Challenging the Identity of South African *Indian* Women through Playwriting (and theatre): A Look at Three South African *Indian* Women Playwrights writing within the KwaZulu-Natal region post 1994.

Krijay Govender

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Lutchmee Naidoo.

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Abstract

This dissertation concerns itself with challenging the identity of South African *Indian* women through playwriting (and theatre). It focuses on three South African *Indian* women playwrights writing in KwaZulu-Natal post 1994.

The identity of South African *Indian*[1] women has been historically constructed as a cultural one. This construction has largely been perpetuated by the South African *Indian* male through cultural practices like theatre. In challenging such constructions it is important to consider discussions on identity and culture itself. As such Gayatri Spivak's (1990) arguments on identity are appropriated in this dissertation. Alice Walker (1984) articulates the black woman's position as that of a 'Womanist'- marginalised by race, class and sex. It could be argued that the South African *Indian* woman is not only marginalised by race, class and sex, but also by a constructed sense of not belonging to South Africa and the African continent at large. This sense of not belonging to the African continent extends to the South African *Indian* community at large, who as a result of apartheid have emerged as a marginalised minority group. This is perhaps one of the main reasons that the South African *Indian* community has looked to India as their historical and cultural 'homeland'. The South African *Indian* identity is therefore constructed within this fixed notion of 'Indian culture'. The role and identity of the South African *Indian* woman within this 'culture' (and cultural practice) has been constructed as a submissive and subordinate one. The notion of culture itself needs to be investigated, since culture is not a neutral entity (Tax, 1973). Moreover, this so-called 'Indian culture' is situated within patriarchy and thus carries further gendered ideological constructions. It therefore becomes necessary to challenge this constructed notion of South African *Indian* women's identity by allowing South African *Indian* women to begin to articulate their own subjectivities.

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(1) The word Indian is placed within inverted commas because being Indian is not a fixed identity, nor is its community a homogeneous whole (Naidoo, 1993: 1). This will be discussed further in Chapter One of the dissertation.

This research aims to examine playwriting and the theatre as one instance where the marginalised South African *Indian* women can challenge their historically and culturally constructed identity by articulating their own subjectivity. Playwriting (and theatre) lends themselves as weapons of liberation for the oppressed (Boal, 1979: 1). We have experienced this theatre in South Africa during the apartheid era, where black theatre practitioners (like Maishe Maponya and Mbongeni Ngema) used the form of protest theatre as a performance form to challenge the status quo; both theatrically and politically. Theatre will be examined as one of the instances in which resistance to dominant ideologies can (and has) occurred.

The period 1990-1994 has marked a turning point in the long history of legislation designed to systematically curb the personal and political freedom of all South Africans not designated "white" (Larlham, 1992: 43). The year 1994 has therefore become symbolically known as the watershed year that marks the end of the apartheid era and the beginning of the 'new' South Africa where previously marginalised people have the political freedom to articulate their own subjectivity(s). This period has thus been chosen to examine the way in which the South African *Indian* woman begins to theatrically articulate her own subjectivity, given the (potential) political freedom to do so.

Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure*; Kriben Pillay's *Looking for Muruga*, and Aldrian Naidu's *Mooidevi* will be examined in the way in which they (as South African *Indian* male playwrights) have constructed the identity of South African *Indian* women in their plays. This dissertation will also examine the works of three South African *Indian* women playwrights in the light of how they challenge their historically constructed identity as South African *Indian* women. Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia* and Devi Sarijeive's *Acts of God* will be the prime focus. My own work, *Women in Brown* will be examined as an appendix to this dissertation.

This research focuses on the Kwa-Zulu Natal region, since this region contains the largest Diaspora Indian community outside of the Indian sub continent. It also reflects the identity - geographical and cultural - of the author of this dissertation.

DECLARATION:

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Natal. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

[redacted]

Ms Krijay Govender

15 December 1999

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INTRODUCTION

Alice Walker (1984) articulates the black woman's position as that of a 'Womanist' - marginalised by race, class and sex. It will be argued that the South African *Indian*[1] woman echoes this position, but also further encounters marginalisation perpetuated by a constructed sense of not belonging to South Africa (and the African continent at large). This is primarily a result of the apartheid legacy where the South African *Indian* woman (and man), as a part of a Diaspora community, has been defined by an *Indian* ancestry (India). It is also one of the main reasons why the identity of the South African *Indian* woman becomes a culturally and politically constructed one. The notions of 'identity' and 'culture' are complex ones. Gayatri Spivak argues that identity itself is a constructed idea (1990: 39). Meredith Tax argues that notions of culture and cultural practice do not operate as a-historic neutral entities (1973: 1) - instead they function within a network of power structures. The so-called 'Indian culture' is further situated within the structure of patriarchy and thus carries gendered ideological constructions. It therefore becomes necessary to challenge this notion of the South African *Indian* woman's identity, which has been historically constructed by her male counterpart, through an encouragement of an articulation of her own subjectivities.

Playwriting (and theatre at large) presents itself as a tool through which such positions can be articulated. Pratibha Parmar, a British *Indian* women writer, claims that 'Words are a weapon of liberation... Writing has always been a powerful means of protest and change for subjugated people all over the world' (1987: 149). Furthermore, in her paper *Theatre after the Dictatorships in Spain and Latin America and after Apartheid in South Africa,* Cathy Maree claims that theatre is the one (genre) most conditioned by its environment (1997: 1)[2].

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(1) The word Indian is placed within inverted commas because being Indian is not a fixed identity, nor is its community a homogeneous whole (Naidoo, 1993: 1). This will be discussed further in Chapter One of the dissertation.

(2) An extract from a conference paper that Maree delivered at Pretoria University in 1997.

Both these women echo the position of theatre practitioner Augusto Boal. In his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), Boal argues that theatre is a political weapon that can equip a people to achieve liberation. Boal's philosophy on theatre becomes useful since it offers marginal groups (like South African *Indian* women) an opportunity to represent their own positions, as opposed to these positions being appropriated and silenced by their male counterparts.

Challenging the identity of South African *Indian* women through playwriting becomes important in the period after 1994. The year 1994 has become synonymously known as the watershed year that marks the end of the apartheid era and the beginning of the 'new' South Africa where previously marginalised people have the political freedom to articulate their own subjectivities. This period has thus been chosen to examine the way in which the South African *Indian* woman begins to articulate her own subjectivity, given the (potential) political freedom to do so.

Chapter One establishes the theoretical framework for this study. Here the notions of identity, culture and theatre as instances of cultural practice will be investigated. The so-called South African *Indian* identity appears problematic since it is based on an essentialist notion of "Indian-ness". It is at this point that the argument of Gayatri Spivak becomes important. Spivak, an *Indian* woman academic living in the United States engages with such notions as identity. She argues that the entire idea of an "Indian-ness" does not exist (1990: 39) and that to define a group of people in terms of their cultural practice is to resort to "simple notions of identity" (1990: 38). Moreover, her arguments around representation and self-representation become crucial in an investigation of theatre as an instance of representation for the South African *Indian* woman.

It is Augusto Boal who articulates the argument that theatre is in fact a moment of representation that is political in nature. Boal claims that all activity of (hu)man[3] is political (1979: 3), thus theatre, which is a cultural activity of (hu)man becomes

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(3) Arguably Boal uses the term *man* generically as a reference to *human*. In a dissertation that concerns itself with gender, however I find it appropriate to distinguish these terms. I have therefore used (hu)man.

highly political. Furthermore, Boal claims that in being a political form, theatre offers itself as a weapon that can assist in the liberation process of any oppressed people (1979: 1). Such theory becomes useful in the investigation of theatre, as an instance of cultural activity within the South African *Indian* community. Boal's approach offers a way of understanding and analysing theatre of the past, which was largely dominated and appropriated by the male voice. It further suggests a way in which historically marginalised and colonised voices can be reclaimed and articulated. It is through this articulation that liberation can be reached.

Chapter Two offers an abridged history of South African *Indian* theatre. In her paper, '*The Personal is Political*'- *Gender in the Context of Apartheid South Africa: A Look at Two Women Playwrights*, Lliane Loots claims that few plays have been written and published by South African women (1996: 63-64). It can be further argued that even a smaller percentage of these plays are written by South African *Indian* women. It is because of such a lack of self-representation and articulation that it becomes crucial to investigate any representation of these women. In this chapter, Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure*; Kriben Pillay's *Looking for Muruga*, and Aldrian Naidu's *Mooidevi* will be examined in the way in which they (as South African *Indian* male playwrights) have constructed the identity of South African *Indian* women in their plays.

In Chapter Three the works of three South African *Indian* women playwrights will be examined in the light of how they challenge their historically constructed identity as South African *Indian* women. Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia* and Devi Sarinjeive's *Acts of God* will be the prime focus. I have chosen to include my own work, *Women in Brown* as the third play to be examined in this research. This decision was made since there is a lack of plays being written or produced by South African *Indian* women - this in itself will be problematised. I am aware that engaging with my own creative process may affect my objectivity as the researcher, I have therefore included the discussion of this work as Appendix D.

In the concluding chapter the main arguments concerning notions of identity and the role of theatre (and playwriting) as a tool for liberation for groups like the South African *Indian* women will be revisited. This chapter will also focus on the necessity for South African *Indian* women to represent themselves and by doing so claiming the right to "name" their own experiences.

CHAPTER ONE: Interrogating South African *Indian* Identity (through Playwriting)

Introductory Remarks

In order to challenge the identity of any group or person, by any means (for example, playwriting) one needs to establish what constitutes identity itself. This chapter therefore aims to do three things:

1. To investigate the notion of identity and more specifically how it operates within the context of the South African *Indian* position.

2. To examine how playwriting (and theatre) lends itself as an effective tool through which these constructed identities can be challenged. This investigation will focus specifically on the constructed identity of the South African *Indian* woman.

3. Finally, this chapter will provide an overall theoretical framework within which further discussions and arguments can be located.

1. Identity and the South African *Indian*

The notion of identity is a complex one. According to Gayatri Spivak, identity is a constructed notion. By this it is meant that identity itself is not fixed – "I am deeply suspicious of any determinist or positivist definition of identity" (Spivak, 1990: 38). The formulation of any identity does not occur in isolation but rather it operates as a reaction to other constructed identities (Spivak, 1990: 38). In order for a group to construct an identity, it needs to react to a constructed 'other'[1]. This 'other' is always constructed as a homogenous one (Spivak, 1990: 39). The term 'other' is a reference to a classification of difference. For example, a group of the same colour only identifies its "sameness" in reaction to people of a different colour.

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(1) It was Simone de Beauvoir who first used this self-other analogue in a feminist context, in her book *The Second Sex* (1972).

Thus people of a different colour are then viewed as a homogenous group - and not as individual members. Homogenisation becomes a crucial part of the process of 'othering' since it emphasises the group identity itself.

With regard to the South African *Indian* position, we need to establish what exactly these constructed notions of identity are at a given time in history. From Spivak's discourse on the nature of identity (1990: 38), it can be argued that identities are not fixed but rather they are dynamic in that they constantly shift depending on the changes in political, social and economic environment. Throughout the history of South Africa, group identities have shifted emphases, depending on the change in stimuli to which they react. The so-called South African *Indian* identity has also experienced a shift in its emphasis. The apartheid era (before 1994) saw a different emphasis in identity as opposed to the post-apartheid era (after 1994). The identity of a group during apartheid was determined by "race." During this period people were formally classified according to their colour. This idea of colour was not isolated from the issue of class. To be white during apartheid was to be both economically and politically advantaged. To be black during apartheid was to be disadvantaged. The term "black" was a reference to any person that was economically and politically marginalised. It thus becomes important to locate the term "black' within the South African historical context. "Blackness" is more complex than just an inclusive idea of being 'non-white'. Inderpal Grewal articulates this point more clearly:

> An idea as yet unmatured and inadequately defined, but proceeding its path in both "real" and in the collective awareness of many of its subjects, both as an idea and a process it is, inevitably, contradictory.
> Contradictory in its conceptualization because it's linguistic expression is defined in terms of colour, yet it is an idea transcendent of colour.
> Contradictory in its material movement because the unity of action, conscious or otherwise, of Asian, Latin American and Arabs, Caribbeans and Africans, gives political expression of common "colour" (Grewal et al. 1988: 1).

Thus being referred to as "black" in this sense was appropriately used as a "unity of action" against the status quo under the apartheid government. The "idea of blackness," to appropriate Grewal's term, was a unifying banner under which a reaction and resistance to the apartheid system was initiated. Here identity is created as a 'reactive front' (Spivak, 1990: 39). While identity can be used as a tool to oppose hegemonic powers as presented in the above argument, it is more frequently used as a reinforcement of such powers[2]. The identity of a particular person is made up of numerous factors – for example age, race, and sexual orientation. However for the purpose of this dissertation race, culture and gender present themselves as most pertinent in view of the construction of identity within the South African *Indian* context.

1.1. Race

In a discussion on identity and the definition of self, the host of the Lotus FM 'Viewpoint' talk show, invited listeners (a majority of whom are South African *Indian*) to call in and discuss their views[3]. It was interesting to note that while a majority defined themselves as "South African" and *Indian*, there was a debate of whether the "South African Indian" could be referred to as "black". Only a few callers identified this term as an umbrella term for "non whites". A majority of the callers viewed the term "black" as descriptive of a monolithic race of people native to the African continent. This can be attributed to a change in the perception of the term 'black". Since 1994 the idea of "blackness" takes on a new meaning. The stimulus (apartheid) no longer exists as a common enemy and thus the "unity of action" disintegrates. There is now a greater emphasis in defining people according to their so-called "cultures".

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(2) Identity, as a tool to reinforce hegemonic powers, is often utilised by Right wing political activism. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), for example, uses the idea of "Zulu-ness" and a "Zulu" culture and tradition as a tool for political mobilisation and party dominance in the Kwa-Zulu Natal region.

(3) Hosted by Devi-Sankree Govender on the 23/04/1998, from 2pm to 3pm. *Viewpoint* is a talk show broadcast from Mondays to Fridays on Lotus FM that addresses topical and controversial issues.

With the establishment of a "new" South Africa, the notion of identity is shifted to react to a new kind of argument (Spivak, 1990:39) - namely the multicultural[4] nation state. It is interesting to trace the relationship of the terms, "race" and "culture" in South Africa's social and political history. The term "race" was used during apartheid as an identifying agent of people of the same colour. It can be argued that after 1994 the term "race" becomes outdated since it carried with it connotations and reminders of apartheid injustices.

The word "culture" becomes the popular term in both social and political rhetoric. Imagined national symbols such as the "rainbow nation" emphasise the new multicultural approach of distinguishing different cultures from each other. Since the term "black" refers to a constructed racial category, it is distinguished from discussions of "cultural" identities. Instead ethnic groups are singled out - we speak now of a "Zulu culture" or a "Xhosa culture" rather than of a black culture. Thus the term "Zulu" now operates as a cultural entity that is defined in reaction to other so-called cultures – such as an *Indian* culture.

What is interesting is that whereas the terms "black" and "white" are seen to imply race, they are not taken to imply culture. In fact within the grouping of people classified as "black" or "white" there is a distinction between cultural sub-categories, such as "Zulu culture" or "Afrikaans culture". The term *Indian* however is taken to imply not only race or colour but also a homogenous cultural status. This is perhaps the main reason that so-called "Indian" identity within the context of South Africa is more culturally determined than those designated "black" or "white".

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(4) The term *Multiculturalism* was developed in the USA and has been adopted in the South African context after 1994. It refers to the idea of cultures existing as separate entities within a common national environment. It operates on the notion of an acknowledgement of difference. It is important to distinguish the term *Multiculturalism* from the term *Interculturalism*. *Interculturalism* refers to a system where cultures borrow from, steal from and exchange with each other (Schechner, 1982: 19). As a result of political rhetoric and presentations in the media, it is often unclear as to which of these two concepts is supposedly reflective of South African society after 1994.

1.2. Culture

Speaking specifically about the so–called South African *Indian* community Muthal Naidoo says, "because it is such a tiny community, it is seen from without to be a homogenous group. Meanwhile, it is an extremely diverse group with different religions, languages, customs, class and political affiliations leading to all kinds of internal tensions" (1993: 1). While Naidoo refers to the South African *Indian* people as a community, it is important to realise that this idea of community is an 'imagined one'. Benedict Anderson, who is writing specifically about national identities, can be appropriated in understanding this phenomena. Anderson claims that such a sense of *community* is an *imagined* one:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest (group) will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of a communion (1983: 6).

Anderson goes on to say that "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuiness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (1983: 6). Arguably the style in which the South African *Indian* is imagined is a cultural one or rather an *imagined* cultural one. *Imagined* because this culture defines itself through cultural practices, which are themselves extremely diverse and varied. Foods, language, dress and religious celebrations often determine cultural practice.

Spivak identifies these examples of food, language and dress as "simple notions of identity" (1990: 38), and she claims that in order to move away from these notions, one needs to acknowledge that identity itself is socially constructed and is a product of its history. In her discussion on identity, Spivak explains by the use of an example:

> 'Indian-ness' is not a thing that exists. Reading Sanskrit scriptures, for example - I can't call that Indian. The name India was given by Alexander the great by mistake. The name Hindustan was given by the Islamic conquerors. So it isn't a place that we Indians can think of as anything, unless we are trying to present a reactive front, against another kind of argument (Spivak, 1990: 39).

The idea of defining oneself as a "South African Indian" seems contradictory. Geographically, India and South Africa are separate locations on the map. Many argue that the "South African" part is the geographical definition or location, whilst the *Indian* is a cultural and ancestral definition. The latter of the two could be found highly problematic. This is because *Indian* culture, as argued above, is not a fixed monolithic notion - in fact culture itself is not a fixed entity. Meredith Tax in her article *Culture is not Neutral, whom does it serve?* (1973: 1) speaks of culture as directly related to the economic and socio-political state. She adopts a Marxist perspective claiming that culture is dictated by the bourgeois (owners of the means of productions) and that dominant cultural practice is a means of re-affirming the status quo. (Tax, 1973). Therefore, defining the South African *Indian* in terms of a *culture* is not a neutral act, since discussions on *culture* cannot be isolated from discussions on the economic and socio-political state.

If it is at all possible to speak of an "Indian culture"[5] , which Spivak argues against by claiming that "Indianess is not a thing that exists"(1990: 39), then this culture would be shaped and defined by the religions, traditions and history[6] of geographic India. If such a culture was "imported" by Indian Diaspora *communities* (for example, South African *Indians*) into the African continent then surely it would have to adapt to its new environment in order to survive – such an adaptation is inevitable since such Diaspora communities are themselves a part of the African continent. It is therefore arguable whether this adapted culture can now be considered "Indian" at all.

Culture as a notion that is neither neutral or fixed (Tax, 1973: 1) does not find definition in essentialist terms, but rather it is defined by the environment in which it is shaped. The political, economic and social forces operating within a specific environment are responsible for shaping and defining a culture. Thus any attempt to relocate this culture results in a re-definition of the culture itself. This is because a "new" environment provides different political, economic and social conditions to that of the "source" environment, thus resulting in a creation of a "culture" that is

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(5) This is within the context of the Indian subcontinent.

(6) This includes the political, social and economic history.

different from that within the "source" environment. Attention is drawn to these issues because they are essential in any investigation of a minority group or group activity (for example, theatre). Minority groups define themselves as a cultural 'reactive front' against other groups (Spivak, 1990: 39), as an attempt to formulate a sense of identity; however, the very cultural practices that help define them need to be questioned in the light of "whom does it serve" (Tax, 1973). Thus if one assumes that we study theatre as a 'cultural product' (Boal, 1979), one needs to question whom it is serving (and whom it does not).

1.3. Gender

What was most interesting about the previously mentioned Lotus FM Radio talk show (see footnote 3 in this chapter), was that none of the callers on the programme identified themselves in terms of their gender. Such a lack of acknowledgement of one's gender could be attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, it could be argued that gender discrimination within the South African *Indian community* is located within some religious and cultural practices. Arguably these practices give meaning to the notion of an "Indian culture"- which in turn defines this culture in reaction to the West and to Africa and thus produces a sense of 'own' communal identity. Attempts made by women (or men) to address gender issues within traditional practices would be frowned upon and rejected as the infiltration of Western ideas into a "Indian culture." Spivak warns that one should also be careful of homogenisation of the West: "We should also look at the West as differentiated. I'm really not that moved by the argument for homogenisation on both sides." (Spivak, 1990: 39). Furthermore, to distinguish the West as a completely separate entity in any discussion of marginalised culture is inaccurate. Whether directly through colonialism, or indirectly through a resistance to colonisation, *Indian culture* and other marginal cultures have been shaped and influenced by the so-called West. It is precisely this homogenous and a-historic notion of culture, together with mostly unchallenged capitalist and religious perspectives, that has ensured the subservient roles of *Indian* women in the South African context. Cultural and religious practices keep women within the private domain of the home, whilst capitalism has devalued the home by seeing it as a "non-productive" (Tong, 1989: 51).

The second reason for such a lack of acknowledgement of one's gender can be attributed to the fact that gender-related issues have always been secondary to issues of race and class in South Africa's history. Whilst the South African liberation struggle was said to be a struggle for freedom for all South Africans, the issues of race and class were seen as more urgent than that of gender. Frene Ginwala publicly announced that liberation of the nation was the primary goal and that once it was achieved other issues would be more appropriately addressed (Hassim, 1991). Chandra Mohanty's response to this hierarchy of issues would be that being 'women' is constituted as much by race, class, nationality and sexuality as by gender.

Deborah King adds that these aspects are not additive but interactive and that they reinforce each other's meaning (Fouche, 1994: 82). Thus, unquestioned cultural and religious practices and the marginalisation of gender as a category for liberation are in part responsible for South African *Indian* women's naturalisation of their roles. Furthermore these roles are located within hegemonic practices of patriarchy.

The South African *Indian* woman's position of marginality differs from that of the South African black woman's experience[7]. The South African *Indian* woman is further marginalised by race, class, sex and a sense of 'not' belonging to the African continent. It could be argued that this sense of 'not belonging' is a part of a constructed nostalgia[8]. This is by the very fact that she is referred to as *Indian*, (which is a reminder of India) - as opposed to "white" or "black" which is a reference to colour. It is interesting to note that during apartheid people of European ancestry were referred to as "European". After apartheid the term becomes outdated and politically offensive because it was closely associated with the exploitation of the colonial era. We now use the term "white". However we still use the term *Indian* for people of Indian decent – as a positive reminder of the homeland, India.

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(7) This is not an attempt to homogenise the black woman's experience. The term *black woman* is as much a construction as the term *Indian woman*. However it is only for the purpose of argument that the term is used in the above context.

(8) Arguably this nostalgia is based on "simple notions of identity" (Spivak, 1990: 39) such as traditional dress and food preparation, which are seen from within the community as women's work. Moreover, identity within the community is fragmented (Naidoo, 1993:1) along the lines of so-called vernacular languages and locations from which these languages originate. Thus a South African *Indian* whose ancestry is from the South of India is often referred to as a Tamilian by the South African *Indian* community – Tamil being the language of South India. By the same token a Gujarati is identified as person whose ancestral origins are from the extreme north of India, where Gujarati is spoken language This classification and identification along these lines occur within the South African *Indian* community, despite the fact that these languages themselves are not spoken by the very groups of people that it defines. Thus the South African *Indian* woman does not only experience a sense of India as her homeland, but specific areas where the language and traditions define her not only in reaction to other races within South Africa, but in reaction to other groups within the South African *Indian* community itself.

Perhaps this is because, as a marginal community consisting of a minority, the South African *Indians* have historically retained their so-called identity by looking to India as their cultural home. This idea of separate cultural development (and race) was encouraged by the government of the apartheid regime and in a way it is still encouraged in the new South Africa under the banner of multiculturalism. Furthermore, organisations such as GOPIO (Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin) reinforce the idea that there is something essentially "Indian" about people of Indian ancestry, that connects or defines them. In fact the outgoing president refers to any countries other than India, where *Indian* people have historically settled, as their "adopted country" (Indigo, 44). Once again there is a sense that India is the home of all of these people of the Indian Diaspora.

2. Playwriting (and Theatre) as a Weapon of Liberation

With a constant reminder through the practices of "simple notions of identity" (Spivak, 1990: 38) and formal institutional reminders of India as her homeland, the South African *Indian* woman's identity (as argued above) is constructed as a cultural one. In the expression of such an identity, the South African *Indian* woman is placed within the private domain, as opposed to the public domain, which is culturally viewed as a masculine one (Tong, 1989). Not only is her physical positioning within the private domain, but also issues that concern her or that she is concerned with are also viewed within this space. Thus the private domain becomes a personal one, which receives little attention in terms of valuing or articulation[9].

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(9) While many feminists have concerned themselves with the distinction of the private and the public Aida Hurtado, a black American woman writer, argues that such distinctions cannot be used with regard to women of colour since they have always been subjected to state intervention in their domestic lives (1989: 849). Hurtado's argument can be appropriated within the context of apartheid South African where South African black women were subjected to constant intervention from the state (police). While these distinctions of the private and the public are problematic in the above two examples, they are useful in a discussion of South African *Indian* women – who did not necessary experience state intervention to the degree that South African black women did.

The French feminist Helene Cixous claims that these binary oppositions (such as private/public and personal/political) are heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system (Moi, 1985: 211). As a challenge to the patriarchal system, the second wave of feminism, which coined the slogan "the personal is political," aimed to blur such binary opposition. The slogan suggests that an act in the private sphere becomes as political as an act in the public. Even a claim to political neutrality or non-activism, is in itself a political 'act'. Loots explains further:

> The radical feminist slogan addresses the patriarchal assumptions of not only defining the 'public' as male and the 'private' as female but also politically addresses the implied hierarchy of devaluing what is defined as 'private' and therefore female. The slogan thus claims political significance for women's 'personal' issues....The personal is therefore placed firmly on the political agenda with the articulated need to start politicizing lives (and hitherto private) experiences of women (1996: 65).

This idea of the personal is political is echoed by theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, who claims that "all activities of (hu)man are political" (Boal, 1979: 3). Boal claims that since theatre is an activity of (hu)mankind, it is therefore political:

> Those who try to separate theater from politics try to lead us into error - this is a political attitude.....theater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon. For this reason one must fight for it. For this reason the ruling classes strive to take permanent hold of the theater and utilize it as a tool for domination. In so doing they have changed the very concept of what "theater" is. But theater can also be a weapon of liberation... Change is imperative (1979: 3).

Augusto Boal sees theatre as a weapon of liberation for an oppressed society (Boal, 1979). During the 70's and 80's many South African playwrights and practitioners[10] adopted this concept as a resistance to dominant theatre practice and the apartheid

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(10) These included practitioners like Maishe Maponya and Mbongeni Ngema, writers of *The Hungry Earth* (1978) and *Asinamali* (1983) respectively.

system. During this period there was a clear distinction between white bourgeois theatre and black (proletarian) theatre (Larlham, 1992: 43). "Black" in this sense is not a reference to a particular ethnic or cultural group but as a "political expression of common 'colour' " as discussed early in this chapter by Grewal (1988: 1). Boal explains this distinction in the following way:

> ...the bourgeois theatre is the finished theatre. The bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, *their* world, and is able to present images of this complete finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theatre will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle (1979: 142).

Therefore if the theatrical arena is regarded as a political arena, the theatre then becomes a microcosm for the larger political and social context. Whilst the theatre is utilised by many groups as a weapon of liberation in Boal's sense, for example the Phyllis Klotz's group who devised the play *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock* (1986), it has not been fully explored by South African *Indian* women to articulate their own subject position. This is mainly because the naturalised roles of women under the banner of culture and cultural preservation confine women to the private sphere. South African *Indian* theatre has been defined as a public endeavour and with the exception of a few Indian women (like Muthal Naidoo and Saira Essa)[11] it has been primarily dominated by the Indian male voice.

The notion of using playwriting and theatre as a way in which the South African *Indian* woman can liberate herself is a notion that is historically foreign too. Firstly, because writing itself is envisaged both historically and culturally as an activity that is a part of the public space and therefore by implication it is primarily male activity.

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(11) Muthal Naidoo and Saira Essa were a part of the Shah Theatre group. This group produced theatre that challenged the apartheid system. Like their male counterparts, Essa and Naidoo focussed on racial injustices. This could be attributed to the policy and goals of the theatre group itself.

Cixous claims that the pen has historically become a phallocentric symbol that is representative of the patriarchal system (Moi, 1985: 212). Furthermore, Dworkin, in her argument on power, claims that women have historically been forbidden to name their own experiences, since men possessed the power of naming (1981: 17). Thus patriarchy presented another binary - men write / women are written about. Cixous argues that the former is presented as the active whilst the latter is the passive existence (Moi, 1985: 211). Boal in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, claims that the main objective of theatre is to transform roles of passivity into action:

> The main objective: to change people - "spectators," passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, actors, transformers of dramatic action (1979: 122).

Thus through the process of playwriting (and theatre) the South African *Indian* woman is actively able to articulate herself. Through this articulation she is able to re-possess her ability to name her own experience, an ability that Mary Daly claims was stolen from women (Dworkin, 1981: 17).

Concluding Remarks

Whilst identity is made up of many factors (for example sexual orientation, race, class, and age), within the context of South African *Indian* women, culture has become an overwhelming and overriding factor that has historically determined their identity. This is as a result of two main factors. Firstly, as discussed on page eight both within the context of apartheid South Africa and post-apartheid South Africa, the term *Indian* has become synonymous with a cultural identity that is beyond a mere semiotic association with the Indian sub-continent. Secondly, gender roles have been stereotyped through certain cultural and religious practices. These practices construct women within the private domain and are based on fixed notions of culture.

The idea that identity and culture are unfixed notions becomes revolutionary in both the psychological and practical experience of South African *Indian* women. It gives South African *Indian* women the opportunity to question, challenge and shift their identity away from a cultural one.

Playwriting and theatre can thus offer South African *Indian* women, a way in which to challenge her identity, which has been culturally constructed. Through such articulations South African *Indian* women challenge not only the notions of private space, but the role which she plays within such a space.

CHAPTER TWO: A Historical Analysis of Representation of South African *Indian* Women as Written by South African *Indian* Male Playwrights

Introductory Remarks

In his paper, *The South African Indian Contribution to the Developing Concept of an Indigenous South African Theatre*, Dennis Schauffer writes:

> Arguably the most neglected area of theatre research in South Africa is that which seeks to investigate the contribution of the South African of Indian classification, to the developing concept of an indigenous South African theatre (Schauffer, 1996: 84)

Moreover there has been no official record of theatre produced by members of the so-called South African *Indian* community. Kriben Pillay, in the *IndicTheatre Monograph Series*[1], claims that "this neglect, however, is not only a consequence of the forces of apartheid keeping cultural activity, to a large extent, within the narrow confines of race, but also the result of an academic tradition with a Western cultural bias" (1994: foreword). Further, in her paper, *The Personal is Political- Gender in the Context of Apartheid South Africa: A Look at Two Women Playwrights*, Lliane Loots claims that, "when one thinks of South African theatre history, very few women playwrights have emerged in the published form" (1996: 63).

As discussed in chapter one, few South African *Indian* women have ventured into playwriting (and theatre), due to their culturally constructed roles that have historically confined them to the private domain. Thus with such a neglect of investigation of theatre

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(1) The *Indic Theatre Monograph Series* is a series published by the Asoka Theatre Publications. This series "is an attempt to publish material on theatre performances and related areas that have their roots in the South African Indian experience" (Pillay, 1994: foreword). Kriben Pillay is the general editor of the publication.

produced by South African *Indian* population (Pillay, 1994: foreword) and a further lack of exposure (publication) of works by South African women playwrights (Loots, 1996: 63), these few South African *Indian* women playwrights find themselves marginalised by both race and gender. It is because of such marginalisation and a lack of self-representation and articulation that it becomes crucial to investigate any representation of South African *Indian* women. This chapter therefore aims to do two things:

1. To provide an abridged history of South African *Indian* theatre[2] - an area that has historically received little attention. This will focus on mainstream[3] plays, written and produced mainly by the South African *Indian* male[4].

2. To investigate the way in which South African *Indian* women are represented in mainstream plays/theatre written by their male counterparts – here Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, Kriben Pillay's *Looking for Muruga* and Aldrin Naidu's *Mooidevi's Muti*, will be examined as examples of mainstream plays.

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(2) The phrase "South African *Indian* theatre" is used in the context of this dissertation as a reference to theatre that has been written and produced by South African *Indians*. As argued in chapter one, it does not claim that there is a monolithic South African *Indian* theatre or that the content of the productions themselves are rooted in constructed notions of a South African *Indian* experience.

(3) The word "mainstream" in the context of this dissertation is more a reference to plays that enjoy the popularity and commercial success amongst their largely South African *Indian* audiences.

(4) According to Toril Moi the terms 'female' and 'male' are references to the biological aspects of sexual difference (1985: 207). 'Women' is a reference to the way in which the female is socially constructed - thus the use of the phrase "South African *Indian* women playwrights". The use of the phrase "South African *Indian* male playwrights" does not aim to define the men in terms of a biological identity, but as an acknowledgement that this identity itself has its basis in *phallocentrism* (Cixous and Clement 1975: 116). Whilst such radical feminist arguments are partially (and critically) appropriated, this dissertation does not propose or reflect a radical feminist approach to theatre.

1. An Abridged[5] History of Theatre Produced by the South African *Indians* Population.

1.a . *Indic* Theatre

In an attempt to address the lack of investigation of theatre produced by South African *Indians* and a history of theatre produced by members of the so-called South African *Indian,* Kriben Pillay and Dennis Shauffer proposed a new category within with such theatre could be discussed. In the early 1990s Pillay and Schauffer, both academics of the Drama Department at the University of Durban Westville, coined the term "Indic." "Indic" theatre has been defined as "theatre and other related areas that have their roots in the South African Indian experience" (Pillay, 1994: introduction). Further the term "Indic" is distinguished from the term "Indian", since the latter is said to imply a more traditional 'motherland' influence (Schauffer, 1994: 16). In a paper reflecting the history of theatre produced by the so-called South African *Indian* community, Schauffer proposes four distinct models within which South African *Indian* theatre can be analysed and discussed - *Classical Vernacular,* the *Popular Vernacular*, the *Eurocentric*, and the *Socio-politically Pertinent Consciousness.* Schauffer locates this "multifaceted nature of the contribution to theatre" (1994: 16) in "Indic Theatre."

Schauffer discusses his four models in conjunction with the different phases of development of theatre proposed by Richard Southern, author of *The Seven Ages of the Theatre* (1963). According to Schauffer, Southern's presentations of *Costumed Player* and *Religious Festivals* share similarities with his (Schauffer's) proposed category of the *Classical Vernacular.* Schaufer includes epic dance dramas and other dances such as Terukoothu and Bharatha Natyam. Also included in this category are festivals such as Kavady and Morum, which are also argued as being ritual.

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(5) This dissertation does not aim to provide a history of theatre produced by South African *Indian population,* however it does offer some reflection of the history of theatre produced by South African *Indians* living in the KwaZulu -Natal region. An abridged history is offered as a means of contextualising the arguments raised in this dissertation.

These festivals are argued as being ritualistic since they consist of communal participation where numerous participants reach altered states of consciousness. *Popular Vernacular* moved theatre away from its ritual roots into formal theatre halls. Schauffer equates this category to that of Southern's *The Roofed Playhouse*. Such a move generally results in a clearer distinction between spectator and performer. It also gives rise to a degree of hierarchy amongst the performers themselves.

Whilst Southern proposes the categories of *Illusion* and *Anti-illusion*, Shauffer argues that these categories, which he argues to be a part of his *Eurocentric* category, cannot be considered within the context of so-called South African *Indian* theatre. This is because theatre productions by South African *Indians* have historically been housed in poorly equipped environments. The lack of suitable acoustics, old or unsuitable equipment and untrained theatre staff hindered any attempts for either illusion or anti-illusion. Shauffer argues that "by no stretch of the imagination does this enter the categories of either the age of illusion or anti-illusion. It remains firmly in what Schauffer calls "low-tec theatre" (1994: 17). This "low-tec" theatre that Schauffer proposes, is itself a reflection and result of the marginalisation of South African *Indians*. During the apartheid era activities such as theatre did not receive funding from the government. Theatre productions occurred in school and community halls, due to the lack of proper theatre structures. These halls were not suitably equipped and as a result the performances were negatively affected. It is for these reasons that these productions can be considered to be "low-tec."

Schauffer claims that the school of Realism[6], which arose in the West, had a significant influence on the way in which many South African *Indian* playwrights wrote and produced their works. He argues that while plays like *Working Class Hero* (1976)

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(6) According to Helen Keyssar " Realism is a matter of style and content: it is a representation of recognisable setting, characters and events reaccentuated by the newness of the material to the stage: it is typified by juxtaposition along with continuity of incident from scene to scene, and reference to popular culture" (1984: 5). Further discussion on Realism and its relation with so-called South African *Indian* theatre practitioners is offered in chapter three, page 64.

by Kessie Govender and *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (1972) by Ronnie Govender were influenced by Realism, they failed to recognise the primacy of the so-called Realist Principles (1994: 18). Here Schauffer criticises both playwrights for some of their inappropriate setting and décor for the above-mentioned plays, which he argues, distorts the specificity of Realism (1994: 18).

While Schauffer does not provide discussions around his fourth category – *Socio-politically Pertinent Consciousness* arguably he is referring to theatre that challenged or reacted to the status quo of the apartheid era. A critique of "Indic Theatre", in which Schauffer locates his models, will be provided after an account of the abridged history of theatre produced by South African *Indians*. Whilst the term "Indic" will not be appropriated in this dissertation (for reasons to be discussed later in this chapter), Schauffer's proposed models will be used as an approach in tracing the development of theatre within this *community*.

1.b. The Early Period (1860-1900)

The *Classical Vernacular* and *Popular Vernacular* (Schauffer, 1994) models of theatre can be traced to the first generations of Indians in South African (1860). The *Classical Vernacular* performance is a reference to performance that came out of religious and traditional texts brought from the Indian subcontinent. There has however been very little theatrical primary or secondary source material for this period (1860-1900). Schauffer's earliest visual evidence of theatre produced by the South African *Indian* is in the form of a faded photograph of the production of *The Caliph of Baghdad* in 1908. From the 1900s till the 1950s there was a mixture of *Classical Vernacular* and *Popular Vernacular*, and also a development of theatre written in the English language. In fact towards the latter part of the 1940s, English, as a spoken language had become more popular amongst the South African *Indian* population. This 'development' was not isolated from the political environment of the country but was probably a direct result of the changes in the education system and the dominance of English as a teaching medium in the so-called non-white schools.

1.c. The Black Consciousness Movement[7] (1960-1979)

The period from 1960-1980 marked the height of the apartheid regime. The 'Separation of Amenities Act' (1953) and later acts like the Group Areas Act implemented in 1962 lay the foundation for the segregated people according to their designated race. This period also saw the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, which, in an appropriation of Spivak's argument, operated as "reactive front" (Spivak, 1990: 39) against the apartheid regime. The period of the Black Consciousness Movement provides an instance where Grewal's interpretation of "black" as a political expression of common 'colour'[8] becomes a lived reality. The idea that theatre could operate as a weapon for liberation (Boal, 1979: introduction) was appropriated by numerous theatre practitioners during this period. However liberation itself was narrowly defined in terms of the eradication of racial and class injustice. Theatre, being a political weapon (Boal, 1979: foreword), reflected and addressed such issues of race and class. As a result these issues became the primary concern in the struggle for liberation. It is through a lack of acknowledgement that race, class and gender are interactive issues that inform each other (Fouche, 1994: 82), gender, as a category of oppression/injustice, became secondary to those of race and class.

Perhaps the most significant development in the history of theatre for the South African *Indian* was the establishment of the Shah Theatre Academy by Ronnie Govender in 1964. Many actors and playwrights within the South African *Indian community* have had their beginnings at this institution. These include Ronnie Govender, Kessie Govender, Saths Cooper, Strini Moodley, Babs Pillay, Essop Khan, Mohammed Ali, Muthal Naidoo and Saira Essa. Naidoo and Essa were amongst the few women in a male-dominated company. Thomas Blom Hansen, a theatre researcher from Roskilde Unversity writes:

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(7) Steven Biko was one of the founding members of The Black Consciousness Movement in South African, which was influenced by writers such as Frantz Fanon and Memi. It was based on the philosophy that black South Africans needed to liberate themselves psychologically from their White oppressors before political liberation could be attained.

(8) See discussion in chapter one pages 6-7.

> Around this significant institution formed a group of people who put their stamp on what was then "black" theatre and later Indian theatre. (Unpublished article, 1998: 9)

Almost every play produced during this period concerned itself largely with the issue of class and race. This could be attributed to the influence of Paulo Freire and other leftist thinkers who were popular within the Black Consciousness Movement. While these thinkers have historically presented influential arguments on issues of race and class, they failed to address the issue of gender as equally important in the discussion of oppression. Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (1972) looks at a barman who serves both the whites and "non-white" customers at different sides of the same bar. This was the first time that the popular working – class idioms of the South African *Indian* were put onto the stage. Kessie Govender's *Stablexpense (*1974) and *Working Class Hero* (1976) were also produced during this period. These plays also emphasised issues of class and race.

Whilst these plays could be classified under *Socio-politically Pertinent Consciousness* (Schauffer, 1994: 16) in that their content challenged the status quo and was influenced by leftist ideologies, their presentation style was very much a *Eurocentric* one (Schauffer, 1994:16). The 'well-made play'[9] had become a 'formula' which many playwrights and directors working within this period adhered to. The 'well-made play' is historically located in the realist approach and therefore typified by "juxtaposition along with continuity of incident from scene to scene, and reference to popular culture" (Keyssar, 1984: 5). Such linear progression can also be located in Boal's argument of "finished theatre" (1979: 142). Boal claims that the ruling class already knows their world and is therefore able to present a finished spectacle (1979: 142). Thus for feminists who identify the ruling class as depictive of men, such a theatre is located within patriarchy. Many feminist theatre practitioners (especially within the school of radical feminism) have therefore reacted against realism by moving away from the 'well-made play'. This discussion will be further investigated in chapter three page 62-63.

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(9) This is a reference to the Aristotelian structure of a play that develops linearly with a distinct beginning, middle and end.

1.d. The Tricameral System[10] (1980s)

One of the results of the Group Areas Act[11] of 1962 was that theatre moved towards addressing specific audiences that were distinguished by race. The Group Areas Act together with the Separation of Amenities Act (1953) made it difficult for marginalised theatre groups to gain access to suitable theatrical facilities. Newly demarcated areas for blacks, *Indians* and coloureds, were not provided with theatres, nor was it possible for theatre practitioners from these groups to use theatres in area classified as "White areas" – due to the Separation of Amenities Act. This resulted in the use of community halls, school halls and temple halls as venues where these plays were performed. The 1980s produced theatre that has a strong community[12] basis. With the exception of a few white middle class liberals and black intellectuals, theatre produced during this period did not move out of the designated areas. Plays produced and performed by South African *Indians* where staged in *Indian* areas and attracted a largely *Indian* audience.

The implementation of the Tricameral System further encouraged this idea of separation. The Tricameral System signified separate developments in terms of education, public and social services based on the different racial divisions. The system further prioritised development for whites rather than equality for all the race groups. The apartheid government justified this system by claiming that it was based on the preservation of the different cultures, which defined the various groups.

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(10) The Tricameral System was a political institution that evolved out of the policy of Apartheid. The forms of these institutions were presented in the separate chambers viz. The House of Delegates (for the South African *Indians*), the House of Representatives (for the South African coloureds) and the House of Assembly (representing the South African whites).

(11) The Group Areas Act (1962) was an act that required the allocation of separate residential areas for different groups according to racial classification.

(12) Here the term "community" is used as a reference to members of the same race group. The formation of these communities was not voluntary, but rather forced due to the implementation of the Group Areas Act.

This is an instance were culture, as argued in chapter one, serves the ruling class and therefore cannot be argued to be a neutral entity (Tax, 1973). Theatre, as a product of cultural activity (Boal, 1979), also develops within such segregated confines. Two of the most significant political changes that affected and shaped South African *Indian* theatre during this period were the establishment of the House of Delegates[13] (as a part of the Tricameral System) and the withdrawal of the Immorality Act[14] (1983).

The South African *Indian* playwrights (and theatre) shifted their approach by reacting to internal arguments within the community that were perpetuated by the changes within larger political structures – like the establishment of the House of Delegates and the withdrawal of the Immorality Act. This period marked the start of a long tradition of a satire[15] in theatre produced by many South African *Indian* playwrights, ridiculing high profile South African *Indian* politicians – the most popular of these politicians being Amichand Rajbansi[16]. In an interview Ronnie Govender (03/11/98) explained that satire was a form of theatre that criticised the status quo, without moving away from one of the main functions of theatre itself – that is to entertain. Satire is a form of comedy and offers criticism of particular systems or persons. Susan Purdie argues in her book *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse:*

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(13) While defined as the representative political voice of the South African Indian, the House of Delegates was not voted in by an *Indian* majority. Majority of the South African Indian population rejected the idea of the Tricameral System and adopted the "Don't Vote" approach towards the proposed policy.

(14) The Immorality Act (1983) regarded the marriage of members from different race groups as an act of "immorality". The laws therefore forbid such marriages.

(15) In general terms satire refers to, "humour that criticises or victimises someone or some thing". (Parmer, 1994: 7). Within the context of these plays satire offers a critique of certain high profile personalities and the status quo.

(16) Amichand Rajbansi is presently the leader of the Minority Front. He has been regard by the media as "the great survivor" since he has managed to retain his political career both during and after the apartheid government.

> Particular joking often targets actual people and it can then have the manifest political effect of 'degrading' power that they hold; which will be oppositional or oppressive depending upon whether the target stands above or below the jokers in the social hierarchy. (1993: 127)

Thus satire presents itself as oppostional to politicians who are considered to hold positions that are high up in the social hierarchy. Investigations into issues of corruption within the House of Delegates resulted in numerous satirical comedies: Ronnie Govender's *Off-side* (1984) and a year later, *Inside* (1985) both presented a comic presentation of Rajbansi as a referee and a politician respectively[17]. In 1986 Dinesh Narandas produced *I Love to Fill in Forms* and *Sammy joins the Circus*. Once again South African *Indian* politicians are portrayed as the subject of ridicule in these productions. Perhaps the best received of these plays during the 1980s, was a play written by Charles Pillay and directed by Saira Essa, entitled *The James Commision*[18]. This was also one of the few plays that received some acknowledgement outside the South African *Indian* community.

However, Hansen claims that this play received such recognition "and found mercy in the eyes of the white reviewers, (probably) because it dealt with a real political scandal and mercilessly revealed graft and mismanagement among Indian politicians" (Unpublished article, 1998: 16). He further claims:

> The Mercury, primary newspaper for white upper middle class, went to the extent of saying that it was a play 'that no longer was Indian' (30/3-89). Could it be that this had to do with the fact that the play confirmed white prejudice concerning 'the Indian' as the 'wheeler and dealer'; the man you

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(17) Govender's play *Backside* which opened in November 1998 at the Playhouse, focuses yet again on the political and personal life of Amichand Rajbansi and other South African politicians.

(18) 'The James Commission' (1989) was the title of the enquiry into alleged corruption amongst South African *Indian* politicians within the House of Delegates.

> cannot trust, who is interested in money, who is secretive, self-serving and unfit to be entrusted with serious matters such as the matters of state ?
> (Unpublished article, 1998: 16)

The withdrawal of the Immorality Act (1983) triggered further reactions amongst playwrights within the South African *Indian community*. Plays such as Muthal Naidoo's *Outside In* and Kessie Govender's *On the Fence*, all dealt with issues of inter-racial relationships within the community.

With the exception of Ronnie Govender's *At the Edge* and *Blossoms from the Bough*, almost all plays produced during this period adopted the form of parody (and event travesty)[19]. Hansen attributes these parodies and travesties produced by the South African *Indian* male to what he calls 'A Culture of Embarrassment':

> Maybe this was a juncture where embarrassment became a very dominant sentiment among Indian intellectuals and activists - embarrassment on the part of the community, the unrestrained drive for middle class respectability, the political preferences of many, the emergence of a class of what an informant called 'political parrots' in the Tricameral system.
> (Unpublished article, 1998: 12)

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(19) Parody is a style that emphasises exaggerated imitations, while travesty emphasises a more grotesque misrepresentation. Both these forms attempt to distance themselves from overt social or political commentary through the use of slapstick and crude or crass humour. However these forms reinforce stereotypical perceptions and thus they are extremely political.

1.e. The Transitional and Post–Apartheid Period (1990 –1998)

The early 1990s have been viewed as the transitional period in South African history where numerous political and cultural organisations, including theatre, underwent a process of restructuring. In 1990 in KwaZulu-Natal Kessie Govender was admitted as one of two 'non-white' members into the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) and in 1994 Ronnie Govender was appointed director of the Playhouse. Whilst these changes aimed to popularise venues like the Playhouse, playwrights and directors continued to perform in halls and other community venues. There are many reasons for this action: firstly, perceptions that the Playhouse is an upper class (primarily white) venue reserved for so-called 'high art' has not been completely eradicated in the post-apartheid era. Secondly, community venues are easily accessible in terms of travel whereas formal theatres, like the Playhouse, are situated in the city. This was a result of the Group Areas Act which classified areas in and around cities as "white areas", whilst areas away from cities and central business districts were regarded as *Indian*, black and coloured areas. Community venues also proved cheaper to hire than formal theatres.

While the political and social environment of South Africa has changed considerably during this period, theatre produced by South African *Indian* male playwrights adhered to the farce style - both in content and presentation- that was introduced in the 1980s. Perhaps one of the main reasons for this is that the parody formula has proved to be commercially successful. This has often resulted in many newspaper critics referring to these productions as "commercial gigs" (Hansen, unpublished article, 1998: 8). Amongst these 'commercial gigs'were: Essop Khan and Mohammed Alli's *My Second Wife* (1995); Ronnie Govender's *Your Own Dog Won't Bite You (1995/6)* and more recently *Backside* (1998); Pravesh Hurban's *The Entertainer: A Man and his Wig* (1994); Rajesh Gopie's *The Balls to Tackle Marriage* (1996) and Aldrin Naidu's M*andrax Muniama and the Suitcase Carriers* (1996) and his recent *Mooidevi's Muti* (1998). These productions cannot be analysed in terms of Schauffer's proposed models; instead Hansen's "Culture of Embarrassment" provides a more appropriate analysis. These productions can be situated in such a "Culture of Embarrassment" since their depictions of South African *Indians* are mockeries. Furthermore, they are all written in the parody/travesty style. Parody and travesty are forms of comedy that reinforce existing stereotypes. These

stereotypes include the presentation of South African *Indians* as having "unrestrained drive for middle class respectability" (Hansen, Unpublished article 1998: 12) and also South African *Indian* politicians as merely "political parrots" (Hansen, Unpublished article 1998: 12). Women (especially South African *Indian* women) also become the *Butt*[20] of ridicule in many of these productions.

In September 1998 *Mahatma vs Gandhi* premiered at the KwaZulu-Natal's Playhouse as the first play from India to be invited to South Africa. The play received excellent reviews in the local newspapers and was rated as the number one stage production of 1998 by theatre critic Mike Tarr (Daily News 22/12/98). *Mahatma vs Gandhi,* which was attended by a largely South African *Indian* audience, was viewed by many critics as an important cultural event. This is perhaps one of the main reasons for the success and popularity of the production. The play presented itself as a cultural product (Boal, 1979) of the Indian subcontinent and since the South African *Indian community* have looked to this subcontinent as its cultural 'homeland' (see discussion chapter one page 10) it appeared to reflect the culture that supposedly defines them. However, as discussed in chapter one, the Indian subcontinent is not a homogenous one and Indianess is not a thing that exists (Spivak, 1990: 39), nor is culture a fixed or neutral notion (Tax, 1973). Therefore such notions of identification are highly problematic. Furthermore, this cultural identification with the Indian subcontinent has resulted in the valuing of Indian theatre (from India) and a devaluing of theatre reflecting experiences within the South African environment, produced by local playwrights. It is also interesting to note that whilst *Mahatma vs Gandhi* was an international production, it nevertheless attracted a largely South African *Indian* audience in its run in South Africa. Arguably this is due to the apartheid legacy of separate development constructing *Indian* theatre for *Indian* audiences. This legacy can be further attributed to acts like the Separation of Amenities Act (1953) and the Group Areas Act (1962), which encourage the idea of separate theatre for separate audiences.

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(20) The word "Butt" is used by Purdie (1993: 127) as a reference to the target of ridicule due to the fact that s/he is positioned outside the teller-audience relationship and is thus constructed as other.

With the exception of *Mahatma vs Gandhi*, Schauffer and Pillay argue that all theatre written and produced by South African *Indians* fall into the category of "Indic Theatre." In the introduction of the *Indic Theatre Monograph Series* Pillay claims that Indic theatre refers to theatre performances and related areas that have their roots in the South African *Indian* experience (1994: introduction). He further argues that the term "Indic" distinguishes such theatre from the Indian subcontinent (1994; introduction). Whilst the contribution of Pillay and Schauffer are groundbreaking, in that they are two of the very few academics who have addressed the contribution of South African *Indians* to theatre in South Africa, their proposal of "Indic Theatre" is problematic on numerous levels.

Firstly, "Indic Theatre" articulates itself as a theatre that is rooted in the "South African *Indian* experience"(1994, foreword). This is based on the assumption that theatre in South Africa can only be produced and analysed in terms of specific cultural categories – for example Zulu theatre or Afrikaans theatre. This rules out the idea that theatre can be analysed by other categories other than race and culture – categories such as age and gender for example. Secondly, the idea that "Indic Theatre" is representative of "the South African *Indian* experience" (1994, foreword) is highly debatable. It is impossible to speak of an homogenous "South African *Indian* experience", because the South African *Indian* community itself is, as argued in chapter one, an imagined community (Anderson, 1983: 6) because "it is an extremely diverse group with different religions, languages, customs, class and political affiliations leading to all kinds of internal tensions" (Naidoo, 1993: 1). Thirdly if "Indic Theatre" is representative of theatre written and produced by South African *Indians* about the "South African *Indian* experience", it can be argued that it is premised on the argument that only South African *Indians* can or should write and represent themselves. This then results in a lack of acknowledgement of contributions made by playwrights from other so-called cultural backgrounds who may choose to write *Indian* characters or about experiences within the South African *Indian community* in their plays. Surely the argument is not whether one is allowed to write and represent another, but rather how one constructs the other in one's writing or representation. In an interview with Spivak entitled "The Problem of Cultural Self-representation", she claims that representing or, "speaking" for, others is acceptable as long as this it is done in a way that they (others) "do not regard as bullshit" (Spivak, 1990: 56). It is for this reason that the second half of this chapter concerns itself with the

way in which South African *Indian* men write and represent their counterpart – South African *Indian* women. Moverover, as discussed in chapter one, South African *Indian* women have been historically marginalised and culturally silenced. This makes an investigation of the representation of South African *Indian* women an important one.

While Pillay argues that "Indic Theatre" distinguishes South African *Indian* theatre away from the Indian subcontinent (1994: introduction), the categories or models of *Classical Vernacular* and *Popular Vernacular*, which Shauffer locates in "Indic Theatre" (1994: 15), cannot be isolated from the Indian subcontinent. This is because of the very fact that these models of theatre involved the production of plays "imported" from India and written in Indian languages. The dance vocabulary of Bharatha Natayam, for example, is not one that is rooted in the so-called South African *Indian* experience that Pillay proposes, but rather it is a vocabulary that is rooted in the Indian subcontinent and reflects the mythology specific to the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter one, attempts to define the so-called South African *Indian* culture have been closely associated with India itself. Thus theatre as a "cultural product" (Boal, 1979) cannot distinguish itself from the Indian subcontinent, since it is the influence of that very same subcontinent that supposedly informs and constructs the South African *Indian* culture and culturally identity. These are the reasons why Pillay's argument on "Indic" as a category that distinguishes the so-called South African *Indian* theatre away from the Indian subcontinent, appears problematic.

In the introduction of the *Indic Theatre Monograph Series*, Pillay claims that marginalisation, and neglect of theatre by South African *Indians* was the result of "forces of apartheid keeping cultural activity, to a large extent, within the narrow confines of race" (1994: introduction). Ironically the proposition of "Indic theatre" reinforces discussions around theatre within the narrow confines of race.

While this dissertation critically examines plays written by South African *Indian* male playwrights, it does not attempt to classify these plays as "Indic" productions. The reason for an investigation is to examine these plays in the light of a feminist argument as opposed to a racial one. Since theatre is a "cultural product" (Boal, 1979), these plays offer a reflection of the culture that informs them. The focus here is on the way in which

women are culturally constructed and how such constructions are represented in theatre. These representations become important since theatre is as much a weapon of oppression as it is a weapon of liberation. Meredith Tax argues that culture itself is not neutral and that it often serves the ruling class (1973). Therefore theatre, as a "cultural product" could act as a weapon to reinforce ruling class ideology and domination. In the case of South African *Indian* women, representation in terms of her culturally constructed role could prove to be reinforcement of unquestioned notions of culture and patriarchy.

The second part of this chapter therefore focuses on the way in which South African *Indian* male playwrights have written and represented the South African *Indian* woman in their plays. The decision to include this discussion of plays written by South African *Indian* male playwrights in this chapter was not an arbitrary one. The South African *Indian* male playwright has historically dominated theatre within the South African *Indian* context. It is for this reason that such a discussion has been offered. Furthermore an abridged history of theatre produced by South African *Indians*, as been included in this dissertation to ensure that these play are historically located.

2. Discussion of Three Plays by South African *Indian* Male Playwrights.

The abridged history offered above supports Loots' argument that there has been a lack of acknowledgement of women writers in the published form (1996: 63). Whilst women playwrights such as Muthal Naidoo[21] have written numerous plays, only a few have been presented in the published form. With a marginalisation of their voices and such a lack of self-representation, it becomes crucial to investigate any representation of South African *Indian* women. Thus for the purpose of this dissertation Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's*

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(21) *We 3 Kings*, is the only play of Naidoo's that has been published. She has also written *Of No Account, Coming Home (Ikhayalethu)* and *Nobody's Hero*.

Pleasure, Kriben Pillay's *Looking for Muruga* and Aldrin Naidu's *Mooidevi's Muti*, will be examined in terms of how they represent the South African *Indian* woman. A synopsis of the plot of each of the plays is provided before critical discussions.

2.a. *The Lahnee's Pleasure*[22]

In *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, Ronnie Govender introduces us to a bar in South Africa, which is divided into two sections, one for Whites and the other for *Indians*. The play is set in the *Indian* section of the bar. A stranger walks into the bar, where Sunny the *Indian* barman has worked for twelve years. The stranger, an educated middle class *Indian* male, converses with Sunny about his job and his relationship with his white boss (lahnee). Later we discover that this relationship is an unjust one, where Sunny is often called 'stupid', 'idiot' and 'boy'. Mothie, a working class widower who has four children, then joins Sunny and the stranger at the bar. He is depressed and has come to drown his troubles in cheap wine. After a while he reveals his problem to the other two: he walked in on his daughter and her lover in bed together. After her father has beaten her up for "disgracing the family" she leaves with her lover and her father has no idea of her whereabouts. The lahnee overhears the conversation and advises Mothie to visit a certain sergeant at the police station. In Mothie's absence, Sunny and the stranger attempt to assist by trying to discover the identity of the lover. They wrongly accuse Johnny, the town's womaniser, who has come into the bar to brag about his latest girlfriend. Mothie returns to the bar unsuccessful. The lahnee then receives a call from his sergeant friend notifying him that the girl and her lover have been found. Everyone is happy for Mothie, and the lahnee offers to buy all his *Indian* customers a drink to celebrate. The stranger suddenly decides to leave. Before his departure he warns the lahnee "One day white man, one day!" For a brief moment Sunny, Johnny and Mothie are shocked at the stranger's remark. They then resume their jovial attitude and offer to sing and dance for the boss.

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(22) No date of publication is offered in the published copy of the play. The play was published by Ravan Press in Johannesburg. The play was first performed in 1972.

This play was written during the period of the Black Consciousness Movement and was first performed in 1972 as part of a festival staged by the South African Black Theatre Union. Like many plays of the era, it concerned itself with issues of racial and class injustice. Govender and other playwrights (like Maishe Maponya and Mbongeni Ngema) appropriated the Boalian approach of using theatre as a weapon of liberation for the oppressed (see discussion chapter one p 14-18).However this oppression was narrowly defined in terms of class and race. The idea that gender constitutes as important a category as race and class, and that these are interactive categories that reinforce each other's meaning (Fouche, 1994: 84), was dismissed. In fact, as argued in chapter one, gender was considered secondary to the issues of race and class. Many activists argued that issues such as gender, would be addressed once liberation was achieved. This idea of 'liberation' was defined in terms of the eradication of unjust race and class laws. Furthermore, it could be argued that the issue of gender within the South African *Indian community* received little attention since gender roles themselves were dictated by unquestioned religious and cultural practises set within set notion of culture.

In his *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) Boal explains that the main objective of theatre is to change people and to get the spectator to be an active subject rather than a passive theatrical phenomenon (1979: 122). Govender *The Lahmee's Pleasure* was groundbreaking in that it allowed the South African *Indian* male, who was historically marginalised in terms of race and class, an opportunity to move away from a passive role into a more active role of self representation. However while the play provides a platform for South African *Indian* males to represent and articulate themselves, this articulation is done at the expense of stereotyping South African *Indian* women. In an interview with Govender (03/11/98), he explained that the idea of an *Indian* woman in a bar was almost unheard of within the historical context from which the play emerges. Govender therefore justifies the lack of representation of South African *Indian* women in his play through the argument of re-creation of a given social order.

This notion that art (theatre) should re-create nature (the given order), is discussed by Boal in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). Boal claims that the purpose of art

is precisely "re-creation"[23] (1979: 1) and that this re-creation "has nothing to do with copying an exterior model" (1979: 1). He further claims that this re-creation "has nothing to do with improvisation or 'realism'" (1979: 8) and that "artists must imitate[24] men (women) 'as they should be' and not as they are" (1979: 8). Thus with the absence of women characters in the bar, Govender has not "re-created" (Boal, 1979: 8) the lived reality, but rather he has reinforced the existing gender stereotypes within that reality.

The bar presents itself as a public space and, through unquestioned cultural and religious practices, it is viewed as a space for men. Women are confined to the private domain of the home. Through the absence of a South African *Indian* woman in his play Govender reinforces distinctions of private and public (see discussion chapter one p12). These categories are further reinforced through articulations of the male characters in the play. For example, the constant reminder that "nice girls" are indoors by six o'clock in the evening (Govender, 7) and that if "girls" are given freedom, they get themselves into trouble (Govender, 30-31). It is interesting to note that throughout the play South African *Indian* women are referred to as "girls". Alice Walker claims that the term "girl" or "girlish" refers to frivolous, irresponsible and not serious (1984: 1). Thus the status of South African *Indian* women within the context of the play is not equivalent to that of the South African Indian male, who is presented as a responsible adult. Furthermore, none of the women whom the male characters talk about are given any names; they are rather referred to as "girls", "wife", "girlfriend", "daughter", "dame" and "chick". Whilst the use of names generally gives recognition to more individual identities, these terms refer to women in terms of their relationship to the male characters themselves. In her article

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(23) In a discussion on the Aristotelian approach to the role of art, Boal argues:

> For him (Aristotle) it is an imitation of nature. For us, the word "imitate" means to make a more or less perfect copy of nature. And "nature" means the whole of created things. Art would, therefore, be a copy of created things. But this has nothing to do with Artistotle For him, to imitate (mimesis) has nothing to do with copying an exterior model. "Mimesis" means "re-creation". (1979: 1)

(24) 'Imitate' is a reference to Boal's concept of *re-creation* (1979: 8).

"Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women", bell hooks[25] attributes this to "male supremacist ideology (that) encourages women to believe that (they) are valueless and obtain value only by relating or bonding with men"(1997: 396).

We are also informed that these "girls" are "clean" (Govender, 29). Cleanliness of women seems to be a recurring theme in the conversation between the male characters in the play. There is a reference to two types of cleanliness: Firstly, cleanliness in terms of bathing:

> MOTHIE: Our girls must bathe everyday in running water when they go and light the God lamp. ... Our girls don't smell like white girls.
>
> (Govender, 21)

This idea of cleansing of the body is seen as an extremely important religious practice. Women are required to bath before lighting the lamp (which is a symbolic idol). Many women are not allowed to perform this task during menstruation, since they are viewed as been unclean and the bearers of misfortune[26]. The second interpretation of "cleanliness" in the play is a reference to virginity:

SUNNY : Okay Lightning, who is this dame you have in Mount Edgecombe?

JOHNNY : She's lekker ekse`. Crazy pair of legs, long black hair and crazy tits.

She's a home bird - you know what I mean. Nice clean Dame.

Yeah, she's in love with me. She wants to marry me.

STRANGER : Why don't you marry her?

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(25) bell hooks deliberately uses lower-casing in her name as a personal statement against patriarchy.

(26) Germaine Greer argues against this in *The Female Eunuch* (1971)

JOHNNY : You know any more jokes?

SUNNY : How can you do that to a nice girl like that?

JOHNNY : She is a nice girl. She has never had a boyfriend before. She'll make some lucky guy a very nice wife.

(Govender, 21)

Through this conversation of the three male characters it is clear that the South African *Indian* woman is valued in terms of her innocence (virginity), her domestication (*home-bird*) and her appearance. On her own, she is presented as an object of desire and as a prize to be won by her male counterpart; however, against "white girls" she is constructed as a cultural being. The South African *Indian* woman as a cultural constructed being does not only dictate her position in society, but also recognises a constructed sense of femininity with that culture. Through the comparisons made between the "unclean and smelly White girls" (Govender, 21) and the "clean" and "homely" Indian girls (Govender, 29) a specific construction of femininity seems to be advocated. In her article, "Feminist Literary Criticism", Toril Moi argues against the argument of femininity:

> 'Femininity is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled as *unfeminine* and *unnatural*. It is the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. Patriarchy, in other words, wants us to believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness, called femininity. (1985: 209)

This notion of femininity is further constructed within fixed notions of culture. In *The Lahnee's Pleasure* femininity is constructed in terms the shyness and "homeliness" and the idea of cleanliness, which has been discussed on page 20 of this chapter. It is because

the so-called "White girls" do not conform to this particular construction that they are seen as "unclean and smelly". Thus is can be argued that femininity is not only located within the patriarchal system but also within specific notions of culture. These specific notions themselves are historically located within patriarchy.

When Mothie's daughter is found in bed with her lover, she destroys the image of the South African *Indian* woman, as constructed by all the male characters of the play. It can be argued that this is her reason for being beaten up. In her discussion on *Power*, Dworkin proposes that one of the ways through power is obtained by the male is through terrorising:

> ...to use self and strength to inculcate fear....The symbols of terror are commonplace and utterly familiar: the gun, the knife, the bomb, the fist and so on (1981: 17).

Mothie uses his fist to beat up his daughter in what the play satirises as a culturally acceptable way of dealing with 'fallen women'. Later in the play he is encouraged not to show any remorse for his *act of terror*:

> SUNNY: Just because you hit her one time, you mustn't worry. You did the right thing. She'll learn her lesson. She must know that she comes from a good family. Don't worry, God is watching.
>
> (Govender, 33)

None of the men question the judgement of the father in beating his daughter up. Furthermore, they celebrate when the police catches her. There is an absolute patriarchal consensus that is, in some sense, undermined by the scene in bed- hence the eruption of male anger, physicality and as mentioned, consensus. It is also interesting to note that masculine consensus overrides racial division. In this situation there is (initially) consensus despite racial acrimony. The example illustrates that the patriarchal system overrides racism, which can therefore support the argument, that racism itself, is located within and is a result of patriarchy.

Govender describes *The Lahnee's Pleasure* as a play that challenges bourgeois theatre. According to Boal "bourgeois theatre is the finished theatre. The bourgeoisie already know what the world is like, *their* world, and is able to present images of this complete finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle" (1979: 142). Through the interrogation of race and class issues in the play, Govender challenges the *complete finished world* that apartheid presented. However the lack of acknowledgement that race and class are interactive with the issue of gender (Fouche, 1994: 84), has resulted in the presentation of South African *Indian* women as culturally constructed beings within fixed notion of that culture. Thus it can be argued that, in the presentation of South African *Indian* women, Govender has resorted to bourgeois notions of theatre, by presenting these women as a *spectacle* (Boal, 1979: 142). Furthermore his 'consensus' of female representation (or the lack of it) is political in that it reflects the growing trend in South African politics to assume that apartheid was a race or, (if you are Marxist) a class issue. With this trend there seems to be a hierarchy of issues: the issues of race and class are often viewed as a fundamental aspect of apartheid. Discussions on culture and gender as categories through which Apartheid could be analysed have been historically viewed as secondary to issues or race and class.

(2b) *Looking for Muruga*[27]

The play opens with Dante, a black drama student, and Muruga, an *Indian* barman, conversing about Dante's coming examination. The examination requires Dante to perform a traditional Indian dance dedicated to a deity with the same name as the barman. Muruga (the barman) is assisting him with the rehearsal and also providing the appropriate costume for the performance. When their discussion is over and Dante leaves, a stranger comes into the bar. The stranger, Sherwin, is writing a play and is looking for a

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(27) *Muruga* is also the name of a Hindu deity worshipped mainly by working-class Hindus of South Indian decent (Pillay, 1995:56). "Maybe all waiters are Murugas"(Pillay, 1995: 7). This could be interpreted as all waiters are gods. For the purpose of this dissertation all reference to the deity will be in italics, while reference to the character of the barman will be non-italicised.

barman (called Muruga) who is the subject and inspiration for the script. After discovering that the barman who is currently an employee at this bar is the same 'Muruga' whom he is looking for, Sherwin explains his visit. Muruga and Sherwin start to converse and debate many memories and issues respectively. Their discussion includes the politics of Apartheid, the 1949 riots, theatre, Marxism and women. These topics are interspersed with risqué jokes often told by Muruga. Dante returns in the second act. Sherwin is surprised at the odd but genuine friendship that Dante and Muruga share. It is obvious that Muruga and Sherwin do not share similar opinions on the various topics discussed. These different perspectives begin to manifest in growing tension between the two characters. The play ends with Muruga inviting Sherwin to join in the rehearsal claiming that dancing is a way in which problems can be solved. Sherwin, enraged by Muruga's casual approach, leaves the bar. Dante and Muruga continue the rehearsal.

Kriben Pillay's *Looking for Muruga* premiered at the Asoka Theatre in 1990 and at Grahamstown Festival in 1991. The play is located within the transitional period of South Africa's history. Whilst most plays written by South African *Indian* males during this period, retained the farcical style introduced in the 1980s, *Looking for Muruga* was a serious attempt to address race and class issues within the context of the transitional political and social South African environment. Pillay's play is an attempt to move away from these farces, which are historically located in a 'Culture of Embarrassment' (Hansen, Unpublished 1998: 12). Pillay goes further to criticise such productions in his play: In act two Muruga and Sherwin speak about these plays:

MURUGA: One of those plays where you laugh because we speak funny, or maybe my jokes are so dirty they make you want to see more and hear more?

SHERWIN: No, nothing like that. I want to write something that's different, a story that doesn't do the same thing as others, you know...the cheap laughs, the coarse action, all those cheap gimmicks. I can make your story into a real story, a story that will make sense to those who want to see more than just cheap tricks.

(Pillay, 1995: 20)

The play becomes groundbreaking for numerous reasons. Firstly, it is argued to be an attempt at an intercultural experience. Secondly, it aimed to address issues that were rooted in the apartheid era. The investigation of such issues becomes important in the reconciliation process, which was one of the primary objectives of the transitional period. An example of such an issue is the tension between South African *Indians* and blacks because of the 1949 riots[28], which the play addresses. Thirdly, *Looking for Muruga* moved away the notion that only South African *Indians* should write and produce theatre for South African *Indians*. The play attempted to attract a broad South African audience.

According to Dennis Schauffer, in the foreword to the play:

> L*ooking for Muruga* forms an important part of an important new phase of South African theatrical development. Characteristic of this is the retention of a distinct 'Indian' character in the ethos, form and structure of the work, whilst moving into the area of Indo- African intercultural experience, in a presentational form which derives its articulateness from the Eurocentric tradition. It is therefore a work of considerable significance for our emergent new culture. (Pillay, 1995: Foreword)

Whilst many critics, including Schauffer, classify *Looking for Muruga* as an "Indo-African intercultural experience," it can be argued that the first part of the definition is less problematic than the second part. The play can be viewed as an Indo-African experience in that the cast consists of black and *Indian* actors and also because there are comparisons and discussion around the so-called African and Indian cultural practices. However whether such an experience could be considered "intercultural" is debatable. Interculturalism refers to a borrowing or exchanging of cultures (Scheiner, 1990:14). The fact that Dante puts on an Indian dance costume and performs a traditional Indian dance

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(28) The 1949 riots were a clash between the South African *Indians* and the South African Blacks (more specifically the Zulus) in the Cato Manor area in KwaZulu-Natal.

does not necessarily constitute an expression of interculturalism. Spivak argues that the costume and dress are simple notions of (cultural) identity (1990: 38). Dante does not perform the dance out of his own free will but rather it is a requirement of his drama syllabus. Rustom Barucha's argument that interculturalism can seem as a form of colonialism (1996: 14) could be appropriated to Dante's position. Surely Dante's position is more of an imposed one than one of cultural borrowing or exchange.

Furthermore, while the play offers interesting discussion around the 1949 riots and the tension between the relationship of South African *Indians* and blacks, Dante (the only black cast member) is not included in these discussions. Such marginalisation in discussions that are arguably central and crucial to the play presents it away from notions of interculturalism.

The play distinguishes between culture and cultural practices on South Africa's politics and history. In the opening scene Muruga and Dante speak of their cultures as monolithic entities. Muruga does not acknowledge that the so-called *Indian* culture is fragmented and diverse as argued by Muthal Naidoo in chapter one page 9 of this dissertation. This monolithic presentation of culture is further located in fixed notions of culture, which are unquestioned within the play. Culture is not viewed as interactive with issues of race, class and gender but rather culture is viewed a neutral entity. Like Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, Pillay's play challenges the status quo through the lenses of race and class.

Issues of culture and gender are not seen as interactive categories but rather as fixed notions. There are in fact two occasions in which South African *Indian* women are presented in the play. Through this presentation it becomes clear that whilst the play becomes a vehicle for the articulation of South African *Indian* men, this is done at the expense of fixed notions of culture and gender roles.

As in *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, South African *Indian* women are appreciated by their male counterparts in terms of their physical appearance and their homeliness. In the play Muruga describes his first love, Rani, as "always got a smile, but never forward" and having a face like a "film star" (Pillay, 1995: 34). The highest achievement in Rani's life

was her wedding, of which "the whole street was proud" (Pillay, 1995: 35). Later on it is discovered that Rani was raped and murdered during the riots (Pillay, 1995: 36). Thus it can be argued that, through the story of Rani, women are presented, as either objects or victims. This victimisation is further located and discussed within the context racial conflict. This becomes an instance where race and class override gender as categories through which such victimisation could be analysed. This is an instance that affirms the growing trend that viewed apartheid within the confines of race and class. Furthermore, Pillay echoes Govender's presentation of the South African *Indian* women as homely, "decent" (Govender, 40) and "not forward" (Pillay, 1995: 34) girls. Such articulations once again present a constructed sense of femininity, which is located within roles defined by culture.

The second representation of South African *Indian* women occurs when Muruga and Sherwin begin discussing upper class morale within the *Indian community*. An argument against class injustice unexpectedly turns into a vicious representation of South African *Indian* women belonging to the upper class:

MURUGA: Our Indian people, give them some money or education and their heads look like the boots of Mercedes-Benz... nice and big with little, very little inside. Our high-class Indian ladies are the worst, their whole bodies look like Mercedes-Benz. Everyone is quick to laugh at Asha Rajbansi, but she is just the same fancy car dressed up for a wedding. Our own people think just the same as Whites and everybody else.

SHERWIN: You're right. But this country has made us this way.

MURUGA: I don't know about that. I don't think even the Devil could have made our high-class Indian ladies the way they are.

SHERWIN: Don't you worry, that kind of lady is all over. In Johannesburg they call them kugels.

MURUGA: Same word I use for them. Koodh...

SHERWIN: No, ku-gel, not kugel, not the word you're thinking about.

MURUGA: I think my word fits the picture perfectly. What word is kugel?

SHERWIN: I think it's Jewish. Haven't you seen the actor Pieter Dirk Uys imitate a kugel on TV?

MURUGA: The same fella that dresses up like a woman?

SHERWIN: Yes, that's him.

MURUGA: Ja, ja, I think I've seen him like a kugel. But tell me, are kugels only White?

SHERWIN: No. For me any rich woman who has everything and is obnoxious is a kugel. There are a lot of Indian kugels, especially in Durban. Let me show you one.

(Pillay, 1995: 28-29)

It is interesting to note that whilst these two character (Sherwin and Muruga) have had different opinions on almost every subject in their lengthy conversions, they are in agreement in terms of how they see these women. This approach can be argued has an instance of patriarchal consensus on the role of South African *Indian* women. No doubt this role is located within fixed notions of culture. Muruga is a working class male, whilst Sherwin is a middle-class male. Thus it can be argued that such "rich" upper-class South African *Indian* women appear intimidating to these characters since they are more financially secure. Whilst wealth and financial security does not necessarily move the South African *Indian* woman way from her culturally constructed role within the private domain, it nevertheless equips her with some degree of power and status. Dworkin argues that money is a tenet of power (1981: 20) and that such power is "distinctly a male power". Thus by possessing money the South African *Indian* woman gains some degree of power and is also able to represent herself in the public space, which is historically a

male dominated space. Thus her economic independence allows her the opportunity to challenge the distinction between the public and the private space, which is heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system (Moi, 1985: 211). By entering into the public arena, South African *Indian* women are further challenging the "homely" or domesticated presentations that are constructed by their male counterparts – for example the character

of Rani whom Muruga relates to Sherwin. It is perhaps for this reason that the character refers to "rich" South African *Indian* women as worse than the devil or as "obnoxious" (Pillay, 1995: 29).

In the final scene Muruga and Dante ask Sherwin to join the rehearsal of the six foot dance, an ancient tradition amongst South African *Indians* with ancestral roots in South India, claiming that only by attempting to dance will one learn how to dance. Whilst dancing becomes a symbolic gesture that is intended to reflect the current South African situation, it is also symbolic in that it encourages a return to one's so-called cultural roots. There is no attempt to question culture itself.

While *Looking for Muruga* is a play that attempts to articulate the past injustice and the effects that it has had in shaping communities and relationships between different communities, it has done so through the lens of a race and class analysis and critique. The issue of culture is examined as a fixed notion and consequently the role and positioning of the South African *Indian* women is unquestioned since it is located within this culture.

(2c) *Mooidevi's Muti* [29] *(Tails of the Bengal Tigers)*

The production *Mooidevi's Muti (Tails of the Bengal Tigers)* features two skits, namely *Four Weddings and a Plastic Surgeon* and *SAA Steamy Seema* and the feature production entitled *Mooidevi's Muti.* These plays/skits were inspired by real people and

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(29) The title plays on three languages. *Mooi* means pretty in Afrikaans while *Moo* means lazy in Tamil; *Devi* refers to Ashadevi Rajbansi, but it is also a reference to the word for goddess in Sanskrit. *Muti* is a mythical signifier of African-ness. (Hansen, Unpublished 1998: 4).

were based on 'real' incidents that have been highly controversial headline stories. *Four Weddings and a Plastic Surgeon* focuses on the personal life of Saira Essa – more particularly the controversy surrounding her marriage to a White South African man and their four elaborate wedding ceremonies. Her alleged plastic surgery is also a discussed within the context of the play. *SAA Steamy Seema* is a reference to the Reema Mahabeer story[30], which made headlines in most papers that enjoyed a largely South African *Indian* readership. Whilst Minority Front leader Amichand Rajbansi has been the subject of numerous plays, amongst them - Charles Pillay's *The James Commission*, Ronnie Govender's *Off-side/Inside* and recently *Backside*, and Pravesh Hurban's *The Entertainer: A Man and his Wig*, Aldrin Naidu's *Mooidevi's Muti* reflects a different perspective. This play focuses more on the personal relationship between Amichand and his wife Ashadevi Rajbansi rather than his political career. Aldrin Naidu, the playwright, derived the material for the play from newspaper articles – mainly from the Post[31], for who Naidu is also a journalist. The plays/skit that make up the production *Mooidevi's Muti (Tails of the Bengal Tiger)* are unpublished. The production premiered at the Arena Park Region Hall in August 1998. It was one of the most commercially successful productions of 1998.Whilst the play was set in the post-apartheid era, it nevertheless reflected the style of the farces and parodies of the 1980s. Hansen claims that *Mooidevi's Muti* is "a rephrasing of older and well-known forms of joking and slapstick comedy that apparently has lost none of its charm" (Unpublished 1998: 9).

In her book *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, Susan Purdie argues that "all habitual joking - recurrent patterns of who makes jokes and who is joked about - will both reflect and create patterns of power"(1993: 129). Naidu uses humour as the tool through which his ideas and views are communicated. These views are, however, located in fixed

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(30) Reema Mahabeer, a beauty queen contestant was reported to have had intercourse with a British man onboard a South African Airlines flight from England to South Africa. The story was published in the Post in 1998. Due to the harassment from members of her neighbourhood after the publication Mahabeer was forced to leave the country.

(31) The Post is a weekly newspaper that targets the South African *Indian community* in Kwazulu – Natal.

notions of culture and more particularly in the role of South African Indian women in this culture. The humour of the plays/skits therefore becomes a direct attack on the three women, who have through their actions challenged the constructed role of South African *Indian* women. Saira Essa, Reema Mahabeer and Ashadevi Rajbansi are therefore presented as easy objects and targets of ridicule within the production. Purdie further agues in her book:

> particular joking often targets actual people and it can then have the manifest political effect of 'degrading' the power that they hold; which will be oppositional or oppressive depending upon whether the target stands above or below the joker in the social hierarchy. (1993: 127).

The very fact that South African *Indian* women have been historically and culturally constructed within the private domain and further, that this private domain has been historically devalued (Tong, 1989), positions these women below the joker - who is in fact a South African *Indian* male playwright.

Whilst the women, through cultural constructions, are positioned below the South African Indian male, there is a hierarchical order amongst the women themselves. This order further influences the portrayal of each of these women in the play. This hierarchical order is an example of the way in which class, race and gender issues act as interactive issue that reinforce each other (Fouche, 1994: 82). Whilst Saira Essa and Ashadevi Rajbansi are public figures of the upper class South African *Indian community*, Mahabeer is a local beauty pageant contestant from a working class background. Thus Mahabeer is arguably located at the bottom of this hierarchy. Her actions pose a direct threat to the constructed notion of the "good clean girl" (Govender: 29), the homely virgin and as a result she is constructed on stage as a one-dimensional character whose only interest is sex. Thus the particular joking about an actual real-life incident becomes a personal attack on Mahabeer and consequently an act of oppression. Her joker, the playwright, portrays her as a slut and even a prostitute.

While *SAA Steamy Seema* (The Mahabeer story) initially ran as a skit, after the first two performances Naidu interwove the skit into the main feature of the production – namely *Mooidevi's Muti*. On numerous occasions within this play, the character Steamy Seema appears with the character Tajbansi (a reference to Amichand Rajbansi). When Tajbansi first meets Steamy Seema, at a house of a family member, he is embarrassed:

TAJBANSI: Why did you bring her here? Imagine what she can do for my reputation? (Pauses) Wonders! (to Seema) I want you to blow the horns at my convention.

(Naidu, Unpublished 1998: 16)

The reference to "blow the horns" is no doubt a sexual one. Such innuendoes are frequently made within the course of the play. Not only is this representation oppressive and a direct attack on Mahabeer (which resulted in her leaving the country), but it could also be viewed as a warning to other South African *Indian* women who choose to move away from constructed notions of their gendered roles.

In *Four Weddings and a Plastic Surgeon*, Naidu introduces us to the character of Saira Essa. She is presented as an overdressed woman who cannot control her sexual drive. Essa is also ridiculed for her accent, since it is presented as similar to that of the South African white English-speaking accent. Through Naidu's presentation of *Four Weddings and a Plastic Surgeon*, Essa is made out to be a "traitor" of the so-called *Indian culture* in South Africa since she marries outside of her race and culture. In doing so Essa challenges the cultural role of the South African *Indian* woman. Within the so-called *Indian* culture, women are viewed as having been given the responsibility of ensuring the continuation of cultural practice. Since most of these practices occurred within the private domain of the home, they have historically become known as "the duty"[32] of the woman. We see this in Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, where we are informed that "Our girls" (South African *Indian* women) "must bath everyday in running water when they light the god lamp" (Govender: 21). The lighting of the god lamp is a reference to a

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(32) See further discussion on "duty" in chapter three page 82

cultural/religious practice that has historically become a woman's "duty". Thus by marrying a white, Essa has challenged the notion of a woman's cultural duty that is constructed within the private space. Her business and financial independence has further challenged constructions of the private and the public spaces (Moi, 1985: 211).

In *Mooidevi's Muti* the character of Ashadevi is played by a man dressed in drag. This choice of using a man for a woman's role is popular amongst numerous South African *Indian* male playwrights and such a device is often used as a comic relief. Thus within the play *Mooidevi's Muti* the character Ashadevi is set up as an object of ridicule from the very outset of the performance. This idea of men playing women in parodies such as this one reinforces stereotypical ways of seeing women. The male actor depends on his interpretation of women in order to play the role and thus reinforces a fixed notion of femininity. Furthermore, the character of Ashadevi is constructed as materialistic and shallow- very similar to the stereotypical women character discussed in Pillay's *Looking for Muruga.*

The play blurs the audience and stage distinction or rather the appearance and reality distinction when Amichand Rajbansi himself appears in place of the actor representing the Rajbansi figure. In this particular scene Rajbansi renders a warning to Ashadevi, who is not given the opportunity to represent herself on stage:

RAJBANSI: Ashadevi, are you prepared to abandon everything, children, husband, grandchildren for the sake of money? You should be like Sita[33] who stood by her husband in good and bad times. She never roamed around with Ravana[34]. They call you Ashazulu in the community!

(Naidu, Unpublished: 22)

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(33) *Sita* is a Hindu goddess who accompanied her husband Rama through his hardships. She is well known in mythology for her loyalty as a wife.

(34) *Ravana* is a black demon in Hindu mythology. However in the context of the play it is a reference to Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party, with whom Ashadevi Rajbansi formed an association. This statement is not only a sexist one but also a racist one.

In the above speech, Rajbansi himself dictates the culturally constructed role of the South African *Indian* woman, who in this case is represented by the Ashadevi figure. This role is constructed within the private space, where the South African *Indian* woman is further constructed as a mother and a wife. Moreover, by using religious references like "Sita" such roles become further naturalised and rooted in fixed notions of cultural identity.

These lines are not only reflective of the way in which South African Indian woman are constructed in the community, but they are also a personal attack on Ashadevi Rajbansi, who incidentally was not given the opportunity to represent herself on this stage. In his paper *The Politics of Recognition* Charles Taylor exclaims that such an attack can be damaging and even oppressive to the misrecognised party:

> The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by the recognition or its absence, often the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (1994: 25).

Through the various South African *Indian* women characters presented in Naidu's production it can be argued that South African *Indian* women are presented in very stereotypical ways which reinforce their cultural identity within the private space. The production could also be argued as being bias in that it does not allow any opportunity for South African *Indian* women to represent themselves either as actors or in the case of the Rajbansis' as themselves.

Concluding Remarks

In an examination of the history of theatre written and produced by South African *Indian* male playwrights, it becomes clear that their theatre occurred as a reaction to the arguments of race and class presented by the apartheid system. Both the apartheid government and its opposition ignored gender and gender-related issues.

While South African *Indian* male playwrights and theatre practitioners were successful in creating a voice for themselves through which the issues of race and class (as categories of oppression) received attention, they did so at the expense of the South African *Indian* women. Their presentation of South African *Indian* women in their plays reinforce stereotypical ways of seeing South African *Indian* women. This presentation is further justified within fixed notions of culture and cultural identity.

Most of the plays produced by South African *Indian* male playwrights occur in the form of parodies and travesties. Since such parodies and travesties occur within the culture of humour, it is important that humour itself is interrogated. Speaking specifically of laughter Susan Purdie claims:

> The obvious effect involved in laughing at someone or something is that it has been 'brought low', degraded. Specifically, a Butt can be seen as denied discursive potency, the power to be an agent who has intentional effect in the world (Purdie, 1993: 59).

In relation to the representation of South African *Indian* women in parodies and travesties produced by their male counterparts, this argument becomes extremely relevant. The South African *Indian* woman, who is constructed as a cultural being within the private domain, has been historically viewed (both by herself and her male counterpart) as second to the South African *Indian* male on the so-called social hierarchy. These parodies and travesties then present themselves as oppositional and oppressive to South African *Indian* women.

The popularity of such parodies/travesties have created and reinforced habitual patterns of joking which according to Purdie, is situated in a complex network of power. Purdie claims that "re-current patterns of who makes jokes and who is joked about- will both reflect and create patterns of power" (Purdie, 1993:129).

CHAPTER THREE: Articulating our own Identity: South African *Indian* Women Writing themselves

Introductory Remarks

The lack of presentation (and often mis-representation) of South African *Indian* women in plays written by South African *Indian* male playwrights does not necessarily stem from a misogynistic or sexist approach, but rather from an often unquestioned stereotypical perception. The reason for the lack of interrogation of ways in which the South African *Indian* woman was/is represented can be attributed to two points: firstly, because gender has been secondary to issues of race and class – rather than interactive (as discussed in chapter one and two). Secondly, because the South African *Indian* woman has been constructed as a cultural being where culture itself is viewed as a fixed monolithic notion. Thus locating the South African *Indian* women within the so-called Indian culture (see discussion in chapter one) has discouraged any critical appraisal of her position.

It is because of such unquestioned and uninterrogated representations of South African *Indian* women, which create or reinforce stereotypical ways of seeing these women, that it becomes necessary for South African *Indian* women to represent themselves. In fact, many feminists claim that it is a responsibility for the oppressed to represent themselves. Writing as a black American feminist, and more specifically about the America situation, Audre Lorde claims that:

> ... in order to survive, those of us for whom are as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection.....it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes (1997: 374)

Further, Boal interprets this sort of responsibility in his presentation of the main objective of theatre, as a weapon for the oppressed to liberate themselves:

> The main objective: to change people - "spectators," passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, actors, transformers of dramatic action (1979: 122).

An appropriation of Boal's theory to the position of the South African *Indian* woman suggests that the main objective for her to represent herself on stage is to transform herself from the "spectator" (Boal, 1979: 122) or "watcher" (Lorde, 1997: 374) into an active participant. According to another black American feminist writer, Maureen Blackwood, representation is important since it:

> refers to the presentation of an image which serves as a symbol for something else immediately, and then beyond that to the social, political and historical situations which have or have had a direct relationship to how an image is presented (Blackwood, 1984: 205).

Whilst Blackwood is speaking specifically about film and the representation of black American women in Hollywood, her argument is useful in a discussion of representation of the South African *Indian* women in the theatre. Blackwood argues that women need to construct images/representations of themselves "in an attempt to offer a more complete picture of our lives/politics" (1984: 203). Playwriting (and theatre) act as vehicles through which these representations can be constructed. In her article *Words are Weapons*, Pratibhar Parmar, a British *Indian* feminist writes:

> Writing has always been a powerful means of protest and change for subjugated people all over the world. For as the Egyptian writer Nawal El Sadawi says: 'Writing is like killing, because it takes a lot of courage, the same courage as when you kill, because you are killing ideas, you are killing injustices, you are killing systems that oppress you. Sometimes it is better to kill the outside world and not kill yourself.' While writing can not always be a substitute for action, words are nevertheless powerful weapons in the struggle against imprisonment, exclusion and invisibility (1987: 149).

While playwriting, as a form of writing (words), presents itself as a weapon (1987: 149), it differs from other forms of writing since it is not an end in itself. Plays are written to be performed and it is through performance that the 'action' which Parmar advocates, is carried out. Boal further argues that neither is the performance of the play an end or a finished product. He claims that "the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theatre will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle (1979, 142). Thus through playwriting and theatre the South African *Indian* woman does not only challenge constructed identities and stereotypical images of representation presented by her male counterparts, but also creates opportunity for women to shift their positions from the passive spectators into "subjects actors and transformers of dramatic action" (Boal, 1979: 122).

At this point it is important to remember that such representation within the South African context, is only truly realised after1994. As a result of the national liberation struggle superseding the struggle against gender oppression, gender as a category of power {that is interactive rather than additive to that of race and class (Fouche, 1994: 82)} is only given attention after the conclusion of the liberation struggle in 1994[1] (see discussion in chapter one). It could therefore be argued that gender concerns receive attention in South Africa and more specifically within the South African *Indian community* only once political freedom is attained[2].

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(1) Within the context of the "new" South Africa the Constitution and the Bill of Rights have ensured women's rights and gender equality. Furthermore, the passing of bills such as the Domestic Violence Bill (1998) and the Maintenance Bill (1998) have created a climate in which women feel better equipped both politically and personally to speak.

(2) While South Africa was cut off from close contact with the developments of feminism in the West, this does not necessarily imply that South African women were inactive in the struggle for gender equality. In the 1980s women's issues were actively discussed, for example a group of women under the direction of Phyllis Klotz in1986, who wrote a play that illustrated exploitation of black women. The play was entitled *You Strike the Woman You Strike the Rock*, which was a slogan used on a peaceful march by South African women outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria. This was the largest gathering of women in the history of South Africa.

Thus, in a discussion of the way in which South African *Indian* women represent themselves (after 1994), it becomes necessary to locate their endeavour within the larger discourse of feminist development. This chapter therefore aims to do two things:

1. To provide an overview of the development of feminism[3] and the way in which it has influenced theatre (and playwriting) produced by women. This provides a historical perspective in which the works of South African *Indian* women playwrights can be discussed.

2. To investigate the way in which South African *Indian* women represent and construct themselves. Here Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia*[4] (1996) and Devi Sarinjeive's *Acts of God*[5] (1997) will be examined as examples of plays written by South African *Indian* women that offer constructions of women challenging those presented by numerous South African *Indian* male playwrights (as discussed in chapter two)[6].

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(3) Feminism is a complex concept. The term 'feminism' is not used as a homogenous one. In fact, any attempt to define the term needs to be located in a historical context. To discuss 'feminism' outside of its historical context is to distort its meaning.

(4) Script provided as Appendix A.

(5) Script provided as Appendix B.

(6) A critical discussion of my own play *Women In Brown* is provided in Appendix D rather than in the body of the dissertation. This is to ensure objectivity within the context of this dissertation. The script is provided as Appendix C. Copies of these plays have been included in this dissertation in an attempt to address the lack of exposure and publication that women playwrights experience within South Africa (Loots, 1996: 63-64). While Schauffer claims that contributions by South African *Indians* to theatre in South Africa have been highly neglected (1996:84), it can be argued that theatre produced by South African *Indian* women is further marginalised in terms of performance, publication, research and general recognition. This dissertation aims to address this marginalisation and attempts to provide a space (though limited) where these plays may receive some exposure.

1. An Overview[7] of the *Development* of Feminism and its Impact on Theatre (Playwriting) produced by Women.

1.a. Defining Feminism

Feminism is a complex concept and one that is not easily defined. In her essay entitled "What is Feminism", Rosalind Delmar says:

> The way in which feminism's past is understood and interpreted thus informs and is informed by the way in which feminism is understood and interpreted in the future (1986:13).

Perhaps it is important to discuss some conceptions (and misconceptions) of the term 'feminism'. It is interesting to note that during the national liberation struggle in India, many women's organisations rejected the label of "feminist", claiming that it was unpatriotic (it put women's rights before the nation) and that it was anti-men (saw men as the enemy) (Forbes, 1982: 530). A similar position was echoed by Frene Ginwala of the African National Congress: 'We must free ourselves from "male chauvinism" and from its counterpart "feminism" (Hassim, 1991). In both these cases the term 'feminism' has been confused with 'radical feminism', which is a historical moment instance in feminist history. As Delmar emphasises in the above quote, feminism by its nature is not a homogenous, monolithic idea, nor can it be defined outside of its historical and socio-political context.

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(7) This dissertation does not aim to provide a detailed discussion of 'feminism' and 'feminist theory'. It is however important, within the context of the gender concerns of this dissertation, that some discussion around the subject of 'feminism' is offered. A brief overview is offered as a means to contextual arguments raised in this chapter.

1.a.1. First Wave of Feminism

At the risk of oversimplification, perhaps a better understanding of feminism could be reached through tracing its historical development. There has been what is referred to as two waves of feminism in the West[8]. The first wave occurred in the 1920s during the development of the suffragist movement in Britain where women fought for the franchise. This period saw women mobilising a social and political force in order to be represented in the political arena. Whilst their endeavours resulted in some degree of change, women were still treated as second class citizens. This was reflected, amongst other things, in wage inequalities and the designations of jobs according to one's gender.

1.a.2. Second Wave of Feminism

The second wave of feminism (1960s) emerges in part out of the history of the World War 2, the American Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam Campaign. Women held strong positions in factories and were extremely influential in shaping the political and socio-economic status of their countries. Women in the United States were actively involved in the anti-war campaign and black women in the South actively involved themselves with gender issues within the Civil Rights Movement. While the first wave of feminism in the West ensured that women got the vote, the second wave focussed more on the private and sexuality identity of women[9]. The second wave of feminism was coined by the slogan "The personal is Political", which revolutionised the way in which women saw and represented themselves. Thus issues like rape, abortion, abuse and pornography, for example, became issues that could now be addressed politically and in the public arena rather than silenced in the private.

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(8) The term "West" is not intended to be used homogenously. Spivak warns against homogenisation of West – (1990: 39) rather it is used in reaction to South Africa and the developing world. In this dissertation West is used as a general reference to the United States and Britain.

(9) See Betty Friedan *The Feminist Mystique* (1965).

In order to challenge the patriarchal system, oppostional positions were taken up. These positions lead to the rise of radical feminism and later (as a reaction to radical feminism) liberal feminism[10].

1.a.2.1. Radical Feminism

It is out of the second wave of feminism that a different feminist ideology and criticism started to develop. Radical Feminism, the roots of which are to be found in the late 1960s and early 1970s, could be argued to be the beginning of feminist critical theories. In her book *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* Tong presents an adequate introduction (for the purpose of this thesis) to radical feminism:

> Radical feminists have traditionally taken the lead not only in articulating the "highly elaborate" and "deeply entrenched" nature of sex/ gender system but also in sketching exit routes out of it. In particular, radical feminists have proposed several ways to free women from the cage of femininity. These proposals have ranged from working towards an androgynous culture in which male and female differences are minimised to replace male culture with female culture. Similarly, radical feminists have proposed several ways to enable women to escape from the sexual domination of men. These have ranged from transforming the institution of heterosexuality so that neither men nor women play a dominant role to rejecting heterosexuality in favour of celibacy, autoeroticism, or lesbianism. Although much of what they have had to say about sex and gender has been said by non-radical feminists, radical feminists should be credited with detailing the ways in which men, rather than "society" or "conditions," have forced women into oppressive gender roles and sexual behaviour (1989: 95).

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(10) The categorises of radical and liberal feminist thought, discussed above, are not simple nor are they homogenous schools. Within both radical feminism and liberal feminism there are disparities and interpretations of issues that further divided feminists. Feminist history has also produced Marxist feminist and social feminist schools; however, for the purpose of this dissertation these schools will not be discussed (see Tong, 1989).

Radical feminism is primarily informed by a reversal of binaries, where men are presented as the enemy. It is within radical feminism that the myth of "sisterhood" is developed. "Sisterhood", initially presented by Robin Morgan, is based on the unification of women under the banner of "common oppression" or "victimisation" (see Tong for more information). Radical feminism also proposed a confrontational and oppositional (even militant) approach to challenging the patriarchal system.[11]

1.a.2.2. Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism occurred as a reaction to radical feminism. While radical feminism, at its most extreme proposed men as the enemy, liberal feminists rejected this proposition, claiming that it was the system rather than men as socialised beings that needed to be changed. Unlike the radical feminist school, liberal feminism proposed to challenge patriarchy from within 'the system' itself and focussed on addressing issues such as education, health, employment opportunity and equality for women. In keeping with mainstream liberal humanist thought, liberal feminism also focussed on the roles and needs women as individuals in society.[12]

1.a.3. A Politics of Difference, "Third World Feminism"[13]

Feminism itself, because of its perceived white Western middle-class roots, has been questioned and even rejected by many women. These women include women of colour in

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(11) Two influential radical feminist writers are Andrea Dworkin's *Men Possessing Women* (1981) and Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975).

(12) Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1965) is often referred to as the key text within the liberal feminist school.

(13) In her article "Under Western Eyes", Mohanty warns that the term "Third World" is used uncritically

> Terms such as "Third World" and "First World" are very problematic both in suggesting over-simplified similarities between and among countries labelled thus and in implicitly reinforcing existing economic, cultural and ideological hierarchy that are conjured up in such terminology. I use the term "Third World" in full awareness of its problems, only because this is the terminology available to us at the moment (1997: 274).

the West and women in developing countries. One of the main reasons for the criticism of feminism is that it is based on the assumption of "common oppression". Alice Walker claims that black women undergo oppression based on their race, gender and class (1984). She has thus coined the term "womanist"(see discussion in Introductory chapter) as reflective of this triple oppression that black woman undergo. Such debate around feminism and its inadequacies has moreover prompted Indian writer Chandra Mohanty to propose a politics of difference (rather than 'feminism'). Mohanty further claims that without the overdetermined discourse that creates the third world, there would be no (singular or privileged) First World. However Mohanty warns:

> This is not to say that the signature of Western feminist writings on The Third World has the same authority as the project of Western humanism. However, in the context of hegemony of the Western scholarly establishment in the production and dissemination of texts, and in the context of the legitimating imperative of humanistic and scientific discourse, the definition of "the Third World woman" as a monolith might well tie into the larger economic and ideological praxis of "disinterested" scientific inquiry and pluralism that are the surface manifestations of a latent economic and cultural colonization of the "non-Western" world. It is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.(1997: 273-274)

Thus it is can be argued that while the category of "Third World women" is presented, it is done so in reaction to and largely as a result of Western scholarly establishment. The homogenisation of "Third World women" often underlies the work of many 'western' researchers. In her *Cartographies of Third Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Mohanty claims that:

> ...they(Some white American feminists) represent a composite singular 'third world woman', the 'essential' third world woman, instead of taking account of third world diversities- their differences of class, ethnicity, their different interests, needs and goals (1991: 53)

What the 'politics of difference' proposes is an acknowledgement of complexity of identity of "Third World Women" and further that such groups are given the opportunity to represent themselves. What this means , is that there is a need for a politics that deals with specific identities (like the South African *Indian* women) rather than focussing on women as a universal monolithic group and that there is a further need for such identities.

1.b The Impact of Feminism on Theatre (and Playwriting) produced by Women in the West

Theatre (and playwriting) provides itself as tools through which such issues and ideas could be presented. Theatre becomes a weapon through which these women could liberation themselves (Boal, 1979). Since the nature of theatre is conditioned by its environment (Maree, 1997:1) (see discussion in introductory chapter), developments in feminism have had a direct impact on the theatre of the time.

1.b.1 Radical Feminist Theatre

Radical feminist theatre was influenced by radical feminist ideology. Theatre Groups like the *Spider Women* (1981) in America, comprised of an all women company. Radical feminist theatre groups worked as collectives. Their productions were classified as experimental theatre, since the content of the work itself (issues that were once considered private) were new and challenging to the status quo. Radical feminist theatre aimed to challenge the way in which theatre was produced by their male counterparts at every level of production. These women challenged hierarchical structures within the theatre by embarking on workshop projects together with profit sharing. They performed in alternative venues instead of the popular mainstream theatres of the time. In her book *Feminist Theatre* Helene Keyssar (1984) writes that within the montage of theories two sets of conventions or styles stand out - realism and Brechtian[14] non-realism (1984: 4).

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(14) Brechtian approach is one that has been developed by theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. It is based on the notion of distancing the audience from the action on stage so that the audience responds critically to the issues that are be addressed. Brecht was a Marxist who used theatre for change.

With a reputation for being oppositional, radical feminist theatre utilised the latter style since the former represented was a style utilised by mainstream theatre produced by men.

1.b.2 Liberal or Mainstream Feminist Theatre

Unlike radical feminist theatre, liberal feminist theatre mainly accessed realism within its theatral practice. This was in keeping with the overall liberal feminist thought - that any challenge to patriarchy would occur from within the system itself. In using the realist convention, a style that was the popular with mainstream male playwrights, these women playwrights were challenging the status quo by presenting women as subject. Not only were these plays classified as mainstream because of the style used in the script, but also because many of them enjoyed commercial success. Among these plays are Nell Dunn's *Steaming* (1981), Maasha Norman's *Night Mother* (1982) and Wendy Wasserstein's *Heidi Chronicles* (1990). Keyssar writes:

> All these plays focus on female characters and explore prevalent themes in feminist drama: mother-daughter relationships, sisterhood sexuality and female autonomy. A common and not trivial attribute of these plays is their ability to make the audience laugh; each of these playwrights has a skill with dialogue and an eye for the absurd in ordinary life that make somber topics palatable and engaging. The weakness common to these plays is inherent in their particular strengths: no matter how serious the topic, they are all comedies of manners, revelations of the surface of sexual identity and sexism; they are not challenges to deeper social structures that allow those manners to endure (1984: 150).

While Keyssar criticises these playwrights for not challenging the deeper social structures, these playwrights nevertheless provided a new role for women on stage. Wasserstein, Norman and playwrights like Nell Dunn presented the woman as the protagonist in their plays. This is a direct challenge to the way in which women were presented in plays written by their male counterparts, who wrote women as reactive to

that of the male protagonist. Thus we find that women now move from passive or reactive roles to ones that represents them as active participants that drive the action - an idea which Boal claims to be the main objective of theatre (1979: 122).

2. South African *Indian* Women Playwrights representing themselves through Playwriting (and Theatre): A look at Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia* and Devi Sarinjeive's *Acts of God.*

Given the historically marginalised position of South African *Indian* women, access and opportunities to create theatre have been limited. This is largely because theatre has been historically constructed within the public space. This space was one that was culturally and religiously occupied by the male, while the private space was associated with the women (See example on "duty" in chapter two pages 53-54). Thus, in order to use theatre as a weapon through which some form of liberation can be achieved, the South African *Indian* woman needs to challenge the constructed cultural role that confines her to the private space (Moi, 1985, 211). The very act of writing and creating theatre is historically and culturally an androcentric endeavour. Thus by writing and creating theatre the South African Indian woman challenges the patriarchal constructions of the private and public domains (Moi, 1985: 211). This section of the chapter focuses on two South African *Indian* women playwrights who have not only challenged the constructed identity of the South African *Indian* woman through representations in their plays, but through the very act of playwriting.

2.1 *NADIA* by Nadine Naidoo

Nadine Naidoo's play *Nadia* was first performed at the Playhouse as part of the 1996 Women's Festival[15]. The play, which consists of eleven scenes, takes the audience through the life (or significant moments in the life) of the central character, Nadia. In scene one we are introduced to Nadia at her birth. Her grandmother takes her to a guru[16] to be christened and to find out her future. The grandmother is told that her future is a bright one. Scenes two to five focus on the childhood years of Nadia. Here we discover her relationship with her friends and parents. We are also confronted with incidents of physical and sexual abuse in these scenes. Scenes seven to nine focus on Nadia's university years and her relationship with a young man. This relationship ends with a pregnancy, for which the young man does not assume responsibility. Nadia decides to have the child and proceeds with her life as a single mother. In scene ten we are introduced to Nadia as a career woman (or rather her attempt to be a career woman). She goes to an interview for a job and encounters a "boss" who offers her the job on the condition that she render him certain "favours". However, he withdraws his offer (of the job itself) when he finds out that she is a mother, claiming that motherhood required too much leave from work. Scene eleven reveals the suicide of Nadia. In Scene twelve we encounter the return of the grandmother to the guru. She complains that he lied about Nadia's future. He assures her that all the suffering that Nadia encountered was necessary and that his next life will be a better one. The final scene is one of rebirth - Nadia's soul enters into a newborn girl belonging to the Zulu culture. A sangoma (a Zulu priest or priestess) christens the child with the name Nomsa. The play then ends with a song about Nadia and Nomsa.

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(15) The annual Women's Festival at the Playhouse started in 1996. According to Gitanjali Pather, the co-ordinator, the festival is a platform where women artists can exhibit their work. This project has been received by the media with much ambivalence: While there was a need to redress the marginalised work of women artists, there was concern whether such a festival favoured exclusivity in terms of exhibiting only the works of women artists.

(16) Guru is a reference to a spiritual/religious man- a swami and a teacher.

The play is a milestone production because it is the first play after 1994 by a South African *Indian* woman playwright that aimed to represent South African *Indian* women and issues concerning South African *Indian* women on stage. The culturally constructed role of South African *Indian* women is challenged by the very fact that they are representing themselves in a public space.

The approach that is used in the writing and in the presentation of this play can be located within the radical feminist approach. While it could be argued that radical feminism is an historical instance in the development of feminism, it is important to note that that development occurred specifically within the context of the West. Indeed, if these developments had been introduced within the South African *Indian* community before 1994 they would have been rejected as the infiltration of Western values into the so-called *Indian* culture (see argument in chapter one). It is for this reason that such a radical approach could be justified as the beginning to gender discussions and awareness.

The cast of *Nadia* consisted of eighteen performers: three South African *Indian* males and fifteen South African *Indian* women of various ages. In an interview, Naidoo claimed that the reason for the large cast was to "give as many women as possible a chance to perform" (04/11/98). Most of the performers had never had the opportunity of performing in a play prior to this production. Through her production, Naidoo creates an opportunity for the spectator to transform her passive role into that of an active subject (Boal, 1979: 122). This, according to Boal, is the main objective of theatre (especially theatre of the oppressed) (1979, 122). This process of transformation involves an engagement with issues that affect the spectator and a platform of empowerment where she is able to represent herself and her own subject position. Thus the process of making theatre (the rehearsal period), especially theatre of the oppressed, is as important as the product. Naidoo claimed that the rehearsal period was most rewarding since most of the women actors could relate to incidents or themes of the play in terms of their own lived experience. This led to numerous discussions after rehearsals on issues and problems facing South African *Indian* women and women in general (Interview with Naidoo 04/11/98). Thus the rehearsal space itself became a space where women articulated and

shared their experiences with one another. While this could be argued as an instance of women bonding on the basis of shared victimisation[17], it nevertheless results in the breaking of a silence that is historically and culturally synonymous with the private space.

Through the act of articulation in such a space "what was thought to be a personal problem has a social cause and a political solution" (Freeman, 1975: 118). One of the first ways that Naidoo represents the South African Indian woman is evident in the fact that she chooses to show the audience the various stages and developments in Nadia's life. Like the theatre produced by radical feminists, Naidoo uses a Brechtian non-realist style in presentation (this will be further discussed later in this chapter). This then offers a more complete and a more complex representation, a goal that Blackwood claims to be one of the main reasons for self-representation (1984: 203). Through these developments (and incidents) we become aware of how Nadia's reality/ies are constructed and shaped by the environment. While this does not necessarily excuse Nadia's suicide, it nevertheless equips us with a better understanding of her choice. Through the idea of the reincarnation, Naidoo presents two things: firstly, a more spiritual argument that the immortal soul is the essence of a being; and secondly, that given this premise, identity is something that is socially constructed. The soul of Nadia after the suicide lives on and enters the body of Nomsa. However, identity of the two women has nothing to do with the presence of the soul but rather with the bodies that it occupies. Nadia is not defined by her soul but by the fact that she is a South African *Indian* woman. Thus her identity and the notion of identity in general is being argued as constructed rather than determinist or positivist. This argument is developed by Spivak (See chapter one page5-9).

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(17) bell hooks locates victimisation as an idea of 'common oppression' within "sexist ideology" and further argues that the idea of "common oppression" itself is a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex reality." (1997: 396-397)

It can be argued that the play itself constructs the South African *Indian* woman largely as a victim (once again a radical interpretation). Each scene focuses on different incidents of abuse and victimisation in the life of Nadia and the other women in the play. In scene two we are introduced to Nadia as a child consoling her physically abused mother. We find out that Nadia's mother has been abused because she has not put enough salt in the food. Through this scene is becomes clear that while the private space is argued culturally, religiously and historically as a woman space, it does not allow women to exercise power within this space. The private space is constructed within patriarchy, and despite the absence or participation of the male from this space, he nevertheless controls it. Thus the South African *Indian* woman becomes a victim of imprisonment within this space. Furthermore, this scene also presents the South African *Indian* woman as a victim of a physical abuse.

In scene five Nadia and her friends are and at a sleepover, when one of them is sexually abused:

RENAY: *Crying*. It was horrible! There was a man. I don't know if it was my brother or my father or one of their drunk... friends! I can't remember what happened but when I awoke... my underclothes were inside out!!!

Appendix A: 6

Here we encounter the representation of South African *Indian* women as victims of sexual abuse. In scene ten Nadia is presented as a single mother, looking for a job. When she arrives for the interview the "boss" makes numerous sexual advances and it is obvious that sexual "favours" are a part of the job. However, when he discovers that she is a single mother he withdraws the offer claiming that " When you decide to breed the next one I will have to give you maternity leave". Here we encounter the South African *Indian* woman as a victim of sexism - ostracised because of her ability to procreate.

From the examples offered in the play, Naidoo can be criticised for presenting the South African *Indian* woman as a victim at almost every level. hooks argues against this presentation of women as victims. She claims that "in their daily lives most women are not continually passive, helpless, or powerless 'victims' and that women "cannot afford to see themselves solely as victims because their survival depends on continued exercise of whatever personal power they possess."(1997: 397). hooks further claims that representation of women as "victims" is limiting in that it is does not explore the complexity of their own experience (1997: 397). Indeed the representation of women as victims can be located in patriarchy or what hooks calls "sexist ideology" (1997: 396) because this is based on binary oppositions. These binary oppositions, according to Toril Moi, are heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system (1985, 211). Helene Cixous further presents a list of binary oppositions, referring to what she calls "death-dealing binary thought" (Cixous and Clement, 1975: 115). Amongst the examples on the list, she presents the activity/passivity distinction. The victim representation of the South African *Indian* woman can be located in this particular example, where woman as victim is seen as the passive and acted upon while the male is seen as the one who victimises/acts.

While Naidoo represents the South African Indian women as "victim" in the various scenes, she undercuts this through the use of poetry, music, projections and movement that act as distancing devices that comment on the action of the play. In other words, while Naidoo presents the "victim" in her play, she also offers commentary on this position. This commentary then acts as a device that distances the audience from merely an emotional response to the action. This discourse of distancing was effectively inaugurated by theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. Brecht argued that through distancing the audience is able to view the play and the issues/problems raised by the play in a more objective way. As a Marxist, he further claimed that it was this objectivity, rather than a mere emotional response, that enable the audience to act and to change the social order.

Naidoo uses this technique because she claims that the "aim of the production was to create a political awareness and to initiate social change with regard to the status of these women" (Interview 04/11/98). In scene five, for example, Naidoo projects real life

statistics onto the wall after the discovery of the sexual abuse of Nadia's friend Renay. This immediately distances the audience from the action of the scene by locating it in reality. The audience is therefore forced to confront the reality of sexual abuse in society instead of merely responding to the action in the play.

Scene eight of the play moves away from these representations of the South African *Indian* woman as a victim. Almost all of the eighteen women actors march onto the stage. They are dressed alike in black robes. They present themselves as soldiers; however, as Naidoo confirms, they are not armed with guns but rather with words. This is an instance of articulations where words become weapons of liberation (Parmar, 1987: 149):

I'm the voice of the abused daughter!
Swine! Idiot! Rubbish! You call me failure and expect me to be a success. How can I trust myself when you can't trust me? You call me a dog, but I mustn't bark!

I am the voice of the abused career woman!
Don't touch me and don't judge me by the length of my skirt. I'm here to do my job! Oh! So I'm good enough to be ogled at but not good enough for that promotion!

I am the voice of the abused wife!
You think I don't know about her? I smelt that perfume! I found those restaurant bills! I know where you were last weekend! I've sacrificed my individuality for you and now I will sacrifice the rest of my life for my children for you are still sleeping in my bed!

I am the abused female body! What gives you the right to stand there and look me up and down or hoot at me with that wife and children sitting beside you in that car!Look at me! My eyes are here...Not HERE!

I am the voice of the liberated career woman!
Hi Honey! I've got my first pay packet. Thank you for all your support! Now at least we'll have enough money to make some of our dreams come true! For beside, not behind, every successful man is a successful woman!

I am the voice of the nurtured daughter!
You dote on me and make sacrifices to give me every opportunity to develop myself completely as a person! I have all the world at my feet and I am everything I am because you love me!

I am the voice of the woman in parliament!
I represent all women who have been part of the struggle!
According to the new constitution WE HAVE RIGHTS and WE NEED TO USE THEM TO EMPOWER OURSELVES! You strike a woman, you strike a rock!

I am the voice of the home executive!
I am all women! No matter what my profession, after work I am always the mistress of my home! I am the confidant to my husband, the teacher to my children, the doctor to my family, and the best friend to them all.
I nurture the future nation, FOR THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE RULES THE WORLD!!!!

Appendix A: 10

It could be argued that this poem (and its presentation) sums up the purpose of the play. It calls for a more active participation of women to liberate themselves. The first four stanzas of the poem, however, echo particular scenes within the play by presenting women as victims. Stanza one reiterated Nadia's childhood. The line "you call me a dog,

but I mustn't bark" is reflective of the silence that has been historically and culturally constructed. The poem presents itself, as does the play as a whole, as a challenge to such notions of silence by allowing women the opportunity to "bark". The second stanza echoes scene ten of the play, when the "boss" harasses Nadia at an interview. Here the idea of women as object of desire/sex is being challenged. In her book Pornography: Men possessing Women Dworkin writes:

> The male, through each and every one of his institutions, forces the female to conform to his supremely ridiculous definition of her as sex object. He fetishes her body as a whole and in its parts (1981, 22).

While Dworkin represents a radical position, it can be argued that Naidoo appropriates this position. In stanza four Naidoo speaks of the abused female body and ways in which men perceive it. Early in the play in scene three Nadia comes across a magazine with sexually explicit material. A voice over of Nadia (the narrator) is then played:

> VOICE-OVER NADIA: At that point in my life, I didn't know what pornography was. I wondered, "Is this the reason why men perceive women as they do?"
>
> Appendix A: 3

What is perhaps most challenging about this poem is that Naidoo ends with an assertion of the private space. Naidoo deliberately puts the stanza about the women in parliament before the stanza about the private space. This is an assertion that the private space is ultimately as political as the public space. Naidoo further argues for a valuing of the private space, which has been historically devalued under patriarchy (Tong, 1985).

The suicide of Nadia is ambivalent: while we understand that circumstances have shaped the decision, it is nevertheless a decision made from a victimised status. Thus if victimisation is a position that is located in patriarchy (hooks 1997: 397) her suicide becomes a reinforcement of the system of patriarchy rather than a challenge to it. The

end of the play is left to the interpretation of the audience - another device that Naidoo uses to distance the audience from the action and encourage a more objective approach. The entry of the soul of Nadia (a South African *Indian* woman) into the body of Nomsa could be interpreted in two ways: either there is a vicious cycle of abuse and victimisation despite the new body, or a better life lies ahead within the new body which is located in another culture (carrying with it its own set of constructions). The first option could therefore claim that victimisation and abuse are a universal norm for women. However, numerous feminists, including hooks and Walker, who defines herself as a "womanist", argue that victimisation and marginality cannot be universally defined because of issues of race and class which reject the idea of "common oppression"(see chapter Introductory chapter). The second interpretation is a very pessimistic one - that the only escape for the South African *Indian* woman from her oppressor is outside of that community, and Naidoo presents that escape in the death of Nadia.

While Naidoo's play could be criticised for the presentation of such radical alternatives and for its overall radical approach, it is important to note that perhaps such an approach is necessary for the development of awareness and discussion around the historical constructed presentation of South African *Indian* women both on stage and in their daily lives. *Nadia* broke the silence and allow South African Indian women (who were spectators) a chance to represent themselves in a public space. It attempted to address issues such as rape, abortion and pornography that were not only considered private issues but also culturally taboo. Furthermore, by allowing South African *Indian* women the opportunity to represent themselves, the theatre produced is a rehearsal (Boal, 1979:142). This is a rehearsal for the necessary social and political changes in the lives of South African *Indian* women (see chapter one page 16).

2.2. *ACTS OF GOD*[18] by Devi Sarinjeive

Acts of God is a five scene play by Devi Sarinjeive that is set in kitchen in Chatsworth[19]. In scene one we are introduced to the character Kanna, a housewife, and Baby, who is Kanna's husband's maternal aunt. It is the day of Kanna's father-in-law's funeral ceremony, and these two women are pottering around in the kitchen discussing his death and other family related issues. From their conversation we learn that the old man lived with Kanna and her husband. We also learn that the old man's daughter Leela (who is Kanna's sister-in-law), is to fly down from Johannesburg to attend the funeral. In scene two Leela arrives. She joins Baby and Kanna in the kitchen. Through the arguments between Leela and Kanna it is established that their relationship is an unhealthy and oppositional one. Kanna finds it hard to believe or accept Leela's lifestyle as an unmarried career woman living outside of her father's home. To Kanna, such an existence is untraditional and therefore immoral. She constantly accuses Leela of sleeping around and having loose morals. Leela in turn views Kanna's position as unfulfilled and idle. She sees the housewife has a bored frustrated person who entertains herself by gossiping and spreading rumours. Baby attempts to stop their noisy argument. Scene three is set at the funeral (which is held at the house in Chatsworth). Baby and Leela sit near the coffin whilst whispering complaints about the way in which Kanna had taken care of the old man. They are later joined by Kanna herself, who dutifully performs tasks allocated to her as the "lady of the house." Once again, Leela and Kanna can not resist arguing with each other. Baby is embarrassed for them, claiming that they are behaving in a disrespectful manner.

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(18) This play was first performed at the Hexagon Theatre in Pietermaritzburg and is soon to be published in the first anthology of works by South African women playwrights. The staff members of the drama department at the University of Natal, Pietermarizburg, embarked on this project.

(19) Chatsworth is a residential area in the south of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal that contains the largest population of South African *Indians* in the country. These residents are largely from the working-class.

In scene four all the characters return to the kitchen. The argument between Kanna and Leela becomes extremely heated – they blame each other for the old man's death. Leela then decides to spend the night at Baby's house. In scene five, set in Baby's kitchen, Leela and Baby have a conversation about marriage, family and work. We discover that while Baby has constantly argued for the nuclear family[20] and has constantly encouraged Leela to marry, she herself is unhappy with her family life. Her husband and children do not communicate with her and consequently she is very lonely. They receive a phone call from Bully, Kanna's husband. He becomes very aggressive toward his aunt, who is trying to resolve the feud between his wife and Leela. Upon losing the argument with his aunt, he resorts to the use of obscene language. Upset by his attitude, Leela then phones her brother. She is greeted by Kanna, who lies that Bully is not home. Leela then insults Kanna and hangs up. The play ends with Baby and Leela continuing their chat about their lives.

Performed after Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia, Acts of God* is situated within the liberal feminist approach to theatre. It utilises similar criteria as discussed by Keyssar on page 64 of this chapter. Like the women playwrights of the liberal feminist theatre of the 1980s, Sarinjeive presents a woman as the protagonist of the action on the stage. The situation that is set up is one of family relationships and is set within the private space of the home and more specifically the kitchen. Another similarity lies in the use of comedy/ humour within the convention of realism, which is a style with which the liberal feminist playwrights have become identified. In her book *Feminist Theatre* Keyssar defines realism as:

> Realism is a matter of style and content: it is a representation of recognisable of recognisable setting, characters and events reaccentuated by the newness of the material to the stage: it is typified by juxtaposition along with continuity of incident from scene to scene, and reference to popular culture (1984: 5).

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(20) Nuclear family refers a family that comprises of a father as the head, a mother and children.

She further claims that

> Realism encourages us to forget the border between stage and audience; the world of play could be part of our world, and we come to care about it almost as we would about our own lives and communities (1984: 5).

Realism, as a matter of style and content, is associated with historically dominated mainstream theatre, which was dominated by male theatre practitioners. Radical feminism therefore reacted against realism, claiming that it was a form synonymous with hegemonic powers. Moreover, through the blurring of the border between stage and audience that realism encouraged, such hegemonic powers are reinforced.

However, Keyssar claims that while realism is a "theatrical representation of everyday life embedded in the more general flux of history," it also refers to "various aspects of a representation, including those not readily seen or felt or heard" (1984: 6-7). Furthermore, Keyssar argues that the fact that realism, as a form of theatre, blurs the distinction between stage and audience, is not necessarily a bad thing but:

> ... is potentially a political good: it allows an audience of ordinary working-class and middle-class people to be at ease with the theatre and thus to be more receptive to political and social ideas and behaviours that they might otherwise avoid (1984: 5).

Therefore, with regard to Sarinjeive's *Acts of God*, which addresses a working-class and middle-class audience, realism lends itself as an appropriate approach. Furthermore, since working-class and middle-class South African *Indian* audiences have encountered the works of South African *Indian* male playwrights, who have used realism, they have associated and to a large extent defined theatre in terms of realism. Sarinjeive's play therefore does not aim to challenge realism as a dominant form of theatre, but rather to use the form because of its dominance in order to represent South African *Indian* women – as a group that is not readily seen or heard (Keyssar, 1984: 6).

Whilst numerous South African *Indian* women playwrights have used the realist

approach in theatre[21], the content of these plays were very often androcentric. Sarinjeive's play becomes groundbreaking in that it is one of the first plays that uses the realist approach in the presentation of feminist argument. Furthermore, if it is the "responsibility of the oppressed to teach (or educate) the oppressor" (Lorde, 1997: 374), it would be argued that such education be carried out in a style familiar to the oppressor[22].

Like the plays written by the South African *Indian* male playwrights and many of the mainstream playwrights, *Acts of God* uses the realist style in its presentation; however, it is in its content that it differs from (and challenges) these conventional plays. By presenting, in both set and plot, the historically and culturally constructed space of the South African *Indian* woman, Sarinjeive has challenged the very nature (constructed) of that space. The play is set in the kitchens of Kanna and Baby – a space that has been historically constructed as a private one, and further within the South African *Indian community* – a space that is culturally a silenced and devalued one. Sarinjeive introduces the audience to the historically "unseen" and misrepresented space of the South African *Indian* woman.This space is questioned throughout the play by the characters involved.

In the play we are introduced to three characters, two of whom are set up against each other. Kanna, a young housewife, attaches value and status to the idea of marriage, having children and to the possession of material assets. We discover that this view in not an individual one but one that is shared amongst the members of the entire community including Baby.

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(21) These include playwrights like Saira Essa, Gita Mala and even Muthal Naidoo.

(22) This idea of writing back in the language of the oppressors (as a form of political protest) was utilised in the 1960's by the Negritude writers in Africa.

In scene one, Baby says to Kanna:

BABY: You got husband... children... house... car... now you think you can talk to me anyhow?

Appendix B: 2

This view is reinforced in a conversation about marriage between Baby and her niece Leela in scene three:

BABY: That's what a family is for...to take care of you. Look at you now. You got no one, no husband, nothing. You all by yourself.

Appendix B: 14

Further in an argument between Kanna and Leela in scene four, Kanna curses Leela :

KANNA: I curse you! You'll never find a husband! Never get married!

Appendix B: 16

It becomes increasingly clear that Kanna considers herself to be superior to her unmarried sister-in-law and that there is a great deal of pressure throughout the play for Leela to find a husband:

LEELA: Oh that old story again. You nothing without a gang of people behind you? Is your life full now Kanna?

KANNA: I'm better than you.

LEELA: What? Husband, children, house, car? Is that what you mean? Now you're a woman?

KANNA: It's better than you, with nothing.

Appendix B: 16

Such an unquestioned attitude stems from an upbringing within the so-called *Indian* culture, where the status of a woman in the community depends on her ability to marry and to procreate within the boundaries of marriage. Her status is also dependent on the profession of her husband. Thus while the married Kanna will have status that is superior to that of the single Leela, she does not necessarily share the same status as say a doctor's wife, for example. This is an instance where class and culture operate as a means of identity construction. In page 13 of chapter one, the argument presented by Deborah King is appropriated in a discussion of identity construction. King argues that the categories of race, class and gender are not additive but rather interactive in that they reinforce each other's meaning (Fouche, 1994:82). The category of cultural identity, especially within the context of the South African *Indian* community, can be argued to be a crucial aspect of identity. From the example discussed above it becomes clear that constructed notions of culture, together with race, class and gender, are interactive categories that reinforce each other's meaning.

Moreover, the idea of women defining themselves in accordance with the male folk in their families is not only one that is culturally constructed, but, according to bell hooks, it is a part of "male supremacist ideology (that) encourages women to believe that (they) are valueless and that they obtain value by relating or bonding with men" (1997: 396). Further, in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, liberal feminist writer, Mary Wollstonecraft writes:

> Connected with man as daughters, wives and mothers, their (women's) moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions, should be to unfold their own facilities and the dignity of conscious virtue. (1988: 8)

Thus through the presentation of this play Sarinjeive questions the constructed role and relationship of the South African *Indian* woman as stipulated by the so-called *Indian culture*. Such representation is geared toward the "unfolding of their own facilities" through representing themselves on stage.

Sarinjeive challenges constructed stereotypical views through the presentation of the character Leela. Leela is a single, economically independent character who lives on her own. She is highly educated and has studied abroad. While she has no intention of marrying there seems to be a lot of pressure from the community for her to marry. There is an assumption that because she is unmarried, she is sexually promiscuous. Thus marriage is presented as an institution to control women's sexuality. In scene three Kanna argues that her marriage which was carried out in a conservative, traditional manner, implies that she (Kanna) is a "decent" woman:

KANNA: Aunty Baby, listen to what she is saying. I came in a decent way into this family. Tell her aunty Baby about the proposal! I'm not sleeping around with hundred and one fellas like her. At least I got one man.

Appendix B: 12

It is through the character of Leela that questioning of culturally constructed roles occurs. Leela has left her father's house and has therefore challenged on of the basic constructions of the identity of South African *Indian* women. It is for this very reason that she faces pressure to marry and poses a threat to the other women in the play. In scene four the cultural role of the South African *Indian* woman is being presented and challenged by Baby and Leela respectively:

BABY: What else is there for a woman?

LEELA: What? Husband, children, washing, cooking?

BABY: That's our duty as women... our dharma... You can't be a man. That's the way God meant us to live.

LEELA: Do I look like a man?

BABY: You don't act like a proper Indian woman. Appendix B: 15

The idea of "duty" is one that is constructed within a fixed notion of culture and is justified through unquestioned cultural and religious practices. Baby is constantly reminding the other two characters of their duties as wives, mothers, daughters-in-law and as a "proper Indian woman". In scene one she reminds Kanna that it is her duty as daughter-in-law to take care of her sick father-in-law. In scene two she reminds Leela that it is proper to dress in cultural clothing. In scene four she talks to Leela about the duties of an *Indian* women. According to the Oxford dictionary the word "duty" refers to "task or action that a person is bound to perform for moral or legal reasons". "Duty" becomes a moral obligation for both Baby and Kanna because it is constructed within a fixed notion of *Indian* culture. Thus the role of South African *Indian* women becomes naturalised through so-called cultural practices. These practices in turn become "duties" which the South African *Indian* women finds herself bound to fulfil since culture itself is presented as a fixed entity.

Through the character of Leela, Sarinjeive challenges the idea of "duty":

> LEELA: Duty isn't enough. I see you and your family, Bully and Kanna, Rajan and his family. Doing your duty does not make you happy.
>
> Appendix B: 22

While Sarinjeive could be criticised for the use of stereotypical characters in her play, what is important is that it is through these stereotypical characters that larger social and political commentaries are presented. In an interview (12/12/98) Sarinjeive claimed that the use of stereotypical characters was a deliberate one. She uses the same type of characters that South African *Indian* male playwrights have often utilised in their plays; however, through her presentation of these characters the status quo is challenged rather than reinforced – as would be the case in plays written by many of the South African *Indian* male playwrights.

Furthermore, while Sarinjeive's play is situated with liberal feminist theatre, through her questioning of the fixed cultural identities of South African *Indian* women, she presents a critique of liberal feminism, which has historically ignored culture as a form of identity construction. As discussed in Chapter one, black feminist writers such as hooks, Walker and Blackwood have all reacted to the theory of triple marginalisation (race, class and gender). South African *Indian* women, while sharing such categories of marginalisation, are further ostracised by a sense of not belonging to the African continent. This is because the South African *Indian* woman is constructed as a cultural being (see discussion in chapter one). In her play *Acts of God* Sarinjeive reacts against these arguments (race, class, gender and culture), which have historically led to fixed representations of South African *Indian* women. Furthermore, the line "wherever you go, whatever you do Leela, you will always be Indian" (Appendix: 22) acts as a warning that that culture as a category of identity within the South African *Indian* community overrides that of race, class and gender.

Sarinjeive's play becomes groundbreaking in that it is one of the first plays written within the realist style that represents South African *Indian* women in theatre, and through this representation they have challenged the stereotypical way in which South African *Indian* women are viewed. It is also one of the first plays to directly question the culturally constructed role of South African *Indian* women.

Concluding Remarks

Both Naidoo and Sarinjeive have reacted to the way in which South African *Indian* women have been constructed in plays written and produced by South African *Indian* male playwrights. Naidoo, who writes after 1994, takes a radical approach in challenging such constructions on stage. While she may be criticised in her representation of South African *Indian* women as victims (a position familiar to radical feminist theatre) she nevertheless gives these victims a platform to represent themselves and thus gave a voice to the victims. Through a Brechtian methodology of playmaking and writing, the play *Nadia*, offers a commentary on the action produced on stage, thus distancing the audience

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from a mere emotional reponse to her characters and encouraging critical awareness around the way in which South African *Indian* women have been historically and culturally constructed. While such a radical approach to theatre has occurred in the 1960's in the West, it is only after 1994 that such articulations were made possible in the South African context. *Nadia* is a groundbreaking production in that it sets the foundation for theatre written and produced by South African *Indian* women playwrights. However, more importantly, it breaks the silence of the private space within which South African Indian women were historically and culturally located.

It is not coincidental that a play, which echoes a liberal feminist approach, followed since liberal feminism occurred as a reaction to radical feminism in the West. Through the realistic presentation of Sarinjeive's *Acts of God* the unquestioned role of South African *Indian* women within the culturally constructed private space is brought to the forefront and notions such as "duty" are questioned as part of fixed cultural practices.

Both plays are significant in that they use theatre as a means of representing and liberating themselves. However, more importantly, for one of the first time in the history of South African theatre South African *Indian* women are transformed from the passive role of spectator into the active role of "subjects, actors, transformers of dramatic action" (Boal, 1979 : 122). In doing so they further create awareness and discussion around the position of the South African *Indian* women.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation does not argue against the idea of South African *Indian* male playwrights writing women into their plays, nor does it argue for the exclusive right of South African *Indian* women to write about their own experiences - even though it could be argued that such a right seems necessary in the initial steps towards challenging their historically and cultural constructed identity. Furthermore, this dissertation does not aim to propose an (alternative) fixed identity for South African *Indian* women, but rather to argue the necessity for the historically imposed and constructed identity for the South African *Indian* women to be challenged.

In order to challenge this historically imposed and cultural identity of South African *Indian* women, which has been largely constructed by their male counterparts through cultural activities such as theatre, it becomes necessary to establish what that constructed identity is. Identity itself is complex because it is not a fixed or deterministic concept (Spivak, 1990:38). Identity shifts and reacts to the particular socio- political, geographic and economic environment that it finds itself constructing and being constructed by. In the case of the South Africa *Indian* community[1], identity during the apartheid era was shaped as a reaction to the arguments of race and class that were dictated by the apartheid system itself. Unlike the arguments of race and class, gender was acknowledged, neither by the apartheid government nor by its opposition, as a legitimate category of identity.

Race within the South African *Indian* context was closely associated with the notion of culture. This fixed notion of culture sought meaning from the Indian sub-continent (see chapter one, page 1-10). Thus, the identity of South Africa *Indian* women was not only a political one but also a cultural one where culture operated as a fixed entity. Such cultural identities in turn defined South African *Indian* (women) from other marginalised groups.

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(1) See chapter one page 9 for discussion on *community*. Community presented as imagined by political scholar Benedict Anderson (1983: 6).

While many black feminists have argued that race, class and gender have marginalised black women, it can be argued that South African *Indian* women have been marginalised not only by race, class, gender, but also a fixed notion of culture.

Culture itself is not neutral (Tax 1973: 1) It is a dynamic entity that operates within a network of power structures. So-called *Indian* culture in South Africa is moreover situated within the structure of patriarchy and thus carries gendered ideological constructions. Through practice (or tradition) which reinforces fixed notions of culture, South African *Indian* women have been bound to perform "duties" according to what is dictated for the preservation of their culture and therefore their identity.

This culturally constructed role is further located within the private domain of the home, where the home itself is devalued and perceived as "non-productive" under the capitalist system (Tong: 1985: 51). The presentation of such binary - as the private and public is located within the patriarchal value system (Moi, 1985: 211) . Within the construction of the private "nonproductive" space and the public "productive" space, women and men are constructed as passive and active beings respectively (Moi. 1985: 211). South African *Indian* women have therefore been culturally constructed and silenced within the private domain. Moreover, like the "Third World" woman proposed by Mohanty, the South African *Indian* woman has been perceived through images like the obedient wife, the chaste virgin and the powerful mother (1997: 273).

These images have been reinforced through cultural practices such as theatre by the South African *Indian* male playwrights and producers. While theatre has historically presented itself as a weapon for oppressed and subjugated people (Boal, 1979), it can also be argued that theatre has been similarly utilised by the oppressors themselves as a tool to reinforce the status quo. Thus theatre produced by South African *Indian* men during the apartheid era operated as a weapon of liberation against the argument of race and class, but it also operated as a tool that reinforced the unquestioned cultural construction of the South African *Indian* woman. It is important to note that gender was secondary to the categories of race and class during the liberation struggle in South Africa (see discussion in chapter one, page 12-13). Thus, together with playwrights and theatre practitioners from the South African black *community*, South African *Indian* male playwrights' produced what is now referred to as protest theatre.

While protest theatre was highly effective in that it gave the South African *Indian* male a voice, it nevertheless failed to address and acknowledge gender as an interactive category along with race and class (Fouche, 1994: 82). South African *Indian* male playwrights therefore continued to misrepresent South African *Indian* women in their plays (if they are represented at all).

It is because of both such lack of representation and such culturally stereotyped representation that it becomes necessary for South African *Indian* women to represent themselves. Playwriting (and theatre) presents itself as a powerful tool through which self-representation and liberation can occur. Liberation is attained through the process of articulation both in the form of words (Parmar, 1987: 149) and perhaps more importantly in the form of action (theatre) (Boal, 1979: 122). According to Boal the main objective of theatre is to change the passive spectator into an active creator (1979: 122). In an appropriation of Boal's theory, theatre presents itself as a way through which the South African *Indian* challenges her historically and culturally constructed identity within the private domain.

It is only after 1994 that such an endeavour is truly realised. This is because the year 1994 became the watershed year in South African history that marked the end of the apartheid regime and provided the potential political freedom for previously marginalised groups like South African *Indian* women, to represent themselves. Thus, gender and gender-related issues finally received its long awaited attention, both socially through the activities of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and politically (in the constitution).

South African *Indian* women playwrights used theatre as a means to liberate and articulate themselves against fixed cultural identities. Such representation has been argued by many feminists as a responsibility of a marginalised group (Lorde, 1997; 374). Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia*, Devi Sarinjeive's *Acts of God*, have become landmark productions not only because they present a platform where South African *Indian* women can represent themselves, but also because South African *Indian* women can transform themselves from the role of spectators to that of creators through the theatrical medium (Boal, 1979: 122). While this process occurs the production of their

theatre is not necessarily a finished product but rather a rehearsal since they are not sure what their world would look like (Boal, 1979: 142).

According to Dworkin men have historically (mis)interpreted and (mis)represented women's experiences as a means of retaining power (1981: 17). What playwriting (and theatre) offer South African *Indians* is the opportunity to reclaim the right to name their own experience and in doing so construct their own identities.

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APPENDIX A

Nadia

Written and Directed by Nadine Naidoo

NADIA

Written and Directed by Nadine Naidoo

Performed at the 1997 Women's Arts Festival Playhouse (Durban)

SCENE ONE: The Birth

Stage in Darkness. Screen Projection: Every second.....Children are born. Lights up. A guru sits in a lotus position on stage. Enter parents with newborn. Place child on before him.

GURU: At what time was the child born?

Parents mime the reply. The guru nods and opens his sacred book.

GURU: Hmmm. According to the time of the birth, this child has been born under a very lucky star. She will have a good heart and great dreams. She has far to go and she will achieve what her heart desires...there will be obstacles that will cross her path, but you should pray that she has the power to overcome them.

Parents hold up the little bundle as the guru applies ashes to all three foreheads.

GURU: According to the stars, her name shall begin with the letter "N".

Parents exit.

GURU: *Chuckles.* Her name SHALL be NADIA!

Lights to half.

SCENE TWO: The Marital Abuse

Lights up. Enter Saras and Nadia.

NADIA: Saras, why are we playing in the rain?

SARAS: Because…mummy and daddy need to talk…and we came to show you, little bunny, the stars and the moon!

Offstage we hear father shouting and mother screaming.

NADIA: Saras, why is daddy shouting at mummy?

SARAS: Because mummy did not put enough salt in the food my darling.

Mother enters sobbing. Child runs and embraces her.

NADIA: Don't cry mummy, don't cry! God is watching us. God will take care of us!

VOICE-OVER NADIA: That night as I stood holding my mother helplessly, too young to comprehend what was happening, I knew that somehow I was a comfort to my mother. Then I saw a bright shooting star move across the sky – and I wished…

NADIA: I wish…I wish my first born child is a girl baby so my daughter can take care of me.

VOICE-OVER NADIA: Little did I know that…was really a plane heading for the landing strip of Durban International Airport.

Lights to half. Exit all.

SCENE THREE: Schooldays

VOICE-OVER NADIA: As I grew older, things never really got better. But, at school I was really lucky to have had 2 of the world's greatest best friends.

Lights up. Enter Renay and Hazel. Nadia enters from opposite side.

RENAY: Hey Nadia!

NADIA: Hi Renay! Hi Hazel!

Sound of the school bell. They pick up their bags and walk to the edge of the stage.

HAZEL: Boys are SO DUMB!!!

RENAY: Especially the high school boys.

NADIA: They are always interfering with us!

HAZEL: I hate when they say "Hey girl!"

RENAY: And what about the whistling and "Tsk! Tsk!"

Nadia rises with a dreamy look on her face. They whisper together and then begin to sing. The boys enter miming laughter.

NADIA: What are you boys laughing at?

KRAIGEN: You three sound like bullfrogs!

HAZEL: You wormers!!!

RYAN: Agh! We've got better things to do!

RENAY: Oh, what are you looking at? Let us see too! *Reaching out.*

They scuffle. The dirty magazine falls to the floor.

GIRLS: Ugh!!!

Projection: (Statistics on pornography).

VOICE-OVER NADIA: At that point in my life, I didn't know what pornography was. I wondered, "Is this the reason why men perceive women as they do?"

Blackout. Exit Renay, Nadia and Hazel.

VOICE-OVER NADIA: I had to tell someone. These pictures were revolting! So, I told my Aya. Aya always had her own way of handling things.

SCENE FOUR

Enter Nadia and Aya. Guru enters opposite side. Lights up.

AYA: Aum and salutations! Oh guru! What a sin I did? I don't know what sin I did!

GURU: What is the matter Ma? Don't cry. Tell me what's wrong.

AYA: This one here best granddaughter for me. Clever, get book prize and all.

GURU: Then what is the problem?

AYA: But now this one, you said born under lucky star. Got so far to go. But now. Rubbish boy showing terrible magazines in school. Putting ideas in head! Now I must take sacrifice to keep the evil spirits away.

GURU: Ma, what do you mean by sacrifice?

AYA: You know, you tell. How many fowl, how many goats. Aya go round the temple. Otherwise, what if she grows up to be just like this!

GURU: Ma, you can't blind her to the world. *To the child* You are a woman of the earth. Life will offer you many temptations and desires. You are a powerful soul and as much as you can be powerful, so can you be destructive. The choice is yours.

AYA: What you meaning? No fowls, no goats! I have to take sacrifice to keep the evil spirits away from her!

GURU: No ma. Nadia from a young girl, you will grow up to be a beautiful woman – and your beauty will lie in your soul. Remember always – you are not a victim of the world – you are a woman.

AYA: You – what you know! You planting calabash in this girl's head and expecting cabbage to grow! Don't know nothing! What sin I did! I MUST do sacrifice!

VOICE-OVER NADIA: As I followed Aya, I couldn't help but turn around and then...something passed between us. There was something in that wink...something in that chuckle.

GURU: Oh! Oh! Oh!...

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

Lights up. Enter Renay and Hazel.

HAZEL: Oh! I'm so glad that you both could come stay over!

RENAY: Well it's only because we did so well in the exam, you know.

HAZEL: Hmmm...All that hard work and now it's time to PLAY!!!

RENAY: Oh goody!

NADIA: What shall we do first? How about...MAKE-UP!! *Running across the dressing table. The other two rush over, giggling in delight.* I borrowed my mum's for the night.

They apply powder and lipstick and sing "Happy Song". Lights fade to blackout.

VOICE-OVER NADIA: That night we went to bed with songs in our hearts but our slumber in dreamland was shattered by Renay's frightening scream.

No lights at this point. Only voices are heard.

Renay screams and sobs hysterically.

HAZEL: Renay, what's wrong? Stop crying! You're making me scared!

NADIA: It won't help if we all start crying! Where are the lights?

Lights up.

HAZEL: It was just a bad dream, right?

RENAY: No! It was worse than that! It was a nightmare! Susie knows. Susie was there!

NADIA: Was it your parents fighting?

RENAY: No! Not my parents!

HAZEL: It must have been that scary movie! Did it have an age restriction?

RENAY: It wasn't the movie! This is real. I'm not making it up!

NADIA: Whatever it is Renay, you can tell us. We'll believe you!

RENAY: *Crying.* It was horrible! There was a man. I don't know if it was my brother or my father or one of their drunk…friends! I can't remember what happened but when I awoke…my underclothes were inside out!!!

She sobs. Lights to half.

SCENE SIX: Alienation Device

Enter news reader.

NEWS READER: Good evening. CNN South Africa – Reporting live. Childline has just issued an urgent appeal.

Projection "By 1997 one in every five boys and three in every five girls will be abused, either mentally, physically or sexually". Enter schoolteacher. Projection.

TEACHER: Hello, is that Child Welfare. I am a school teacher and I … I need your help. There is this child in my class who comes in everyday totally battered and bruised.

Enter child. Projection.

CHILD: Hello, is this Childline? *Sobs.* I need your help! No…I can't tell you my name!

Projection off. Voices vogue. Child sobs louder.

VOICE-OVER NADIA: That night we returned to bed frightened and confused. There were no more sweet dreams.

Blackout. All exit.

SCENE SEVEN: Campus Scene

VOICE-OVER NADIA: Those experiences drew Renay, Hazel and I even closer as friends and later as students on campus. We discovered our womanhood together.

Lights up. Enter Nadia, Renay and Hazel. Soft background music.

NADIA: Gee Hazel, that lecture on gender discrimination was so long. Thank God Prof. had some jokes this time.

HAZEL: Wasn't it an eye-opener, Nadia? To think that all women are affected by gender discrimination in the same way!

RENAY: The part I like best was when Prof. said "Ladies, we need to think for men because they are too busy following their ..... Rather than their brains!"

Music fades completely.

NADIA: I've got to make a call.

RENAY: Don't even tell me to whom, Nadia! Why do you still stick with that loser? I don't get it – he goes out with the guys all the time while you have to tolerate his whims and fancies!

HAZEL: Can't you see Nadia? He is stringing you along like a puppet!

NADIA: But Hazel, it's not like that! He's the only one who really loves me. My parents were so busy fighting that they never had time to love me!

RENAY: Love! You call that love! He dictates to you, that's all he does! Nadia, he cheated on you!

NADIA: That was in the past! My father hit my mother to gain respect. He doesn't hit me! He really loves me!

HAZEL: Listen Nadia, there's more to a relationship than just that! You DON'T need him! We've got grad coming up!

RENAY: You'll have your career, and Nadia...

BOTH: YOU HAVE US!

Enter Tammy

TAMMY: Hey Renay, Hazel Nadia!

ALL 3: Hi Tammy!

TAMMY: Wow! You guys look so down. How about helping me out with this show we're doing for National Women's Day?

RENAY: What do we have to do, Tammy?

TAMMY: A dance, a song...anything you like!

HAZEL: That's a good idea!

RENAY: How about this Tammy?

Hazel and Renay start to sing and encourage Nadia to join in. Nadia drifts away...

NADIA: Oh but...I don't know if I can take part.

RENAY: Why not? What's stopping you?

NADIA: We're a couple, you know. I don't know whether he'd approve.

HAZEL: Oh! Come on! Why do you need his approval?

TAMMY: Worried about your boyfriend? If he really loves you, he wouldn't have a problem with it! Come on girls... celebrate your womanhood!

Lights to half. Girls vogue. Enter Lecturer. Girls exit. Lecturer addresses campus.

LECTURER: Students and lecturers who have taken time off to join us on campus for this Women's Day Celebration. You've been awakened to a new perspective of women. We must thank our guest of honour for her thought provoking seminar. The statistics and case studies she presented us with all point in one direction – that we as woman should not resign ourselves to being victims of the world...
To conclude we present our very own student presentation "The Voices of Women."

Lights to half.

SCENE EIGHT: Voices of Women

Lights dim when marching starts. Enter soldiers.
In UNISON: We are the voices of women marching to the tune of the world!

Lights to full.

I'm the voice of the abused daughter!
Swine! Idiot! Rubbish! You call me failure and expect me to be a success. How can I trust myself when you can't trust me? You call me a dog, but I mustn't bark!

I am the voice of the abused career woman!
Don't touch me and don't judge me by the length of my skirt. I'm here to do my job! Oh! So I'm good enough to be ogled at but not good enough for that promotion!

I am the voice of the abused wife!
You think I don't know about her? I smelt that perfume! I found those restaurant bills! I know know where you were last weekend! I've sacrificed my individuality for you and now I will sacrifice the rest of my life for my children for you are still sleeping in my bed!

I am the abused female body!
What gives you the right to stand there and look me up and down or hoot at me with that wife and children sitting beside you in that car! Look at me! My eyes are here... Not HERE!

I am the voice if the liberated career woman!
Hi Honey! I've got my first pay packet. Thank you for all your support! Now at least we'll have enough money to make some of our dreams come true! For beside, not behind every successful man is a successful woman!

I am the voice of the nurtured daughter!
You dote on me and make sacrifices to give me every oppourtunity to develop myself completely as a person! I have all the world at my feet and I am everything I am because you love me!
I am the voice of the woman in parliament!
I represent all women who have been part of the struggle! According to the new constitution WE HAVE RIGHTS and WE NEED TO USE THEM TO EMPOWER OURSELVES! You strike a woman, you strike a rock!

I am the voice of the home executive!
I am all women! No matter my profession, after work, I am always the mistress of my home! I am the confidant to my husband, the teacher to my children, the doctor to my family, and the best friend to them all.
I nurture the future nation, FOR THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE RULES THE WORLD!!!!

All join in dance and come into central position. Lights blackout.

VOICE-OVER NADIA: I was so glad I had joined in. It made me feel so good about myself.....but ... little did I know the strength of my womanhood was soon to be tested.

SCENE NINE: Nadia in despair

Voices offstage.

RENAY: Baby! Nadia!

Lights on. Enter Hazel, Nadia and Renay.

HAZEL: Your talent!

RENAY: Your career!

HAZEL: How can you throw your life away?!?

RENAY: There's only one thing to do. You have to have an abortion!

NADIA: No! No! It is MY baby!

RENAY: I thought you were a couple! Where's he now?

HAZEL: Probably having a good time with his friends!

NADIA: No, he wouldn't do that, NOT now! Not NOW?

RENAY: This is your life we are talking about, Nadia, You're only twenty!

HAZEL: Are you going through the abortion?

NADIA: Just because he says he needs some space, doesn't mean that he doesn't want the baby.

RENAY: Nadia, do you love him?

NADIA: Yes, I do...at least I think so...I'm not sure...leave me alone! LEAVE ME ALONE!

H & R : Nadia...Nadia

Lights out. Scream!!!

VOICE-OVER NADIA: God! It hurts so much, the pain, lying there, the doctors. Renay and Hazel were there through it all, it wasn't easy, the baby, the books but finally graduation. From that point on my battles were my own!

SCENE TEN

Melvin comes on stage. Lights up. Nadia mimes to knock.

MELVIN: Come in!

NADIA: Good day sir, I'm here for the job interview...*handshake*

MELVIN: Mmm... Very nice, very nice indeed...sit down – *to audience* - isn't she sexy? I have been waiting for one like this for a long time! *To Nadia* - What makes you think that you are the person for the job?

NADIA: *Hands over C.V.* Well sir, I have the qualifications and have been Looking for a job for a long time. Your friend Jake sent me!

MELVIN: Well you certainly have the assets...if you know what I mean?

NADIA: No sir, I do not understand.

MEVIN: Listen girl, grow up. We bosses expect certain favours, you know.

NADIA: I am prepared to work overtime, sir.

MELVIN: Well, I could certainly work you overtime! Ah, ah, ah think about my proposal!

NADIA: Definitely not! I will not allow my body to be a part of your bargains! *Hands on hips.*

CHILD: Mummy! I need to go to the toilet!

MELVIN: Who's this?

NADIA: My child.

MELVIN: Ah! Ah! Ah! This job is not for a woman, leave alone a married woman. When you decide to breed the next one I will have to give you maternity leave.

Telephone rings.

MELVIN: Hi Jake! How are you doing boet?.....I'm fine man.....this chick you sent me, what's her name?..Yes, yes Nadia. How can you send me a woman? You know it's a man's graaf. Hey, but she's lekker eh ! What do you mean I must change my attitude? Your vrou...she's joining this women's lib – therefore she's controlling you. What! What! Women are driving these days? What rubbish! The only thing a woman can drive you is..drive you crazy man. Hey, Jake you are too LUCKIN SUTCH!!!! Hey you heard about this joint Flamingo Lounge....Lekker place....Things are happening there! I am not going to tune with you woman, you come with me next week. Hey, but I tell you what.....they take it all out boet! Lekker, I will see you next week! Ah! Ah! Ah! Women! Too LUCKIN SUTCH!!!! Ah! Ah! Ah!

Blackout.

SCENE ELEVEN: Nadine Soliloquy

Lights on. Nadine's solo. Sound of gunshot at end of soliloquy. Then, blackout.

SCENE TWELVE: Lamp Dance

Lights on - to half. Dancers enter.

AYA: Oh Guru! What sin I did! My grandaughter is dead. You said she was born under lucky star. Why you bluffed me swami? *Sobbing.*

GURU: Ma, her star is still shining, her soul will find a better place in another life. This time man will reflect and realise her true nature and beauty as a woman. Nadia, in this life has contributed to that change in man's views. She has spent this life in vain.

AYA: Ayo swami! I made so many sacrifices. Why this must happen to Nadia!

GURU: Ma, Nadia has made even more sacrifices than you and she will even in future, until she is released from her bondages and adversities. Never mind ma. This world is full of man's oppression, but women have suffered enough for him to realise himself and change.

AYA: What's this nonsense you talking swami? All this talk is not gong to bring my Nadia back!

GURU: Ma, Nadia must not come back to suffering. She will go on into a world where she is treted as a person, where there is no discrimination, where there is love and sharing and respect between man and woman. A place where man will realise that a woman is like a reed. She can bend to the wind but she will never break.

AYA: Swami I will never see you again. You lied to my Nadia! Now you lie to me!

GURU: Ma, I will see you in my next life. Where's that going to be, I don't know. The destiny of my soul will be determined by my actions and thoughts in my present life. Don't worry ma. Don't worry.

Dancers blow out lamps. Blackout.

SCENE THIRTEEN: The rebirth

Sound of African drums. Projection. Lights to full. Parents enter carrying newborn baby. Sangoma dancing around. Parents approach Sangoma and place child before him.

SANGOMA: What time……child born?

Parents lean forward and mime reply. Sangoma nods and dances around.

SANGOMA: Hmm. Aah! This child……born under a very lucky star…have a good heart……great dreams. She has far to go. There will be obstacles to cross her path but……you pray ……she has power to overcome them.

The parents hold up the little bundle as the Sangoma dances around.

SANGOMA: According to the stars, her name shall begin with the letter……"N"

Parents exit.

SANGOMA: *Chuckles.* Her name SHALL be NOMSA!!!

Lights to blackout. Voice offstage – song – Nomsa, Nomsa, Nadia, Nadia. Lights up during song and final bow. Lights to half.

THE END

APPENDIX B

'Acts of God'

DEVI SARINJEIVE

1997

Characters:

Leela, a thirty-something educated, single woman
Baby, her maternal aunt
Kanna, Leela's sister-in-law

Scene 1

Kitchen in Leela's father's house in Chatsworth, Durban. Baby, Leela's maternal aunt, is pottering in the kitchen anxiously waiting for Leela, her niece, to arrive from Johannesburg for her father's funeral. Kanna, Leela's sister-in-law, who is also waiting to see her sister-in-law, barges into the kitchen.

Kanna: She's still not here?

Baby: What you expect? She can't fly here!

Kanna: Why not? She's loaded. She can't come by plane, what? Her own father's funeral!

Baby: What you think? Money just jumps into her hands?

Kanna: What she gets for all that education, then?

Baby: You never had to work in your life.... What you know?

Kanna: You think I'm stupid, aunty Baby? Why she went on and on then? Studying and studying? Even went overseas!

Baby: Everything is money for you!

Kanna: Why she left home then? Chee! What kind of daughter?

Baby: Kanna, you only think there's one way of life... your way.

Kanna: She should have stayed at home... not gallivant all over the show.

Baby: Why? To keep you company?

Kanna: I don't wish for her company. It was her duty to help when her father got sick.

Baby: He wasn't sick all the time ..only the last few years...

Kanna: You don't know what we went through.

Baby: Why you didn't get a servant?

Kanna: Money doesn't grow on trees.... nothing's cheap today.

Baby: That old man had money ... where's it now?

Kanna: He gave us nothing... Bully spent his money.... We not like her .... We decent....

Baby: Why you after her? You not going to act like this when she comes, are you?

Kanna: Can't even say anything for a word... how she left home, then?

Baby: When she comes, you ask her.

Kanna: Huh! She treats me like shit... you think she'll tell me anything?

Baby: Why you did that to her on your wedding day, then?

Kanna: What I did? What I did?

Baby: Don't act so innocent... You know what you did?

Kanna: She was going ... I was just helping her with her clothes...

Baby: That's still your story?

Kanna: You don't trust me? Why you not on my side? You don't like me anymore?

Baby: Kanna, my girl, you were very young when you got married.... when you going to grow up?

Kanna: What you mean? What you mean?

Baby: You got husband... children...house...car... now you can talk to me anyhow?

Kanna: How you talking, aunty Baby? I just came to check if Leela was here.... it's getting so late....

Baby: You started with me, Kanna. Got nothing better to do. We

all doing the cooking. You free to walk around and look for trouble...

Kanna: How you saying, aunty Baby? How hard I work? Who took care of the old man? Who did everything for him?

Baby: That´s the duty of a daughter-in-law, Kanna. You not doing anything special.

Kanna: How you talking to me, aunty Baby? You brought me to this family...

Baby: Oh, you finished with Leela, now it´s my turn?

Kanna: You don´t understand, aunty Baby, you taking it the wrong way.

Baby: Kanna, you´re a baby in front of me. Your life is easy... you get everything...

Kanna: What you mean? You think I´m spoilt? I work very hard, you know?

Baby: But you don´t go out to work, right? Then come home and do more work. I had to do that.

Kanna: There´s so much to do here. How I can go to work? Bully won´t allow it...

Baby: Then don´t talk so much ...

Kanna: You taking your niece´s part. I´m nobody... outsider. I have no rights. I can´t say anything.

Baby: Why you came here to the kitchen?

Kanna: It´s my house, I can go where I like..

Baby: What you mean? The old man left you the house? What about the will?

Kanna: We took care of the old man. Other people did nothing. They can´t come here and demand anything...

Baby: What you talking? Where´s the will?

Kanna: With the lawyer.

Baby: What´s his name?

Kanna: How do I know? Bully doesn´t tell me everything.

Baby: That´ll be the day! You know and won´t tell...

Kanna; You don´t believe anything I say... no use talking to you...

Baby: Kanna, you so used to lying, you won't know the truth if you see it...According to you the old man was like this.... Leela was like that ... I don't see them the same way.

Kanna: You didn't stay with them. How can you know?

Baby: You didn't do anything to them? You not so innocent.

Kanna: I never did anything. True's God! They never gave me a chance.

Baby: Then why did Rajan have to leave his father's house and pay rent somewhere else?

Kanna: You don't know what his wife did to me.

Baby: What?

Kanna: She tried to trick us with black magic...

Baby: How you know that?

Kanna: Bully found things, monkey balls in the yard.... he lost his job... everything.

Baby: He didn't lose it for other reasons? It could be his own fault.

Kanna: You taking their part. You not fair.

Baby: You asked me to come. I came to bury my brother-in-law, not listen to your nonsense.

Kanna: You don't visit us anymore. We had to call you last night.

Baby: Because you didn't know what to do? Why you didn't cali your mother?

Kanna: Bully said to call you... you the closest....

Baby: Only when I'm needed.

Kanna: How you saying, aunty Baby. We visit you. We brought the old man to see you.

Baby: But you never left us alone, not for one minute.

Kanna: We like to be with you... why you want to be only with him? You got secrets?

Baby: You got a very fast mouth. Who's got secrets now? What about the will? What about the house? What about the money?

Kanna: That's no secret. We the only ones who took care. We only stayed with him.

Baby: Why? Because it was cheaper?

Kanna: We not like Leela...

Baby: You after her again....What you wanted ... for her to stay to have someone to fight with?

Kanna: Not for that. How can any woman leave her father's house like a man?

Baby: She left before you came ... You suddenly very old and wise to judge her?

Kanna: She never even phoned to ask how he was. Not a word.

Baby: Wait till she comes.... When you'll phoned her?

Kanna: Last night. Bully phoned to tell her about the funeral...

Baby: When she comes, don't make trouble... Let the funeral be peaceful...

Kanna: Then how I can talk to her?

Baby: You only know how to make trouble?

Kanna: You starting me again, aunty Baby?

Baby: Not starting... giving some advice how to be decent.

Kanna: Ever since you came... You blaming me for everything....After all I did for this family...

Baby: What you want? Gold and diamonds? You the daughter-in-law. It's your duty.

Kanna: To be a dog and listen to your words..

Baby: If you're a dog Kanna, I want to be in your shoes.

Baby: You think I'm the queen here?

Baby: Look Kanna... there must be something wrong with you... It's the old man's funeral and you bringing up old stories.. What you up to?

Kanna: Nothing... I'm talking so nicely to you and you suspect me... I'm not the boss here...

Baby: Then who's the boss? Bully?

Kanna: This happens everytime I try to be nice...

Baby: Because you only interested in what you can get. You have no respect for anyone.

Kanna: I respect you aunty Baby. I´m not going to fight with you. You don´t understand my position.

Baby: You better go outside... people are looking at us... your duty comes first.

Kanna: That´s what I´m trying to do... but everyone expects me to be everything.

Baby: If you didn´t want that, why you got married?

Kanna: Why you didn´t tell me when you came to propose, aunty Baby?

Baby: No one told me, Kanna.

Scene 2

Same kitchen with Baby still pottering around waiting for her niece.

Baby (as she embraces her niece): Thank God you came. I was so worried about you.

Leela: Hullo Baby. How you?

Baby: I´m so tired, no sleep from last night. Bully phoned late last night.... Look at you! You came to your father´s funeral dressed like that?

Leela: Why, what´s wrong? I came straight from work when Bully phoned. Anyway, what´s wrong with this dress?

Baby: Ai chee! What will people say? You, the eldest and your dress is so short. Ai, you modern girls!

Leela: I knew you´d say that. Don´t worry, I bought another dress this morning before I left Jo´burg.

Baby: Let´s see what you got, what it looks like.

(Pause as Baby checks the dress)

Ai! This is worse, such a low neckline. Chee! What will people say?

Leela: Then what must I wear? It´s so hot here, too.

Baby: I brought clothes. My clothes will fit you. Go wash your face, look how you sweating! The punjabi is on the bed in Kanna´s room.

Leela: What! You want me to go in her room? You know what happened on her wedding day? She threw my clothes out. She´ll

think that I´m stealing something.

Baby: Tjoep - Leela, man! You have to do the prayers for your father. (ushers Leela to the bathroom) Come, go wash your face and change. Quick man, you came just in time. People are waiting for you.

Leela (from the bathroom): Okay, Okay. This place is so hot.

Baby (mutters in the kitchen): Girls nowadays! You can´t tell them anything. They know everything.

Leela (offstage): What´s that, Baby? Who you talking to?

Baby: No one. Hurry up. It´s almost time to go to the crematorium.

Leela: What filth! Baby! This bathroom´s filthy! All the towels are soaking wet and black. Don´t they clean here? What does Kanna do the whole day? Baby you knew Kanna was so filthy and such a guboo when you went looking for a girl for Bully?

Baby: I didn´t know she´ll end up like this. How nice she looked! Even you saw on the wedding day....

Leela: Looks aren´t everything. Look at this bathroom. All she can do is spread the dirt around...

Baby: You telling....

Leela: In more ways than one ...

Kanna enters.

Baby (loudly): Kanna! you checked on the cooking outside? Leela, Kanna´s here ... hurry up! You taking too long, man...

Kanna: Oh, Leela´s here at last? How she looks? How she looks?

Baby (sarcastically): How you want her to look?

Kanna (very sweetly): Hullo Leela, you only came now?

Leela (prickly): What you mean? What you think, I got wings? You could have phoned me last night, not 9 o´clock this morning.

Baby: What? You´ll only phoned her this morning. Didn´t you say just now Bully phoned last night.

Leela: Huh! Phone the people in Durban first, me last!

Kanna: We so busy, Leela. You don´t know what we went through with the old man.

Leela: So when he dies, I´m the last to know?

Kanna: Everyone makes mistakes, Leela. Bully must have forgotten.

Leela: You'll didn't forget to buy flowers for the lounge. I had to drive like mad to get here on time!

Kanna: Well, you here now. Whose dress is this?

Baby: What you worrying about the dress? Why didn't you phone her?

Kanna: Bully said he'd phone. So much I had to do. Had to clean the house. There's so many people here now. (Pause) Oh, Edgar's packet? ... Must have been expensive? Whose? Whose?

Leela: That's mine if you must know. I bought it this morning.

Kanna: You went shopping this morning?

Leela: Is that a sin?

Kanna: It looks nice. How much?

Leela: My father is lying dead outside and you asking how much?

Kanna: I can't even ask? It looks so nice.

Baby: Don't make trouble, you two. This is a funeral house.

Leela: I didn't come to fight, Baby. I came to my father's funeral.

Baby: Kanna, is the curry cooked? We have to go just now.

Leela: Aren't you supposed to cook after the body goes?

Baby: Things change, Leela. There's no time later. God will understand. Kanna, you going to the crematorium?

Kanna: Ja, I'm going.

Leela: But you the lady of the house? Can you go?

Kanna: Everyone goes now, ladies and men. You can go too, if you want.

Leela: Baby, you going too?

Baby: Ja, of course yes. Kanna, your sister can finish boiling the rice .... (Pause) That poor old man. You should have seen him Leela. Skin and bone .... skin and bone.... I look healthier. Look at my arm. He was thinner.

Leela: What happened Kanna?

Kanna: He was so sick. You don't know what we went through! The hospital, the doctors. He used to mess himself. Balan helped me to bath and shave him.

Leela: Why didn't you get someone to help you or put him in a home?

Kanna: And who was going to pay?

Leela: He had his own money. Where's all the money he had?

Kanna: We never touched a cent. Sathima! You can ask anyone. Ask Aunt Baby. ... You staying here tonight?

Baby: I asked her to come home with me.

Kanna: That's funny. Her father died. She must stay here.

Leela: Let's not argue. Anyway, you'll be crowded here.

Kanna (mutters as she exits): Own father's funeral and she can't stay here.

(Pause during which Leela and Baby exchange looks)

Leela: The last thing I want to do is sleep with her mother.

Baby: Don't worry. You'll sleep with me. Harry can sleep in the sitting-room.

Leela: How's Harry?

Baby: You know how to do the prayers?

Leela: What you think I'm an idiot, Baby? You forgot I got a lamp in my house.

Baby: There's a right way of doing things and a wrong way. Just look at what I do and you'll see. Come, let me see what you look like again.

Leela (smiles); You treat me like a child.

Baby: Okay, okay. You my sister's daughter. She's not here now. So I'm your mother... But please don't make trouble like you started with Kanna just now. Let the old man go in peace.

Leela: You fuss too much, Baby. That's why I came.... for the funeral.

Scene 3

Leela and Baby enter the crowded funeral scene. The corpse is in a coffin centre-stage. On stage there are three chairs in a line behind the coffin.

Leela: So many people ... I didn´t know so many people would come.

Baby: You were hardly here - how would you know?

Leela: I used to phone, but Kanna always answered. She never mentioned my father´s health.

Baby: What did you´ll talk about then?

Leela: She was more interested in my bank account and my salary. You saw now with the dress.

Baby: That dress is expensive. I, too, looked at the price.

(Baby and Leela take their seats with Baby in the middle seat)

Leela: You getting like her now. She never talked much about my father. Did you visit him?

Baby: Whenever I got a chance. Meena took me. But Kanna wasn´t too happy to see us.

Leela: How was he then?

Baby: OK - he showed me all the pills he took. He used to be so happy to see us.

Leela: Look at him now. Can´t they close his mouth? Where´s his false teeth?

Baby: God knows... he won´t need it now.

Leela: So this is how they took care of him. He looks like a child. He´s shrunk so much.

Baby: You should have seen his room ... you saw the bathroom?

Leela: Why? They put him in that small prayer-room, my room - what did Kanna do to him?

Baby: The bed was soaked in pee. That woman will pay for her sins. Her children used his room. God watches and He knows!

Leela: There´s hardly any room to move in that small room.

Baby: It was the old man´s last sleeping place. Your mother´s photo is there with a dry garland.

Leela: And now they fill the sitting room with fresh flowers ...

Baby: Ssshhh ... tjoep now. She´s coming. Look how she´s crying.

Kanna (weeping and holding the unlit lamp, she takes her seat on the other side of Baby): I took so good care of him...

Leela: Was he eating properly?

Kanna: What you think? Of course, yes. We bought him the best of everything.

Leela: Why's he looking like that then?

Kanna: What you know? That's the sickness.

Leela: What sickness?

Kanna: I think the doctor said something like ... Alz-heimers ... I think.

Leela: You don't even know...

Kanna: At least I was here to take care of him. You and Rajan never cared like us.

Leela: Don't tell lies, Kanna - I used to phone. You always changed the subject. Why didn't you phone when he got bad?

Kanna: We phoned, but you weren't there. You gallivant all over the world. No one knows where you or what you doing.

Leela: I'm earning my own living. I don't depend on other people's sweat like you.

Kanna: What we know what you doing there? You don't know what people say about you.

Leela: What? As if I care ... no one pays my rent...

Kanna: Oh, you'll care when you hear.

Leela: Well, speak up then! What do they say?

Kanna: Shall I tell her aunty Baby? Shall I tell her?

Baby: Tell her, it's best she knows.

Kanna: That fellah you had, someone's husband - you stole him from his wife. If it wasn't for you - he'd still be married.

Leela: What you talking about? You know nothing about that. And I don't have to tell a little gossip-monger like you anything. How many other men am I supposed to have slept with? Go on, tell me what goes on in that rat-brain of your's?

Kanna: See, aunty Baby, you told me to tell her. Now see what she's calling me, a rat-brain! At least I'm better than you. I'm not a husband-stealer and home-wrecker. A whore who can't find her own man. Look at you!

Leela: Look at yourself. Sitting at home like a fat cow. What about you? You a fine one to talk! Aren't you sleeping with Bully for a roof over your head and a plate of food?

Kanna (gets up in a rage and waves her arms about): Aunty Baby, listen to what she's saying. I came in a decent way into this family. Tell her aunty Baby about the proposal! I'm not sleeping with hundred and one fellahs like her. At least I got one man (drops lamp on the coffin).

Baby: Kanna, what's wrong with you? Look what you doing now. Everyone is looking at us. Got no respect for the dead. He's lying there and you creating.

Kanna: This is my house and I can do what I like. No one can tell me what to do, no one.

Leela: Oh, your house, since when?

Kanna: The old man said us not to sell the house. This is all his hard sweat.

Leela: Hmph! And what about my mother's sweat? Are you supposed to be the caretaker for both of them? Is that how your mother taught you to behave when you get married? Sit down! Don't stand like a junglee! Don't be a disgrace at least for today! We'll discuss the house later.

Kanna (takes her seat): What your mother taught you? How to run from house to house and change men like you change underwear.

Leela: Can't you shut up! If you can't at least respect the dead, why don't you go and calm down. You not fit to be at any funeral.

Kanna: Aunty Baby, look at her. She's always hated me, ever since I came to this house. I told Bully. He'll fix you up.

Baby: Tjoep you two! What will people say if they see the family fighting at the funeral!

Kanna: Aunty Baby, don't shout me. Whose side you on?

Baby: On the dead man's side. Let him go in some dignity. What's this nonsense - airing your guboo in public for everyone to hear.

Kanna: Still, she thinks she's too independent. Comes when she likes ... goes when she likes. We stay here, like dogs, and do all the dirty work. Ever since I came to this house, nothing's changed.

Leela: You wanted it that way ... You made sure you got rid of everyone!

Baby: Tjoep, you two ... everyone can hear ... what will they think?

Kanna: Look at her aunty Baby. I´m minding my own business, She´s starting with me again.

Leela: Ever since I came, you´ve been needling me ... what´s your problem? And why are you always after me? You don´t want to leave me alone.

Kanna: What you think? You God or something? Why should I follow you? You not so wonderful. You think you so innocent.

Leela: What do you mean?

Baby: Don´t make trouble you two... let the old man go in peace. You can fight after the funeral.

Kanna: I don´t fight... I´m always so nice to her .. she´s got a fast mouth.

Baby: Kanna, you the lady of the house. Act like one.

(Kanna leaves in a huff)

Leela: What´s wrong with that bitch? Why´s she hanging around me for? The children used to spy for her before. Never ever left me alone with my father.

Baby: Maybe she wants something.

Leela: What? What have I got to give her? The only thing they interested in now is this house and the old man´s money.

Baby: She acts as if they getting everything.

Leela: Did my father ever talk to you about his will?

Baby: He said he´s not a fool. He knows what he´s doing. He told me he´ll do the right thing.

Leela: I don´t trust those two. Look at her now ... talking to Bully .... ssshhh ...ssshhh... Listen to what she´s saying.

Kanna (from backstage she speaks as if in conversation with Bully): Leela is acting so funny. The things she called me... What you mean you´ll put her in her place if she asks?... You worried about that. Aren´t you going to take my part? What you going to do Bully? What? Wait and I´ll see what? We worked so hard, nobody else cared. We did all the running around. What she did? Only ran away so no one can see what she´s doing.

Leela: Can you hear, Baby, what that cow is saying?

Baby: She´s behind everything. Sounds like they know what´s in the will.

Leela: What? Bully's got no brains of his own? What's he under? His wife's skirt? Is he going to read the will?

Baby: That's what he's supposed to do.

Leela: Who cares about law and order now?

Baby: Don't jump. Give him a chance. If he doesn't read the will, I'll ask him. I'm there for you, you not by yourself.

Leela: Where's Rajan? That bitch has been getting on my nerves ever since I came, I forgot to ask about him. He should be here.

Baby: Says he's working ... true, so hard to get work now.

Leela: What? His own father's funeral. He, too, got money every chance he could from the old man.

Baby: You should see him now. Drink and drugs... if your mother was alive... Her heart would break to see her baby.

Leela: She cared more about her sons.

Baby: Don't speak like that, Leela. Don't say that about my dead sister. She was very proud of you.

Leela: Why didn't she tell me then? Why you think I left home?

Baby: Why? Your mother didn't say anything ... Only you had to work and Chatsworth was too far away.

Leela: There was more to it than that. She made my life miserable.

Baby: How can you say that about your own mother?

Leela: That's the trouble, isn't it? Everybody expects mothers, fathers, sons and daughters to get on. Be happy. We weren't such a happy family. It was like living in prison. They were checking on me all the time. I couldn't be trusted.

Baby: You wrong there, Leela, it's because they care. What you want them to do?

Leela: That's it! It was always like that. They were watching me all the time. Just like Kanna. They also wanted all my money. But I couldn't go out when I wanted to. When I did go out my mother had the longest face you can imagine. She made a point of ignoring me for weeks after that.

Baby: That's what a family is for ... to take care of you. Look at you now. You got no one, no husband, nothing. You all by yourself.

Leela: Look at my father. Frightened to go on his own. Look at

him now. You born alone, you die alone.

Baby: You know everything, Leela. You and that sister-in-law of your´s - just the same.

Kanna: Me and her, never. What´s right? To be in a family even if they suffocate you? I had to get out and make my own life.

Baby: You won´t talk like that when you get old and sick. Then you´ll realise what nonsense you got in your head.

Leela: Is your way the right way then? Is that what you saying?

Baby: What else is there for a woman?.

Leela: What? Husband, children, washing, cooking?

Baby: That is our duty as women ... our dharma.... You can´t be a man. That´s the way God meant us to live.

Leela: Do I look like a man?

Baby: You don´t act like a proper Indian woman.

Leela: So why didn´t you find me a husband like you found Kanna for Bully? Look how nice that turned out.

Baby: Don´t get funny, Leela. How nice she looked.... young, fair, long hair...

Leela: Look at her now... But why didn´t you find me a husband?

Baby: What could we do? It´s not like we want to get rid of you. You, too, reading, reading, all the time. Your mother thought you´ll meet someone.

Leela: What? That´s why she asked Bully to spy on me? That´s a funny way of finding a husband.

Baby: So many things can go wrong, Leela. What if you got pregnant? You know what a disgrace that is... Your mother would have killed you...

Leela: That´s what everyone thinks I´m doing all the time. I left home for sex. That´s why they think I left home. Just like that crackpot Kanna with her one-track mind. Haven´t they heard of AIDS?

Baby: Chee, what you talking? Indians don´t get AIDS.

Leela: Why not.

Baby: We just not like that. Don´t talk like that.

Leela: You don´t like the truth. All of you prefer rumours and stories. You know what your children are doing? You know what Harry´s doing?

Baby: Don´t start with me now. Tjoep, time for prayers.

Scene 4

Kanna is in the kitchen shifting pots and dishes around. Leela walks in.

Kanna: You put water on your head?

Leela: Why?

Kanna: You have to do that after the cremation.

Leela: Oh? So you keep some rules and bugger the rest?

Kanna: It´s my duty to tell you.

Leela: And if I didn´t do it? Then what?

Kanna: You bring bad luck into the house.

Leela: What about the other rules you broke? What about them?

Kanna: I´m trying to give good advice.

Leela: Why? What you up to?

Kanna: Can´t even be nice to you. You still want to jump down my throat.

Leela: I shall never understand you. You made sure you got rid of all of us. Now you changing your tune.

Kanna: I´m always nice to you. But you never give me a chance.

Leela: After all these years? Why so friendly now? After what you said today?

Kanna: You got no one. We your family.

Leela: Oh, that old story again. You nothing without a gang of people behind you? Is your life full now, Kanna?

Kanna: I´m better than you.

Leela: What? Husband, children, house, car? Is that what you mean? Now you´re a woman?

Kanna: It´s better than you, with nothing.

Leela: You don´t know much about me. There´s only one way of

life for you.

Kanna: You tell us nothing.

Leela: And why should I? I know you dying to know. Shall I tell about how many men I slept with?

Kanna: Huh! As if I´m interested in such filth! As if I got no life of my own! Me worry about you! That´ll be the day!

Leela: Oh! Then why the interest in the rumours about me?

Kanna: I´m just telling you what people say. Your brother and I have to face the music!

Leela: And how much do you add to the stories?

Kanna: You think I got time for nothing else? I just hear. Why not ask Bully? Ask aunty Baby?

Leela: What? More fantasies? Because your life is so dull and all of you need to make up stories about other people?

Kanna: People ask why you left. When you getting married.

Leela: Next time, give them my phone number. You still have that, don´t you?

Kanna: You mad or what? How you think Bully phoned?

Leela: But you didn´t have it for Meena´s wedding?

Kanna: What you talking? She didn´t ask us.

Leela: Don´t lie. Baby asked you. She told me. Shall I ask her in front of you?

Kanna: I can´t remember.... When she asked?

Leela: You such a clumsy liar! You don´t even know how to cover up.

Kanna: You just like your aunty! Never believe anything I say.

Leela: You so full of lies. Pretending to be nice when you don´t really want any of us here.

Kanna: I asked you to stay.

Leela: Why? Because my father´s dead and gone now. It´s safe.

Kanna: What you talking? Safe for what?

Leela: Safe for you and Bully.

Kanna: I don´t understand you. I´m trying to be nice but you

still don't trust me.

Leela: Why should I? What have you done all the time I've known you to make me trust you?

Kanna: I'm your sister-in-law, Leela, your brother's wife.

Leela: What does that make you? Someone to trust?

Kanna: After all I did for this family. Did all the dirty work for your father...

Leela: You didn't have to.

Kanna: What choice did I have?

Leela: Is that why you neglected and starved him?

Kanna: God will punish you! I was here for him, not you.

Leela: Oh yes! You made sure no one else got near him. So why not nurse him too?

Kanna: We the only ones who cared. No one else.

Leela: You cared so much, you let the man die in pee?

Kanna: What pee? What pee? I changed the bedding everyday.

Leela: That's not what Baby saw. The whole house smells of pee.

Kanna: She's after me now. You teaching her.

Leela: No one has to teach anyone. Five minutes with you is enough.

Kanna: You starting me again. I'm so nice to you.

Leela: You have your reasons. Not far to look. It's usually connected with money, isn't it?

Kanna: What money you keep on talking about?

Leela: My father's money, you money-hungry!

Kanna: We never touched a cent. Ask Bully? Ask the children?

Leela: You think they'll be more truthful than you? With you for a mother?

Kanna: I'm not like you, man-stealer. home-wrecker!

Leela: It doesn't take much to rattle you. Now you show your true colours!

Kanna: I curse you! You'll never find a husband! Never get married!

(Baby rushes in)

Baby: God! You two! Can't leave you five minutes alone! All the people are watching!

Kanna: Look at her, aunty Baby. I'm so nice to her.

Leela: This is what she calls nice. Which rubbish dump you picked her up from, Baby? This house must have looked like paradise to her!

Kanna: Look at her! Look at her!

Baby: Shut up you two! Nice fun for everyone to see and laugh.

Kanna: I'm gonna tell Bully what she said.

Leela: Tell him I called you a vicious, manipulating bitch. You only interested in his money. What he can give you. That's why you never let the old man out of your sight!

Baby: That's enough, Leela, let's go.

Kanna: You'll not eating first?

Scene 5

In Baby's kitchen after the funeral. Leela and Baby are relaxing.

Baby (as she lights a cigarette): At last! The first cigarette today! (draws in deeply) Poor man! At last his soul is in peace. He's with your mother now.

Leela: Mmm... he won't have to see Kanna again. I can't forget how she deliberately set out to make me mad.

Baby: You fell for it to. I didn't know it was so bad between you. Both of you were like mad things. Such a disgrace... funeral house.

Leela: You helped her too.

Baby: The truth is the truth, Leela. You should know what people are saying about you.

Leela: But that isn't the truth. What you think my life is like?

Baby: I don't know. You never say anything.

Leela: So you people here make up stories. I got no time for hundred and one men. Not even one man. My life is too busy.

Baby: If you don't tell, how will people know? And you can't stay by yourself, one out.

Leela: So I'm incomplete. I have to have a man to be a woman. Otherwise what am I?

Baby: It looks funny. If you don't get married you should stay at home, not by yourself, and God knows where.

Leela: You'll be surprised to see how I live, not very different from you in some ways.

Baby: What? Housework, cooking, washing? Then why you left?

Leela: What you think I don't do housework? I have no maid.

Baby: What? You clean your own house? Can't afford a maid?

Leela: No, I like my own space. I didn't have that at home. You saw that pokey room my father died in.

Baby: That's all you left home for?

Leela: That's a great deal. It's space to breathe and do things YOU don't have time for. Time to be myself.

Baby: Who stopped you doing that at home?

Leela: It's not the same. No one leaves you alone. I just came today and what have I heard? Why I'm not married. You, too, like Kanna, think that I'm sleeping around. I have no time for that. My work keeps me busy and happy most of the time.

Baby: Still .... all by yourself.

Leela: I have friends, not too many, just a few.

Baby: What friends?

Leela: People I like. People I choose to talk and laugh with. Not what you and that mad Kanna think I do.

Baby: What about your own family? We only see you at funerals.

Leela: Where's your family now, Baby? Where's Harry?

Baby: He goes around and comes home when he feels like.

Leela: He doesn't tell you?

Baby: We don't talk.

Leela: What? After all these years? You quarrel like lovers?

Baby: Huh! What lovers? He's got lovers outside. not here.

Leela: What you mean? How you know?

Baby: Why you think I don't talk to him? Bully knows everything. These men, just like one club. He won't tell me. All these men stick together.

Leela: What club you talking about?

Baby: Not a real club ... They know what they do outside the house. All of them know how to keep secrets. Uncles, nephews, sons, fathers .... all know.

Leela: You can't do anything?

Baby: What can I do? I have nowhere else to go. I 'm not working anymore.

Leela: Does he know you know?

Baby: I don't cook for him. He washes his own clothes. After he sleeps around I'm not going to feed him or wash his filthy clothes. He can do it himself.

Leela: But he buys the food and pays the accounts, doesn't he?

Baby: Some of the food and the accounts. Meena and I pay for the rest.

Leela: With what?

Baby: Meena and her husband eat with us. I get rent from the outhouse.

Leela: And the furniture?

Baby: I bought most of it when I was working in the factory. Harry can never say he keeps me like a queen.

Leela: You work so hard and have to take his nonsense on top of that.

Baby: I can't leave like you did. He's the children's father. This is his house.

Leela: At least he knows you know what he's doing.

Baby: What else can I do? You made your own home. You have somewhere to go. Where can I go? I'm trapped. What else can a woman do, Leela? What choice do I have?

Leela: But you still want me to get married?

Baby: Not right to leave your father's house like that, Leela. I had bad luck, maybe your luck is better. Who knows? You

didn't even try. You just packed up and left.

Leela: I tried for a long time until I couldn't stand it anymore.

Baby: I can't do that. I need my family. I can't think of being by myself.

Leela: But you are by yourself now.

Baby: That's my luck. But you here with me today. I'm frightened to do what you did.

Leela: You alone most of the time?

Baby: Not always, they come to eat, sleep.... Meena's next door...

Leela: Families can be lonely. I was lonely in my family.

Baby: But your mother and father were always there.

Leela: They never went anywhere.

Baby: They gave you a roof over your head, clothes, food. What more you want?

Leela: I needed more than that.

Baby: What?

Leela: It's a great deal more than doing your duty.

Baby: What you talking about?

Leela: Duty isn't enough. I see you and your family, Bully and Kanna, Rajan and his family. Doing your duty doesn't make you happy.

Baby: You can't be happy all the time. We put to suffer on this earth.

Leela: Not more than we have to.

Baby; You too educated now. But remember, wherever you go, whatever you do. Leela, you'll always be an Indian. I'm meant to be this way ... it's my karma.

Leela: Your karma's a cage.

Baby: That's very big talk, Leela. What's your's?

Leela: I'm working on it. My life isn't perfect. but it's my own karma. I, too, get lonely, just like you.

Baby: At least I have my family to go to.

Leela: Who. Baby, who? Who's here now? (Pause. Baby is silent) Where's your family?

Baby: And you left your's.

Leela: You think I can talk to Bully or Kanna? They only interested in what they can grab in life.

PHONE RINGS.

Leela: The phone! I don't want to speak to anyone.

Baby: Why? What if it's Bully? (gets up to answer phone)

Leela: I need some peace and quiet. I've had a very hard day.

Baby (on the phone): What? Leela? She's sleeping. You know she drove all the way here. She's fast asleep. What? Get her up? What for? What she said to Kanna? I was there. Kanna started with her. What's wrong with your wife? Oh, you don't want Leela to talk to her like that... I'll tell her. Bully, Leela is going back, why don't you read the will? She can't come back again ... What? You not reading the will? Why? How can you do that? The will will only be read after you die? That doesn't make sense ... Your wife and children will get everything then. What about Leela and Rajan? Didn't your father leave them something? God how can you swear me like that, Bully? (Leela joins Baby at the telephone) I am your Aunty... you got no respect. You break my heart. My own sister's son saying 'Fuck off' to me. What did I do to you? I'm only speaking for Leela. She's got no one now. You swearing again ... I must mind my own business. What a sin , Bully! God can see what you doing. This is not right. You hurt me so much. (Weeps and hangs up the phone)

LLela: What was going on? He swore you?

Baby (crying): He said 'Fuck off' and I must mind my own business. You'll see, he'll be a dog still barking in his next life ... He's not going to read the will.

Leela: Never mind the will. He can't do that to you. I'll fix him up. Sit down.

(Leela phones Bully)

Leela: Hello, Kanna? Where's Bully? I want to speak to him. What? He was there just now ... Where did he go? Out. His father was just cremated and he's gallivanting already. What you told him? What I called you? You told him what you said? Of course not. He mustn't know what a rotter you are, must he? You start the fights and then you ask him to protect you. When you going to learn to fight for yourself, you rat? Oh, I'm picking on you again! Bully swore Baby just now. He has no respect for his elders. Did you teach him that, too? What? The will? You such a greedy bitch that is all you can think of. Money, money, money. That's why you married Bully, isn't that

so? Nice house. nice car, nice job - that's all life is about and you'll do anything for that won't you? Me and my hundred and one fellas! Frankly, Kanna. I think you're better built than I am to do what you think I'm doing. I don't have to have words with you anymore. You're not fit to polish my shoes. Go back to where you came from and learn some respect for others. The will? As far as I am concerned. you snake. you got what you wanted. You can rot in that house and with all my father's money. I make my own way in life. I don't need to wait for handouts like you. (She hangs up)

Baby: What she said?

Leele: Her usual rubbish. That Kanna is so mentally stunted. she can't think beyond things and money. Now I see why she was provoking me at the funeral.

Baby: Bully upset me very much. No one has ever treated me like that. Not even Harry.... You had a lot of advice : for me just now, what you going to do?

Leela: About what?

Baby: What you going to do if they don't read the will? You going to let Bully get away with it? That fat cow, Kanna, will get all your mother's things. You saw what she already did to your mother's pots.

Leela: You want me to fight? I didn't come to Durban to take something back to Jo'burg. I came for my father's sake. We didn't get on when he was alive. That cow nearly wrecked the funeral. No respect for anyone.

Baby: You not going to go there and ask what your father left you?

Leela: I didn't come to Durban for that. I'm not worrying my head about what that poor old man suffered for. I'm not getting lawyers, writing letters, phoning and running around chasing my tail. I'm going back to my job and my house. I'll work for myself.

Baby: Kanna was right. You too independent now. The time will come, you know.

Leela: For what? To come crying back to Durban with my tail between my legs. You get tough, Baby. You learn to rely on yourself.

Baby: You must fight for what's your's by right.

Leela: What for? Even if I go there now and scream and shout like Kanna, you think Bully's going to sell the house and give me my share?

Baby; You can tell him his fortune.

Leela: What for? Waste my breathe and energy for nothing. Deep down he knows what he's doing. He may not feel anything but he knows.

Baby: That bastard swore me and feels nothing. He'll be quite happy to grab everything. You wait and see, his day will come.

Leela: You saw how we all end up, Baby? All that greed and want .... ashes in the end. You people .... I have to go back home tomorrow.

Baby: You not staying for the prayers?

Leela: Go back there again? Go through the same performance again? I've had enough. Some things never change. (Exits while Baby sits and lights another cigarette).

Curtain

APPENDIX C

WOMEN IN BROWN

Written and directed by
Krijay Govender

PERFORMANCES:

October 1997	**- University of Natal, Durban - (Square Space Theatre)**
July 1998	**- Standard Bank Grahamstown National Arts Festival (Monument Theatre, Rehearsal Room)**
August 1998	**- South African Women's Arts Festival (Playhouse Company)**
September 1998	**- Playhouse -Two week run (Sanlam Loft)**
October 1988	**- Womens' Festival (Studio Five, UND)**

CHARACTERS

Three actresses playing both male and female characters.

Actresses:	**Females:**	**Males:**
Suhana Gordhan	Kammy (18yrs old - student)	Dino
Priya Reddy	Mona (Late 20's - Business woman)	Suspect
Subashnee Naidoo	Pritha (Late 30's - Housewife)	Siva

There is also a Director/god figure who participates and sometimes controls the action.

Krijay Govender	Director figure (DG Fig)

PRE-SET

SET: The set is minimal: Three black blocks creating three different performance spaces. There is a backdrop of transparent saries, behind which the silhouettes of five dancers can be seen. These silhouettes are brought up in particular scenes ie. The Male Scenes. Throughout the play the director/god figure is seated at the back of the theatre (lighting box)- watching and commenting on the action.

As the audience enters to take their seats, the dancers perform simple gestures (Indian dance) behind the backdrop. Their silhouettes are visible in the half-light.

SCENE ONE

Lights come up as Kammy walks onto stage with her varsity bag. She sits down, exhausted. Pritha walks in - goes to her area, picks up some clothes and walks straight to stage R where there is a sari, lying crumpled on a block. She speaks to the DG Fig who is seated in the lighting box.

PRITHA I must fold this?

DG FIG No, don't worry.

PRITHA No, I don't mind. I'll fold it. I fold everyday. You know how it is. I get up in the morning, I make Des's lunch, I cook, I clean, I scrub the verandah. By the time evening comes, I make Des's supper. I don't mind, I'm so used. My nieces and nephews ask me: "Aunty Pritha - How you fold so nice?" I say: "Darlings, so easy - from one corner to another corner, another corner to another corner, and when you finished - thawa just like Popatlall's Kara.

Mona walks onto stage and stops and stares at Pritha before she speaks.

MONA Hello... Hello?

PRITHA Oh hello! My name's Pritha, what's yours?

MONA Mona.

PRITHA Mona?

MONA Yes.

PRITHA So smart jacket you got. Let me see the lining (*She lifts and feels Mona's jacket)* Oh, so nice... such lovely covered buttons. You know my sister-in-law got one just like this, only hers is pink. You know my sister-in-law? –

MONA Excuse me! *(Louder)* Excuse me!!

DG FIG Yes.

MONA Who the hell is this?

DG FIG Sorry Mona, that's Pritha.

MONA Yes, I know who she is, but what the hell is she doing in my space?

DG FIG Pritha, would you mind moving ou of her space?

PRITHA No, I like it here.

MONA Look - either she goes or I go!

PRITHA No, but I like it here.

MONA That's it - I'm leaving!

DG FIG No, don't leave. Mona, I'd like you to meet someone. Kammy that's Mona, Mona - Kammy.

KAMMY Hi.

MONA *(Nods)*

DG FIG Pritha, that's Kammy. Kammy, Pritha.

KAMMY Hello.

PRITHA Hello. You so pretty.

KAMMY Thanks. Oh - this is such a lovely sari (*takes sari that Pritha is holding)*

PRITHA Oh, you like it?

KAMMY Where did you get it from?

PRITHA My wedding sari, that! When you getting married?

KAMMY You know aunty, my parents want me to marry someone. His name's Rajesh. But I don't even love him. I love Shaylen.

PRITHA Oh, arranged marriage, eh? I too had arranged –

MONA *(irritated)* Excuse me! Time is money! Can we please get started?

DG FIG Yes, can you please set your props.

They set up props and exit

MONA *(As she is leaving)* It's about bloody time!

SCENE TWO- Male Scene: Draining the lizard

Lights up on dancers behind saris. They perform "beautiful" gestures. The three actors now play their male counterparts. This scene is set in the men's toilets. Dino walks in - moves to front L. Mimes grooming actions in front of an imaginary mirror - eg. polishing shoes. Suspect walks in - moves across to front R. When he reaches his side, they both nod to acknowledge each other. Suspect mimes washing hands etc. The two move to centre and get ready to mime urinating. These characters speak South African Indian slang.

DINO What kind brew?

SUSPECT What's up guzz?

SIVA *(backstage)* YA! - Don't worry, don't worry, I'll site you by the posie! (*walking onto stage; he sees Suspect and stands between Dino and Suspect)* EH! Howzit man?

SUSPECT Eh SIVA!! Eh, how's it hanging ekse?

SIVA It's hanging lukker! (*Indicating penis) (he notices Dino)* Eh - what's your story lightie, you supposed to organize my cab for me?

DINO You tune me the bitch was vying lukker.

SIVA Ya, she has her moods, her monthlys - you know what I mean?

They all laugh.

SUSPECT Eh, ekse - I didn't know you're a mac. and all?

DINO *(looking at penis)* Ya- who the man, who the man?!

SUSPECT Ekse, you can organize one two CV joints for me?

DINO Shot –

SIVA Eh- Stand in line, I'm first! I want you to organize my exhaust, lower the suspension - she'll handle better. FREE FLOW!

ALL *(making racing car sounds)* VRRRMMM VRRRMMM – SCHOEMACKER! (continue with sounds) Peep, Peep. (*they zip up their pants and freeze).*

Blackout. Suspect exits ,Siva sits in Pritha's space and Dino, in Kammy's space.

SCENE THREE

Lights up on Kammy

KAMMY AAAAAHHH!! He's driving me INSANE!!! OH , oh... I can't describe the feeling. OH - you know the feeling when you see him? *(moves hands down belly)* From here...to here. It's like - it's like vanilla ice-cream on a hot, scorching day! It's liiike..... er - a pillow fight or a water-bed!! *(grabs cushions)* It's like, it's like - (*falls over and looks upside-down at audience)* - Oh -I don't know! I know, I know you think I'm crazy and I'm nuts; well I am! (*running and jumping onto block)*
I am , I am crazy. I'm nuts, I'm crazy. I'm crazy about you Shaylen! (*hugs herself)* Shaylen, Shaylen! (*Shouts out)* SHAAAAYLEN!!!
(*She jumps off the block, giggling)* SSSHHH! Sshh. My parents would absolutely freak out if they knew about Shaylen.

Oh, don't get me wrong - they don't mind me having a boyfriend, as long they choose him. They have someone in mind. His name's Rajesh (*disgusted).* I haven't met him - oh, but I have seen his number plate. It reads 'RAJESH-ZN'! (*Sarcastic)* How original!! I haven't spoken to him. I haven't even kissed him. Not that I would ever want to. But I'll never give in to them - NEVER! I am their eternal virgin (*spreads legs open. Then, mischievous smile)* If only they knew!

Once, when I was nine - Std 2 I think - my mum was going through my bag, which still secretly does sometimes and she found a note from this boy. The note said: "Dear Kameshri, You are pretty. I love you." And, it had these cute little stick figures - like the one's you find on the doors of public toilets. It had these huge butterflies and flowers. Perhaps that's what love is about - receiving flowers and feeling butterflies. (

My mother gave the letter to my father, and in those days every family had a huge whip. My dad was no exception and I got the hiding of my life! I got the daylights beaten out of me. It's strange how times have changed....I remember locking myself up in my room, holding my teddy close to me and promising never to speak to them again. When we angry, how many 'never-speaks' and vows of silence do we make and break?

I don't think they'll mind now, though... I'm eighteen, for God's sake! But still I wouldn't want to risk it. Besides my friends and I have mastered the art of sneaking around. You know the cover ups, telephone codes and the Oscars for lying with a straight face! It's so much fun, so loyal - our own little family, honest family. My parents are great, though... I mean who would buy their daughter a car, pay for varsity and money to shop? They're always looking out for my interests....and guess what? They're always saying it. *(leans on block R. Then sits on block and folds Mona's jacket)*

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. (*Get up and walk towards her block)* He's intelligent, funny, witty, generous, charming... (*Picks up cushion and kisses it)* 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!
(*She drops cushion and lies down. Freeze)*
Blackout.

SCENE FOUR

Lights up on Pritha who is folding clothes.

PRITHA I tried again this morning... still only one pink strip. Eh, I'm fed up. eh! How many tests I took - from one doctor to another doctor, another doctor to another doctor. Same thing they always say: "Don't worry Mrs Moodley, nothing wrong with you. Just try harder next time. This time between one week after Aunty Suzy's visit " - you know - Umlazi River. Eh, but no use hah! For three years I was trying. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday - Sunday we have rest! But still nothing. But as Des always say: "Better to try and fail, than to fail to try!"

(During the following she dusts her stool and sweeps)

But to tell you the truth, I don't mind not having children, bah! The peace is nice. I got time for difficult recipes, I can polish the brasso, listen to the radio - VIEWPOINT! Oyooo! the way I love that programme! Sometimes when I got the guts, I phone and give my view. What - just the other day I phoned Devi Sankaree Govender and told her all about Des and my courting days!

Des loves children hah! The way he's worrying me. But I can't tell him how I feel. You know what these people are like - if you can't have children, they think something wrong with you and your marriage. Besides, Des is the only son, and my in-laws are such wonderful people...if I don't give them a grandson, who's gonna carry the family name? To tell you the truth, I'm a little bit worried...everyone say motherhood is natural... but I don't think I can look after children, bah!

Des always call me "Miss Butterfingers" - "Bull in China...Bull in China shop". He's so good. He knows so much things. He does the accounts on the dining room table every Thursday, without fail, and he makes the shopping list *and* he goes shopping for me! He says he hates it when I'm not at home. That's why I don't go nowhere. Sometimes, when he comes from work and I'm in the bathroom, he gets so cross. He like I must stand by the front door and greet him. I think he misses me lot at work, no?

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 better than no loaf!

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?

(She moves to centre, clears throat and sings the following song, using the broom as a mike and a dancing partner.)

Islands in the stream
That is what we are
No one in between
How can we be wrong
Sail away with me
To another world
And we rely on each other - ah, ah
From one lover to another - ah, ah

(Embarrassed, she starts sweeping again)

Otherwise, I won't mind being like Sally Spectra. What - for her size, she's a mover, man! She don't wait for invitation, nothing - she just goes, to the beat!!

Mona walks in and sits on her block. Pritha stops sweeping and stares at her.

PRITHA So smart, no? How nice I can wear like that? Some people have all the luck.

(Mona lights a cigarette. Pritha sees this)

PRITHA Oyyooo!!

MONA (*To DG Fig)* OH, God - not again!

Pritha goes back to her stool and freezes.

SCENE FIVE

Lights down on her and up on Mona)

MONA The first problem they have, is my smoking. You see, it's just not *traditional* enough for an Indian woman to smoke. She's either trying to be white, or she's simply a slut. My response I "Kiss my butt", excuse the pun.
I started smoking when I was... seventeen, when my father was screwing the whole of Johannesburg. Affairs have a way of making one sick - don't they?

So, to prevent my brain from bursting, I decided I could do one of two things. I could shoot my father for his betrayal, or I could shoot my mother, for forgiving him time, after time, after time. I did neither, unfortunately. A friend of mine suggested I take up smoking. He said it would be a means of escape. My friend lied - you can't escape anything! Smoking reminded me of my dad. The way he would pull her close, drag the life out of her, and when he was done, he would just flick her aside and walk all over her. (*She does these actions with her cigarette)* It made me sick, it made me angry, it made me numb.

Oh - don't get me wrong! I'm not one of those people who has a problem dealing with repressed childhood emotions caused by the male figure in my life. I like men, I enjoy their company. Oh! Didn't I mention I had a boyfriend? His name's Neil. He's a lawyer too. We see each other on Tuesdays and Thursdays and we call each other on Sundays - clashing schedules, you see! I think I'll marry him - it's convenient.

Despite my crappy childhood, I would like to have children one day. The people at work find this hard to believe. They think I'm this 'hard-core, no-nonsense bitch'. To an extent I guess I am. (*She lights another cigarette)* It's strange how people react to me. During the weekends, when I'm in my shorts and a T-shirt, they call me a 'cheap slut', and when I'm all dressed up to go to court, they call me a 'classy bitch.' Either way, I'm still a label. Oh, it's not the clothes, you see - it's the accessory! (*indicates cigarette)* Ah, I've gotten used to it . The hush-hush chatter, the looks of disapproval... hey, at least I'm open about it! I don't smoke in toilets or chew some cheap mint gum afterwards to dissolve the tobacco-breath.

People! Who the hell are they to judge me? I know I'm not traditional, cultural...I never was! I'm different. I'm a strong woman and that intimidates them. Well tough! I'm not going to change - they must deal with it!

Blackout.

SCENE SIX – Male Scene: That Card Game

Lights up on dancers behind saris They perform cooking gestures with a pots. All three males are seated in the centre. They are playing thanee (card game).

SIVA Came way, came way, came way!

SUSPECT Eh, whose cutting, whose cutting?

DINO Eh, chill man!

SUSPECT What shit cards!

DINO Your granny's ass!

SIVA Right, right play now.

SUSPECT Eh, don't pick on my granny!

DINO Sorry boss. (*To Suspect)* Eh, what's the story, no bites and all here. I'm a little bit skraal, you know what I'm saying?

SUSPECT Ya, swak, ekse.

SIVA (*Shouts to wife offstage)* Eh, bring the bites, man!

SUSPECT Eh uncle, your wife got you unders eh? Petticoat government big time!

Suspect and Dino laugh

SIVA What - just now I klapped her nicely, she's sitting in the kitchen and crying. She don't know me, I'll come there and I'll give her another one!

DINO Eh uncle, why you slaan your vrou?

SIVA Mouth lightie, mouth! One thing I can't stand is lip service.

SUSPECT Fuck, hundreds ekse! You know these char chicks? they scheme they too wit. *(Dino and Siva agree)* You know this one chick at work –

SIVA & DINO Thick?

SUSPECT Ya, thick! Anyway, she got one two promotions, now she schemes she shits ice-cream.

SIVA Run after her with the cones, ekse, with the cones.
(*Dino and Suspect laugh)*

DINO Ya, eh - you know these varsity chicks? they scheme they to clever for they own good.

SIVA Eh, brew! I didn't know you vying varsity and all. What you studying?

DINO Eh, I did some BA/ML shit, I was their for the babes hah, the chicks!

SUSPECT What you doing now?

DINO I'm graphing - by my uncle's shop.

SIVA & SUSPECT (*look at each other)* Oh!

DINO Eh, whose hand?

SIVA & SUSPECT Take it, take it, take it!

SUSPECT Ekse, varsity chicks are lukker? You'll organize for me?

DINO Ya shot, waarheid - they lukker and easy!

SIVA I know.

DINO Eh uncle! How you know?

SIVA I may be old, but I'm not cold!

Dino and Suspect laugh and cheer

SUSPECT Eh brew, what's this 'Women's lib.' shit?

SIVA Women who want to be on the top.

DINO Ya, Woman's lib. - Leaders in Bed!

SIVA The way these steckies are carrying on, they'll be Lonely in Bed!

(*All laugh)*

SUSPECT Thanks, brew.

SIVA (*to wife, offstage)* Eh, bring the bites, man!

SUSPECT Uncle, come here, I tune you something. (*They all come closer)* You call one time, they don't come....you call two times, they still don't come? Third time? You don't waste time - You moer 'em!

DINO Ya, moer 'em lukker!

Dino and Suspect encourage Siva and cheer him on as he leaves

SIVA You scheme? You scheme? (*He storms out, muttering)*

Lights fade. We hear Siva backstage shouting. The dancers pass the pots to each other. Blackout. In the blackout we hear pots banging and Siva hitting his wife..

SIVA *(offstage)* When I tell you to bring the bites, you bring the bites - you rubbish, fucking dog!

Suspect moves the block to Mona's space, sits on it and freezes. Dino freezes on Kammy's block

SCENE SEVEN

Lights come up slowly on Pritha, who walks on to stage L and sits down. It is obvious that she is in pain.

DG FIG Are you ok?

PRITHA *(shakes her head- No)*

DG FIG Do you want to talk about it?

PRITHA *(shakes her head- No)*

DG FIG Are you sure?

PRITHA *(nods- Yes)*

DG FIG Where is he now?

PRITHA *(no response)*

DG FIG But you still love him, don't you?

PRITHA *(starts to shake her head - No, then shamefully nods Yes.)*

Blackout.

SCENE NINE

Pritha comes on with mixing bowl and wooden spoon. She is mixing vigorously and is obviously angry.

DG FIG You seem a bit agitated. What's wrong?

PRITHA I'll kill him, I'll kill him! He doesn't know me, I'll divorce him!

DG FIG No, you can't do that.

PRITHA True, what the people will say? I know - I'll shoot him!

DG FIG You can't do that either.

PRITHA Ya, who wants to go to jail for that rubbish? I know... You want cake...I'll give you cake - *(She spits into mixing bowl)*

Blackout.

SCENE TEN

Mona comes in with a sari. She feels it and holds it against her. Then suddenly she squashes it up and throws it aside. She goes to her block - stage R. She is very upset.

DG FIG He left you, didn't he?

MONA *(Starts scratching block)*

DG FIG What? Was it another woman?

MONA *(Scratches more vigorously)*

DG FIG Come on, you can tell us!

MONA *(Bangs block down)* Look - I need to smoke!

DG FIG Ok, go ahead.

MONA *(Sits on block, lights a cigarette, then takes a letter out of her pocket and starts to read it)* "My dear sweet Mona, (*She burns the word 'sweet' with her cigarette)* You're a wonderful person and wonderful people deserve wonderful, wonderful things. I love the way you touch my - (*Burns it)* My love for you has grown strong enough for me to realise that I must let you go. Spread your - (*Burns it)* and fly free." *(She squashes the letter in one hand, and looks at the men in the audience)* BASTARDS - all of you! (Blackout).

SCENE ELEVEN

Kammy is having a fight with her parents, offstage. The audience hears her shouting.

KAMMY NO! I won't do it. I won't do it! How can you make me do it? You don't understand - I don't love him. How can you be so - How can you even call yourself parents?

Lights come up on Kammy who comes running onto stage. She is extremely upset. She is crying and mumbling things. Then she starts to try to tear the cushions. She bites and flings them in her rage. After this she just hugs herself and cries quietly. Slowly, she quietens down, but is still shaking. Suddenly, she grabs her bag and pulls out her notepad and pen, and starts to write suicide notes. She tears up and squashes the first two notes. The last one she writes, puts her pen down, reads the note and slowly gets up. She starts to leave, but stops. She goes to her block and takes out a wedding sari, underskirt, bangles and dots. Gently she feels the sari and starts to put it on. From this point onwards her actions are almost ritualistic and she looks as though she is in a zombie state. Once she starts to tie the sari around her, Pritha, in her space, starts to fold her sari. Mona, in her space, starts to rip her sari, very slowly. The sound of the ripping is heard until the end. Kammy dresses herself and climbs onto the block. She grabs the sari from her head and starts to wind it around her neck. She turns around on the block as she struggles with the sari. The lights fade on her, as the music plays. The final, chilling image is that of the end bit of the sari held up high above her head.

Blackout.

Curtain

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D: South African *Indian* Women Playwrights representing themselves through Playwriting (and Theatre): A look at Krijay Govender's *Women In Brown.*

Introductory Remarks:

I have chosen to include my own play *Women In Brown* as part of this dissertation for two reasons: Firstly, because there have been few plays written and produced by South African *Indian* women and thus the inclusion of *Women In Brown* becomes a necessity. Secondly, because the play concerns itself with the identity of South African *Indian* women, which is the focus of this dissertation. I am aware that critically engaging with my own work may affect my objectivity as a researcher and it is for this reason that I have included this discussion as an appendix to the dissertation. Furthermore, I have chosen to write this appendix in the first person since it is my own creative process that is being explored here.

In this discussion the following areas will be explored:

1. A brief synopsis of the plot.

2. South African *Indian* Women representing themselves through playwriting (and theatre: The process of creating *Women In Brown*

3. A critique of the play in terms of how it challenges the constructed identity of South African *Indian* women through the medium of playwriting and theatre.

1. The plot of *Women In Brown*

The cast of *Women In Brown* consists of five woman dancers and three woman actors[1]. The play opens with five woman dancers who perform basic classical Indian dance gestures behind a backdrop of saries. Their faces are not identifiable - only the silhouettes of their bodies are visible. The set in front of this backdrop is minimalist with three distinct spaces set up for the three woman actors. In scene one the three actors enter the stage area as three very different women characters: Mona, a strong head ambitious businesswoman; Kammy, a varsity student and Pritha, a friendly housewife. They speak with the director figure who in as integral part of the entire production. This woman director figure (played by myself) is seated in the audience but nevertheless talks to the actors. With the aid of the director figure the actors decipher their particular spaces. These spaces become their own private spaces for the duration of the performance. In scene two the three woman actors take on male personas. This scene is set in a urinal where the male characters talk about their cars. Their actions in the urinal are juxtaposed to that of the dancers behind the saries who are appear during this scene (and every scene hereafter that concerns itself with these male characters). Scene three focuses on Kammy, a student who is caught up in an arranged marriage situation. The scene is set in the private space of her bedroom where she is often caught whispering to the audience so that her parents will not overhear her conversation with the audience. Through her conversation it is discovered that she is in love with another person. In scene four we encounter Pritha, an extremely friendly and talkative housewife. Throughout her monologue, which is played to the audience, she continues to perform various household chores in her kitchen. She occasionally slips into a daydream and imagines being a singer or an actor. She is unable to have children but faces an immense amount of pressure from both her husband and her in-laws to do so. Furthermore, she is not excited at the idea of being a mother but keeps this view to herself. Scene five focuses on the third of the three woman characters. Mona, is encountered at her home where she also has a turn to engage with the audience. She explains the way in which she picked up a smoking habit and that she aware that it is not "right" for an *Indian* women to smoke, within the confines of the community. We learn she started smoking at the age of

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(1) The term "actor" is used as a generic term for performers of both genders.

seventeen when she discovered that her father was involved in adulterous relationships. She speaks about the way in which he took advantage of her mother and how angry she felt towards her father. It becomes obvious to the audience that she still carries some of the anger within her. It is also discovered that she organises her life, this includes meetings with her boyfriend. Scene six sees the reappearance of the three male characters. This time they are involved in a card game[2] at one of the character's (Siva) house. This scene is also juxtaposed with the presence of dancers behind the sari screen. While the men are playing cards, the women (represented by the dancers) are gathering and preparing food. The same actor who plays Pritha, the housewife, plays Siva. During this scene the men discuss way in which ways in which women whom they consider "disrespectful" and "disobedient" should be dealt with. During the entire scene Siva calls to his wife in the kitchen (off stage) to bring in the snacks. Finally, when the snacks do not arrive, he goes to his wife in the kitchen. This action is a form of showmanship to his friends in terms of the discussion they had been engaged in. At this point the stage is in darkness, only the voice of the Siva can be heard. He beats his wife in the blackout. The sound of pots being hurled by the dancers assist in creating an effect, which audibly encapsulates the act of violence that has occurred in the kitchen. In the next scene we see a lonely and beaten up Pritha dragging herself across the stage to her designated space. She is very different from the first time the audience meets her. It is at this point that the director figure, who is sitting in the audience, intervenes. The director figure asks about her condition and her feelings towards the perpetrator. Scene eight focuses on the male characters watching a pornographic movie at the cinema. Once again the figures of the dancers appear behind the sari. The men enjoy the movie until an *Indian* woman enters into one of the scenes in the movie. They get embarrassed and leave the cinema. In scene nine Pritha resorts to spitting into a cake mixture as a way of getting back at her abusive husband. Scene ten focuses on Mona, who reads a letter of rejection from her boyfriend. She interacts with the director figure in order to confront the anger and disappointment she feels toward men in general. In the final scene (scene eleven) Kammy enters her bedroom in a rage. She then breaks down and cries. She eventually calms herself and reaches for a pen and paper and scribbles a note. Then in a very

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(2) The card game that is played is called "Thunee" and has its origins from the South African *Indian* males live KwaZulu- Natal.

calculated way she begins to put on her wedding sari. At this point the two other women characters pick up their sari within their own spaces. Mona tears her sari into little pieces while Pritha neatly and dutifully folds her sari. This last scene is done in silence and in the final moment Kammy uses her sari to hang herself.

2. South African *Indian* women representing themselves through playwriting (and theatre): The process of creating *Women In Brown.*

In his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal emphasises the importance of making or creating theatre, where he claims that the making of theatre is as important as the performance and that the performance itself is not an end or finished product, but itself a rehearsal. This is because, according to Boal oppressed groups do not know what their world will be like (1979: 142). It is for this reason that I have decided to include a brief overview of the process of creating *Women In Brown.*

While the play was written and directed by myself, it is important that I acknowledge the process through which the playwriting and formulation of the script came about. The approach that I used at the very initial stages of this project can be located or compared to that of the radical feminist theatre school (see chapter three page 63). Firstly, I insisted on an all South African *Indian* women acting cast. This was aimed at redressing the lack of South African *Indian* women not only as playwrights and directors but also as performers on the stage. The stage has been historically and culturally constructed as a public arena and therefore not one that encourages the participation of South African *Indian* women.

I also chose to workshop and improvise ideas around identity, which is/was an approach popular in radical feminist theatre. Here the cast was encouraged to share their real life experiences of being a South African *Indian* during this period of South Africa's history. They were also encouraged to share the experience of other women in their family, through storytelling, videos and even photographs. Improvisation skills were used in different role playing activities both in the public areas (like supermarkets and bus stops) and in the privacy of their homes where the actors paid careful attention to the way in which cultural and religious practices constructed the South African Indian woman. Similar to the experiences of Nadine Naidoo during her

rehearsal period for *Nadia*, the cast of *Women In Brown* also became very aware of the various issues concerning and constructed roles of South African *Indian* women. Perhaps more importantly the cast became aware as to how these roles have been naturalised through fixed notions of culture (and through cultural practices such as theatre). The images of the South African Indian woman (like Mohanty's presentation of the perceived "Third World woman") are images of a veiled woman, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, and obedient wife (1997: 274). These images are reinforced through the representation of the South African *Indian* woman in plays written by their male counterparts. For example - the discussion on virgin "good, clean girls" in Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (Goveneder, 40) or the speech about the obedient wife by the Rajbansi figure in Aldrin Naidu's *Mooidevi's Muti* (Unpublished: 22). It becomes clear that self-representation is not only necessary but moreover it is a responsibility (Lorde, 1997: 397) of South African *Indian* women to challenge such image constructions and represent themselves.

It was only after this process of identifying (as a cast) the stereotypical ways in which South African *Indian* men and society at large constructed South African *Indian* women, and only after an intense workshop experience that I began formally scripting the play.

I decided to use a minimalist set with a few blocks and saries as a backdrop and as a prop. While Spivak argues that dress constitutes as a 'simple notion of identity' (1990: 39), I would argue that while this might be true within scholarly discourse, theatrically it provides itself as a powerful and symbolic tool. The saries were used as a backdrop to divide the space between the private and public – as proposed by patriarchy (Moi, 1985: 211). The men are place in front while the women (dancers) are behind. The saries provide the veiled imagery that Mohanty speaks of in her presentation of the stereotyped "Third World woman" (1997: 274). Toward the end of the play the saries become a metaphor for the so-call *Indian* culture itself and each of the characters is forced to interact with this notion. Mona, tears her sari as a sign rejecting any notion or identity with "Indianess". Pritha folds her sari. There is a bit of ambivience as to whether she does this as a dutiful wife who will continue to exist within the system or whether she is packing up to leave. Kammy uses her sari to hang

herself. This action becomes visually symbolic as to the way in which this constructed and fixed notion of culture strangles and oppresses the South African *Indian* woman.

Whilst the elements of radical feminist theatre did influence the rehearsal process, I decided against the use of alternative venues (as encouraged by radical feminist theatre practitioners). The play ran at the Playhouse in Durban, which is a mainstream theatre venue. This decision was based on the idea that whilst the play provided a platform for South African *Indian* women to articulate the previously marginalised and oppressed voices, it was equally important that these voices were heard by as many people (both men and women) as possible. This is a view encouraged by the liberal feminist theatre practitioners.

3. A critique of *Women In Brown*

The notion of space has been both historically and culturally politicised. Patriarchy has historically proposed the idea of the private and the public space (Moi, 1985; 211). Culture, which is constructed within the patriarchal system, further reinforces these ideas through practices (like theatre). Moreover within the South African context the notion of space has been politicised within the apartheid through acts like the Separation of Amenities Act (1953) and the Group Areas Act (1962). Thus, the South African *Indian* woman as part of a group that has been historical constructed in terms of a cultural identity, finds her space constructed at almost every level of her existence.

The play therefore opens with a discussion amongst the actors and with the director figure as to which space they should occupy. This scene aims to do two things; Firstly, to highlight the notion of constructed spaces and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to establish at the very outset that whilst the play represents South African Indian women, there is an awareness that this is not a homogenous group. As Muthal Naidoo explains:

> Because it is such a tiny community, it is seen from without to be a homogenous group. Meanwhile, it is an extremely diverse group with different religions, languages, customs, class and political affiliations leading to all kinds of internal tensions (1993: 1).

The scenes involving the male characters were deliberately constructed as public spaces on stage. The male characters always appear in a group on stage, with the silhouettes of *Indian* women in the background. These women characters are set up in the private space behind the screen of saries. This scenario was set up to reflect the clear distinctions within the so-called South African *Indian* community as to which space is culturally constructed for which gender. The backdrop of saries becomes a symbol of the cultural boundary, which dictates that the South African *Indian* woman remains out of the public arena. It is interesting to note that at the end of scene six Siva enters the kitchen and beats his wife in a blackout. This scene becomes important for two reasons: Firstly, it establishes that while the woman n constructed within the private domain, she does not have any power over that domain. Patriarchy is the dominating force, which controls this space. The second reason for his actions occurring in a blackout, is that it reflects the silenced and unseen activities that are committed within the private domain. His actions can be further considered as an act of showmanship to his friends, where such an assertion of physical strength becomes a means of reinforcing power (Dworkin, 1981: 13).

It is important to note that the male character scene at the movies is not one that aims to address the issue of pornography, but rather explore that way in which the male characters react to "deviant" behaviour by South African *Indian* women. It is interesting to note that whilst such “deviance" or "disobedience" in the private space would handled by means of physical force, it is ignored in this particular situation since it is clearly out of their control.

The decision to use three women actors to play the roles of both the women and male characters was a deliberate one. The actors have the difficult task of playing multiple roles; this technique however is extremely useful in that it means the audience is forced to reflect on what is happening. The device is a Brechtian one and is useful in challenging the audience to think. The device allows the actors to play the roles of the abusive husband, the pervert, the gangster and so on which is interesting in terms of the way in which power operates in relationships explored on stage. The multiple use of voices further destabilises and challenges the realist form in which many of the scenes are written.

Whilst the play can be criticised for presenting the South African *Indian* men in a stereotypical way, it must be noted that this presentation does not construct men as objects of ridicule. The actors did not put on any "voices" or costumes to signify that they were playing men. This was a deliberate choice so that audience where aware that the actors were offering a critique to the way in which men behaved in the various scenes. Furthermore, Susan Purdie claims that:

> ...joking often targets actual people and can then have the manifest political effect of 'degrading' the power that they hold; which will be oppostional or oppressive depending upon whether the target stands above or below the joker in the social hierarchy (1993: 127).

Thus the humour presented is not an oppressive one but an oppositional one, since the South African Indian woman (the joker) is below the existing social hierarchy.

The structure of the play further juxtaposes the scenes concerned with the women characters to those that are concerned with the male characters. Furthermore, whilst the male characters are not aware of the audiences' presence in the theatre, the women character are aware and they therefore chose to speak with the audience. Therefore it can be argued that the play does not own present a platform for the marginalised South African *Indian* woman to represent herself but it does moreover it establishes a more personal connection with the audience through both the style in which it is presented and through the presence of the director figure who is a part of the audience.

In the final scene (suicide), through the use of the sari as a metaphor for culture, the point is made that it is ultimately culture and moreover, fixed notions of culture that contain South African *Indian* women.

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E: A Chronological List of Plays written by South African *Indian* Playwrights from 1953 to 1998 in the KwaZulu-Natal Region

Dennis Schauffer argues that the most neglected area of theatre research in South Africa is that which seeks to investigate the contribution of the South African *Indian* population (1996: 84). As a means of redressing this problem of lack of research, I have compiled a list of plays written by the South African *Indian* playwrights from 1958 to 1998 in the KwaZulu-Natal region. This list includes the name of the playwright; title of the play and year in which it was first performed (and published where applicable). While an extensive amount of field research has gone into the compilations of this list, it is possible that there are plays which have not been brought to the attention of the researcher before the submission date of this dissertation.

1958
Ronnie Govender's *Beyond Calvary*

1959
Ronnie Govender's *His Brothers Keeper*

1961
Ronnie Govender's *Swami*

1969
Guru Pillay's *Oh, What a ColourfulWorld*

1972
Ronnie Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (published Raven Press1974)

1973
Guru Pillay's *Saras*

1974
Kessie Govender's *Stablexpense*

1975
Kessie Govender's *You Tramp, Me tramp*

1976
Kessie Govender's *Working Class Hero*

1977
Kessie Govender's *The decision*

1978
Kessie Govender's *The Shack*

1979
Kessie Govender's *Kagoose*

1981
Kessie Govender's *On the Fence*

1982
*Muthal Naidoo's *We 3 Kings* (published1992)

1983
Muthal Naidoo's *Masks*

1984
Kessie Govender's *Black Skies*
Ronnie Govender's *Off-side*

1985
Ronnie Govender's *Inside*

1986
Ronnie Govender's *Blossoms from the Bough*
Ajay Hurbans and Junid Aman's *Jump*
Dinesh Narandas' *I Love to Fill in Forms*
Dinesh Narandas' *Sammy Joins the Circus*
Kriben Pillay's *Moments*

1987
Ajay Hurbans and Rasheeda Hurbans' *Bombay Duck*
Kriben Pillay's *Mr Bansi is Dead*

1988
Kessie Govender's *Underground*
Ronnie Govender's *At the Edge*
Ronnie Govender's *Who or What is Deena Naicker?*
Ajay Hurbans' *Blast! No Bang!*
Charles Pillai's *The Biko Inquisition*

1989
Ajay Hurbans and Rasheeda Hurbans' *Bombay Duck Take 2*
Charles Pillai's T*he James Commission*

1990
Farouk Hoosen's and Vivian Moodley's *Coast of Dreams*
Farouk Hoosen and Vivian Moodley's *Hambe Kahle Moodley*

1991
Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *The Jamal Syndrome*
Satchu Annamalai's *Three Hand Six Foot*
Ajay Hurbans' *Stardust*
Kriben Pillay's *Looking for Muruga* (published 1995)

1992
Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Jamal 2*
Satchu Annamalai's *Fish Curry*
Ronnie Govender's *You Own Dog Won't Bite You*
Farouk Hoosen's *A New Kind of Living*
Vrenika Pather's *Ooloo*
Kriben Pillay's *F.M Stereotype*
Kriben Pillay's *Side by Side Masiszane* (musical)

1993
Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Muthoos are Coming to Dinner*
Satchu Annamalai and Dr Mantzaris' *It's Bloody Cold Tonight Comrade*
Kessie Govender's *Alternative Action*
Kessie Govender's *Her Story*
Pravesh Hurbans' *I Hate Shakespeare*
Pravesh Hurbans' *March or Die*
Vivian Moodley's *Got Green Chillies Makoti*
Vivian Moodley's Jokes Aside Bra
Vivian Moodley and Pat Pillai's *Short-Changed*
Aldrin Naidu's *Priceless Jewel (The Missing India Page)*
Kriben Pillay's *Coming Home* (musical)
Robin Singh's *Till Death Do Us Part*

1994
Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Sacrifice*
Satchu Annamalai's *Child Witness*
Kessie Govender's *God made mosquitoes too*
Rajesh Gopie's *Stumbling-Up*
Pravesh Hurbans' *The Entertainer: A Man and his Wig*
Aldrin Naidu's *Undecided Voter* (musical)
Vivian Moodley's *Cast The First Stone*
Vivian Moodley's *In Love All By Myself*
Vivian Moodley's *Ironstone*

1995

Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *My Second Wife*
Ronnie Govender in collaboration with Vivian Moodley and Yugen Naidoo
Too Muckin Fuch
Vivian Moodley's *Dust to Dust*
Vivian Moodley's *Shady Lagoon*
Vivian Moodley's *Mum's the Word*
Vivian Moodley's *Heaven's Door*
Aldrin Naidu and Geetha Mala's *Mandrax Muniama and the Suitcase Carriers*

1996

Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Heads and Tails*
Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Money-in laws*
Satchu Annamalai's *When the Dead Must Die*
Rajesh Gopie's *The Balls to Tackle Marriage*
Ronnie Govender's *1949*
Vivian Moodley's *Black Tomato Juice*
Vivian Moodley's *A Trilogy -A View from the side*
Aldrin Naidu's *Babalaas (The Cato Manor Hangover)*
Leeanda Reddy and Eubulus Tracy's *Kindle Me*

1997

Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Kachumbar* (musical)
Krijay Govender's *Women In Brown*
Ronnie Govender's *The Great 31 Million Robbery*
Geetha Mala's *As' Kachra Koolies'? Aya'bo Wito*
Nadine Naidoo's *Nadia*
Vivian Moodley's *Hang by Thalie*
Aldrin Naidu's *Taj Mahala (4 Weddings and a Plastic Surgeon)*
Leeanda Reddy and Eubulus Tracy 's *Gee T.V*
Devi Sajinjeive's *Acts of God*

1998

Mohammed Alli and Essop Khan's *Krazy Kracks* (musical)
Ronnie Govender's *Backside*
Renai Januk's *Tula Mathaji' Su'wee'cide generation*
Aldrin Naidu's *Moodevi's Muti (Tails of the Bengal Tigers)*
Vivian Moodley's *Pushpa's Lovechild*

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* Muthal Naidoo could not be contacted to confirm the dates of performance of her plays. However here is a list of plays written by Naidoo. *Prison Walls; Of No Account; Coming Home ikhayalethu); Having Tea and Go; Black Magic; Outside In* and *Nobody's Hero*