlighting the larger political identities of heroes like Dadoo she, like Goonam and Phyllis Naidoo, was moving outside the racialisation of the regime, and looking at Indians as South Africans. Dadoo is described as an "implacable foe of sectarianism and exclusivism...[making]...an immeasurable contribution to the significant role played by the Indians in the revolutionary struggle" (Pahad 1991:32). In extolling Dadoo's example and underlining his contribution beyond ethnocentric enclaves, Oliver Tambo observes:

It would be wrong to conceive of Comrade Dadoo only as a leader of the Indian community of our population. He was one of the foremost leaders of our country, of the stature of Chief Luthuli, Moses Kotane, J B Marks, Bram Fischer, Nelson Mandela and others...(In Reddy E S 1991:52)

Meer's tribute to Yusuf Dadoo, who died in 1983, and her description of her visit to his

grave at Highgate Cemetery in London shows her commitment to justice and to her own faith as a Muslim:

I paid my respect to the memory of Dadoo in London. The massive head of the granite Marx brooded over the little grave, no more than a mound of earth surrounded by a low picket fence. Yusuf Dadoo lay buried as he requested, in a Muslim cemetery, but as in life, so in death he remained integrated in two ideologies. Brian Bunting and Winnie Dadoo attested that he was a Communist to the last. His brother Eboo believes, however, once a Muslim always a Muslim; the roots are too deep, too strong. Yusuf Dadoo was probably both, reconciling the two in their commitment to life as freedom from tyranny. (Meer, Fatima 1991b:388)

While Meer produced biographies of illustrious figures such as Gandhi, Mandela and Dadoo, she also brought into the public view penetrating analyses of the lives of less celebrated persons. One of the most significant books in the past decade, *The Trial of Andrew Zondo* (1987), and later renamed, *The Mis-trial of Andrew Zondo* (1998), was written by her, a book that has not been given its critical due.

In the biography Meer evokes great sympathy for the young ANC activist by giving a background to his life. Andrew Zondo was hanged for a bombing that killed five and injured forty-eight people in Amanzimtoti two days before Christmas in 1985. Zondo, whose father was a priest, was nineteen years old at the time and gave himself up to the police soon after the incident. In the Introduction Meer stresses: "Andrew Zondo was no common criminal: he was in fact a martyr of the resistance struggle against apartheid" (Meer, Fatima 1998a:Introduction). At his trial, where Meer gave "sociological evidence in mitigation", all pleas in mitigation were finally dismissed; and Zondo was hanged in Pretoria Central Prison in 1986, being one of the youngest cadres to die in this way.

While the State was reducing Zondo to a stereotypical "terrorist", Meer was rescuing him from anonymity, and giving him a more human face. Premesh Lalu and Brent Harris argue that she "utilises the opportunity to introduce two points upon which she constructs her own narrative: the first is the relationship between Zondo, a militant political activist, and his deeply religious parents; the second is the contrast between his intense opposition to the state and his respect and care for his family" (Lalu and Harris 1996:27). Meer represents Zondo's life as a paradigm case of many young persons in South Africa - the post-Soweto generation - who gave their lives for the cause of liberation. Evident is a special empathy with the youth of the country, and she argues that adults in general have not understood the tenacity of young people. The "belligerency" attributed to the youth was directly caused by the very same intractable regime which then put the youth on trial for their aggressive and violent behaviour. She shows that Zondo had "lost his humanity" directly as a result of the actions of the apartheid regime.

In the biography Meer criticises the kind of justice that operates regardless of the context and motive for actions of this nature. In developing her finely nuanced arguments in mitigation of the death sentence, she matches the clinical justice of the apartheid state and

its legal machinery with her own legal-cum-moral perspicuity. She handles the 'case' with an intimacy and humaneness, another kind of truth and justice that is suppressed and ignored in the public trial of Zondo. She points to the inseparability of the political, legal, moral and personal questions in deciding on political acts of violence, and the need for "employing an enlarged historical context" in determining "truth" (29). Lalu and Harris argue that

[i]n her book Fatima Meer seems to have inadvertently opened up the question of the differences between approaches to evidence within the legal system, and the approaches adopted by historians and sociologists. Her book is an attack on the positivism and the reductive, almost anti-historical, tendencies of the South African legal system in determining Andrew Zondo's guilt. (26)

Meer weighs the many representations of "truths" that reside in a case such as Zondo's against one another, as the following extracts from the biography show:

While it made good sense within the legal framework to concentrate on Andrew's behaviour at the time he placed the bomb and evaluate his mental state as at that time, it did not make good sociological or psychological sense. Andrew's behaviour at that specific time could not be separated from the generality of his behaviour. One had to take his total personality into consideration, to study the accumulated effects of the stresses and strains he had suffered over the period of time and evaluate his act of placing the bomb accordingly....

The court took an historical view of behaviour, emptying it of its experiential and interactional content. It treated each piece of behaviour as an independent, unconnected entity. It separated Andrew Zondo on December 23, from Andrew Zondo at all other times in his history. It did not want to enter into psychological or sociological dialectics which deflected from the bombing, the consequent deaths and the charges of murder, and the court upheld its right to do so....

From the sociological standpoint, the court was atomising Andrew Zondo and judging, not the whole Andrew Zondo, but a legal abstraction, that Andrew Zondo, who, at 10 a.m. December 23, had detonated a mine and who had become transfixed into that act. In a sense the court had created a legal fiction to pursue its work of justice, just as King Solomon had, when, in order to uncover the identity of the real mother, offered to cut the baby in half and to give to each mother a portion. No baby would have been left had that been done. What Andrew Zondo would be left in court if he was decimated into one event in his life? (Meer, Fatima 1998a:92-93)

Meer's meta-discursive analysis of identity-construction in relation to Zondo may be used to read Meer herself in an "experiential and interactional context", to link the many "pieces" of her own life as reflections of a larger personality. As with Zondo, to consider one in isolation from the other would be to miss the complexity that she embodies. Especially in the light of different kinds of 'truth' highlighted by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in this decade - the "truths" of the perpetrators, of the victims, of their respective legal teams, to name a few - Meer's biography of Zondo assumes particular significance.

In it she anticipates the dilemmas that the country as a whole must face, and those that other writers have also confronted. Antjie Krog, in *The Country of My Skull* (1998), for

example, produced in the same year as Meer's revised biography of Zondo, reflects on the hearings at the TRC and realises that in the past whites decided what was true and not true. Who decides now, she asks? She points to the different "theories" that are used to explain "truth" - correspondence, coherence, redundancy, pragmatic, semantic (Krog 1998:18) - yet none of them ever quite capturing the intense human emotion that drives us, in a complex set of circumstances, to commit the deeds we do. A recent novel by Gordimer, *The House Gun* (1999), also foregrounds the question of "truth" as the legal system tries to domesticate it. Gordimer shows that responses to an act of murder are not as straight-forward as one might assume, and that there may well be competing codes of interpretation in respect of it. J M Coetzee, in his novel *Disgrace* (1999) also explores issues of truth and justice in the context of contemporary South Africa, showing its multi-facetedness and problematising questions of history and culpability, of retribution and atonement. In acts of political or racial violence, where killings occur that have been directly or indirectly caused by the institutional violence of the state, culpability is difficult to pin down.

In *The Mis-Trial of Andrew Zondo* Meer shows how very complex issues in terms of the politics of blame were being dramatised in the searing context of South Africa's liberation struggle. She takes on the role of "speaking for the subaltern", to use the well-known phrase from Spivak: the biography is a strategic intervention, in the form of *testimonio*, in which she acts as a spokesperson for the deceased Zondo. Beverley's definition of *testimonio* bears out Meer's own purpose in writing Zondo's biography and appealing for a new reading of his life:

The word *testimonio* translates literally as 'testimonio', as in the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense. This connotation is important because it distinguishes *testimonio* from recorded participant narrative, as in the case of 'oral history'...In *testimonio*...it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount. The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself. The position of the reader of *testimonio* is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom. (Beverley 1992:94)

Although she does not purport to take a feminist stance, it is feasible to read Meer's criticism of the legal system as a criticism of the male rationality that undergirds the apartheid state, and in this she is in line with the general critique of feminists such as Luce Irigaray. Meer's political identity is interpellated and positioned strategically in the writing of these biographies: her subjects provide important parables for her identity as an activist against apartheid. Clingman, in writing the biography of Bram Fischer, states that in the writing of a life one must hear "voices":

those multiple and varied voices that enter into the self and provide the ground for its own re-articulation and identity. We must delve back in time and space to hear them, to see their presence in the identity they helped fashion, and the way the life both absorbed and transformed them, turning them into a different kind of utterance in the world. We must find those layers, as in a personal archaeology - competing, superimposed, fractured, in-

tersecting - that underlie the visible landscape, that give it its inner shape and deeper modulations. (Clingman 1998:Prologue)

In the biographies of the political figures that Meer has chosen, she is able to delve into the layers of their lives, and in so doing reaches into her own passions and priorities.

Unsung Heroines

A further facet of Meer's identity is linked to her work with indigent groups; many of the projects that she was involved in dealt directly with their welfare. She has written of women's experiences, particularly the plight of working-class black women in Durban. Through her historical acumen and sense of social justice Meer has been able to provide information about women's lives that might otherwise have been suppressed or hidden. She has also stressed the important role that women have played in the history of resistance. In her interview with Diana Russell she points out:

Women have always played a very important role. They have very often been ahead of the men. For instance, during the whole Anti-Pass struggle, it was the women who rose in spontaneous revolt in 1953. The women were very militant, particularly in the rural areas. The men joined in the Anti-Pass Campaign only in 1960, almost a decade after the women had taken it up very forcibly. (In Russell 1988:69-73)

Meer was able to consider the insidious long-term damage caused by apartheid and devised creative practical ways of forestalling and counteracting this damage. This resulted in several community projects, such as a self-help scheme for women in the Nqutu district in KwaZulu-Natal, adult education projects and a school building programme.

Meer also foregrounds the day-to-day lives of ordinary black women, burdened by oppressions of various kinds. She shows how their life-stories collectively depict the economic and patriarchal injustices of the apartheid system. She analyses the way in which women have been called upon to provide "alienated labour" in capitalist-driven economies. In apartheid society the concept of women's rights was subsumed under human rights and given less importance or ignored.

The collaborative book, *Black Woman Worker*, written by Meer, together with Sayo Skweyiya, Sheila Jolobe, Jean Westmore and Shamim Meer, and dedicated to the "women workers of South Africa", highlights their plight. Although Meer does not write from a declared feminist position, her representations of local black women workers resonate with a significant body of feminist analyses that shows the way in which women's work is undervalued, with women being dislodged from their pivotal roles in the traditional economy. *Black Woman Worker* locates these issues directly in the context of Durban's labour economy, and gives substance and perspective to the anonymous category of the 'factory worker':

Who are these women? Where do they come from? What do they do? What is their position in the company or in society? How are they viewed in their immediate communities, by members of the family, by their fellow male workers? What are their own self perceptions, their hopes and aspira-

tions...(Meer et al 1990:10)

The research for the project was done in the 80's in the Durban-Pinetown area, and portrays the views of black women - Coloured, African and Indian. Through their detailed narratives, Meer and her co-writers highlight the women's experiences of surviving in a racially-divided society; they tell of oppression through patriarchal and class domination. The physical and social infrastructure under apartheid does not make life habitable for these women, and they experience problems related to lengthy travelling and poor transport, lack of childcare, low wages, sexual harassment, and exclusion from decision-making in the family (see 154f).

A telling chapter in the book is the description of four women, Chandni, Priscilla, Deliswe and Margaret, who are typical workers in the garment industry. In describing the lives of these women, Meer shows that working-class experiences link groups across the apartheid divide. The first three work in the same factory in Clairwood, an industrial suburb of Durban; Margaret works in a factory in Hammarsdale. Chandni (twenty-five) sews left trouser legs, Priscilla (thirty-five years) sews on buttons, and Deliswe (twenty years) sews on right trouser legs. At the time when the research was being done they were earning forty-five rands a week, with Margaret, who worked in another factory about forty miles from Durban, earning thirty-five rands a week.

Chandni, Priscilla and Margaret are married. Deliswe is an unmarried mother with two minor children living with her family. Chandni and Deliswe's day begins at four o'clock in the morning because they have to take several buses to work, and have to spend two hours travelling. Priscilla and Margaret live closer to their places of work and so they get up at 5 a.m. Their daily routines (a 'double shift') are similar: each woman puts in about six hours of non-stop hurried work at home, in addition to the eight hours in the factory. Chandni and Priscilla's husbands do not help with the housework, while Priscilla's and Margaret's children give some help. Deliswe lives with her mother who helps with the housework and cares for Deliswe's child (see 186-187). Chandni lives in Phoenix, and her "double shift" also shows her dual roles of housekeeper and breadwinner.

Meer et al draw attention to the combined effects of apartheid, capitalism and patriarchy on the lives of poor black women:

South African patriarchy defines the woman's place to be in the home with the family, yet the economic order forces the women out of the home in search of jobs primarily because their husbands' wages do not cover family needs. This is glaringly so in the wages of male immigrants where there is a built-in assumption that the women in the 'homelands' sustain the dependants from subsistence eked out from the land.(163)

In all this the women merely accept their lot; they even participate in their own oppression; there is no militancy or resistance against their victim-status. Women's perceptions of themselves as the subordinate sex, their acceptance and unquestioning obedience are clearly evident: "Women wanted to be women, subservient, submissive and dependent on

males, even though, deep down unconscious feelings of oppressiveness nibbled their souls and were manifested in physical symptoms" (163).

Recently Ashwin Desai, in his book *The Pools of Chatsworth* (2000), has observed that "Indian history has generally been recorded on a macro level with focus on political heroes, anti-apartheid activists from the community, etc, and few people know the history of people like the flat dwellers of Chatsworth" (in Yoganathan 2000:9). Desai's book records the active involvement of Meer in the working-class struggles of both Indians and Africans living in the poorer areas of Chatsworth over the past year. Meer is able to bridge the divide and write about the well-known heroes and heroines of the liberation struggle as well as about ordinary, working class men and women often in dire poverty. She shows the bond, not of resistance, among oppressed women, but of poverty and patriarchy. Through these descriptions Meer and her co-authors move away from being merely chroniclers of what have been constructed as the main themes of Indian and African history. The work shows that black women are constructed not only as heroines in the anti-apartheid struggle, as recorded for example in *Coolie Doctor* or "Ten Days," or in *Passive Resistance 1946 - A Selection of Documents* edited by Enuga Reddy and Fatima Meer (1996), but also as impoverished and depressed working-class women for whom political activism was quite foreign. Passive (as opposed to being a passive resister), Chandni, Priscilla, Margaret and Deliswe are women who are quite different from women like Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo, and Meer herself in terms of their political empowerment, but both groups were caught up in apartheid either through its oppressiveness or in resistance to it. Meer makes a conscious and necessary effort to identify with the lot of the women, and her own multi-faceted political identity is evident in her drawing attention to their situation.

Indians in South Africa

It was Meer's mission in speaking for all oppressed groups that also made her highlight the history of Indians in South Africa. Writing about Indians might seem to have all the appearances of replicating the identities and differences instituted by the apartheid system, but she saw Indians as part of the larger disenfranchised, marginalised masses in South Africa. She has been one political activist who has consistently written about Indian history and experiences in South Africa. As an Indian woman who was a social historian and activist her research on Indians in South Africa was natural and inevitable. Without being ethnocentric, she assiduously pursued a study of Indians in South Africa and fought discrimination against Indians in the context of the larger oppression of all blacks.

Meer's earlier writings (and those published by Madiba Press when it was formed) are unique in that she has consistently interwoven the history of Indians into the national political narrative of the liberation struggle in South Africa. She frequently recounts the main outlines of the history of South Africans in this century; and the story of Indians - the Defi-

ance Campaigns, the Satyagraha Movement, Passive Resistance, the Pass Laws - forms an integral part of this macro-narrative. While Meer has resisted the ghettoising politics of the apartheid regime, she has also wanted to restore knowledge and appreciation of the various racial and cultural groups in South Africa, fight racial oppression in any guise and move out of the binary distinctions that opposition politics sometimes led to. Often this has resulted in complex or competing positionings, for such political gymnastics is often locked in the very binaries that it seeks to overturn. Meer has always explored the consonances that presented themselves between groups, in order to find common ground between them, but when necessary she considered Indians as a distinct category, albeit within the South African context.

In her earlier writings, Meer tried to understand the social structure of Indians in South Africa. She argues that Indians and Whites both had common origins in the Caucasoid race, and developed different cultures. Africans were Negroid, and Coloureds were both Negroid and Caucasoid, and indigenous Bushman and Hottentot groups shared Mongoloid origins, with some African and Coloured ancestry. Her purpose in differentiating between the origins of the various groups is to demystify the whole concept of race, on which the apartheid superstructure had been built. Ironically she uses the language of race in order to do so, showing our complicity in legitimising discourses, as in this study as well, even at the moment when we resist them. As Nuttall and Michael ask: "If race is a genetic fallacy, how then does it continue to dominate imaginings of identity?" (Nuttall and Michael 2000b:11).

The *Portrait of Indian South Africans* (1969), one of Meer's earliest works, focused entirely on the history and socio-cultural aspects of Indian life in South Africa. Meer's style of writing in sections of the work implicitly draws attention to the relationship between ethnography and literature, a relationship highlighted by anthropologists such as James Clifford and George Marcus. In such an approach, instead of using normative anthropological approaches, the ethnographer embeds her descriptions in a storytelling tradition and captures the idiom and tenor of speech of the communities she is describing (see Visweswaran 1994:33). This melding of different stylistic codes may be seen in the following extract from the vignette, "Murmurs in the Kutum", in Meer's *Portrait of Indian South Africans*:

Hlatikulu, the Great Forest, is an African Reserve. The landscape is bush and scattered trees and rounded huts that look like some browning vegetation sprouting from the earth. Near the mountain, it is really a hill, there is a store which belonged to Amod who died five years ago, and before Amod, to Amod's father, Ebrahim, and before Ebrahim to Dawood. Now Amod's widow and his eldest son run the shop. There are other children - Yakub in London studying to be a lawyer and Suliman in Dublin who will be a doctor, and there is Farida, who helps her mother with household chores and in the evenings, keeps a firm eye on neatly tabulated notes from the Correspondence College. She learns History and Geography, English and Afri-

kaans and Botany in preparation for the Matriculation exam....

In the shop, large curling sacks of beans and mealies, hlubus and flour lean against the wooden counter; brightly coloured scarves, square cotton dresses and men's checked shirts hang from the ceiling. Tins of food and rolls of material line the shelves; bunches of billy cans dangle from the king-size nails and an old gramophone beats out a rhythm to which pican-nins dance. The customers come when there is money - women big-bosomed and big-bottomed with wired ankles and beaded necks, and sometimes men with rippling muscles and shiny flesh. (Meer, Fatima 1969:128)

Meer uses the trope of the Indian store in Africa, familiar already in *Mayat* and *Karodia*, showing at once intimacies between groups in the neutral space of the shop and in her very descriptions, the othering of groups not like oneself. The worlds of the owners and of the "customers" are poles apart, yet the aspirations of the one are dependent on the custom of the other. The women's opportunities in the gendered household are limited compared to those of their male counterparts; yet they are more privileged than both their male and female customers.

Exploring some of the cameos in the *Portrait* takes one to the "borderlands" of texts and genres, as much as to the complexities and contradictions in the representation of identity and difference. In adopting this approach Meer is probably imitating her mentor, Hilda Kuper, who was open to the possibilities of literary genres in sociological writing and argued that "drama, the novel, the poem and the monograph complement one another, each presenting a different facet of the whirling worlds around and within the self" (in Robinson 1994:209).

Jenny Robinson's critique of Meer's representation of Indians in *Portrait of Indian South Africans* raises interesting questions. Robinson's critique is situated in the debates around the representation of black women by white women academics that emerged at the first Women and Gender in Southern Africa Conference held in Durban in January 1991. As a counter to the arguments raised by black women Robinson points out that cultural insiders are not necessarily more reliable or authentic in their analysis. To support her argument she compares the descriptions of Indians by Mabel Palmer, Hilda Kuper and Meer. Robinson points out that although Meer presents an 'insider' view, she still represents Indians as "others, distant, exotic, romantic, ancient, peaceful, rich and poor....[that she] constructs Indian people through a lens of exotica and 'sameness' [and] that the markers of difference are significantly gendered" (Robinson 1994:215-216). Robinson concludes that while the positionality and subjectivity of a researcher are significant they cannot be reduced only to categories of race, class and gender, and that Meer was no different from Palmer and Kuper in her representations of Indians. As Robinson concludes:

Just as the constitution of the subjects of Mabel Palmer and Hilda Kuper were bound up with 'otherness' and 'sameness' - attempts to interpret the other in terms and value judgements familiar to the author, scripting the other in their own lives and in the concepts available within their specific disciplinary and political grid - so Meer links into this process of con-

structing subjects for certain readers within a particular discursive terrain.
(217)

The principle that Robinson wishes to assert - that cultural insiders are not necessarily more authentic as researchers than cultural outsiders - has merit but the example she has chosen to prove her point is questionable. What Robinson neglects to consider in her analysis is that all three women academics - Kuper, Palmer and Meer - were products of a particular historical period in sociological and anthropological research, a scholarship that still operated through the Western gaze rather than through any self-questioning. These academics may appear contradictory and compromised in their scholarship because they were working mainly within the constraints of intellectual thought of the 50's. But although, as Robinson points out, these "enlightened" scholars still "fed into the (colonial/apartheid) process of constructing communities and racial identities" (216), they were not equivocal and compromising in their condemnation of the injustices of apartheid. Is there a lesson somewhere in this for us academics who are concerned about theoretical correctness, sometimes at the expense of activism and simple action? What might it mean to discard the "habit of power", as Daymond (1996c:xix) urges, using Hendricks and Lewis's phrase (Hendricks and Lewis 1994), more completely, in terms of the privileged positions in the academy from which we read?

With Meer, for example, the political edge of her anti-apartheid stance was not blunted by the absence of theoretical sophistication in respect of her scholarship. Further, one has to appreciate that Meer has shown a measure of critical reflexivity since the publication of *A Portrait of Indian South Africans*. Using Meer's writing from an earlier period to prove her point, Robinson sees Meer as 'frozen in time' and does not make allowances for changes in perspectives that an individual may undergo. With reference to the work on the working-class women, referred to earlier, Meer and her co-authors stress the role and agency of the researched and the way they are represented. They point to the need for the researched to see a change in their lives. As with Phyllis Naidoo in her prison experiences, Meer and her co-authors do not usurp the women's subjecthood but provide the space for the women's own 'voices' to be heard; they criticise researchers who use their power against the powerless. As Meer herself writes:

Research of the underprivileged usually treats the underprivileged as research objects. Social scientists lose sight of the fact that they are not doing physical or chemical research in a laboratory. People are asked all kinds of questions, their homes are entered and their privacy intruded on, and then the results are presented for the benefit of someone else - legislators or planners or academics. (In Hayter 1985:40)

In Meer's writings on Indians in general her predominant aim was to inculcate in Indians and other South Africans an appreciation for Indian history and culture; she also wished to build unity among Indians given attempts to divide them by the apartheid state. This was an important theme in a large number of her discursive writings and speeches at confer-

ences, both locally and internationally. Meer saw Indians as divided by class, caste and language, among other factors. But more important, Meer saw Indians divided politically, and she encouraged them to see themselves primarily as South Africans. There is a tension between these two impulses - the need to promote an awareness of Indian history and culture, and the need to merge with an all-embracing South Africanness. Balancing the two impulses has been, and continues to be, difficult. Even if there were no contradiction in Meer's mind and in her political intentions and strategies, translating these into the "zone of occult instability" where the people actually live invariably induces self-Othering and Orientalising. *A Portrait of Indian South Africans* became a much-coveted possession among Indians, rather than among other race groups, to whom it was originally directed. After Ansuyah Singh's *Behold the Earth Mourns*, published in 1960, it became an important symbolic marker in the celebration among Indians themselves of over one hundred years of struggle and survival in South Africa. And Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie's *From Cane-fields to Freedom - A Chronicle of Indian South African Life*, published in 2000, one hundred and forty years after the arrival of indentured labourers in South Africa, seems to be a contemporary equivalent of Meer's book. The need for scholarship that supersedes studies such as Meer's and Dhupelia-Mesthrie's, and also my own, studies that tell a more racially integrated history, is compelling.

Given her political activism, Meer's writing about Indians, mainly as a historian and sociologist, has placed her in a unique position. She has been able to assume the position of speaking authoritatively for Indians in the larger context of racial segregation; she has also assumed the role, as a leader and opinion-maker, of speaking to Indians on matters of inter-racial harmony, as the following section shows. Meer's identity constantly straddles the two roles.

Unity between Indians and Africans

Meer envisioned an integrated Indian-African philosophy in her writing of *Ahimsa-Ubuntu* (1995). Combining Gandhian ahimsa and African Humanism, this dance drama focuses on the Indo-African liberation struggle in South Africa. It was performed in Sri Lanka and in several major cities in India. Meer wrote the script for the production in which she developed the interconnections between the main milestones of Indian and African history in South Africa.

Apart from writing about Indians and speaking up for solidarity within groups, Meer has also resolutely fought for solidarity among all oppressed groups, and consistently resisted attempts to ghettoise and fragment the freedom struggle. She has encouraged alliances and partnerships across racial groups as a way of strengthening solidarity against an intransigent regime. One of Meer's major strategic roles in the 80's was to unite all forces fighting apartheid. Unity between Africans and Indians evolved as resistance against a common

oppressor grew in increasing urgency in South Africa and when political groups separated it was largely for the strategic convenience of focusing on specific issues.

Meer has always taken a long-range historical view of inter-racial tensions, showing the role that colonialism and apartheid played in them. She constantly explores the dynamic connections between past and present to obtain a clearer picture of the forces that have been shaping racial and ethnic consciousness and divisions. Meer attributes the periodic hostility between Africans and Indians to the role that the white oppressor has played historically in dividing the two groups. There were deliberate attempts, she points out, to demonise oppressed groups against each other and to prevent the development of solidarity among them. For example Meer provides a telling indictment of the inhumane practices during the period of indenture, constantly returning to this history to understand contemporary political formations. In one of her speeches (at a convention of the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin) Meer explained the background for hostility between Indian and African:

It was in the interest of the white colonist to fan... hostility, for any consolidation of interest between the two labour contingents would have been fatal in a situation where the ratio between white and black was already in the region of 1:10. Consequently, Indians and Africans were separated from each other, and in separation, projected as dangerous to each other. They were at the same time within 'viewing' distance of each other, so that they could be constantly reminded of their strange and different ways. The use of African whipping boys on the sugar estate, the condemnation of a transgressing 'Coolie' to the 'Kaffir' barracks where he could be terrorised and ridiculed as the master intended: the appointment of an Indian overseer over the African mill hands, the use of African police to suppress Indian strikers, were all calculated to keep the two peoples violently divided. Presiding over it all were the stereotypes calculated to present each with an adverse image of the other. The stereotypes were fabricated in the first instance for the peace of mind of the whites themselves, to relieve them of Christian guilt for the humanity they degraded. (Meer, Fatima 1998c:12)

Against this background of a discordant intimacy that Indians and Africans have known, Meer outlines present-day challenges that have to be faced. Rather than engage in academic discussions around issues of identity and difference she urges Indians to respond to a history of oppression to which all have been subjected; she especially urges that Indians respond sympathetically to the situation of another oppressed group:

As a minority, they suffer misgivings and insecurities. In the final analysis, it is up to them to overcome these, to accept the inevitable process of Africanisation and make an even more meaningful contribution to their own lives and the lives of South Africans in general. Whatever their frustrations, South African Indians have to bear in mind that they are relatively privileged participants in a poor country and they have to join in the struggle to alleviate poverty which continues to be race-bound... Sixty-one percent of Africans live in poverty as against 5% of Indians and 1% of whites. The unemployment rate runs at about 30 - 35% of the employable and 93% of these are Africans. (16)

Meer points to the tendency now for Indians to retreat into a 'minority' laager, in spite of

their participation in working for non-racialism in South Africa:

Politically, Indian South Africans have since the last five decades identified strongly with their fellow disenfranchised South Africans; they began their organised and militant opposition to race discrimination, in the last century, developing Passive Resistance, and have played a leading role in the struggle against apartheid. Despite this, the generality of SA's Indians are sensitive to their position as a minority, and their insecurities in this regard have not been alleviated since the founding of South Africa's non-racial democracy; in fact it appears to have heightened. (2)

Meer's aim in drawing on the history of conflict is to promote understanding of the forces that divide communities, in order now to build a new nation. She points out that intolerance is at the heart of the conflict, "intolerance of other cultures, other religions, other ideologies, other languages. We have been plunged in ethnic wars, because we have refused to tolerate the other occupying our physical and social spaces" (Meer, Fatima 1998d).

Intolerance is evident, Meer points out, in our educational institutions which were created along separate racial lines. When institutions have had a history of separateness and come into being as a result of under-privilege, it is often difficult for 'transformation' to move beyond ethnocentric, one-dimensional approaches. Speaking at a Transformation Forum meeting at the M L Sultan Technikon in 1997 Meer was at pains to encourage students and staff to take a more dynamic view of race and ethnicity in the present post-apartheid era since the institution "inherited a racially fragmented educational system" (Meer, Fatima 1997b:1). There is much suspicion about affirmative action, and this is manifest on our campuses. As Meer writes: "Territorialism is evident too on our campuses that have become mixed" (4). It is only by giving students a sense of the history of institutions that misconceptions and prejudices will be removed. In tracing the history of the M L Sultan Technikon she pointed out that the institution was inaugurated in 1929 in direct response to the absence of facilities for Indians at Whites-only technical colleges:

The Indianness of the Sultan Technikon must be understood against this background which, apart from Indian self-help is also due to the fact that until two decades back, they were restricted to Natal and not allowed into other provinces, save by special permit. The result is the 80% of the entire Indian population is concentrated in KwaZulu Natal...(5)

Meer argues that it is easy for racial and ethnic tension to emerge among oppressed groups as they fight over limited resources. She is aware of how fragile nation-building is, and of the need to avoid simplistic ethnocentric claims to identity. Constantly in her writings she pleads for peaceful co-existence among South Africa's various groups. As she urges: "If the diverse peoples are to feel a real sense of ownership of their country, then their diverse cultures and knowledge systems have to be reflected in our formal educational institutions" (7). As suggested already, there has been an inevitable tension in her work between concentrating on Indians as a separate group and seeing them in a wider inter-racial context. She always tries to understand fears and anxieties within and between groups; at the same time, she prompts a criticism of them.

"The Rushdie Affair"

This tension was to be especially concentrated in Meer's involvement in "The Rushdie Affair". It was Meer's strong criticism of colonialism and its continuing stranglehold in the post-colonial world that put her on the side against Salman Rushdie, in one of the most controversial incidents in her life. Rushdie was invited to the Book Fair organised by *The Weekly Mail* and COSAW in November 1988, and was to have delivered the keynote address and shared a panel discussion with Meer and J M Coetzee. Two weeks before the Book Fair the fatwa was issued against Rushdie and COSAW and *The Weekly Mail* both withdrew the invitation to Rushdie when they could not guarantee his safety. Coetzee noted that COSAW had acceded to the demands of Muslim fundamentalists as it did not want to antagonise the many Muslims in the anti-apartheid movement. Gordimer, herself, as vice-president of COSAW at the time was involved in negotiations with Muslim leaders in South Africa that eventually failed.

Meer supported the ban on Rushdie in South Africa, and this was seen as a highly controversial step for a political activist of Meer's stature, one who had long been a vigorous opponent of the draconian laws of the South African apartheid government which included strong censorship legislation. It was in a highly-wrought and highly-charged public arena that Meer made a swift and decisive response against Rushdie. While it would seem that Meer was reacting to Rushdie as a Muslim and in solidarity with the larger Muslim world and as an Indian who criticised another for "a malicious attack on his ethnic past", it is necessary to point out that she couched her criticism of Rushdie as one who is highly critical of post-colonial writers who seemed to her to pander to Western views of the Orient.

Meer accepted that Rushdie's work was a parody, but objected to the implications of such a parody of Islam, seeing it ultimately as an attack on any faith that strives against injustice. As pointed out earlier, in relation to Ansuyah Singh, a wholly secular route is not always welcomed by groups rooted in traditional faith. And a post-modernist critique of religion, while theoretically attractive and condonable to an intellectual elite is far from acceptable to ordinary believers. Meer, who we have seen is rooted in a (modernist) belief in freedom, reason and social justice, argues that political resistance is frequently propelled by religious convictions (a point that is supported by the development of liberation theology in South Africa, with Archbishop Tutu as one of its best-known proponents). It was clearly as a political activist that Meer declared:

I admire Salman Rushdie's literary genius - my regret is that in *The Satanic Verses* in particular, he has used it to desecrate the Islamic faith and to falsify Islamic history albeit in the form of parody.

For the thousands of millions of our world who cannot live by their wits, who have not had the opportunity to sharpen their minds, and who combat the tyranny of materialism by their faith in an ideal or ideology, the absolute is imperative.

It is that 'immortal' faith that is expressed in the relentless jihad of a Mandela, of the proletariat and peasant who achieves a self-realisation that is at once intellectual and spiritual and hence wholly human... (Meer, Fatima 1988b:6)

Meer, assuming the role of spokesperson here for the multitudes who live by the "absolute", saw in Rushdie's approach, as in V S Naipaul's, the colonised's self-flagellation, exhibited for the benefit of a Western audience. Drawing from Memmi, who criticised the colonised bourgeois intellectual's "disappearance" into the coloniser, Meer pointed out in her response to *The Weekly Mail* that

Rushdie's recoil from the decolonised Third World is not objective. It is a deeply experienced subjective recoil, a recoil from his own self turned inside out, and distorted into the grotesque and the surrealistic. His is not the innocent surrealism of an Alice in Wonderland, it is a malicious attack on his ethnic past, a conscious compulsion to obliterate the memory traces of that past, by making it absurd, irrelevant, worthless, but good book material.(7)

Certainly Rushdie was unaware at the time of writing of the political ramifications of his project. While I agree with Sara Suleri (and Rushdie) that in a post-modern world there is need for faith to guard against its own constructedness and obsolescence, this very "post-modern world" is also riddled with its own double standards from a political perspective, and in asserting selective certainties (and uncertainties) actually prompts a retreat into fundamentalism. Rushdie was also oblivious of the fact, as pointed out by Haideh Moghissi, of the "profound heterogeneity of peoples from Muslim societies within or without the Middle East. People who live under Islamic laws are not bound together by a metaculture, even less by Islamist politics" (Moghissi 1999:5). It would seem that Rushdie was homogenising Islamic influence rather than making room for the variety that exists within it. While it is true that Rushdie, more than most writers, has celebrated heterogeneity, his metaphoric use of Islam in his book was read as a one-dimensional condemnation of the faith and its practices everywhere.

Indeed, the furore that erupted on all sides showed that the intentions that Rushdie had, and the reactions to the book, were misinterpreted by East and West alike. It showed that the very alterities and simple binarisms between East and West that Rushdie was criticising and that prompted Meer's own participation in the fray were in stark evidence more than ever before. While a petition of 127 Iranian intellectuals in exile was directed to the Ayatollah in support of Rushdie, and declarations were issued by Arab and Iranian intellectuals against Ayatollah Khomeini at the time of the fatwa (6), there were those, ironically, in the West and Middle East who stated that the book needed to be accepted in the name of "different cultural standards" (6). The dominant Orientalist reception of the text on the one hand and the Islamist perspective on the other both tended to

...obscure the complex web of class, gender, ethnic, religious and regional differences which separate rather than unite the ways of life, and particularly the political and ideological perspectives, of people in the Middle East. Critical writings challenge the typical Orientalist and fundamentalist identi-

fication of people in Islamic societies as Muslim conformists. (6)

Moghissi, writing on the role of women in Islamic societies, concedes that, "given the recurrent Islamophobia of media and governments in the West and the growing arsenal of racist imagery about Islam" (4) it is difficult to write critically on these issues. She points out that although objectivity is difficult under these circumstances it should still be pursued:

The question is always whose interests are being served, and whose side one is taking. It is in this climate, perhaps, that certain scholars deny the more punishing features of Islamic practices and traditions, emphasising, instead, the positive aspects of Islamic culture. Such a position, however, is highly problematic. (4)

She points out - and this could be construed as a criticism of positions such as those of Meer - that the "political options for the Middle Eastern intellectual are not as narrow as is often implied. We are not forced to choose between passively keeping silent and minimising the consequences of Islamic fundamentalism or siding with the bullying policy of foreign powers, particularly the United States..."(6). Given the complexities involved, whatever the choices that intellectuals feel compelled to make, they are vulnerable to co-option or misinterpretation or castigation.

Perhaps what is at stake in the controversy, as van der Veer notes (van der Veer 1997:102), is the crucial difference between literature and other forms of writing, especially religious, and the implications of this in complex contexts of reception in the contemporary world. In deploying the ambivalent interplay between the two genres Rushdie, as van der Veer seems to suggest, should have anticipated diverse responses from the two diametrically opposed reading communities:

Literary texts are the very sites of self-fashioning in modern, bourgeois culture. Literature has replaced religious texts as a source of elevated reflection about the nature of the self. Rushdie's thematic takes part precisely in that displacement. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which his hybrid self-fashioning feeds on Islamic traditions. It is this engagement which leads to a reading of his text not only by those who valorise the invention of culture in art, but also by migrant settlers who are very differently placed in relation to those traditions (van der Veer 1997:102)

Rushdie's views at a press conference after the Iranian state's withdrawal of support for the *fatwa* placed on his head ten years ago show that his concerns in writing *The Satanic Verses* were mainly literary rather than religious:

Some incredibly important things were being fought for here. A thing that is important to me - the art of the novel. Beyond that, the freedom of the imagination, the great, overwhelming, overarching issue of freedom of speech. The right of a human being to walk down the street of their own country without fear. (McCrum 1998:37)

Ziauddin Sardar, in a critique of postmodernism, makes the interesting point that *The Satanic Verses* was feared for the very reason that it was seen as a work of literature, especially when such literature is used as a "political and ideological weapon":

Faith may or may not move mountains; but ideas certainly do, particularly when they are transformed into literature or technology... There is no vehi-

cle more powerful for a direct onslaught on the sacred territory of Other cultures than a work of fiction....*The Satanic Verses*, with all its pathological symptoms of the fear and hatred of the Other, is not 'literature' as a tool for moral and poetic uplifting of people or a vehicle for illuminating the inner recesses of humanity, it is literature as a naked political and ideological weapon. (Sardar 1998:183)

Sala Suleri, on the other hand, a scholar of English Literature at Yale, and formerly from Pakistan, has argued that Rushdie's has been a "secular voice speaking against the impingement of a monolithic fundamentalism" (Suleri 1992:190) in all spheres of life, religious, political (such as Thatcherite Britain), and socio-cultural. Ironically, Suleri, looking at the concluding chapters of *The Satanic Verses* rather than the offending earlier chapters, argues that "Rushdie has written a deeply Islamic book" (191); she considers it to be "a work of meticulous religious attentiveness" (191). She points out that Rushdie has written a self-questioning, entangled work, interrogating the way religion, and the rest of our institutional life, immunises itself by a "nostalgia for the unitary". J M Coetzee sums this up when he stated at the time of the controversy in South Africa: "Fundamentalism abhors the free play of signs, the endlessness of writing...*The Satanic Verses* strikes at the foundation of the structure of authorities of Islam and it does so in the name of writing" (in Morphet 1996:56). Coetzee observed that the Prophet was placed on the same level as a writer (rather than an author), as one who constructed and created truth or meaning.

The different and diverse interpretations and receptions - which even Rushdie cannot disallow - show that one cannot ponder on "pieties concerning aesthetic freedom" (Suleri 1992:190) in a rarefied stratum, divorced from emotional responses to faith or readings determined by political perceptions and agendas, or to specific contexts in which the reception occurs. In a world that witnesses a great deal of anti-Arab racism and anti-Islamic prejudice, problematising the inspirational writing of the Koran metaphorically (Conrad did the same in *A Heart of Darkness*, where he made Africa the metaphor of evil in Western civilisation) and presenting a parody of Mohamed's life - adopting a 'literary' approach with a provocative religious theme - was, if nothing else, a perilous thing to do.

In general then, whatever the specificities of "the Rushdie affair" and the competing views on it were (and I have dwelt on it here at some length to show some of the complexities involved), Meer saw herself as being vigilant about the different guises that post-coloniality would take. Her criticism of Rushdie may also be seen in the context of the continuing inequities that persist in the post-colonial world. Meer's stance, a provocative one in the face of the consequences for her point of view at that particular time in South African history, and one that will be debated in literary circles for a long time, shows that *The Satanic Verses*, and the furore that developed around it, raised different issues also in South Africa for literary critics, political activists and adherents of particular religions, and no one side could claim the appropriate response. It also shows her disposition to make hard choices, whatever the difficulty for a public icon of political resistance

such as she is, especially when the competing strands of contestation are entangled and not easily distinguishable.

The world of the late 80's into which the book was released must also account for the kind of response it received. An important question that J M Coetzee himself asks a good few years after the furore around *The Satanic Verses* in relation to the general topic of censorship might suggest that Meer's speaking on behalf of all those who "took offence" at the Rushdie affair cannot be dismissed outright. Coetzee's question is: "What does it mean to respect - really respect - the taking-offence of others when you do not share the religious convictions or ethnic sensitivities from which this taking-offence emerges?" (Coetzee 1996a:110). Coetzee points out that "[i]t is a measure of the degree to which Western society has become secularised that Muslim outrage against *The Satanic Verses* and its author, Salman Rushdie, should have met with widespread bewilderment" (Coetzee 1996b:8).

Meer's involvement in the Rushdie affair epitomises her own complex position in the turbulent and rapidly changing politics of the late 80's in South Africa. Castells argues that Islamic fundamentalist identity, strengthened by its exclusion and marginalisation in Western countries, is opposed to "all failing ideologies of the post-colonial order" such as capitalism, socialism and nationalism, and an exclusionary global order (Castells 1997:17-20). Meer understands this, which prompted her sympathetic response to Iran in the Rushdie affair. At the same time, given the background of apartheid which denied the creation of nationhood, Meer has been a strong supporter of the building of a new nation in South Africa.

Conclusion

Lewis Nkosi, writing in 1960, noted that the role of the writer is "to reveal our inner geography to the world as well as to ourselves; and this is all we can ask [of] our writers" (in Gray 1991:30). Meer has been able to reveal the racial "geography" of South Africa to itself, which she has insisted includes an Indian "geography", without defining herself as a writer. In attempting to do this she has revealed the diverse impulses that make up her own complex identity. Among the writers in this study Meer has been a significant voice reflecting primarily on the nature of racial dynamics against a colonial and apartheid ideological background and at the same time attempting as far as possible to resist its very formulations. (In many ways these contradictions underlie this very research project.) She has been able to combine issues of gender, ethnicity, race and class in the context of political resistance; and she continues to do so, in spite of attempts throughout our history, even at the present time, to divide and fracture political solidarities. When necessary, in an oppositional context, she has not hesitated to assert her Indian (and Muslim) identity. At the same time she is adamantly critical of narrow, ethnocentric and exclusivist views among Indians. Meer has asserted and claimed the right to speak about/for the Gandhis as

much as for the Andrew Zondos or the "poors of Chatsworth". Identity for Meer is about justice in a particular context, about making a stand, with all its possible vexed intricacies and controversies at times, rather than resorting to ready-made formulaic responses or abstaining altogether because it may be politically expedient to do so.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Meer very recently announced that she has designed a ten-part television series on the early history of the Cape, focusing on the resistance of the Khoi Khoi against Jan Van Riebeeck and the early Dutch colonisation. Meer, who has been researching this topic for the past fourteen years, has conceived of this production from the perspective of Krotoa, the Khoi woman who worked in the house of Jan van Riebeeck, as an unusual and lesser known instance of "intimacy" between oppressor and oppressed. Krotoa was instrumental in negotiating between the Khoi Khoi and the early Dutch settlers. Meer projects Krotoa as the first woman politician in South Africa, and conveys the rich and colourful background of the lives of the Khoi Khoi during the time of European settlement in the seventeenth century

What is worth noting is Meer's emphasis, once again through this project, on her South Africanness. She refuses to be pigeonholed. She constantly refers to the Krotoa story as "our history", as pointed out earlier. The story of Krotoa, as much as Indian history, is every South African's story. Meer has all her life agitated against the racialisation of politics and of intellectual work in South Africa, with all its power relations, and it is not surprising that she should embark on this excavatory project. The Krotoa project connects with the rest of her work, reflecting again her identity primarily in her commitment to and within history, exploring possibilities for re-imagining history and historiography. Meer is boldly striding back to another "beginning" - not the old indentured theme of Indians' arrival in South Africa that one finds in *A Portrait of Indian South Africans* - in a quest for a new paradigm case of the way our histories are imbricated and the need for their re-imagining. It is largely her concern for a corrective vision of history, for a particular re-presentation of truth and meaning, that has been the driving force in her activism and her documentation of political and social history. Meer has constantly reinscribed herself and constructed her identity against the marginalisation of apartheid, holding up a mirror to all South Africa's peoples to counter apartheid's ideological manipulation.

In the present time then Meer continues to interpret a complex history in the context of new political alignments and realities, refusing the paralysis that might well attend living in the new "interregnum". Earlier in the year 2000, Meer spoke on the search for a "South African ethos", her perennial concern, her speech illustrating well that identity is not seamless and that difference is not fixed. Her speech embodies some of the complexities and contradictions of the expression of identity at the present time. In the past choosing a resistance identity in opposition to the legitimising identity of apartheid was clear cut. Now one is up against the new legitimising identities of an emerging nationalism coinciding

with (and sometimes even inducing) the expression of new (and old) ethnicities. Nuttall and Michael observe that it is difficult for intellectual work on identity politics in South Africa to resist being fixed and constrained :

...an engagement with a version of identity politics in which affirming an identity veers dangerously towards a kind of fixing; and the problem of thinking oppositionally - as if somewhere, despite the adoption of a language of fluidity, hardline divisions, based on an 'authentic' difference, remain. (Nuttall and Michael 2000b:16)

Meer attempts precisely to avoid any fixity or totalising on any front. This characteristic of Meer's - her ability to be within, empathic, and without, critical, at the same time, in her relations to Indians in South Africa - has marked her political career and her writings. Castells points out that a plurality of identities is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action. In an excerpt from her speech, with which I end this chapter, Meer however shows that she is able to reflect the contradictions found within the boundaries of her own polemic, straddle the tensions and complexities of identity politics in the present time in South Africa and yet try not to be constrained by them. She shows an understandable anxiety about erasing (Indian) difference and undervaluing it, yet avoids an ethnic absolutism. Directing her views primarily to Indians, stressing their diversity within, encouraging and celebrating uniqueness among them, but advocating this under an umbrella "South African ethos" - although admittedly this is sometimes perilously close to a questionable "rainbowism" ("recreate ourselves within the matrix of our cultural milieus"; "a unity in our separateness") - she engages in a delicate balancing act. Meer, as elusive as ever, shows at the same time that she always dismantles the boundaries she sets up, asserting provocatively that there is no "minority" or "majority".

Rather than exhibiting a contradictory identity, which seems to me to suggest paralysis (which Meer is certainly far from, politically speaking), I would like to read her views, here and elsewhere, as coming from what Sanford Budick, in his discussion of alterity calls, "a manifold of mind" which operates oppositionally *and* reciprocally (Budick 1996:225, 230). Is this not the story of the many "Ruths" in this study, and in countless contexts in history, women who have had constantly to find a shifting, tenuous middle ground of "cross-culture": assimilative, conceding, yet recalcitrant at the same time? Is it not the perennial story of their desire for belonging, intensified now within the prospect of the new nation, having been so long denied a sense of home? The irony of Meer's stating her views, of course, is that she still presumes to speak for Indians as a group, given that more and more Indians are claiming the right and freedom to speak for themselves, though not always progressively and radically, due to a process of empowerment to which Meer herself made a significant contribution. This is the excerpt:

There are Indians today, third generation deep, who insist that they are Africans. There are Indians again who insist on their Indianness, and draw even narrower boundaries around them as Hindus, Muslims, South Indians, North Indians, Tamils, Telegus, Gujeratis and Hindustanis. To say that

South African society is multi-cultural, is an understatement; there are whirls of cultures within cultures. There is no more one Indian culture as there is one African culture....

Our new democracy creates space for the proverbial thousand blossoms to bloom in unison without a single one losing its colour or texture, and it is in this context that we seek to recreate ourselves within the matrix of our cultural milieus. In this process, there is no minority and no majority, for any distinctions of that nature can but revert us to domination and subordination and subvert us from the goal we have in mind, a unity of our separateness, a South African culture, a South African ethos. (Meer 2000:2)

CONCLUSION

"...reading is being the arm and being the axe *and* being the skull; reading is giving yourself up, not holding yourself at a distance and jeering" (J M Coetzee: *The Master of Petersburg*)

*"The wise see knowledge and action as one:
They see truly.
Take either path
And tread it to the end:
The end is the same.
There the followers of action
Meet the seekers after knowledge
In equal freedom."
(From the *The Bhagavad Gita*)*

Emmanuel Ngara states that "the rebirth of South Africa is an opportune moment for examining the literary wealth of Southern Africa" (Ngara 1994:x). The "rebirth" of the country affords a space, hitherto resisted, to excavate our suppressed literary heritage in all its diversity. I have been concerned in this study with claiming a literary space for a corpus of writings that has been marginalised. This corpus is, unarguably, a part of the "literary wealth" of South Africa.

I had decided to embark on this study given the present climate in the new South Africa - what Boehmer (1996) refers to as a "cusp time" - in which narratives of apartheid history are increasingly being produced. I believe that the examination of personal or communal narratives by Indian women writers in this wider context is an important critical activity. In order to deepen our perceptions of our political, cultural and social history, I have tried to understand how Indian women's writings contribute to new and alternative ways of reading and conceptualising our past and present in South Africa. Even if this corpus of writing constitutes a small segment, it gives attention to a local topography that has been hitherto ignored, and re-configures the whole in the process. Daymond writes that "[f]rom the earliest published writing in the 1880's, white women such as Olive Schreiner and Frances Colenso ... used their fictional and other work to intervene in national politics. Their example produced a line from which Nadine Gordimer comes and, despite the racial divisions of the past, this line may be helping in the creation of the space from which black women writers are now working" (Daymond 1996c:xviii). Indian women's writings may be seen as part of this "line", even if their influences appear to derive from other sources (although it might be interesting to consider hitherto unexplored intersections: the influence of Gandhi on the Suffragette Movement or on Olive Schreiner, and vice versa, for example, in relation to some of the women in this study comes to mind (see Meer, Fatima

1996b:996-1003)).

As pointed out in the Introductory chapter this study has been propelled by the general gynocritical activity that has developed in women's writings in South Africa in recent decades. Excavatory work, especially of all women's writings, will impress upon us that nation and nationality, usually male-defined, are not to be seen as essences but as narratives, "as a historically constituted terrain...always 'in process'" (Tharu and Lalita 1995:53). World-wide, suppressed voices from the margins are now demanding a hearing at the centre, and rewriting the very centre as we see an ideological shift not only in post-apartheid South Africa but in the world more generally at the turn of the new century. Radhakrishnan states that even if the tools of the centre are used by the margins for their critique, it "is a way of peripheralising the centre and not an act of capitulation to the metropolitan centre...When postcoloniality moves to the centre, the centre itself is not and cannot be the same anymore" (Radhakrishnan 1994:17).

This study has also been prompted by the concern that, at a time when South Africa is emerging from its isolation, and participating more fully on the world stage, some literatures could easily be further marginalised. It is tempting in such a period of transnational expansiveness to ignore the role that 'minor' writings could play in revisioning the national imaginary. The very notion of 'minor' literatures is a political one, and needs to be interrogated. In the search for representative texts the temptation to concentrate on men's writings or what are considered mainstream narratives is compelling. Exclusionary practices could well persist at the present time, perpetuating old exclusions, even if brought about by different forces.

Ngugi speaks of "moving the centre" in two senses - between nations and within nations. The impulse to move Indian women's writings from the margins to the centre of South African literary criticism and historiography is a necessarily corrective activity within the context of a revisioning of South African literary history and demography. We need to reflect on individual and collective histories from all quarters to order to rewrite the single, monolithic or hegemonic meta-narratives of our literary histories and genealogies. Part of the excavatory process is to consider those writings that have been side-lined for various reasons in previous decades, and such a process raises important concerns and questions. What place do the literatures by minority groups have in South African writing as a whole, and how do they rewrite canonicity itself, not just broaden its diversity? How is the notion of a *national literature* constantly contested and redefined, taking into consideration issues of location, identity and the construction of knowledge? How would an inclusion of Indian women's writings for study in our educational institutions challenge inherited syllabuses and inform and transform our present scholarship? What resources are necessary to ensure that excavatory work such as this proceeds apace, and that related work (such as oral history projects) are given encouragement? What campaigning and advocacy is necessary for

such excavatory work as well as creative writing, given that the present crises facing the humanities in our educational institutions is an unfortunate deterrent to expanding research in this area and that the politics of production continues to work against new, fledgling or unknown writers? And, more generally, what part do Indian women's writings in South Africa play in understanding the post-colonial world: how do they interact and resonate with post-colonial studies and literatures globally? In reading the different texts selected for this study I have directly or implicitly looked for resonances both within and beyond the South African political and literary context, generating dialogue centripetally and centrifugally.

The gynocritical rationale of the research project, the foregrounding of Indian women's texts in South Africa, has been in a large way the initial driving force of the study. Part of my conviction in pursuing this study has been my awareness of the political need to write 'history from below', broadly defined. The gynocritical work of literary feminists in South Africa has been a key influence in my own awareness of the importance of such a study. The glaring absence of the study of Indian women's texts motivated me to find out more about this neglected field. I have become aware of the selective way in which literary historiography has developed, resulting in the exclusion of Indian women's history and writings. In the process I myself have learned a great deal about the writings of Indian women in South Africa, writings that I had either taken for granted, not really known, or not previously read with critical attentiveness as I colluded with old marginalisations.

As indicated earlier, my own literary journey began almost exclusively with metropolitan texts, then moved to South African literature, mainly white. I then became aware of African literature (defined for a few decades as the literature north of the Limpopo), largely male (the Achebes, Soyinkas, Ngugis and others). I moved to an appreciation of African women writers, and finally to black women's writings in the South African context. It was this that made me become gradually aware of a lacuna - that of Indian women's writings. Thus I arrived at the texts of Indian women writers, some of whom had not been heard of in South African literary studies. I was also prompted to construct the story of my grandmother in the macro-narrative of Indian indenture and to look for writings that may not be considered 'literary' in the traditional definitions of Literature.

Guided by feminist thinking in general, I have been aware of the need to find differences within difference as I considered the writings of South African women generally. Daymond speaks of the need to highlight the "variousness of South Africa's women" in order to "give a new slant to 'difference' and to 'other(s)'" (Daymond 1990:iii). Through my exploration I began to appreciate, as intimated earlier, that there are both similarities and differences among black women writers in South Africa, between Indian women's writing and those of women in other parts of the world, especially Third World women, among Indian women writers themselves, and with individual writers as they evolve and change over a

period of time.

Aware of the need for transcultural literary excavations and historical revisioning, I entered the study with reservations about separatist study, and these feelings have persisted. In choosing Indian women's writings in South Africa as a field for study and research, I have often wondered whether I am in fact drawing attention to its very difference, treating it as a separate corpus of writing, and thereby validating, indirectly, the 'mainstream'? In reclaiming marginal, lost and suppressed voices, am I reinforcing perceptions of marginality? Paradoxically, an excavatory exercise such as this is premised on the very assumptions it contests. In the South African context there has been a vigorous debate around some of these issues in the context of "rethinking" a literary history (see Smit, Wade and van Wyk 1996). How do we engage in excavatory projects that challenge the old categories of literary criticism without further entrenching the segregation of the study of South African literature into "ethno-linguistic bantustans" (Wade 1996:3). And Ampie Coetzee sees the need for "non-ethnic and non-linguistic categories to be assembled where trans-cultural intertextuality can be profitably researched" (Wade 1996:7; see Coetzee, Ampie 1996).

As I argued in an earlier chapter, the gynocritical exercise is based on old exclusions and on contested categories. And as Rushdie states: "The point about the periphery is that it implies a centre..." (Rushdie 1988:37). Should not Indian women's writing be naturally included in the overall literary critical endeavour, and should not discussion of it take place incidentally? Is the very reference to, or invention of the category, "Writings by South African Indian women", part of this process of marginalisation (Rushdie makes a similar point in reference to the construction of the category "Commonwealth Literature")?

Writing from the margins should not be reclaimed for its exotic or 'diverse' value, thereby validating the centre. In the need to create a 'culture of diversity' in the new South Africa, we must beware of the possibility of commodifying identity or difference. Appiah cautions against writers of colour being treated as "otherness machines with the manufacture of alterity as (their) principal role" (in Stasiulus 1993:54). Woodward et al question the excavatory project that usually proceeds in a positivist mode rescuing women from invisibility, but where "visibility might well constitute an 'iron cage'" (Woodward, et al 2000:3). Critics since Edward Said have cautioned against the slide to a "new Orientalism", when writers and cultural workers rightly engage in recovery of suppressed voices, but in the sites of intellectual production of the first world academy. And as much as we wish for approval from international audiences, we should be aware, as Jean-Philippe Wade points out, of the "'culture industry' of a global capitalism" (Wade 1996:4). This reservation must account for some of the negative reaction in India to the international success of Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things* (see Dhawan 1999).

Rushdie points to another possible danger when constructing a literature that is different - "a danger of marginalisation from within", where writers from minority groups become

prone to new orthodoxies, and erect boundaries around their work. He states that "according to these new orthodoxies...works which do not speak to us only, to the inside, become suspect; that is to say, parochialism instead of being considered a weakness becomes a virtue" (Rushdie 1988:38). And such parochialism might well apply to critics who write about these works. And so writers who do not write about typical Indian life are not seen as 'representative' of 'Indian experience'. By this 'yardstick' Vickram Seth's *An Equal Music* would be seen as being less typically 'Indian' than his *A Suitable Boy*, or Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight* may be seen as more representative of Indian experience than her *Shattering of Silence*.

The way we have constructed categories of identity for writings or writers is based on the old apartheid categories of racial difference and creates its own anomalies. Are writers who are more open to the experiences of other groups progressive? In my reading of the texts selected for study here I have constantly tried to find a balance between these pull and push factors, showing how writers take both insider and outsider stances in their writing, how they are created and constrained by apartheid experience, and the manner in which they constantly move beyond it, aware as I am that even these categories of 'insider' and 'outsider' are ideologically loaded. It is critical to read (and re-read) Indian women's writings in a changed context of reception, when we are re-constituting and reconfiguring (and indeed contesting) the very idea of a South African nation. Foregrounding the marginalised writings was for me a fundamental and necessary, but initial, exercise in this regard. The potential value of this study lies in the new possibilities for comparative study in a host of directions, including non-generic writing and diverse contexts of cultural production and reception, that might be sought in future research. Studies of this kind are necessary in realising van Niekerk's vision that a "national literary history could crystallise as a multi-layered, multi-structured system, inevitably connected, if not by similarities then by differences; and this synthesis of different cultural tensions will activate the discursive nature of texts, metatexts and history" (van Niekerk 1996:150).

* * * * *

Stratton's arguments about the importance of reading women's writings in the context of national politics is relevant to my concerns here. Drawing from Frederic Jameson, Stratton points out that all Third World texts are to be seen as allegorical, and are to be read as national allegories, so that the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society (Stratton 1994:10). For Jameson colonialism and imperialism are the defining experiences of the Third World. Stratton points out, however, the irony in relation to women's texts in these Third World contexts is that women are marginal in national politics and in public life in Third World contexts, and

are less likely to write "national allegories".

Do the Indian women writers in South Africa write national allegories? The picture is not a simple one. This study of Indian women's writings in South Africa reveals that some of them have indeed been concerned, as with women writers from other groups, like the Afrikaans novelist, Marlene van Niekerk, and her novel, *Triomf* (1994/1999), with national politics, but this has occurred in different ways, with each writer writing from her particular vantage point. Reddy, for example, writes out of her specificity and locatedness against the macro-political scene of South Africa's apartheid policies. In her writing we are reminded that in South African cultural history a sense of 'community' is determined by socio-political factors, but while there is no direct polemical critique of apartheid, her writings abound with descriptions of the divided living of apartheid society. *Coolie Doctor*, the autobiography by Goonam, on the other hand, consciously and overtly situates itself in the context of a more radical political history in South Africa, as does Meer in her writing of, for example, the biography of Andrew Zondo.

A question I have often asked myself is which one of the writings in this study is a metaphor for the situation in South Africa. Which one is a national allegory? Though not in the sense that Stratton intends, I believe that each example of writing in its own way is symbolic of South African life. (It is worth noting J M Coetzee's observation in relation to the production of the Great South African Novel, that paradigmatic works are unlikely to emerge from a society so riven with divisions). Stratton's general point that African literatures and other post-colonial literatures are each based on their own respective "internal dynamic" may be one way of accepting that each writer contributes to the whole, even if from a different perspective.

Each writer in this study writes from her own specific historical and social context. Whatever the differences the common denominator in their writings has been the distinctive South Africanness of their experiences in all its heterogeneity, whether in Mayat's descriptions of life in Potchefstroom, Karodia's in Sterkstroom, Reddy's in Briardene, or Goonam's or Phyllis Naidoo's in an apartheid prison. This is true also of writers such as Sam, Goonam and Karodia who have written of experiences in exile from South Africa. Their writings contribute to a richer and more intricately textured South African story than simply rigid and naturalised narratives of racialisation.

Contributing to the national narrative of South Africa's political development is the historical role that Passive Resistance played. Mandela, for one, refers to the Movement in his autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, as an important marker in the development of resistance to apartheid, and the *Readers' Digest History of South Africa* also considers it important in South African history. As pointed out earlier Meer, who has consistently tried to challenge boundaries of apartheid ideology, points out that we need to see *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* as being as indigenous to the political history of South Africa as *Amandla* and

Mayibuye Afrika (see Meer 1995). It seems to me that the Passive Resistance Movement and Defiance Campaign of the mid-50's may be seen as a "threshold moment", to use Whitlock's phrase in describing key moments in South African literary history, in prompting the writings of Indian women in South Africa; among the others were the initial phases of Passive Resistance Movement in the first decade of the twentieth century under the leadership of Gandhi himself, the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the Soweto uprising in 1976 and the changing political climate at the beginning of the 90's.

What has been generally neglected in South African historiography is the participation of women in the Passive Resistance Movement, and in literary history and study, their writings on this theme. Indian women's resistance both to colonial and indigenous male domination is suppressed in the male literary tradition. Mandela, for example, only refers to the male resisters and not the female ones. The award-winning film by Richard Attenborough, *Gandhi*, also showed mainly male protesters, with women visibly absent (except for Kasturbai) from the portrayal of passive resisters in the mass meetings and marches that were reconstructed for the film. The story of Valliamma, depicted decades later in the play *The Sacrifice*, is given iconic status by Gandhi in the first decade of the twentieth century as if it were exceptional.

It has been mainly the writings by Indian women, as exemplified in this study, which have brought to the fore the participation of women in Passive Resistance. The original impulse by Indian women in South Africa to write of Gandhi and of Satyagraha may have been to document a part of the history and legacy of 'struggle' in South Africa, or to celebrate a largely Indian resistance movement and a legendary Indian hero such as the Mahatma. Whatever the reason, the point is that this has emerged as an identifiable trope, almost a female tradition, in their writings. The number of women who have written on this theme is significant: The Indian Women's Association, Olga Paruk, Ansuyah Singh, Saira Essa, Fatima Meer, Ela Gandhi and Dr Goonam - and their writings (except Ela Gandhi's) are all considered in this study. These writers (except Essa) all played an important role in either the earlier or later Passive Resistance Movement activities of the twentieth century.

Exploring the theme of Gandhian influence on women's writing as I do in this study is also unique, as far as I am aware, in South African literary and historical studies. This theme highlights the important role that Indian women did play, from a particular vantage point, in the political struggles in South Africa. I have already argued that the Movement undoubtedly provided them, and other Indian women, with a context for their growth and empowerment, legitimising their public activity and shaping their political consciousness in various ways. They enjoyed a 'constitutive' identity, being defined by association with Gandhi. As Goonam recalls, when she was in Edinburgh she was immediately associated with Gandhi: "I was veiled in Gandhi's glory" (Goonam 1991:10). What is noteworthy of the Passive Resistance Movement is that it provided a sense of community among women

across individual, religious, language and class differences; it also provided women with a ready solidarity with men.

Neglect of this theme has resulted in the absence in South Africa of adequate critical assessment of Gandhi and of Passive Resistance from a gendered perspective. New critical spaces now present themselves in the context of the changing political climate in South Africa for interrogation of issues related to gender, culture and imperialism. In this connection Passive Resistance calls for the kind of interrogation that is occurring with Black Consciousness. Pnina Werbner, for example, in a larger post-colonial context, makes the interesting point that:

Mahatma Gandhi, in his espousal of non-violent resistance, developed his own version of political motherhood, exhorting women to 'extend their hearts and interests beyond the narrow confines of their homes', and arguing that the principle of 'non-violence' (ahimsa) and political non-violent resistance were sullied by nature, that women's courage and self-sacrifice were superior to men's...(Werbner 1999:229-230)

Werbner's argument, that there are many different and diverse strands that made up the identities of resistant women, is true of Indian women in South Africa as well. She argues that there is a "conjuncture of the popular and the religious, the patriotic, feminist and humanitarian, the civic and the private, which has enabled the women to forge their own distinctive ...political imaginary of maternal and feminine - as well as feminist - politics" (Werbner 1999:239). This "conjuncture" needs to be explored more fully and critically now.

The women's writings depicted here are generally not critical of Gandhi, with the writers themselves imbricated in the gender politics of their times (from the turn of the twentieth century to roughly the 60's). However it should be pointed out that Meer in her analysis of "Gandhi on Women" in her book, *The South African Gandhi*, published in 1996, does provide some points of criticism. She argues that while Indian women's tolerance, that is seen to typify their behaviour, may have made them willing participants in the Passive Resistance Movement, this does not necessarily mean that acquiescence to all injustices is commendable:

Tolerance is good, but to tolerate injustices is bad, and that is the cardinal point in satyagraha. To constitute into a virtue the sufferings of a repressed soul is surely a contradiction of satyagraha. No human should be so repressed that he/she is unable to recognise that repression and no person should be reduced to that kind of incarnation. (Meer, Fatima 1996b:997)

Meer also criticises Gandhi for not cultivating leadership among Indian women, relegating them to inferior positions because they were not literate in English; he seemed, rather, to treat white women (such as Sonia Schlesin and Mrs Vogel) "as independent persons" (998). Meer has been forthright too about the omissions in historical documentation of the

way Indian women resisted the imposition of passes on them in 1913:

There is a historical silence about what Indian women felt about the passes imposed on them, but the men's fulminations at this attack on the honour of their women, resound through Gandhi's documents. It was the men's honour that was assailed when their women were assailed, and it was the men's job, not the women's, to defend that honour. It would not have occurred to Gandhi that this attitude reduced the women to utter dependency; that a like affront on Indian men would not have been perceived as violations of the women's honour; men did not belong to women as women did to men. Five years later, black women in the Orange Free State were similarly inflicted with passes. The women, unassisted by the men, rose in revolt, in defence of their honour. (999)

Generally, however, in defining their participation in the Movement the women writers hovered between compliance and protest in relation to women's roles, and showed ambivalence between following Gandhi and criticising him. What is important to remember is that Indian women's participation in the Passive Resistance Movement coincided with wider political conscientization. The women were gradually able to connect with struggles with other race groups, and what is evident is a nascent feminist consciousness which saw its maturing in the decades that followed the Passive Resistance Movement of the 1950's.

What is true is that although the writings do not all set out to be consciously critical of the gendered nature of Passive Resistance, they do engage generally in a dialogue on gender in various ways. The writers do not seem to be primarily engaging with a male tradition of writing, as do African women writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and others. Ansuyah Singh, for example, presents complementary roles for women and men, in keeping with her utopian vision of a world order that is beyond a stratified society. Singh questions the assumption of the primacy of the male subject or *satygrahi*, and does not assume that different, lesser roles are appropriate for women. And beginning to transcend the binaries of gender, she is critical of both men and women who have myopic views on race and gender discrimination. While Mayat assigns different roles to men and women, Phyllis Naidoo and Meer, for example, by their activism challenge a man's world with its male-defined values and objectification of women. Karodia, in her novel *Daughters of the Twilight*, undermines the stereotype that female sexuality is dangerous and destructive. In legitimating female power, she subverts traditional concepts of male heroism. She overturns the usual gender binaries by replacing negative representations of women with positive ones, showing black men to be weak and the black women strong, although this is determined, of course, by the apartheid economy. Reddy and Sam depict the reinscription of conventional gender codes in many situations, particularly domestic ones. Goonam and Meer, for their part, are very concerned with local, immediate issues and base the vision they develop on specific historical events rather than on ideological critique.

I have found other elements of difference worth pursuing in the writings of Indian women that reflect on the South African context in new and interesting ways. I have be-

come aware of the unique amalgam of historical, social and cultural as well as discursive forces at work in racial, ethnic and gender identity construction and resistance. The record of how the women writers were influenced by indenture, migration from India, settlement in South Africa, the Group Areas Act, political activism both within Passive Resistance and revolutionary modes, imprisonment and banning, and how they constructed images of home, and of exile, are all important in the macro-historical picture of South Africa. Meena Alexander's phrases, "fragments of a broken geography" and "multiple beings locked into the journeys of one body" (Alexander, Meena 1993:2) have haunted me throughout the writing of this study, as I have noticed their relevance to the experiences of the writers I have considered in this project. In this context comparison with other women's experiences in South Africa, particularly black women, is necessary and suggests a number of exciting possibilities for further reflection and research. The writers here have also been interested in the "geography of other identities", to use a phrase from Said (1994:336), as we see in numerous examples of writings referred to here, such as those of Sam, Karodia, Reddy, Phyllis Naidoo, Muthal Naidoo and Meer.

Another interesting trope that has resonances in a range of colonial and postcolonial texts more widely is the depiction of intimacy between oppressed and oppressor, often in micro-relationships, as has been explored in the discursive writings of Sala Suleri, Gillian Whitlock and Nuttall and Michael, among others. In this study this theme is evident in the writings of Sam, Karodia, or Reddy, or the play, "Coming Home", by Muthal Naidoo, or in larger contexts as in Mayat's *Potchefstroom*, where the nuances of shifting inter-racial relationships and contacts are variously explored. Interesting variations of this theme include the depiction of apartheid and masculinity in Karodia's *Daughters of the Twilight*, which shows the emasculation of the black male and the chauvinistic dominance of the white male. And in another of Karodia's novels, *A Shattering of Silence*, we have the white, rather than black, woman colonial freedom fighter, who finds her community of resistance among black women in Mozambique.

To look for broader themes and tropes - the possible national allegories and symbolic identifications with larger historical realities - is to risk these themes becoming controlling orthodoxies in a hierarchy of significance, making one overlook the personal and everyday. It is important to remember that apart from "judgemental texts", to use a phrase of Jolly and Attridge (1996:7), where there is an overwhelming condemnation of apartheid, some of the writings in this study deal with different themes. As the Survey chapter indicated there are examples of writings that are not necessarily about the social and political situation in South Africa but about personal loves and losses, of life that is mundane and ordinary, and about subjectivity in everyday situations.

Of course, the notion of a national allegory must also be tempered with the realisation that many of the writers here do not aspire to be representative, that some of them step

outside the South African context (as with Karodia in *A Shattering of Silence*) and that others, such as Ansuyah Singh, deliberately move beyond an exclusivist national context to anticipate an all-embracing universalism. Further, as Maria Olausson argues, the "question of representative texts should be discussed within the context of the global centre-periphery discrepancy we live with today" (Olausson 1999:189). This is going beyond Stratton's (and Jameson's) concern around "national allegories" to consider more global ones. Indeed, as the notion of the "nation" and "imagined communities" is contested (from feminists not least) and the exclusivist racial nationalism of the "nation-state" is questioned, the notion of a "national allegory" is fast becoming obsolete. Wade, for one, draws attention to "the weakening of the nation-state by the allied pressures of globalisation and the emerging importance of 'local' diversity, and the subsequent transformations in discourses of nationalism" (Wade 1996:4). New critical studies on women's texts (and experiences) in South Africa, both mainstream and peripheral, are now necessary to consider these new discursive questions, as are generally occurring elsewhere (see Alexander and Mohanty 1997).

* * * * *

As much as I turned my attention towards suppressed writers to consider the construction of their narrative voices, their identities and differences, I have become aware that my own role as researcher is constructed, that certain values and assumptions direct the study.

Looking specifically at the Women Writing in India project, Sunder Rajan cautions against the temptation, in excavatory work, for critics to act as "impresarios", speaking for marginalised women (Rajan 1991:4). Questions need to be posed about the way writings from the margins are read, writings that are not written directly for an academic gaze. Who the writers are writing for and what their political purposes are, are important questions to reflect upon. How do we inhabit the worlds of the writers rather than patronisingly allow them into ours? This is what Said meant when he drew attention to the "worldliness of the text". Many of the texts here, such as the socially vigilant writings of Phyllis Naidoo and Meer for example, would be incongruous if they were, in Said's words, "displaced from a worldly context into the academy and therefore de-natured, de-politicised" (Said 2000).

De-politicising these texts may occur at many levels. The problem of appropriating the voices of others into the academy is an enduring one. Dirlik rightly insists that we look more circumspectly at our critical practice, at the need to historicise the conditions of our emergence as "authoritative voices" (Dirlik 1996:307). It is problematic if the role of researchers and critics is limited to the rarified atmosphere of academic conference papers and the pages of dissertations and journal articles, where researchers and critics generally speak to one another rather than to the rest of the world. This is not to minimise the im-

portance of the critical enterprise. In South Africa literary critics have long been seen as cultural workers who have kept political critique alive even when there had been a certain sedateness about general academic study. I myself have acquired a deeper and more critical awareness of our history and of the complexities of living in South Africa through my study of literature and literary theory. But the on-going challenge is to look critically at the way the academy might wield a hegemony that hinders rather than enhances a politics of reading. Certainly feminist criticism in South Africa has grasped this nettle, as it has constantly pondered over, as Barbara Bowen has observed, the importance of developing feminist knowledge in the absence of a mass feminist movement, of asking "what it might be like to write theory and criticism that is answerable to an ongoing liberation politics" (in Daymond 1996b:x).

This challenge is particularly true of excavatory work, where we assume the right to approve or disapprove of the excavated, marginal material. The writing is only taken into the academy if we can use it to prove (or disprove) our theories, an exercise which may have a debilitating effect on the writing. What does it mean to discard the "habit of power" so that we do not theoretically misappropriate the writings of women who live and act in the world, who have to survive, or who may write for all sorts of reasons other than academic ones?

In analysing the issues around identity and difference, the connecting discursive strand in this study, I realise the need to always keep in mind the concrete and material problems that women face in the everyday world. For some of the writers in this study this was what their writing was about in the first place. It is when writers are moved out of their natural habitat that critics such as Dirlik are sceptical of the literary endeavour, especially when there is an emphasis on problems of subjectivity:

Postcolonial critics have had little to say about contemporary figurations. They have rendered into problems of subjectivity and epistemology concrete and material problems of the everyday day. While capital in its motions continues to structure the world, refusing it foundational status renders impossible the cognitive mapping that must be the point of departure for any practice of resistance. (In Loomba 1998a:14)

While I generally agree with Dirlik's insightful criticisms, in this case I believe that asking questions of identity and difference, as I have done in this study, is directly linked to the concrete and material reality of those who live in oppressive conditions. The purpose of reflecting on questions of subjectivity, of constructions and representations of identity, are ultimately material, an intervention in the world. While apartheid and imperialism tried hard to separate the private and public domains of the lives of the oppressed we do well to remember that there was inevitably an inter-relatedness between the discursive and material effects of identity. The Black Consciousness movement understood this well and developed an alternative ideological understanding of subjectivity in the struggle to change the apartheid order.

In feminist critique the relational nature of the personal and the political has long been asserted, and the need for material change to go hand in hand with ideological change has always been seen as indisputable. Feminist theorising is an inextricable part of praxis and has enabled us to rethink the way in which the ideological is distinctly material; it is emphasised that a transformative politics and ethics is also a discursive process, a process of producing meaning, and of exploring, exposing and subverting representations of gender and identity that do not promote the development of women.

We should therefore be aware that depoliticising and domesticating texts may take the form of reading them in the academy on the basis of fixed theoretical formulations, and of legitimating or delegitimizing them in the light of our own current theoretical persuasions. Given the institutionalisation of discourses on the subject and subjectivity it is understandable when they exert a dominance over our academic readings. Academic study has to be flexible enough to take into consideration other emphases, other motivations, and to constantly review discursive positions in relation to their effects in the world.

Paula Moya (1997) grapples with the problem of the academic study of texts, especially against the hegemony of postmodernist thinking in the United States academy, as she tries to understand the politics of identity for women of colour in the United States. On the one hand one is faced with the tendency to erase difference based on race, ethnicity, class, as these are seen as unstable categories; on the other one is faced with indisputable material effects of race, ethnicity and class. Moya cautions against erasing differences, in order to account for the material differences that people do experience and the diverse feelings of identity and difference that do occur. She argues that difference is relational, it is grounded in historically produced social facts which constitute social locations.

Drawing from Satya Mohanty and analysing the writings of Cherrie Moraga in relation to Chicana identity, Moya develops a realist theory of identity, which theorises the connections between social location, experience, cultural identity and knowledge. She looks at the workings of ideology and oppression, of the cultural and historical conditions from which identity emerges, and the effect they have on racialised, gendered bodies. Critics need to find a balance between academic and critical discussion on the one hand and an appreciation of the context of "occult instability" where women live. Instead of being judgemental of writers' possible contradictions, for example, we should try to understand the contradictions in which writers are themselves located. It is necessary to understand motivations, political necessities, even expediencies, as writers construct worlds, their own as well as those of others.

The need to consider issues of subjectivity in a flexible way, working from theory to practice and vice versa, attentive to the dynamic nature of the field, is necessary now more than ever. This is particularly so as new legitimising forces, in Castells' formulation, are emerging in the present network society, and resistance to this may be both reactionary

and progressive. This is true of South Africa as well as of the rest of the world. Castells suggests that in the network society it is comforting to preserve the self-serving myths of identity. He speaks of various insurrections, such as among the Catalonians in Spain, and of the rise of fundamentalism, both Muslim and Christian, as examples of the need to assert tribal identity. And Hall's sympathetic assessment of the rise of "new ethnicities" in Britain, which is also a global phenomenon, is an interesting new departure in discursive analysis, as pointed out earlier. Echoing Castells, who observes that the "age of globalisation is also the age of nationalist insurgence" (Castells 1997:27), Michael Shapiro argues that the retreat towards secure identities is understandable in the context of globalisation. Because of spatio-temporal disruptions there are anxieties about "ontological security", with people needing "collective symbolic guarantees" (Shapiro 1999:112).

Against this emerging global scenario the picture in South Africa is a complex and contradictory one. It is entrapped in the contemporary global context. At the same time, some groups and individuals in South Africa have always felt insecurities about separate identities, caused mainly by apartheid laws. There is a desire now to move beyond this history and to subscribe to an integrative, coherent and shared culture, as is evidenced in some of the discourses around nation-building. In spite of the "scholarly assault" on the unitary and monolithic notion of nation, as Castells argues, there is still a resilience to the concept, and South Africa is firmly embarked on developing a national identity. Anthony D Smith argues that it is evident that asserting national identity is sometimes closely connected with keeping alive memories through a "community of history" and a "chain of generations of those who share an historic and quasi-familial bond" (in Castells 1997:31). Some of the writings by Indian women in South Africa are expressly about recalling a past, of keeping alive past memories in order to show how the present nation struggled to come into being. This is true of Phyllis Naidoo's writings, for example, as pointed out already, where she is intent on keeping alive the memory of those who struggled for freedom for the express purpose of developing a national consciousness for the present and future, and of making sure that the "South African miracle" is sustained: "We owe it to...dead and dying comrades everywhere. We must succeed now" (Naidoo, Phyllis 1992:88).

At the same time, there is fear among some in South Africa about alterity being swallowed up altogether, and there is an expectation and a hope that the emerging democratic state will provide new spaces for the expression of separate ethnic identities, with the term culture being used euphemistically and synonymously for race (see Nuttall and Michael 2000c:113). The changing socio-political climate clearly gives rise to a new politics of identity, but the legacy of apartheid is not just residual. In spite of the general drive towards homogenising the South Africa 'nation' in a euphoric historical moment, with a tendency to imagine that the old power differences no longer exist, what is evident is the emergence of new tribalisms in South Africa, and we see this not just in the more obvious

rise of the separate ethnic nationalism of the right-wing Afrikaner group that wishes to create an independent homeland of Orania, but also in ostensibly progressive anti-apartheid contexts.

Rhoda Kadalie draws attention to this "excess" of identity, to use Wicomb's words cited in an earlier chapter to describe the assertion of Coloured identity, and to the contradictory impulses around identity that are now present in South Africa (We saw some of these competing views in the writings of Indian women in South Africa):

The depoliticisation of race in the new South Africa has led to the re-emergence of ethnic identities, ironically, in the same way as used by the architects of apartheid in the construction of homelands on the basis of ethnicity. In current discourse, the usage of Xhosa culture, Zulu culture, Tswana culture, coloured, Indian, etc., even by former president Mandela, has been unquestioningly to imply once again that we differ from each other by virtue of objective cultural differences. It implies that members of the group share common interests and would unite to defend their interests. (In Nuttall and Michael 2000c:114)

The difficulty must surely be that one is trying to do a balancing act, of ensuring that the call for 'nation-building' is not a call for a "repressive homogeneity" (Boyce 1999:231) but one that ensures the multi-ethnic character of South Africa. While there is a moving away from race there is the assertion of ethnicity (with rainbowism sometimes merely a euphemism for racialisation or ethnicisation). There is a hope that identities may be negotiated without the old power hierarchies; yet the reality is that much of the old hegemonic distinctions linger.

Nuttall and Michael point out that "cultural theorising in South Africa, with its emphasis on separation and segregation, has been based until recently on the following tendencies: the over-determination of the political, the inflation of resistance, and the fixation on race, or more particularly on racial supremacy and racial victimhood as a determinant of identity" (Nuttall and Michael 2000b:1-2). In many ways this study has been influenced by and located in this very "over-determination", and although we need to consider how Indian women's writings emerged in a particular historical and cultural moment, the time has come for new and different emphases. Jolly and Attridge argue that one needs to be critical of the tendency to assume that "to be black was to be constantly in search of one's ethnic 'roots', to be on a sort of eternal pilgrimage in the wilderness for one's (lost) self" (Jolly and Attridge 1996:9). The challenge, as Jolly and Attridge point out, is to move beyond the "stigmatization of race" and acknowledge difference without fetishising it, to find new spaces to "imagine difference differently" (Jolly and Attridge 1996:10, 11). They remind us that the "history of South African culture is illuminating for its numerous instances of those who have rejected ethnic identification as a means of negotiating their future because of the bigoted formulation it takes within a racist imagination" (Jolly and Attridge 1996:9). As pointed out several times already, this is true of many of the women writers considered in this study, and new and divergent studies that incorporate their work, would be illumi-

nating.

Parallel to the assertion of separatist identities, then, is the need to erase them and assert a South African identity. There is also the tendency to contain ethnicity within a South African identity, or maintain a tension between the two, as is evident with Fatima Meer, who takes on the role of negotiator and reconciler amid different and differing viewpoints, so that ethnic separatism is avoided. Similarly, Percy Mobogo More argues for a balance between universalism and particularism, between the "politics of sameness" and the "politics of difference" (in Boyce 1999:234); and Mark Simpson argues that

loyalty to one's ethnic group is not necessarily incompatible with loyalty to the State one finds oneself in, nor does it preclude the possibility of identification with one's fellow citizens even if they are not of the same ethnic origin. What is important for the stability of the state is that the latter set of allegiances override the former. (239)

Interestingly, Nuttall and Michael make the important point that although there seems to be a re-emergence of multiple identities in the South African scene now, complex identities were always present; it is merely that the present political climate has given room for greater expression of this: "South Africa is...a place striking for its imbrication of multiple identities - identities that mythologies of apartheid, and of resistance to it, tended to silence" (Nuttall and Michael 2000b:1). And Said has reminded us that globally, in spite of the "persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies", there are "overlapping territories, intertwined histories" (Said 1994:336).

Against these new competing developments the time has come for new challenges in gynocritical and discursive analyses of identity and difference, for a new critical consciousness, theorising and action, and for a new praxis that works on linkages and interdependencies in diverse ways. Reading Indian women's writings in a complex and contradictory contemporary context would open up new insights into the politics of identity at the present time, especially the desire to rewrite the social and political imaginary in an integrative way and emphasise a shared ethnic, social and cultural history. It is for these reasons that we should persist with our gynocritical endeavours, with all their "representational inconsistencies and dilemmas" (Koshy 1996:342): they bring new questions and insights and meanings to our discursive practices, constantly redefining and reshaping them.

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